

Spider Mite Woes + State of Our Industry + a Flower Farmer Wins!



Crop culture and commentary for fresh-cut flower growers

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BLOOM BEAT

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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

- End-of-July Farm Update
- Spider Mite Woes
- Charlie Hall's Industry Recap
- YGA Winner is a Flower Farmer!



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End of July Farm Update





The farm exploded into color while we were gone. The lisianthus is swoon-worthy!

Tater and I managed to sneak away to Lake Michigan for a much-needed vacations this month. She had the best time on the beach under her blue umbrella. It was nice being able to leave the farm in the hands of our employees and take a break. The best part is, the farm was intact when we came home!

It was odd not working for a few days (not sure if that is good or bad). Sometimes I'm too close to the forest to see all the trees, but I was able to step back and plan for the months ahead. Granted, we did unplug and take a break from even thinking about the farm. But we did some hiring before we left and now I have to rework the budget to account for the new hires. The best part is, there is plenty of runway between now and Christmas to engineer a plan for more flowers. I'd rather retain the talent we're training now than scrounge for more help next season. It's a good problem to have; we just need to make sure we have the flowers to sell to account for the increase in payroll.

I'm starting to realize that building our bench of talent is critical each season. In order to grow sustainably you need the talent to match the volume you're producing. Needless to say, vacation was relaxing but also gave me time to strategize for the future.

As soon as we got home the outdoor fields were starting to explode in color. Welcome to peak flower season! Most of our summer favorites made their debut over the last few weeks, including (but not limited to): dahlias, sunflowers, zinnias, lisianthus, strawflowers and celosia. Thankfully, we have the weeds and insects under control—at least for the most part. We found some rockstar new hires, and Tater and I are getting them trained just in time for peak harvest season.

I keep telling myself that eventually I will get the hang of this, but veteran growers in my community tell me that they've been doing this for more than 30 years and still get thrown a curve ball every season. Well, at least I'm in good company!

In this edition of *Bloom Beat* we're talking about spider mites, Dr. Hall's green industry outlook and more! With all that being said, let's talk shop.



Dr. Charlie Hall: "It's too early to freak out"

I missed seeing my green industry friends at Cultivate last week. Dr. Hall's annual state of the industry address is always one of the highlights. Dr. Hall of Texas A&M is also the chief green industry economist for AmericanHort and is the industry's go-to guy for industry statistics, forecasting and benchmarking. Although this data is geared towards bedding plant production, landscapers and independent garden centers, flower farmers can glean a lot of information about consumer spending. Fellow editor Bill Calkins from [Tech on Demand](#) was there to capture the key points from Dr. Hall's presentation. Thank you, Bill!

Read carefully and enjoy!

While the spring season wasn't record-breaking by any means, there are plenty of reasons to remain optimistic. Judging by the vast crowd of people attending the Monday morning keynote at AmericanHort's Cultivate'24 event this week, finding guidance from the folks who study the industry at a macro level is as important now as it has ever been. In the words of Ken Fisher (president and CEO of AmericanHort), if you have questions about industry data, the economy,

the election or how to plan for 2025, ASK DR. HALL!

Here's what green industry economist and Texas A&M prof Dr. Charlie Hall had to say to the crowd. Oh, and the title of this news piece was his Monday mantra: it's too early to freak out.

Charlie reminded everyone to take the big-picture data points and drill down to your unique business and region when planning ahead. Know the customers you serve. And don't make decisions based on one year of data, because it doesn't always tell the full story. Charlie compared the 2024 numbers to 2019 (pre-pandemic) and the story was quite positive.

All that said, here are some bullet points from his talk, which was based on information from his market studies and national data sources:

- Looking at gross sales from spring 2024 versus spring 2023 (based on growers surveyed by Charlie's market studies), about 1/3 were up, 1/3 were down and 1/3 were basically flat.
- BUT, compared to 2019, 98% were up, with about 65% up by more than 25%.
- In terms of units sold, more than half of growers surveyed were down.
- Looking at spring profit, the numbers (up/down) were 50/50. But the "tails" of the data from 2024 versus 2023 were significant: 19% of growers surveyed were up 25+% and 9% were down 25+%.
- But again, compared to 2019, 81% of growers surveyed were up, and 37% up more than 25%.

