

The Last Weekend of Spring; Rancho and Hemp; Pathogens in H2O



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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

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The last weekend of spring!

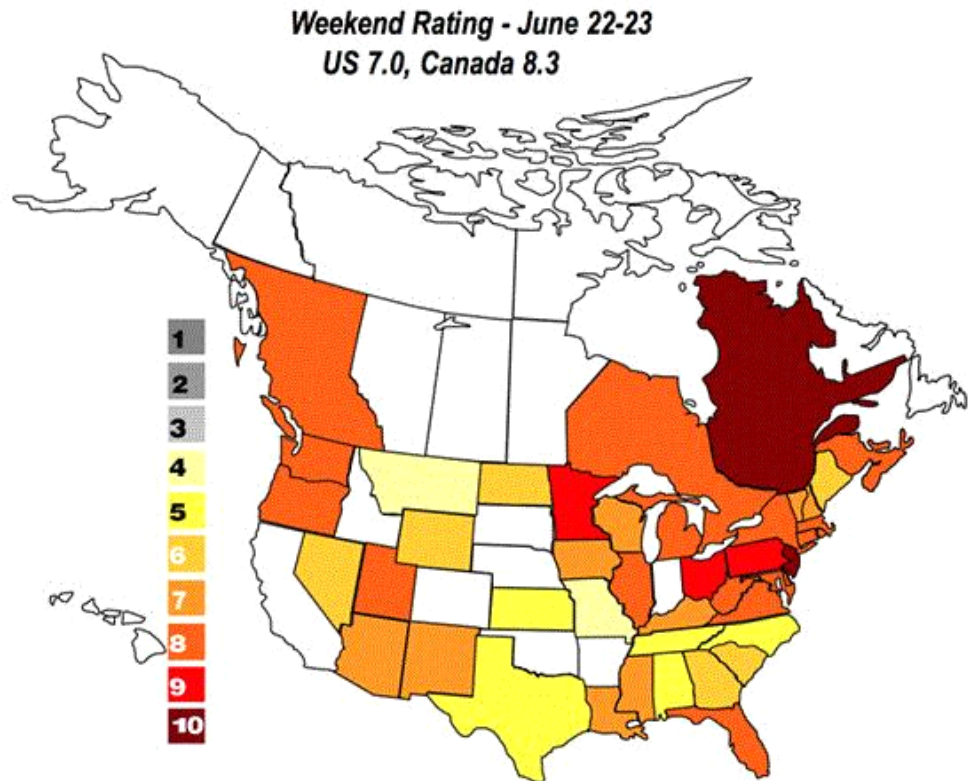


I'll cut right to the chase and tell you that it was a 7.0 in the U.S. and an 8.3 in Canada—based upon 79 scores, which is half or less than what I get during the peak season, meaning half of you have gone fishin'—well-deserved after this roller-coaster ride.

Now, I don't expect high scores this late in the season except in the most northern spots where the season is lingering. So I was happy to see nine 10s from you (11%). And you were mostly in a good mood, either reveling in the late sales or acknowledging that you expected the slow-down.

However, rain continued to dampen your spirits in some parts of the country. I got complaints from Tennessee, Kentucky, Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, Wyoming and North Carolina.

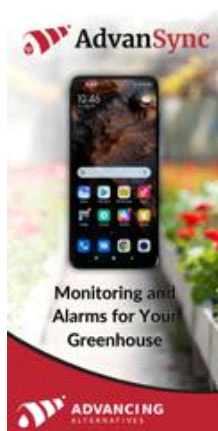
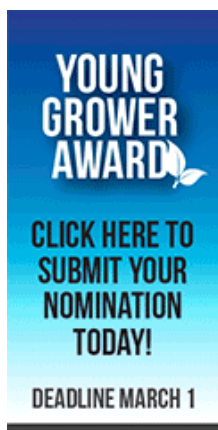
Here's the map:



To me, the most interesting thing about the last weekend of spring is seeing how it compares with other seasons. Let's take a look:

2019	7.0/8.3
2018	6.3/6.7
2017	6.8/7.2
2016	7.1/6.8
2015	5.1/7.2
2014	6.3/7.1
2013	n/a
2012	6.0/6.8

Well, what do you know? The best by far in Canada, and just .1 below the best in the U.S.! Well done, everybody!



