

April 10-11; Natives; Seeds; Pot Covers: Bitcoin



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News and Commentary from GrowerTalks Magazine

COMING UP THIS WEEK:

How was April 10-11?
- Your comments
Why not sell some natives, too?
Seed sales strong in Q1
More pot covers in less space
Autonomous growing in Canada
Finally ...



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How was April 10-11?

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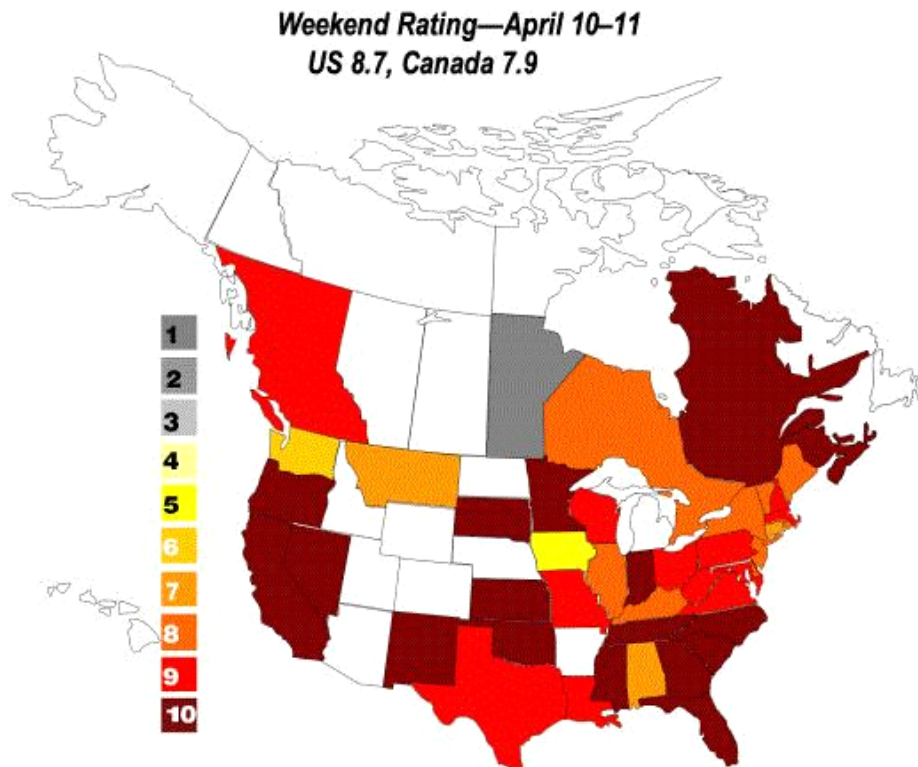
**HELP
WANTED**

What if
the person
you need
is not looking
for a job?

Florascarch, Inc.

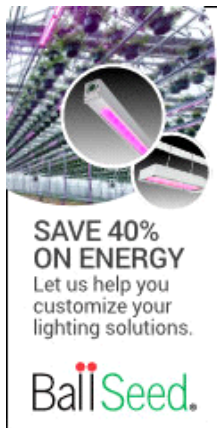
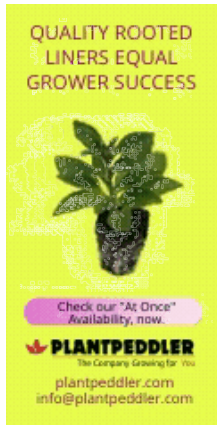
Another doggone solid one, that's how it was! High scores came in from northern regions like Minnesota that, in a normal year, would still be anticipating the arrival of spring, not dealing with it. That led to a very high (for mid April) score of **8.7 in the U.S.** and a almost equally high **7.9 in Canada** (a pair of 3s from Manitoba, and Ontario dragged down the six 10s sent in from Quebec, Ontario, Atlantic region and BC).

Here's the map:



That's based on 78 scores from 40 states and 5 provinces. Twenty-eight of those scores (36%) were perfect 10s. (A handful scored it one better, 11, and one cheery retailer scored it 15! Of course, I round down.)

It seems the only thing that kept scores in the 6 or 7 range instead of 9 or 10 was rain or cold. Even then, we seem to be a bit weatherproof again this year—at least so far. Abe Van Wingerden from Metrolina, who sent scores of 8 to 9.5 for the 13 states he covers, noted that:



"Normally when we have rain, I don't give higher than a 6 or 7, and we had rain in many of our markets on both Saturday and Sunday. BUT the consumers was not deterred and they either came out the next day or came in during the weekday."

Abe added that while weekday sales at the box stores he serves have shown an uptick during the pandemic, it's not what he would call a "seismic" shift. He does about 55% of sales on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, with the remaining 45% split evenly across the remaining weekdays. However, "the last two weeks, the weekdays have been exceptionally good, as spring break hits at many schools between the Easter dates and weather has been top-notch."

