



How Was Easter? Plus More Dummer; CAST Dates; Amazing Plant Research




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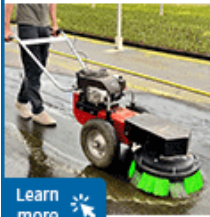
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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

- Easter was great!
- States and regions
 - A good analysis
 - Your comments
- Dummer sells orchid biz
CAST dates for '25, '26
Finally ...

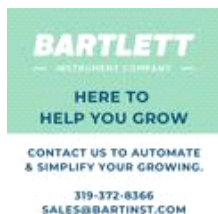
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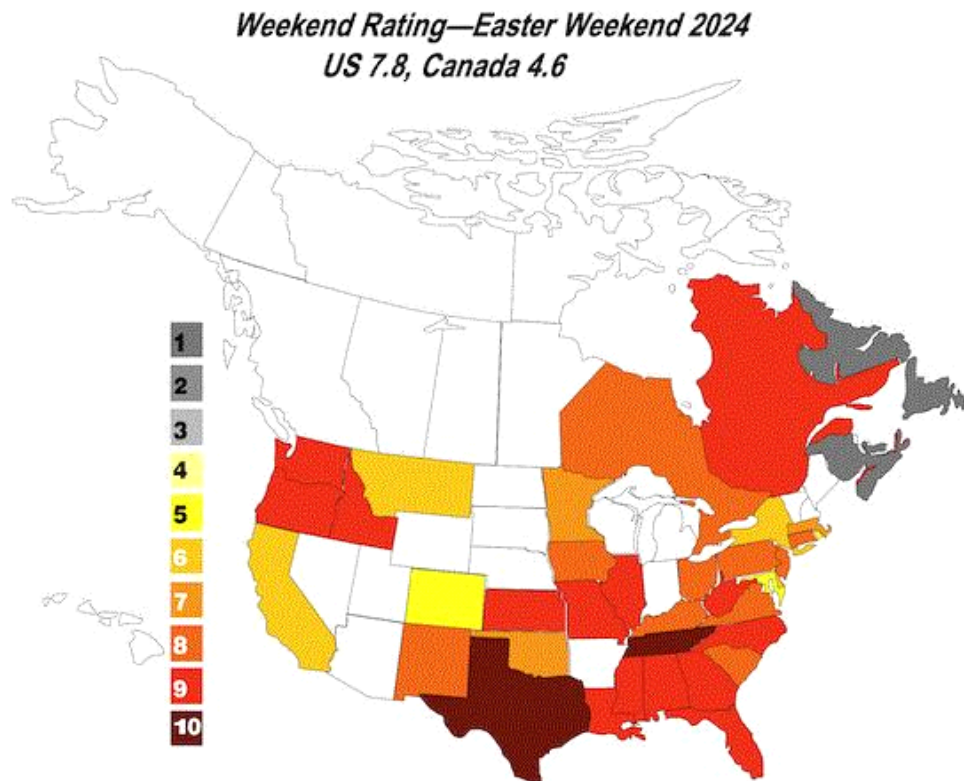
Easter was great, considering how early it was



What a great start to Spring 2024! Or at least the first weekend of April, which I consider the unofficial official start to spring, which this year happened to be Easter, which could be a blessing or a curse—a blessing because it's a weekend many consumers like to get out and buy some flowers, either Easter flowers or garden flowers, and a curse because an early Easter could also be a cold Easter, which isn't conducive to visiting a garden center.

Thankfully, most of you report a stellar weather weekend and the weekend score reflects that: **7.8 in the U.S. and 4.6 in Canada** (more on that in a second).

Here's the map:

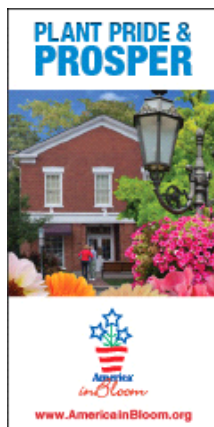
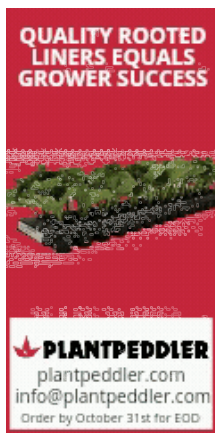


That's based on 69 scores from 34 states and four provinces. (There are still lots of blanks, folks, so please consider playing along starting next week!) You sent in eleven 10s and ten 9s. There were low scores—four 1s and five 2s. And a few of you from the most northern climes sent no score, saying your season hadn't yet started, which is understandable. Upper New England, for instance.

