

Outback, Ball Partner; April 15-16 Scores; Easter for Grocers

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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

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Outback Plants, Ball Horticultural join forces



It's been quiet on the horticultural mergers & acquisitions front, but we've got one this week involving an Australian plant/TC/licensing company and a major breeder/distributor you may have heard of.

Outback Plants of Melbourne, Australia, which you may know from some of the unique “down-under” genetics you’ve seen from them over the years, like brachyscome, scaevola and lomandra, has joined forces with **Ball Horticultural Company**, based in West Chicago, Illinois (but with divisions and partners all around the globe—including Australia). The merger will “support important global initiatives in tissue culture supply management and continue to build additional licensing opportunities for the horticulture industry,” said Ball in the press release. In plain English, Ball says it wants to expand its capabilities in tissue culture—one of Outback Plants’ key strengths. Already heavily into seed and cutting production, Ball sees TC as a future growth area.



In addition, the partnership will give Ball greater access to the wide array of genetics from the many global breeders that Outback represents and licenses to Ball and other third-party distributors. However, Outback’s relationships with third-party distributors will continue, we are told. The deal also includes Australian Horticultural Services, which does consulting, plant breeder’s rights and plant patent applications.

Outback Plants and Australian Horticultural Services has been operated by Managing Director Mark Lunghusen for some 33 years, according to LinkedIn. Mark will join Ball Horticultural Company in a licensing and supply management position. The existing Outback Plants team will continue their work on sourcing new plant specimens from independent breeders and building global laboratory relationships.

“For years, Outback Plants has been passionate about refining pathways for tissue culture into both the local and global markets,” said Mark. “Merging these services with Ball Horticultural Company is a natural next step to pursuing even wider assortments of specimens into tissue culture.”

Added Al Davidson, president of Ball Horticultural Company, “Mark and his team have built a strong foundation in tissue culture supply management and have found new avenues to bring new and exciting plants to market. Their close relationships with designated labs across all stages of TC development places them in the center of this growing segment. We look forward to combining forces and opening new channels for breeding and supply management in this area.”



How was last week/weekend?

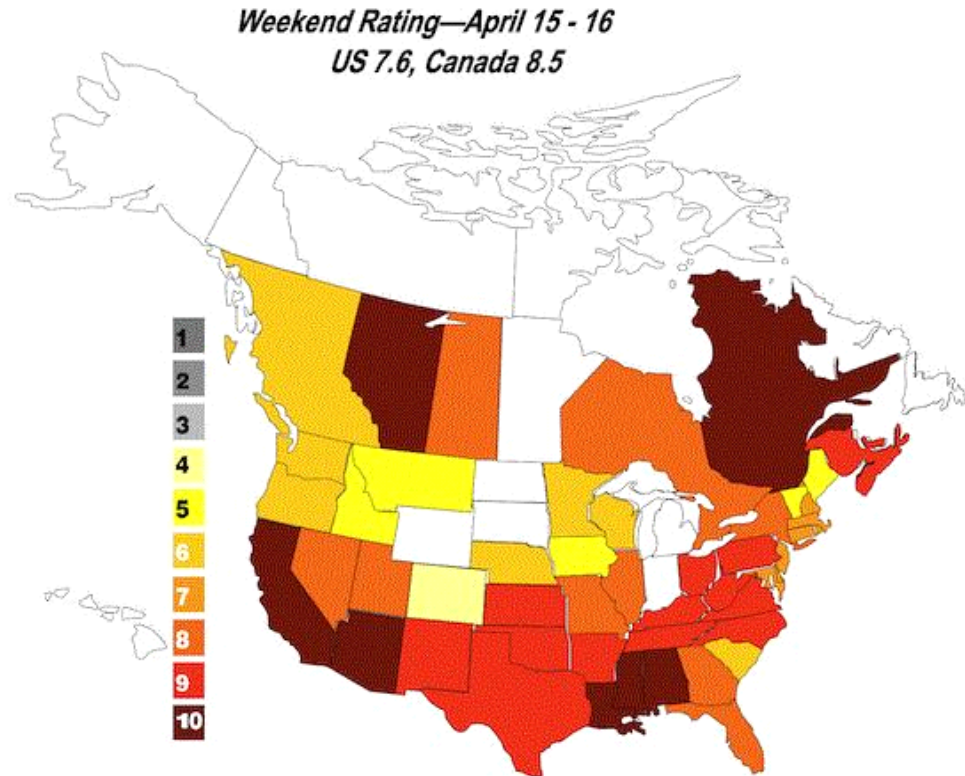
Very solid for mid-April in the U.S. and extremely strong in much of Canada, with the exception of British Columbia, which is still facing the lousy weather affecting all of the Pacific Northwest.

