

Mother's Day Results; Pot and Pack Sales; Van de Wetering and Cannabis



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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

How was Mother's Day?
- Pack & pot sales a good sign!
- Your comments
- Meanwhile, up in Canada
Leasing your own greenhouse?
Many new positions
Finally ...



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How was Mother's Day?

I received two more juicy adjectives to describe the 2021 season thus far:

"Insanity," wrote Tami Adams from Calvert's Plant Interiors in Oklahoma. "Bonkers," suggested Alene Mangino from Ball in West Chicago, Illinois, who said it's her daughter's recent favorite.

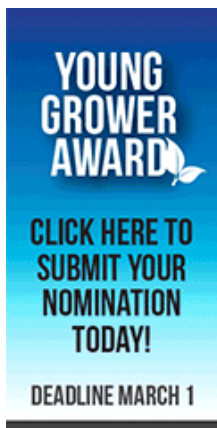
Both apropos of the previous week and the season. It was probably the strongest Mother's Day in anyone's memory.

Rather than give you the final national scores right up front, I thought I'd give you a glimpse into my world of weekend rating scorekeeping. You see, you send me scores all week long, but I barely glance at them as they arrive, instead dropping them into a folder for later. I don't start putting them into my magical spreadsheet until Wednesday or Thursday. That's when the excitement begins for me, as I glance up to see how the overall score is looking as I input the data.

For instance, after inputting my first 25 scores, the overall tally was 9.6 in the U.S. and 10.0 in Canada, with 17 10s (68%). The lowest score I'd received is an 8. I'm thinking, "Wow!"

At 34 scores in, I got my first low score, a 5 from central Illinois, where it was rainy and cold. But the overall average had climbed to 9.7/10.0, with 25 10s (74%).

Fifty scores in and it had dropped just a tad to 9.5/9.7. The percentage of 10s had dropped to



66% (33 out of 50). I'm still thinking, "Wow!"

The very next score, number 51, was a sour one: a 6 from Michigan's Garden Fantasy Florist, with the note, "It was okay, but it rained all weekend so we didn't get the people we normally get. Last year was better." Bummer.

I kept on tabulating. At 75 scores in, my friend Joe Ward from Oklahoma gave his weekend a 10. We're now at 9.4/9.3, with 54% 10s.

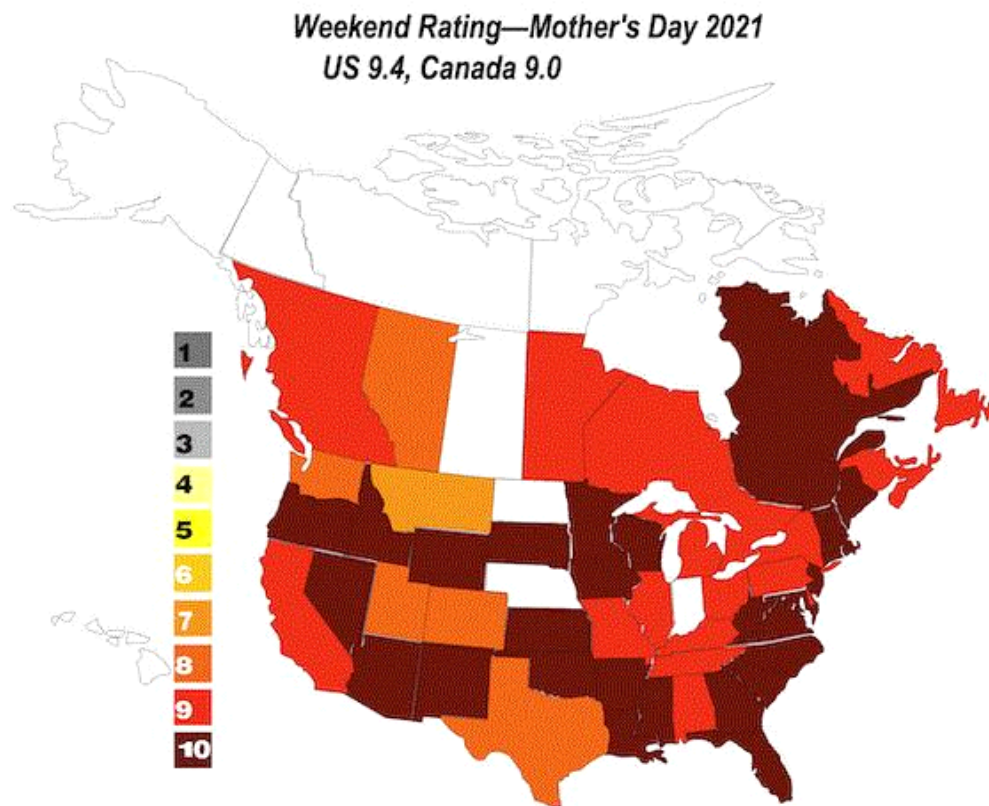
One score later, John David Boone from Alabama gave his Mother's Day an 11, saying, "Best day ever Saturday, had open house, people everywhere, didn't stop all day. Couldn't be happier!" (I rounded it down to 10.)

