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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

Smith acquires Skagit  
How was last weekend?  
- Your comments, from 10 to 1  
Proven Winners annuals for '25  
Finally I ...  
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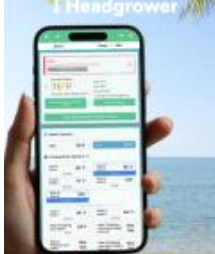
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**BARTLETT**  
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GrowerTalks editor Jen Zurko beat me to the punch reporting this big news out of the Pacific Northwest:

Last week, **Smith Gardens** of Bellingham, Washington, announced that it had acquired Skagit Horticulture's Riverbend facility operating out of Mount Vernon, Washington. The deal also includes all of the inventory that was already in production.

You may recall that in February, Skagit made the announcement that the company was discontinuing operations effective April 7. On April 8, we learned that Smith Gardens was taking over.

I reached out to Eric Smith, co-owner and CEO of Smith Gardens, to get some more background about the acquisition, and his and his brother Mark's plans for the Riverbend location.

Eric acknowledged that they were just as surprised as everyone else when Skagit made their announcement, but then the wheels started to turn. As Smith was also in peak production time, they were feeling the full strain of being at capacity at their four locations—to the point where the forklifts and other plant-spacing automation they've invested in couldn't operate effectively because there simply wasn't enough room for them to move.

"April 8 is a challenging time of year to do a business transaction, let alone an operational transition, but we were interested," Eric told me. "So early on, we signed a letter of intent with Skagit Horticulture after their announcement that gave them the confidence to keep producing as we worked on a longer agreement for the facilities and the systems."

The letter of intent included a request that Skagit continue production and keep the facility functioning so that when Smith took over the site it would be delivered in working order. Everything moved quickly—between Skagit's announcement and when Smith took over was less than two months.

"When there are live plants involved, everybody's on a timeline," said Eric.

Now, with the addition of what Smith will call "Riverbend," they'll have an additional 24 acres under cover and 20 field acres to continue to produce annuals and perennials, which is pretty much the same product mix Skagit was growing. Seven managers and 50 employees were selected to stay; Andres Alamillo, Smith's continuous improvement manager, will serve as Riverbend's interim site and integration manager, overseeing the transition to all of Smith's processes and company culture.


With it being spring and the acquisition still very new, Eric said they haven't had a chance to really think about long-term investments they'll be making at Riverbend, but it's got loads of potential.

"Currently, the Riverbend site is about 30% utilized," said Eric. "We look forward to expanding our business to fully utilize the site. What that looks like in the next two and three years is to be determined. Right now, it gives us a chance to really dial in our other operations, while this takes some of the over-capacities we have felt and can spread that out at Riverbend."



**How was last weekend?**

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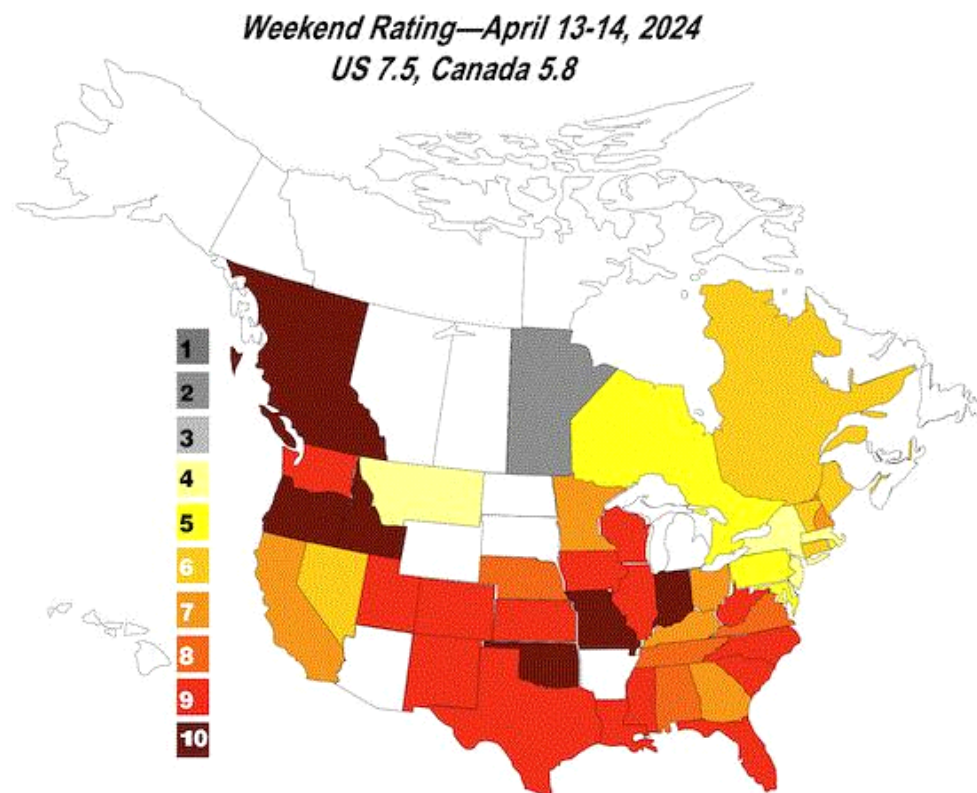
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Fantastic for some, dismal for others, and about average overall across the U.S. and Canada. But what does average mean to the person who has one foot in boiling water and the other foot in freezing water (the average of which is a comfortable 122F)? In other words, either you had a great weekend or you didn't. If you didn't, it's almost certain to be because of the weather. Either that or you don't know the power of homemade donuts. Or coleus. More on that later ...

Oh, I almost forgot the score! It was **7.5 in the U.S.** and **5.8 in Canada.** Here's the map:



That's based on 103 scores from 42 states and four provinces. You sent in twenty-one 10s (21%).