So say your scores for April 15-16. The results: **7.6 in the U.S.** and **8.5 in Canada.**

GrowerTalks Magazine, Ball Horticultural Company, BASF & AmericanHort are happy to present:



Here's the map:



That's based on 107 scores from 43 states and six provinces.

I'd say it was the first strong weekend of the year for many of you because you sent in 29 perfect 10s—that's 27% of all scores. In fact, several of you said it was a record-setting weekend or the best in many years. That says a lot, considering that the same weekend last year was Easter!

Regionally, the West led the way at 9.3, followed by the South (8.8) and East (7.9).

Conversely, you sent in three scores of 2 (Colorado, Iowa and Minnesota), 3 (Illinois ... surprisingly because the rest of that state averaged 8.4, including two 10s), and 3.5 (Washington). Regionally, the Pacific Northwest (5.5) struggled the most, followed by the Mountain region (5.7) and New England (6.3). Not that we expect records from the northernmost regions in mid-April, but we can hope for an early start!

Up in Canada, BC sent the most scores (4), resulting in a rather dismal 6.0. Alberta and Quebec each scored a single perfect 10, the Atlantic region a 9, Ontario and Saskatchewan each an 8—not enough scores to judge an entire country, but at least a taste of what occurred.

Like last week, the map colors tell the tale of where the weather—and hence business—was good and where it wasn't. Because thus far it seems to be all about the weather, as many of you said in your comments.

Your enthusiastic comments

With so many 10s, I thought we'd hear from those who saw great success this past week.

Virginia (10). "In spite of a rainy start to the day, sales were awesome. It feels like the spring season has finally kicked into gear."—*Duane Weaver, Millmont Greenhouses*

Virginia (10). "Beautiful weather and excited gardeners made for a great weekend, with strong sales across all categories!"—*Gary Garner III, Gary's Garden Center*

Oklahoma (10). “Absolutely incredible.”—*Joe Ward, Southwood Nursery*

North Carolina (10). “Record day for receipts. First beautiful spring day.”—*Judy Mitchell, Mitchell’s Nursery & Greenhouse*

Ohio (10). “What perfect weather Saturday for our opening day of the season. All-time daily record for April.”—*Kim Grant, Strait Gate Greenhouses*

Missouri (10). “Exceptional weather, with the exception of a pop-up thunderstorm that dumped lots of rain and had lots of lightning for about 30 minutes. Had approximately 25 customers riding the storm out inside the greenhouses—a fun and memorable event for all!”—*Tim Cahill, Cahill Family Greenhouses*

California (15 ... but I brought it down to my maximum, 10). “Biggest day ever on Saturday. Monster Thursday–Sunday. Shelves are empty ... a great problem!”—*Tom Courtright, Orchard Nursery*

North Carolina (10). “Best weekend in 23 years.”—*Marty Martin, Stacy’s Garden World*

Illinois (10). “Beautiful weather led to sales doubled compared to same day last year. The temperature was probably doubled, too!”—*Trevor Woldhuis, Woldhuis Farms Sunrise Greenhouse*

Alabama (10). “Finally, a pretty Saturday—moved us from third-best-year ever easily into our second-best-year ever—2021 best, 2022 now third, 2023 now second. I despise how dependent we are on the weather, but this weekend I loved how dependent we were on the weather. Top five busiest days of all time.”—*JD Boone, Dothan Nurseries*

New York (9). “The weather was great, almost too good for this time of year. Many customers [are] looking for vegetables and bedding plants that we haven’t even brought in yet this spring because it is too soon. But trees, shrubs and perennials went out nicely.”—*Jim Boxberger, Monticello Farm Home & Garden*

Notes from the rest of you

Nevada (8). “Transactions and sales up strongly over a year ago; the first indication this year that earlier weak results were more bad weather/snow/cold-related than economic/other issues.”—*Bruce Gescheider, Moana Nursery*

Florida (8). “North and Central Florida seeing really dry weather. We truly need rain to motivate buying.”—*Bill Biedenstein*

Iowa (7). “Banging day on Saturday with 80F temperatures and sun. Sunday followed with cold and a rainout. Still, decently busy despite the rain.”—*Kate Terrell, Wallace’s Garden Center*