All over the board

This week's scores reflect a wide range of weekend results, from "meh" to "magnificent!" Wholesalers who have about finished shipping plants rated it poorly (especially if they still had product in the greenhouse), while some retailers are still scoring it high (36 of the 79 respondents scored the weekend an 8, 9 or 10).

Regionally, the East blew away the rest of the country, with an 8.5. Here are all the regional results:

East	8.5
Northwest	8.1
Midwest	7.5
New England	7.2
West	6.7
South	6.2
Mountains	6.1
Plains	6.0

What is a shame is how poorly the Plains and Mountains did. Blame it on rain. Or maybe worse—it snowed in Colorado on June 21, the first day of summer. Missouri can claim the lowest average in the country—3.5. Montana was 4.0.

New Jersey topped all the states, with a pair of 10s and a 9 for a 9.7 average. Illinois, with its pair of 10s, would have been perfect ... but then somebody had to send in a 5.

Up in Canada, BC scored 9 and 6; Ontario scored 10, 9, 9, 7 and 4; the other provinces only had single scores, due to the low response rate. Quebec's lone score was one of our 10s, which certainly helped Canada's overall average.



A few end-of-season comments (with scores)

Missouri (4) "I'd give it a solid 4. Coincides with the inches of rain we had ..."

New York (9.5) "People are buying because it was so cold and wet in the spring. The season has extended. Yay!"

Louisiana/Mississippi (6.5) "Winding down. Getting very hot."

Ohio (10) "We've had strong late-season sales. Some people are first getting their vegetable gardens in."

Illinois (10) "Demand is still the strongest I have ever seen this late. We are going to have another record year!!!"

Washington (8) "Customers are still coming in the door, and we're pleased—one of our strongest

late June weekends ever! Sold shrubs, trees, perennials, annuals, bulk products ... just about anything and everything is still selling."

New Mexico (9) "Beautiful weather. Not as hot as it normally is for June!"

Alabama (5) "Hot, but still worth showing up for work. Enough business to be happy."

Ohio (8) "First three-day period without measurable rainfall all spring, with many people just getting into their gardens for the first time. Unfortunately, it is too late to make up much ground."

Michigan (10) "Not a mid-May 10, but a late June 10. Sales have been very good in June to date. We already have record sales for June with a week to go. Nice to see the demand is there even this late in the season."

Ontario (10) "Several clear sunny and warm days—all in a row! Not too hot, plus offering strawberries for sale made for an amazing amount of greenhouse traffic for this time of year."

North Carolina (4) "Still having rain and cooler weather. Summer will return this week. We have had 11.5 inches of rain so far this month. Normal is 2.9 inches. We have had over 10 inches of rain above normal for the year. May was below normal."

Iowa (7) "Nice and steady, cooler weekend for June. Strong sales in perennials and fresh greenhouse annuals. Definitely starting to get a little less busy. The forecasted high heat this week will officially begin the 'summer' season for us."

Kansas (7) "It's really late for us to still be shipping wholesale, but we still had a decent week. Still seeing too much rain!"

Michigan (8) "Had .63 inches of rain on Thursday, but Friday, Saturday and Sunday were pleasant, with temperatures in upper 70s and low 80s, humidity about 60%. Three-day sales were up 18% over 2018."

Ontario (7) "Sales seem to be maintaining momentum without a steep drop-off. Not bad."

New York (8) "There is still a lot of planting to be done. If we can find good product, 'spring' should carry into July."



Summertime sales: Up? Profitable?

That last comment makes a valid point: How long can one keep "spring" going at retail? Certainly, you have to have fresh plant material to pull it off.

Long-time survey contributor John Derrick of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada (who scored the weekend a 9), suggested I do a summer sales survey, saying:

"It would be interesting to survey summer sales [to see] if they are getting stronger each year. We have, by customer count, only 30% of the customers we have in the prime of May, but still enough to make a profit, as we have 50% less staff."

Interesting, John. Let's ask that question of my retail readers: Can you adjust staffing (and other costs) based on customer count and still make a profit during summer? Many garden centers say they lose money in every month but May ... perhaps we can strive to do better than that.

If you've got thoughts or ideas, click [HERE](#) to share them.

Rancho Tissue adds hemp to lineup

The way things are heating up in the hemp market, I'm going to have to institute a weekly hemp update. Or perhaps it will eventually be easier to list the companies that are NOT in hemp.

This week, it's Rancho Tissue Technologies (RTT) that has announced entry into the hemp and hemp/CBD markets. The tissue culture lab, based in Rancho Santa Fe, California, will soon be offering "clean, high-quality, true-to-type tissue culture and propagation of hemp."