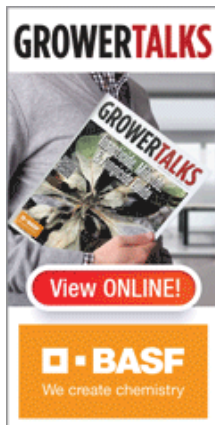


Here are some more comments

Oklahoma (10). "Almost too busy to send you my score. LOL!"—*Tami Adams, Calvert's Plant Interiors*

South Dakota (10). "Holy Buckets, they can't wait and aren't. They are buying garden plants and annuals that shouldn't go out for a month, but you finally give up on saying 'not yet' as I guess they want to babysit it for a while. We had a very nice weekend and you'd a thought it was May with the traffic and buying. The downside is that we're just early enough that much of the nursery stock hasn't arrived quite yet, which is an item they could plant. Looking like a stellar season ahead and a duffle bag full of cash if we do our job."—*Tim Sime, Jolly Lane Greenhouse*

Ontario (15). "Warm and sunny, and soil is dry. We're struggling to get transplanting on track, no planters made yet, no letters on our sign to say we're open and customers come at a rate we would've been happy with for the week prior to Mother's Day, which would be a more normal



starting time for the season here in our area. Seems like the weather and COVID conspired together to get decent early cash flow going!"—*Joanna Steckle, Steckle's Produce and Flowers*

Illinois (11). "Despite the rain, we had record numbers on Saturday. Sunday was our first Sunday open for the season and we had about three times the normal traffic than our 'usual' opening Sunday. Let's talk about Mondays and Tuesdays, though: mid-week days have been INSANE, with near-weekend traffic. No complaints for being busy, though! Happy spring!—*Candi Scheuermann, Green View Companies*

Kansas (10). "We opened for the season on the 10th. Our biggest opening day ever. It was nonstop until we closed."—*Max Thompson, Southwestern Greenhouses*

Nevada (10). "Business continues strong. Weather is perfect. Only issue of consequence is ability to hire enough qualified teammates, as supply of product is, so far, adequate."—*Bruce Gescheider, Moana Nursery*

Ohio (9). "Woody plant sales very strong in spite of heavy cost increases. Many requests for summer annuals that will not be ready for a couple of weeks. We are already experiencing difficulty with maintaining green inventory this season due to both greater demand and decreased availability ... and we haven't even started yet!"—*Jeff Griff, Lowes Greenhouses*

Minnesota (9). "The weather kept me from scoring a 10 because it was not nice in the Twin Cities over the weekend. But when compared to the same weekend last year, when 75% of our crew was laid off and our retail was closed due to a stay-at-home order, it was brilliant."—*Derek Lynde, Lynde Greenhouse & Nursery*



While you're selling, sell some natives

I forgot to tell you about this at the very beginning of the month, but April 2021 has been declared National Native Plant Month by the U.S. Senate, led by Senators Mazie Hirono (D-Hawaii) and Rob Portman (R-Ohio). The resolution passed by unanimous consent on March 25. The [National Audubon Society](#) is using the news to encourage folks to add some native plants to their landscaping. It can be an especially useful sales tool for those customers looking to attract birds to their yards.

"This resolution recognizes the benefits of native plants for people, birds and other wildlife" said John Rowden, Senior Director for Bird-Friendly Communities at the National Audubon Society.

Most urban parks, yards and other green spaces are dominated by non-native species like ginkgoes, London plane trees and other popular imports, says the Society. These plantings often require extra water in drier climates, or the use of pesticides or other types of additional care in general. Unlike native plant species, which evolved with North American birds over millions of years, exotic plants create food and nesting deserts where birds can't find appropriate food sources or nesting sites. Some beloved backyard birds, like the Carolina Chickadee, require areas planted with at least 70% native species to maintain their populations.