Last year, the first weekend of April (April 1-2) scored a so-so 6.3 in the U.S. Was the boost of 1.5 points solely due to Easter? No, because Easter 2023 was the very next weekend (April 8-9) and it scored just 7.0. No, I think we have to credit Easter AND the great weather most of you reported.

As for Canada, it's still seasonably cold up there, and the early Easter was probably wasted. Last year, Canada scored a whopping 7.8, one of its best season-opener scores since I started this little survey. In 2023, Canada scored just 4.5 for Easter, so the holiday is no help; I think only sun and warmth will bring out the serious shoppers.

Regionally and top states



After a tough season last year, it was nice to hear so many strong comments from the Pacific Northwest, which scored a 9.0. Weatherwise, it can go either direction—miserable or mild—and this year is starting off nice.

Ed Blatter of Cornell Farms in Oregon scored it a 10, writing, “Don’t know if folks are replacing what the abnormally brutal winter killed or just reacting to three very fine blue spring days, but we had a record weekend for March.”

Kathy Wheaton of Kathy’s Corner in Washington scored her weekend a 10-plus ... and also gave it an “OMG!!!”

She wrote, “People were out in force. The weather was so perfect. Everyone was in a great mood, we had early color ready, and with the shelves full and the weather prefect, the nursery was looking great and the full parking lot made all the work worthwhile.”

The South (8.8) we expect to be strong in April, but the Plains (8.3) and Midwest (8.2) were early surprises. Illinois sent me a 10, a 9 and two 8s. Kansas sent a 9 and an 8. Missouri sent a 10, a 9 and a 7. Even Minnesota, home of Frostbite Falls, sent an 8 and a 6, for an average of 7. Some years we don’t see scores like that from them until Mother’s Day.

Overall, it doesn’t seem like anyone was expecting strong sales and didn’t get them due to weather. Well, maybe California, where someone sent in a 4 due to rain all weekend.



A good analysis of the holiday

Metrolina Greenhouses CEO Abe VanWingerden always provides insightful comments about the 16 states he serves. His scores ranged from 10 (Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina) down to 5 (Maryland) for an average of 9. Here’s his analysis of the weekend:

“Great sales in the South last week, with many 10s across the board as all three days of the holiday weekend—Friday/Saturday/Sunday—were perfect weather and consumers were in the buying mood. Scores are based on what we expected to sell, so while Pennsylvania (9), West Virginia (9) and Illinois (9) were not big [sales] numbers, they exceeded our expectations on early season product.

“Easter is not as big of a floral holiday as it used to be, but a good mix of hydrangeas, lilies and other bulb product still sold well. More importantly, gardening consumers were out in full force, either getting ready for the season or putting out some early color in their yards. Decorative items like color bowls, containers and hanging baskets were the strongest sellers, which makes sense early, and only some coastal rain in DE/MD/NJ slowed sales.

“Good start to the season, and we are not seeing any pullback in spending or engagement from consumers.”

Your reports from the field echoed what Abe said about strong early sales boding well for the season. Customers are shopping—and spending! It’s too early to know how much they’ll be spending, or what on, but if they’re in your store it’s up to you to inspire them to fill their carts and wagons.

Here are some more comments from across the U.S. and Canada:

Alabama (10.5 ... which I reduce to 10). “Wow! Second-best day Saturday and second-best March ever, missing best by less than 1%. [We were] 20% down three weeks ago, 10% up

today. Blessed!"—*John David Boone, Dothan Nurseries*

Texas (10). "Good weather and timely rains have helped this spring in all Texas market areas."—*Brad Abrameit, Magnolia Gardens Nursery*

Ontario (9). "Three days of Easter egg hunts went very well (we capped the daily numbers at 360 and sold out on the spaces). Good sales numbers. The weather is just starting to warm up. English roses and Eden roses are in high demand, but not sold out yet. [We had] leftover Easter lilies (they aren't selling as well as they used to)."—*MaryAnn Vandermeer, Vandermeer Nursery*