That data was all based on wholesale greenhouse sales, but Charlie says the story is pretty much the same for all market venues—IGC, big box, landscapers—with the outliers being sales to municipalities and direct-to-consumer strategies.

- Specific to independent garden centers, gross sales and customer counts were down 1 to 2% overall in 2024 versus 2023, but the differences by region were significant (more on that in a minute).
- BUT those who participated in the studies are up 40% compared to 2019 in sales and 12+% in customer count.
- As Charlie said, we're back to normal—post-pandemic boom—in the sense that weather is once again a significant factor in retail revenue.

It's always interesting to dig into the details of the data to benchmark where your operation stands, but I think most come to Charlie's talk and log on to his webinars to hear what this economist says about the near future. He always takes time to look forward, and although predictions are nearly impossible to make and the usual answer is "it depends," there are indicators to consider.

- Landscape service demand is strong, driven by housing AND demographic shifts. And as each generation ages, landscape services will continue to grow in importance.
- The cost of doing business (inputs, labor, trucking, etc.) continues to increase. Cost of goods was up about 1% in 2024 compared to 2023 and is expected to rise another 3.2% in 2025 (trucking and labor). Bottom line: Continue to raise prices to cover this cost and to drive growth.
- Although overall consumer purchases of seeds, flowers and potted plants (not shrubs) has plateaued, it has NOT declined post-recession like in the past. Bottom line: Don't lower prices.
- The income of our key customer base (middle- to upper-class) has not gone down. It's still higher than before the pandemic, meaning our customers have money to spend. These shoppers are spending at the same rate, no matter how they "feel." (Depending on the political party in control, half the population is positive and half the population is negative about the economy.)

To wrap it up, I'll reiterate: big-picture numbers are pretty solid. Our industry is maintaining many of the customers gained during the pandemic and sales dollars are significantly higher than they were in 2019. However, costs continue to rise, so we need to increase prices to stay ahead. No matter what happens in November, our core customers will continue to buy what they like and what makes their lives better. If we double down on our messaging around the positives that come from flowers and plants, there's no reason to freak out. In fact, there's a heckuva lot to be positive about!

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Spider Mite Woes



Dahlias are a crowd favorite—but only when they are spider mite-free!

Welcome to the dog days of summer. Not only is it hot, but the insect populations (both good and bad) are surging. Dahlia production is inherently difficult, but if you are a glutton for punishment like me, you put them in the greenhouse where the pests are 10 times more difficult than in the field.

Tater and I typically plant approximately two thousand dahlias in the greenhouse, to have the earliest crop of dahlias possible. This season, however, spring was mild and we got our outdoor

dahlia patch planted early. We still put a couple of hundred inside the greenhouse, but I changed my IPM strategy. In the past we used biological controls in an attempt to let nature help us manage this problem. I have found that biological control isn't economically feasible for a few hundred dahlias. For my farm, the numbers add up when we plant two thousand or more dahlias under cover. I switched production practices since we only had a few hundred inside and here we are, with a bad infestation of spider mites, because hot, dry, conditions are conducive for spider mites.

And guess what? They love dahlias! Spider mites are a common production woe for indoor dahlias. Spider mites can cause trouble in the fields as well, but I have yet to see them cause trouble on my outdoor production. I think rain and morning dew discourage them from the outdoor patch.

For those of you unfamiliar, spider mites are arachnids with eight legs and are incredibly small—approximately 1/50 of an inch. Intentional scouting is critical, especially since they can be hard to spot with the naked eye.



Symptoms include yellow speckles on foliage and webbing on the undersides of leaves. Severe infestations cause leaves to turn yellow and fall off.