New Jersey (7). “We had a beautiful week of weather. Warm and sunny, and this is stimulating our customers to start getting deliveries of spring material.”—*Bill Swanekamp, Kube-Pak*

Oregon (7). “Saturday was actually almost 60F, with some rare sun, so sales shot up. Then it rained and hailed all Sunday.”—*Ed Blatter, Cornell Farm*

British Columbia (7). “The one day of t-shirt weather was the only reason this is a 7. Very chilly for annual sales, but perennial and shrub sales doing well.”—*John Derrick, Elk Lake Garden Centre*

Washington (6). “It’s been a wet and cold start to spring in the PNW. We had decent traffic and okay sales through the weekend, but spring has not sprung!”—*Tom Van Wingerden, Van Wingerden Greenhouses*

Minnesota (2). “80s and sunshine for most of last week turned into a cold and rainy Saturday, then two more inches of white stuff on Sunday. Welcome to Minnesota in April!”—*Derek Lynde, Lynde Greenhouse & Nursery*

Iowa (2). “Mother Nature played a dirty trick on us. Mid-week we set record highs, only to have a

Sunday surprise with below-freezing temps and 4 in. of snow. Up to 10 in. in nearby La Crosse, Wisconsin. Making matters worse, next weekend has predicted below-freezing lows for most of the upper Midwest. Not the start we needed.”—Mike Gooder, *Plantpeddler*

I was pleased to hear what Bruce from Nevada had to say about his sales being impacted by weather, not the economy. What about the rest of you—as we head into May and Mother’s Day and Victoria Day and Memorial Day, do you have any reason to believe Spring 2023 will be affected by anything other than the weather? Are interest rates or inflation having an effect on your business? Let me know [HERE](#).



How was Easter for grocery floral?

“Below expectations,” for a majority of retailers, reports the [International Fresh Produce Association](#) (IFPA), which generously shared its Easter Pulse Survey data with me. Here is IFPA’s summary of the holiday:

“Easter 2023 floral sales did not meet expectations for 62% of retailers, as consumers struggle with decreased purchasing power due to inflation. Many customers traded down on Easter purchases. Bouquets, consumer bunches and roses performed well for most retailers, while traditional Easter bulbs and arrangements did not perform as well as expected. It appears that the cost of product was elevated compared to 2022 and in-store labor is still an issue.”

In addition, 38% of retailers reported floral sales were down Easter 2023 compared to Easter 2022.



Traditional Easter bulbs were down for 62% of respondents. Instead, consumers picked bouquets and bunches.

Here are some key questions they asked of supermarket retailers:

How did floral sales for the Easter holiday meet your expectations?

	2022	2023
Exceeded expectations	38%	8%
Met expectations	46%	31%
Were below expectations	15%	62%

Which floral categories performed well the week of Easter?

	2022	2023
Bouquets	92%	92%
Consumer bunches	54%	69%
Roses	62%	54%
Potted plants	69%	38%
Traditional Easter bulbs	31%	31%
Arrangements	31%	23%

Which floral categories did NOT perform as expected the week of Easter?

	2022	2023
Traditional Easter bulbs	23%	62%
Arrangements	31%	54%
Potted plants	31%	23%
Roses	15%	23%
Bouquets	8%	8%
Consumer bunches	8%	8%

How was traffic in the floral department compared to last year?

	2022	2023
Down	15%	38%
The same	23%	38%
Up	62%	23%



Regis Berger honored by peat industry

Congratulations to Mr. Regis Berger, the second-generation leader and patriarch of the three-generation peat moss company that bears the family's name, who was recently awarded the Medal of Honor from the [New Brunswick Peat Producers Association](#). The award recognizes individuals who have demonstrated a high level of excellence and outstanding realizations to the peat industry and who contributed, with their actions, to the overall well being of the Province of New Brunswick on a social, cultural and economic level.



Regis Berger (third from left) surrounded by some of the company's New Brunswick employees.

"This prestigious award fills me with both gratitude and humility, especially now that we are celebrating the 60th anniversary of Berger," said Mr. Berger. "I would like to share this medal with Claudin, my brother and long-time partner, as well as with the whole Berger family."

Regis Berger began working with his mother—the founder of **Berger**—when he was 11. He ran the business with his brother from 1980 to 2015. Under their leadership, Berger innovated the peat industry with value-added products, including international exports, the creation of different grades of peat, the deployment of the Skyscraper extra-large peat bale, and innovative, sustainable management of harvesting sites.