Washington (9). "Friday was perfect weather and a bang-up way to start the weekend—customers were shopping every display and filling their carts! Saturday was even better, although cool, cloudy weather rolling in around noon slowed customers down in the afternoon hours. Still, an excellent way to start the spring selling season!"—*David Vos, Vander Giessen Nursery*

Washington/Oregon/Idaho (9). "We are in a region still recovering from the loss of Skagit Gardens, so there is a giant void that needs to be filled. We are also experiencing pretty great weather for our region, so it feels very good for this time of year! I didn't want to start out too optimistic, but I can't help myself!"—*Tom Van Wingerden, Van Wingerden Greenhouses*



More solid scores

Minnesota (8). "Strong sales of potted flowering plants and Easter Lilies. Weather was cool, but not absurdly cold. This coming weekend shows highs in the 60s and lots of sun to boot. We expect early spring pansies to be mostly shipped out by the end of next week."—*Jay Holasek, Fred Holasek & Son Greenhouse*

Virginia (8). "Spring is off to a great start!"—*Gary Garner III, Gary's Garden Center*

Virginia (8). "Very good, but not wonderful."—*Duane Weaver, Milmont Greenhouses*

Illinois (8). "Wow, another season coming up again ... It feels like yesterday I gave my last score for the season. Weather here in Illinois is very up and down, days in the 40s to 60s F, some sun, rain and occasionally a few flurries. Easter was good—we had more churches interested than last year and larger numbers. It is early, but overall customers are super excited about spring and we are getting lots of calls every day with questions about what is ready. (People are ready for tomatoes, but sorry, it is a bit too early for that.) Pansies are selling well and so are hellebores. Lots of interest in seeds and germination mix with trays so people start a taste of spring at home. Let's see what spring brings, but hopeful for a good season."—*JP, Countryside Flower Shop, Nursery and Garden Center*

Iowa (8). "We had a jumping Friday with nice sunny weather. Saturday was nice weather, and we had a spring event with Meet the Easter Bunny, lambs to pet and train rides for the kids. No egg hunt, but we did have a kids' scavenger hunt through the store that is offered all the time. We were overrun with customers and people parking blocks away to come in. At one point we

had over 200 people in line to meet the Easter Bunny. The huge crowd translated to good sales that day. We were open Easter Sunday for a partial day and did a pretty decent business while we were open. We were genuinely caught off guard at our Easter Saturday traffic and ended up doing pretty great with the flood of people that were here. Let's hope this is just the start!"—*Kate Terrell, Wallace's Garden Center*



And a few softer scores

Missouri (7). "Opening weekend, our soft opening. I have given up on a lot of the hoopla of opening for the season and holiday sales. The weather is far more influential than any sale or promotion and it has been and was variable all of March. People are confused and frustrated by it. Me, too! And we all know that the weather will continue the same! My sales were just about right between my best and worst opening weekend of Easter. This includes a big fat 0 and snow for Easter 2018 and my highest opening weekend, the one before the state shut down on Monday in 2020 (my only Sunday sales ever). Rollercoasters hold no interest for me."—*Beth Weidner, Weeds Greenhouse & Gardens*

Kentucky ("a weak 7, traditional Easter items maybe a 3"). "Nice weather. Good sales in fruit trees, strawberries, brambles. Poor sales of traditional Easter items—church orders for lilies steeply declined over the past few years and continues; bulb crops didn't time well due to issues in Holland. Very strong sales to commercial veggie growers, especially in the tunnel tomatoes."—*Jesse Shelton, Sheltons Greenhouses*

Ontario (6). "Cool temps kept things slowish for the box stores. Potted indoor hydrangeas did well, but flat to last year; spring Easter planters did not do as well, had to be discounted to move. Eventually did, but it was a push. Those were flat to last year as well. IGCs were full of traffic, but actual sales were just okay. I'm optimistic that this is an indication that the consumer has spring fever. We are expecting a snow storm in the north this week, so pansy suppliers here in Niagara are holding on shipping this week's orders until next week."—*Brenda Bliss Cooling, Ball Seed*