There are different kinds of spider mites, and if you are having trouble identifying them, contact your local floriculture extension agent. Identifying the kind of mite you have is important, especially if you are using conventional chemical controls, since some chemicals work better on some mite species than others. Spider mites have a wide host range, so once identified it is important to take action quickly. Female two-spotted spider mites can lay 100 or more eggs, so the wheels can fall off the bus in a blink of an eye.

There isn't a one-size-fits-all-solution for managing spider mites, but here are some recommendations:

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Cultural control practices such as syringing

(misting) your crops discourage mites, especially when temperatures in the greenhouse get over 85F. Syringe your dahlias multiple times a day when it is hot. This isn't a standalone technique—it works best combined with other control strategies.

Biologicals are a great proactive approach to pest management. But once spider mite populations are established, this approach doesn't work well. Start this at the beginning of the crop production and when managed appropriately the results are stunning. We will be going back to biocontrol next season for our indoor dahlias. We had great luck in the past using *Amblyseius swirskii* and *Neoseiulus californicus* mites last season. If you want to use biologicals, work with an expert to design a program to meet your needs. The learning curve is steep and it may take a few seasons to get the hang of using them.



Spider mite damage on dahlia foliage. (Photo from Longfield Gardens)

Chemical control is also an option. Horticultural oil and insecticidal soaps work well, but do not spray this on the flowers, as it will ruin them. Horticultural oil smoothers the eggs and is one of my favorite strategies. Be sure to apply them when it isn't too hot! These are contact-kill chemicals, meaning if the mite doesn't come into contact with it, it will not kill them. There is no systemic or translaminar activity within the plant.

Conventional miticides are another option. Remember, there is a difference between miticides and insecticides. Some chemicals are suppressants, meaning, they won't work well during an outbreak, but they can serve as a valuable tool if populations are detected early. For more information on conventional spider mite sprays, check out these resources from [Colorado State University Extension](#) and the [American Dahlia Society](#).

Have you seen spider mites in your greenhouse dahlia crop this year? What control strategies have worked for you? Tater and I would love to hear from you! Send us a note to ldaschner@ballpublishing.com.

A banner for the American Society for Horticultural Science (ASHS). On the left is a logo with three green leaves. The text reads: "GROW YOUR CAREER WITH ASHS", "Become an ASHS Member", "Are you passionate about plants, research, and the future of horticulture? Become a member of the American Society for Horticultural Science and join a thriving community of researchers, scientists, industry, academia, government, extension agents, and students who are shaping the landscape of tomorrow.", and "Join ASHS!". On the right is a QR code. The background of the banner shows a person in a white lab coat working in a laboratory setting with various glassware and equipment.

Cut Flower Farmer Wins Young Grower Award



Drew

Groezinger is owner of Clara Joyce Flowers. He's with Young Retailer winner McKenzie Lain.

Drew Groezinger, owner and operator of [Clara Joyce Flowers](#) in Stockton Illinois, won the prestigious *GrowerTalks*/Ball Horticultural Company Young Grower Awards, presented at AmericanHort's Unplugged event at Cultivate'24 last week. Also earning a top award was McKenzie Lain of Watters Garden Center in Prescott, Arizona, who was presented with the *Green Profit*/Garden Center Group Young Retailer Award.

Growers (and retailers) are nominated from all over the U.S. and Canada. Candidates for this award must be under the age of 35 and illustrate leadership qualities, creativity and passion for growing plants. A panel of discerning green industry professionals select a winner from the top three nominees (which are chosen by the Ball Publishing editors).

Drew's farm wholesales flowers to florists, sells heirloom chrysanthemums and specialty dahlia cuttings to growers, and offers full-service wedding flowers. I think it's wonderful that a cut flower farmer won this award! It really helps put our fledgling segment of the industry on the map for other green industry professionals to see.

You can tour Drew's farm at the ASCFG regional conference next month. Learn more [HERE](#).

Enthusiastically!

Lindsay 

Lindsay Daschner (and Tater)

Editor-at-Large—*Bloom Beat*

Owner—Forget-Me-Not Farms

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