As a registered hemp cultivator in San Diego County, RTT will provide custom contract growing for growers' own selections, as well as tissue culture of the most in-demand hemp selections. They'll accept orders from registered hemp growers located in any U.S. state, and will also hold genetics for other hemp growers.

"With 40 years of tissue culture experience, I regularly receive requests from growers wanting tissue-cultured microcuttings and liners of popular hemp selections or of their own genetics," said owner and founder Heather Hunter May in the press release. "Hemp fits in well with the lab's history of tissue culture and exclusive work for high value crops from growers around the world."

One thing I noted was that RTT isn't bothering to do this under the guise of a separate division.

They're being quite open about adding hemp to their production, alongside the numerous varieties of ornamentals and edibles they've been doing for four decades. I asked Heather via email if they were at all concerned that some of their more conservative customers might take exception to them going into the hemp business.

"I have spoken to some of our customers and they haven't expressed concern," she replied. "I believe there should not be any conflict in the minds of our ornamental customers." But she wanted me to make it clear that they are NOT producing medical or recreational cannabis, which is still federally illegal. They are producing hemp, which by law contains no more than .3% THC and is now, thanks to the 2018 Farm Bill, legal to produce in the U.S.

"We will be working very hard to produce clean, true-to-type plants without pesticides, just as we have been for the last 40 years."

RTT will be doing liners and microcuttings of industrial and CBD hemp in their lab and 40,000 sq. ft. greenhouse. Heather says they won't be doing any breeding; instead, they'll produce varieties supplied by registered hemp growers along with some industry favorites. She wouldn't get at the quantity they might be producing, saying that it depended upon market demand, custom-grow contract arrangements and licensing deals.

For more information or to order hemp or other RTT varieties, email them at info@ranchotissue.com, or visit www.ranchotissue.com.



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Bower & Branch hires COO ... from the oil biz?

Online tree and shrub (and now perennials, grasses, gift, accessories and services, too, I'm told) seller **Bower & Branch** has just hired two new executives to help run and guide the business. They are Brian Gerhart and Michael O'Hara. Brian will be Chief Operations Officer, leading the development and execution of short- and long-term growth strategies. Michael O'Hara is the new Chief Strategic Officer, overseeing finance, planning, development and execution of multiple marketing objectives.

What's most interesting is that these two gents don't come from horticulture. Brian's background is the petroleum industry, including Gulf Oil, Pyramid Oil and Amerigreen Renewable Fuels. He's got 27 years of experience running everything from startups to established companies.

Michael, meanwhile, has a broad range of executive experience with publishing companies, marketing firms and even Pep Boys (where he served as Chief Marketing Officer).

Curious, I reached out to B&B's Scott Chamberlain, VP of operations, who sent out the announcement, to ask why they decided to hire a guy from the petroleum business as COO. I wrote, "I'm sure he's smart ... but trees and shrubs are different from barrels of oil in more than a few ways."

Scott replied by saying, "This was exactly the type of response we hoped to invoke. Perhaps I should have titled [the press release] 'Garden e-retailer hires Petroleum Industry Executive'?"

Scott continued with this answer to my question:

"One of the misconceptions about Bower & Branch is that we are a garden center or grower, when in fact, we are neither. We are an e-commerce and logistics solution for garden centers and growers to reach customers where they live, work and play, under a national brand. Our solution provides a way forward for our industry, founded and started from within the industry. Without Bower & Branch, our industry is at risk from others (both from the industry and outsiders) confusing and underwhelming the marketplace at the very time we want them to share in our excitement. Think Amazon Plant Store, Proven Winners Direct, Fast-Growing-Trees.com, shrubbucket.com, Etsy, Terrain, thesill.com ... the list goes on of direct-to-consumer models shaking the industry.

"While your comparison of barrels of oil to trees and shrubs is true, Bower & Branch is deep in talent who possess the knowledge, skills and abilities the industry would expect, from within our own team and through our partners localized across 25 states and 140 retail locations. No other model I'm aware of has access to this level of experience and also makes it accessible to consumers nationwide.

"While not a green thumb, Brian's addition to our team brings a fresh perspective and energy to our company. He is also a man rooted in faith and family. He has a solid history of implementing internal systems and strategies as well as improving efficiencies and growth."