At 100 scores in, Canada had slipped a tenth of a point to 9.3 because of a couple of 8s. But the U.S. was still at 9.4 and more than half (55%) of all respondents had rated their weekend a 10.

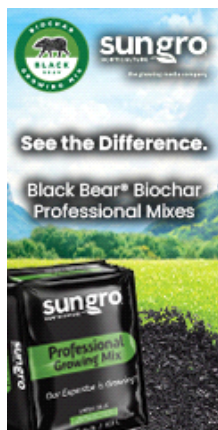
I tally the last score, number 118, and it's a 10 from Virginia, wrapping up Mother's Day at **9.4 in the U.S.** and **9.0 in Canada**, with 61% of you scoring it a perfect 10. Canada slipped a bit due to receiving a 9 and a 7, but 6 of 16 Canadians (37.5%) ranked it a perfect 10.

Compare that to Mother's Day 2020, which was **8.2 in the U.S.** and **8.9 in Canada**. I think that was due to some retailers being just barely open and many having to depend on online sales and curbside pickup. This year, we're wide open (except in Canada, which I'll get to in a bit). Go back to pre-pandemic 2019 and Mother's Day scored **7.6/8.2**. I'm sure we were happy then, but it looks pitiful now, doesn't it?

Here's the map:



That's based on 118 scores from 45 states and 7 provinces.



Pretty phenomenal. Yes, there were low scores, but overall, Spring 2021 seems to be bettering Spring 2020. And we'd have been thrilled if it had only been half as good.



Abe's says pack and pot sales a good sign

Metrolina's Abe VanWingerden dependably sends in scores each week for the 15 states he and his brothers serve. He also provides a thoughtful analysis behind his scoring based on actual sales data tracked by customer, by state and by day, so when Abe says it was an 8, 9 or 10, I believe him. Here's a bit of what he had to say about Mother's Day 2021:

Mother's Day Weekend. Soft last year, so figured it would be "better than most" this year, but some rain on Sunday slowed our Midwest sales. But we had a record day at every one of our accounts on Saturday on our pinnacle day, so I can do nothing but grade that a "10." We did have rain throughout our areas (spotty in most cases), but it did not slow this consumer down.

More importantly (at least I think it is more important), our sales were very strong on packs and potted items just as much as hanging baskets and containers. This is abnormal for Mother's Day Weekend, so it tells me we have some great opportunity with new gardeners who are out and trying their hand at digging in the dirt. The basket and container sales are great, but it's great to see the big sales on packs and potted for the long-term impact on the business.

Interestingly, Abe gave the states of Delaware, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and New York, where it rained on Saturday, a score of 9, even though sales were up 15% over Mother's Day 2020. Wrote Abe, "How can I give that a 9 on our biggest weekend and sales are up? Because I think it actually could have been bigger with better weather."

Lastly, Abe points out something important about this year vs. last year: We have three weeks between Mother's Day and Memorial Day instead of the usual two. Let's see what that does for sales!