Berger, headquartered in Saint-Modeste, Quebec, is a third-generation family business currently managed by Valerie and Melissa Berger, operating 11 harvesting sites, nine production plants in North America and employing more than 800 employees.



Tour Green Circle Growers this summer!

To get the most from your time in Columbus, Ohio, this July when attending Cultivate'23, consider joining their Saturday Greenhouse Production Tour, which this year includes Green Circle Growers, the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center (OARDC), and Secret Arboretum.

Green Circle Growers is one of the largest greenhouse growers in the state of Ohio, if not the Midwest. Come see how they use technology to drive operational efficiency, especially in their shipping practices. You'll explore their orchid, ornamental, and tropical and foliage plant greenhouses, as well as have a chance to talk about production practices for each of these crops. You'll learn more about how they manage numerous growing teams to achieve consistent plant quality.

For the second half of the day, you'll visit the **Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center** (OARDC) in Wooster—part of The Ohio State University. The campus houses multiple

greenhouse complexes involved in applied and basic research in horticulture, engineering, plant pathology and entomology. Hear about the latest game-changing research findings in technology around the greenhouse and efficient growing practices. You'll tour greenhouses currently being used to conduct a wide range of research, including evaluating production inputs, plant growth regulators, managing phosphorous use efficiency, integrated pest management and benchmarks for sustainable floriculture crop production.

You'll also see the new TraitFinder Greenhouse Phenotyping system that's used to provide fully automated multispectral images of experimental plants. These images are used to quantify plant growth and crop health.

The tour will also include a stop at the [Secret Arboretum](#), located at the OARDC, where participants will hear about the research on Rose Rosette and Black Spot diseases, as well as have a chance to examine cultivars being evaluated for resistance to these diseases.

Cultivate tours are a great way to learn more about greenhouse technology, network with other greenhouse growers and take away new ideas for your own operations on this day-long tour.

To register, click [HERE](#).

If you're a retailer or more interested in visiting nurseries than greenhouses, you'll find those tours at the same location.



Register now for FlowerTrials 2023

If you're a flower gal or guy, this event should be on your bucket list: the annual European FlowerTrials (AKA Week 24 Trials), which is very much the equivalent of the California Spring Trials—except on steroids!

This four-day event, slated for June 13-16, features a whopping 60 breeders of bedding and potted plants, perennials, cut flowers, tropicals and more, exhibiting at 29 locations in the Netherlands and Germany. Thankfully, some of them are situated so that you can park once and walk to several. Even at that, it's impossible to see them all unless you do it at a fast lope—and skip the coffee, snacks, lunches, adult beverages and networking with plant people from more than 80 countries. (Which is NOT the way to do it!)



Multiply this Selecta One display by 60 and you get an idea of the scale and scope of FlowerTrials.

Why attend? For growers, FlowerTrials showcases the latest varieties for the upcoming season, with experts on hand to provide cultural support. For wholesalers and retailers, the event is an outstanding opportunity to meet the breeders, examine the top varieties and have the opportunity to view and even influence trends. While not all the varieties are available in North America, many are—and the ideas and inspiration you'll find know no borders.

For more information and to register (one registration covers all locations), click [HERE](#).

Another reason to attend? It's at the same time as [GreenTech Amsterdam](#), June 13-15. Make a week of it and take the tax writeoff!

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Finally ...

The Doctor is In is a podcast series hosted by Nadia “Dr. Greenhouse” Sabeh, Ph.D., an expert and self-professed greenhouse geek. She earned her Ph.D. in agriculture and biosystems engineering at the University of Arizona’s Controlled Environment Agriculture Center (CEAC) and has even done interesting research, like putting a greenhouse model in a wind tunnel in Japan to study how its ventilation works in different orientations.

Anyway, her current podcast series is called “What Plants Crave” and it focuses on the technology required to provide the optimum climate for plants in greenhouse and vertical farm settings—fascinating!

There are several episodes in this series, plus 65 podcasts total, so plenty to learn about greenhouses from Dr. Greenhouse. One you might consider starting with is [THIS EPISODE](#),

which features Jim Rearden and Thad Humphrey from BioTherm. Jim and Thad discuss a wide range of topics, including heating, of course, as that's one of their specialties, but they also get into the topic of greenhouse vs. indoor farming. Jim describes the key advantage to greenhouses as, "One simple thing: The big lightbulb in the sky."



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See you next time,

Chris Beytes

Editor

GrowerTalks and Green Profit

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