Thanks for the detailed reply, Scott! It's fascinating to see how our products are being sold through all these relatively young online marketplaces.



A tomato-picking robot

Why didn't I go to the United Fresh show with the Jens Zurko and Polanz when it was in Chicago last week? They got to see a tomato-picking robot! Here's what JP wrote about it:

Meet Virgo, an AI tomato-picking robot. Designed by [Root AI](#) to mimic a human's touch, this robot has a 3-D visual system, laser sights and a dexterous arm with a sensitive set of grippers or "fingers" to pick either ripe tomatoes or green tomatoes (depending on what you want it to pick).



It was purposefully built on a human body design rather than for a specific crop, says co-founder Josh Lessing, because then it can be expanded for use on berries, cucumbers and peppers, among other greenhouse crops.

"At the core is an AI-based computer vision and machine learning system purpose-built for harvesting, crop care and yield optimization," notes a printed description of Virgo. "Moreover Root can gather and analyze an unprecedented trove of data to glean insights at the plant level."

Virgo is designed to be fitted onto guided tracks that are already used in tomato greenhouses. It can be retrofitted for use on wheels, too. Root AI won best new Innovation in Indoor Tech at the show. [CLICK HERE](#) to see videos of Virgo in action.

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Plantpeddler adds Hort Couture liners

Hort Couture has just announced that you'll now be able to get their vegetative liners through Plantpeddler, the young plant producer in Cresco, Iowa, owned by Mike and Rachel Gooder. The supply will come online for the 2019-2020 season and be available through Ball Seed Co, Eason Horticultural Resources, Fred C. Gloeckner & Co, Griffin Greenhouse Supply, McHutchison and Vaughan's Horticulture.

"Plantpeddler is exactly the type of partner we want for our young plant supply chain. They are

quality driven, energetic participants in the industry and have a reputation based on integrity and trialing. We could not be more thrilled to have Mike and his team behind our brand,” says Jim Monroe of Hort Couture.

For more information, email Plantpeddler at info@plantpeddler.com.



Dümmen Orange to help beautify Gardens by the Bay

Gardens by the Bay in Singapore is definitely high on my must-visit list—the pictures I've seen are spectacular! Between the “Supertree Grove” and the “Flower Dome” (world's largest greenhouse, according to Guinness), it looks to be a plant-lover's paradise and architectural dream.



How Dümmen Orange can make the 242-acre garden any more awe-inspiring I don't know, but they're going to try: They've just penned a “memorandum of understanding” with the Gardens to do just that. The agreement means:

- Both parties will collaborate in the display of Dümmen Orange's finest cultivars of flowers at Gardens by the Bay, including new cultivars that have yet to be introduced at the Gardens or in Asia Pacific;
- The collaboration will enrich Gardens by the Bay's horticultural offerings and support its continual efforts in presenting flowers from around the world that are not commonly seen in Singapore and the tropics.
- The collaboration will help Dümmen Orange to select the best varieties for its broader Asia Pacific market.

The first hint offered as to specifics is that their poinsettias will be featured in the garden's year-

end floral display called "Poinsettia Wishes."

Yeunjoo Park, President of Dümme Orange Asia, stated in the press release, "Landscaping is an important segment that will drive growth for Dümme Orange in Asia Pacific. Therefore, it is an honor to partner with a landmark landscape player like Gardens by the Bay. We are confident that Dümme Orange is best positioned to serve Gardens by the Bay, based on our rich crop portfolio, cutting edge breeding and global network of our grower customers."

New research: Plant pathogens in your irrigation water

The smart folks at federally funded specialty crops research initiative [Clean WaterR3](#) have just released their latest research findings, titled "Diversity of Phytophthora, Pythium, and Phytophthora Species in Recycled Irrigation Water in a Container Nursery."

The researchers tracked the above plant pathogens in the irrigation water of an Oregon nursery for a year to see which, if any, pathogens tended to occur together, and which water sources (creek, pond, reservoir, runoff channels) they were most prevalent in.

Do you know what method you should be using to detect oomycete communities? Find out by reading the full research paper [HERE](#).

Finally ...

If you suspect it rained a lot this spring, you are correct: NOAA says this past January to June was the wettest in U.S history. The national average was 15.71 inches, well above the previous record of 15.13 inches. And May was the second-wettest month, with 4.41 inches.

All of which can only mean one thing: We're headed for a drought.

See you next time,



Chris Beytes

Editor

GrowerTalks and Green Profit

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