Your comments

As always, it's fascinating to read about what happens where the rubber meets the road ... or should I say where the customers meet the plants:

Florida (10+++). "Best weekend EVER! Both Saturday and Sunday were record-breakers. Weather was pretty perfect after a few very hot days. It was in the lower 80s with a nice breeze. People were happy and buying LOTS of things ... for mom and for themselves."—*Theresa Riley, Rockledge Gardens*

Minnesota (10). "The Twin Cities were still a bit cold with nights in the mid-30s, but the sun was shining and there were shoppers in every aisle for every minute we were open. I started comparing this spring to 2019 out of curiosity, and found that April and May of 2021 are up 120% to date over the last pre-pandemic spring."—*Derek Lynde, Lynde Greenhouse*

Wyoming (10). "Record Friday. All-time daily sales record Saturday, new all-time daily sales record Sunday. All with no price increases at all this year, so transaction count and ticket increase accounts for both. Includes poor weather forecast with two days of rain followed by likely freeze Wednesday morning, so quite surprised."— *Jeff Jones, Great Gardens*

Idaho (10). "Fantastic week despite less-than-ideal weather and constant threat of frost. (It got down to 25F on Saturday night.) Sales were slightly below last year's unbelievable week, but not by much. We would have blown last year out of the water if people had dared to plant."—*John Crook, Town & Country Gardens*

Iowa (10). "Shattered an all-time company record for one-day sales on Saturday. Pretty sure Friday set a record for weekday sales numbers. Three guys directing traffic and parking was one in/one out most of the day. Ran out of parking, ran out of carts, but customers were all nice and in great moods. Not one complaint. Sunday started with rain, but finished strong and a very good Mother's Day."—*Kate Terrell, Wallace's Garden Center*

Missouri (15). "In business for 22 years—best weekend in our history!"—*Valarie Collup, Willow Green Acres*



Meanwhile, up in Canada ...

Effective May 5, the province of Alberta had reinstated strict restrictions on businesses, including garden centers, which has to put a big damper on May sales.

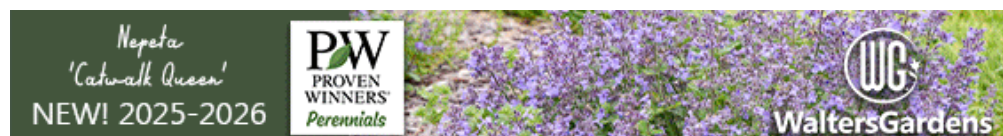
Alberta (7). "With recent provincial restrictions set in place for COVID, businesses in our province are limited to 10% capacity. Though we maintained lineups outside the store through the weekend, some simply chose not to shop. Coupled with rain all Saturday, things were steady, but product certainly did not move as quickly as it did last year when there were no restrictions in place for capacity. We've now made the decision to open earlier, so as to offer even more time to shop, and have altered navigation through the store to keep customers separated amongst plant departments. All in all, we feel very fortunate to be open, as restaurants, salons, spas and many other businesses are currently closed."—*Tina Burbach, Greenland Garden Centre*

Alberta (7). "Rain, snow, sleet, with some extra wind thrown in for good measure. Customers stood out in line to enter the greenhouse. Our current restricted access is at 10%. We knew we had great product to sell, we just had to make people wait for it."—*Kristen Busse, Greengate Garden Centers*

Fortunately, other provinces aren't as restrictive:

British Columbia (10). "Friday tied our best day ever. Saturday was 20% more. Tons of baskets sold. Bedding was a little slower. Overall, a huge success."—*Tim Vaandrager, Vaandrager Nurseries*

Ontario (9). "Weather here is similar to Chicago: cold, some rain and heavy morning frosts. Guess that doesn't affect mom!"—*Joanna Steckles, Steckles' Produce & Flowers*



Van de Wetering enters lease agreement with cannabis company

Jen Zurko handled the reporting duties on the following interesting story of how an ornamental greenhouse can profit from cannabis without growing cannabis:

Van de Wetering Greenhouses on Long Island has announced that it has entered into a long-term, multi-year lease agreement with Columbia Care, Inc., a cultivator, manufacturer and provider of medical and recreational cannabis products. Columbia Care is now the sole owner of the 34-acre property in Riverhead, New York. But interestingly, Van de Wetering will be leasing back 90% of the greenhouse space to continue growing their plugs and liners.