Minnesota (6). "Difficult to compare with Easter being a week earlier than last year. Versus the same weekend from last year, we did great. Easter vs. Easter, I'd rather not score it. I'm not getting too excited yet though; a good day this time of year is equal to a good hour on a weekday in May."—*Derek Lynde, Lynde Greenhouse*

Montana (6). "Based on gut instinct, great turnout for seminars, surprisingly decent weather, so folks came to stroll about and ask gardening questions. Sales not great, but I gave it a 6 because we had foot traffic even if not all were buyers. Trees and houseplants were big sellers."—*Jeri Zirbel, Caras Nursery*

Colorado (5). "Some rain, some wind, some cold, some sun. Spring in the Rockies."—*Gene Pielin, Gulley Greenhouse*



Another Dümme Orange divestiture: Orchids

Following on the heels of my [Dümmen Orange update](#) of a few weeks ago, the German company has made yet another “strategic realignment”—selling its global phalaenopsis orchid business, which includes all breeding, propagation and sales activities worldwide—to the management team of Sogo, the Taiwanese orchid breeder that Dümmen Orange [acquired in 2017](#). Sogo began operating independently on April 1. Sogo currently employs 330 people and comprises propagation for customers around the world.

Said Dümmen Orange in the press release, this move is “further reinforcing Dümmen Orange’s commitment to streamlining its operations and focusing on offerings in markets where it already has core competencies and strong positions.”



Orchid tissue culture propagation at Sogo.

Marta Maria Garcia, head of product management, marketing and retail for the company, reiterated via email what COO Perry Wismans told me a few weeks ago: “The selling of this piece of business is going to help us remain committed to our core business strategies—breeding high-quality products, ensure best production quality of starter material and focus on our distribution in North America.”

CEO Hugo Noordhoek Hegt offered a bit more detail in the release, stating “... We have to be realistic. As a breeder we cannot always make the difference in the marketplace, which for orchids has its very specific characteristics. To remain successful in the global orchids market, focus is needed. Within Dümmen Orange’s global portfolio we cannot offer orchids that focus and that is why it’s better to take this decision. With a great team, a strong customer base and 100% focus on the orchids business, Sogo is very well positioned to continue to have a bright future.”

New CAST dates

Putting to bed any rumors, rumblings, questions or concerns about the future of the long-running new varieties showcase, the powers that be regarding the California Spring Trials have announced dates for the 2025 *AND* 2026 events—showing they’re committed to the event. The dates are:

2025—Wednesday through Saturday, March 26-29

2026—Wednesday through Saturday, March 25-28

Astute and curious editor Jen Zurko is digging into the question of “why announce so early?” Normally, we don’t get dates until July. And even then for just one year. Interesting!

Speaking of the California Spring Trials, if you missed our coverage of CAST 2024, you can find all the written stuff at our [California Trials](#) website and all our video coverage on our [YouTube](#)



Finally ...

Dutch scientists have figured out some pretty wild things. Like using a giant **microwave oven to heat pavement** so it melts slightly, smoothing and leveling itself. And **cement that contains bacteria** that poop limestone, which can seal cracks in the concrete.

A next frontier for Dutch boffins? Figuring out how plants register forces if they don't have a brain and central nervous system. That will be the research focus of the GreenTE (Green Tissue Engineering) consortium over the next 10 years. The group has been awarded a \$24.7 million grant for this purpose. The consortium is led by Professors Dolf Weijers and Joris Sprakel of the Laboratory of Biochemistry at Wageningen University & Research.

"It has been known for more than 100 years that plants have a sense of touch," said Professor Sprakel. "They sense touch or wind, they register when a fungus tries to invade. Grass, for example, perceives whether you walk on it and that then triggers all kinds of processes in the plant that lead to increased strength. But how exactly does that work? That's really still a blind spot in our knowledge."

Adds Professor Weijers, "That is the first big challenge in this program. If we better understand how a plant perceives that fungus is invading, we might also be able to help them become more resilient. That is the second challenge. Using the mechanical defenses of plants is an area that is totally untapped in all attempts to make plants more resistant to diseases. As such, this research could boost the development of food crops that are more resistant to plant diseases."

Ornamental crops, too, I would imagine, if their efforts are fruitful.

Feel free to email me at beytes@growertalks.com if you have ideas, comments or questions.

See you next time!



Chris Beytes

Editor-in-Chief

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