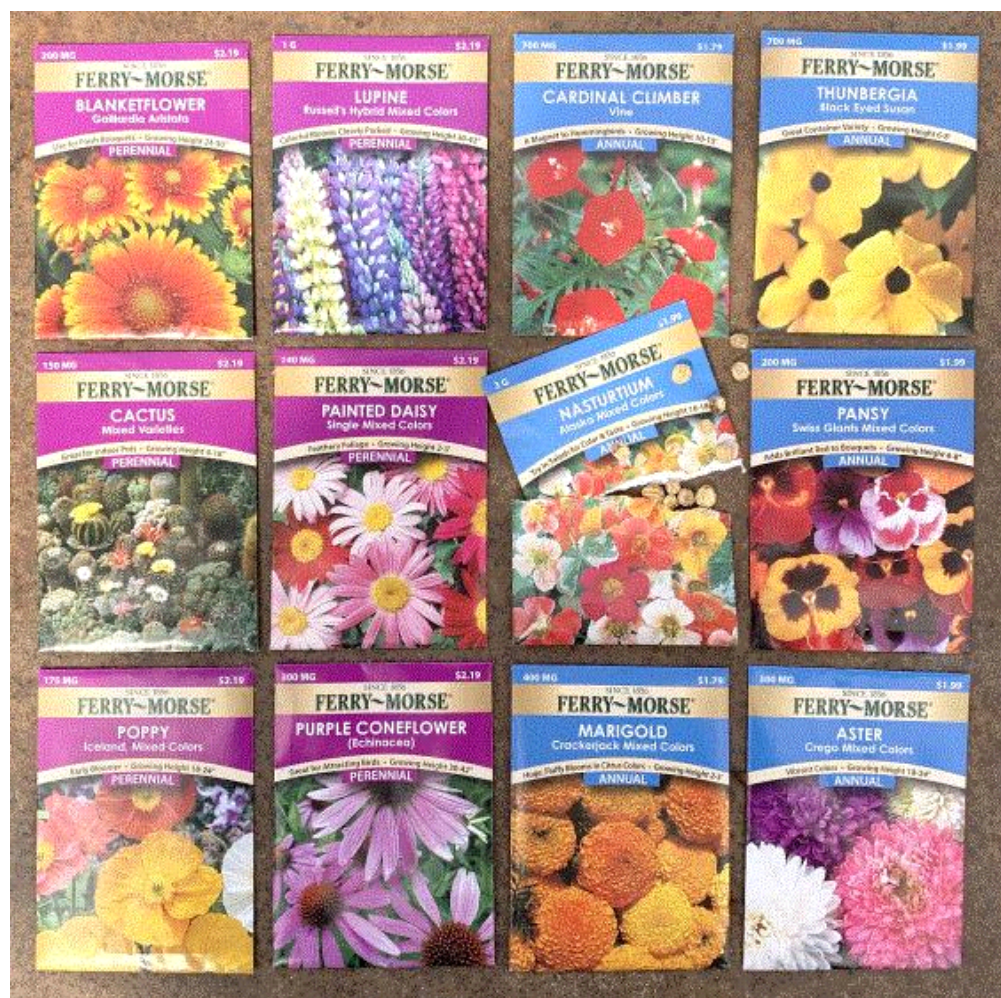
Want to know what plants to recommend where? The Society, through its Plants for Birds program, maintains a [Native Plant Database](#) to link gardeners with appropriate natives to plant in their area.



Seed sales strong in Q1, says Ferry-Morse

A bit more evidence that gardeners want to continue gardening in 2021—or maybe even take it up—comes from packet seed company **Ferry-Morse**. They report that their online seed sales for Q1 of 2021 were higher than Q1 of 2020.

Granted, Q1 of 2020—January through March—was just before the pandemic really struck. The lockdowns didn't start till mid-March and so gardeners wouldn't have had time to react to the pandemic by purchasing seeds. Still, sales being up over last year (they didn't say how much) is still a good thing!



Interestingly, flower seeds have traditionally been about half of F-M's total sales, but last year edibles grew faster than flowers. This year, the trend has reversed, with flower seed sales growing at 10 times the pace of edibles. Top sellers at the moment are sunflowers, zinnias and wildflowers.

F-M's research found that the top reason new gardeners were motivated to get started last year was for relaxation (52%).

Read the whole press release [HERE](#).



More pot covers in less warehouse space

You've got loads of extra warehouse space, right? Of course you don't! Like everybody, you wish you'd built it twice as big when you had the chance.

If some of that valuable space is taken up with boxes and boxes of pot covers, one way to get a bit of that space back is by trying [Flopak USA](#) pot covers, which now come packed in a patent-pending "Paklite Shipping System." The pallet-based system uses individual tubes of pot covers stacked sideways, with up to 86,000 pot covers on a single pallet, taking up 50% less space in your warehouse over boxes. The translucent packaging makes it easy to keep track of your color inventory, too.



[HERE](#) is a brief video explaining the system.

Autonomous growing coming to a Canadian greenhouse near you

The greenhouse sector remains important to Canada, as witnessed by the Greenhouse Competitiveness and Innovation Initiative, a collection of 12 projects funded by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to the tune of \$3.6 million. The goal is to develop new technologies and improve competitiveness and innovation among greenhouse growers.

One of those projects is called Autonomous Greenhouse Management, which will be run in partnership with **Blue Radix**, a Rotterdam-based artificial intelligence specialist serving the international greenhouse industry.

Autonomous growing doesn't replace the grower. But it does help the grower make better, more precise decisions that are supported by artificial intelligence, plus a team of "Autonomous Greenhouse Managers" with in-depth knowledge about crops, energy and data. They develop algorithms that do the routine and repetitive climate control work so the grower can manage more space and focus on crop strategy.



The project starts with three vegetable greenhouse sites in Ontario, where they'll research the specific needs of Canadian growers, research the climate conditions in Canada, demonstrate the Blue Radix data models and algorithms, and share that knowledge with the industry.

Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers (OGVG) will select the three trial sites and will share information regularly about progress and results through articles, learn 'n lunch sessions, presentations and online demos.

HERE is a video that quickly describes what autonomous growing is.

Finally ...

Leave it to our old friend Lloyd Traven of **Peace Tree Farm** in Kintersville, Pennsylvania, to capitalize on two big trends—cybercurrency and houseplants—with one product.



I spotted this 813 miles away from Peace Tree at Blumen Gardens in Sycamore, Illinois.

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Chris Beytes

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