Walter Gravagna, president and owner of Van de Wetering Greenhouses, explained that with New York state recently legalizing recreational cannabis, they'd been approached during the past year by multiple cannabis companies looking to lease or rent out greenhouse space. There were so many that Walter hired Rubin Capital, an investment banking firm, to manage the inquiries and vet the interested companies—one of which was Columbia Care.

Walter admitted that he and his wife, Karin, whose family started the business in 1989, weren't looking to sell, but when they met with Columbia Care, the offer they presented was too tempting not to consider. Columbia Care wanted to buy the entire property and then lease a majority of it back to Van de Wetering. This way, Columbia Care could use a small amount of established greenhouse space to start their cannabis business, while Van de Wetering could continue to operate its ornamentals business as usual in the rest of the space.



Photo from their website.

"Looking 10, 12 years down the road, I needed a plan," said Walter. "It was a perfect situation for me and for our employees."

Walter said that it presented the best of both worlds—he and Karin had plans to continue their growing operation for many years yet, but the deal also allows them to plan ahead for the future of the property and the business. None of their three children—who are all around college-age—are interested in pursuing a career in the family business, so this gives the Gravagnas an option once they decide to retire.



Van de Wetering (continued)

Columbia Care will start out with 100,000 sq. ft. in an isolated rear greenhouse toward the back of the property. The company's plan is to slowly expand as necessary as their business and the New York cannabis marketplace evolves. Columbia Care's medical cannabis program is expected to start in the fourth quarter of 2021, pending regulatory approvals.

Walter said he and Karin not only liked Columbia Care because they were so open and agreeable to the terms, but because they're a local company. Columbia Care has a dispensary in Riverhead and have been in the community for the last few years. Walter is a member of the New York Farm Bureau and on Riverhead's ag advisory committee, so he was already familiar with them.

In the short-term, not much will change for Van de Wetering and its customers. They're continuing with business as usual as a Gold Supplier for Ball Seed, supplying young plants for the mid-Atlantic and Midwest.

"We're looking to continue to do business as we always have," said Walter. "Will there be some impact on some of our finished crops? Sure. But this will have zero impact on our young plant business, which is 80% of what we do. It's our bread-and-butter, and we want to be the best at that. Our customers are growing and demand is growing, and we want to be able to meet that demand."

Walter said that the partnership with Columbia Care will provide new opportunities for Van de Wetering to expand and focus on its already robust young plant program.

"We're always looking to get better every year, but sometimes when you're in this cycle of always doing everything to please everyone, you kind of compromise in some areas. We're really trying to get to a point where we don't compromise on anything," he said. "This will only make us stronger and more focused. We want our customers to know that the young plants that they've always depended on, they can continue to depend on for years to come."



A raft of new industry positions

Every day I've been getting announcements of folks taking new positions within horticulture. Here are a few of them:

Syngenta Flowers announced that **Kelli Gibson** has joined the sales team in North America as its newest broker account manager. Kelli has more than 20 years of experience working in horticulture and has previously held sales positions at Express and PanAmerican Seed.

Eason Horticultural Resources of Ft. Wright, Kentucky, announces quite a few new office staff, plus these three new sales positions:

- **Jim Etzel** will be covering Delaware, Maryland, Eastern Pennsylvania and the Washington, D.C. area

- **Paige Moats** will be handling nursery sales throughout Oklahoma, northwest Arkansas and northern Texas

- **Jack Campbell** will cover parts of Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina

Dümmen Orange announced a change of position and a new employee:

- **Rebecca Lusk**, a 19-year Dümmen Orange employee and director of retail accounts, will be joining Vaughan's Horticulture as part of its key account team

- **Marta Maria Garcia**, an experienced corporate retail marketing executive who came to horticulture from Bacardi via Costa Farms, is set to become the new retail director of Dümmen Orange North America

Congrats to all!



Finally ...

Did you experience an unusually high heating fuel bill in February? As in, like, normally you'd spend \$2,000 to heat and this year you were billed \$90,000? If so, I'd like to hear from you. I recently got the news that growers in some parts of the Midwest and maybe elsewhere got hit with outrageously high bills this winter—high enough to possibly put some of them under—and I'm trying to find out why, and if there is any relief for them or if it's just a case of caveat emptor. Email me at beytes@growertalks.com if you have any insights or information.

See you next time!

Chi

Chris Beytes

Editor

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