The 12-year average for this weekend in April is **7.2 and 6.5**. Due to weather, the middle of April can go either way—great like May or dismal like March. Here's the historical view of the same weekend going back to 2012 that shows the wild variations year to year:

	US	CAN	
24	7.5	5.8	
23	7.6	8.5	
22	6.5	4.7	(Easter)
21	8.8	8.3	
20	6.4	8.0	
19	6.8	7.5	
18	4.1	3.5	
17	8.3	6.9	(Easter)
16	8.2	8.3	
15	8.1	5.3	
14	7.0	5.4	
13	-	-	
12	7.2	5.6	
AVG	7.2	6.5	



As you can see, scores in the U.S. have ranged from 4.1 to 8.8; in Canada from 3.5 to 8.5 (just last year). Easter doesn't necessarily help, as evidenced by the difference between 2017 and 2022. I suspect it's all about the weather.

The strongest regions were the Pacific Northwest (9.6), Midwest (8.6) and South (8.5). The PNW is only three states: Oregon, Washington and Idaho. If I toss in British Columbia (which scored two perfect 10s), the overall score would only go up! Oklahoma scores two perfect 10s. North Carolina scores three 10s and a 6. Texas scores 9.5 and two 9s.

In the Midwest, Illinois scores 8.8 with five scores ranging from 10 down to 8. Iowa had a pair of 9s, Kansas a 10 and an 8.

Weakest was the East (4.5) and New England (5.5), although some folks reported some 7s and 8s from the latter region. Eastern states suffered rain when it could have been nice. Pennsylvania scored 4.7 on a 7, 5 and 2. New York scored a 6 and a 2; Maryland a pair of 5s.

In Canada, BC had a pair of perfect 10s, as I mentioned. Ontario and Quebec were like the East U.S. at 5.3 and 6.9, respectively. A lone score of 2 from Manitoba brought down the average of the entire country.



## Your comments, from 10s to a 1

**Indiana (10).** "It was a gorgeous day, although a bit windy (gusts to 30 mph). People's yards are still quite wet from the week-long rain and floods, so nursery sales were a notch lower than we hoped. We made up the difference in annual color—geraniums, petunias, etc.—to make for a great weekend at the register."—*Becky Salsbery, Salsbery Garden Center*

**Missouri (10).** "I give up. There is no rhyme, reason or logic to this business anymore. Record week for this time of the year by over 50%. There are two nights in the 30s in the 10-day forecast. The wind was, is and has been blowing like a banshee. And we need rain. But it was warm and the sun was shining. So ... they bought stuff! I wish I knew how to make whatever happened happen regularly!"—*Beth Weidner, Weeds Greenhouse & Gardens*

**Virginia (10).** "Beautiful weather, beautiful sales!"—*Gary Garner III, Gary's Garden Center*

**British Columbia (10).** "Weather is great. A few early morning frosts, but mostly sunny and cool to warm. Perennial and shrub sales very strong. Still a little early, but this weekend coming up will be our first annual sale. Price points are up, and more customers are noticing, but buying anyway."—*John Derrick, Elk Lake Garden Center*

**Washington (9.5).** "I don't know how the weekend could have gone much better, but I feel weird scoring a mid-April weekend with a perfect 10 ... shouldn't I save those for May? Kidding aside, we had excellent weather and huge amounts of customer enthusiasm to get out and garden—we are so grateful!"—*David Vos, Vander Giessen Nursery*

**Texas (9.5).** "Good weather, good sales."—*Danny Lenderman, Enchanted Forest*

**Wisconsin (9).** "Perfect weather for early April. We would have sold more if we had more ready."—*Chris Williams, K&W Greenery*

**California (8).** "In spite of rain and cold on Saturday, and cool and overcast on Sunday in Northern California, sales were surprisingly good. Last year, we had one of our best weeks in history, so no matching that. I give it a solid 8."—*Dave Vincent, Cal Color Growers*

**Kentucky (8).** "As nice an early April as I can remember. Sales of traditional greenhouse materials still seem very draggy. Cole crops off substantially; great demand for trees, shrubs, perennials. [My] daughter has tremendous demand for newer varieties of houseplants and succulents; common species sit on the bench. Amish neighbors again did three 10-in. Wave baskets for \$25. Don't know if they're heavily overstocked or spooked. That's going to pull down local sales."—*Jessie Shelton, Sheltons Greenhouses*

**Minnesota (8).** "The numbers are still small, but we're warming up! The Friday, Saturday and Sunday weather was absolutely perfect. We'd all be able to retire early if I could copy and paste that forecast into every weekend in May."—*Derek Lynde, Lynde Greenhouse*

**Ontario (7).** "April 13–14 was not too bad. Our weather here was fantastic, sunny and warm, however, we were not as busy as we thought we would be. It seemed like it was almost too warm—we live in a beach town and a lot of people were out enjoying the beach, sunshine and patios. A lot of requests for shrubs, trees and perennials, which are just starting to arrive. Sales are lower than this weekend last year. We will score it a 7."—*Anita VanAdrichem, Westland Greenhouses*

**Minnesota (6).** "HOT weather—we hit almost 80F both days—but sales were not as strong as we anticipated. It's still early and we expect things to pick up quickly, so long as Mother Nature cooperates."—*Jay Holasek, Fred Holasek & Son Greenhouse*

**Virginia (5).** "It was a cool, rainy week that cleared in time for a very windy Saturday. Customer count was down and sales were weaker than we hoped for."—*Duane Weaver, Milmont Greenhouses*

**New York (2).** "It can't get much worse. Severe weather, rain and high winds sent everything sailing except our sales."—*Jim Boxberger, Monticello Farm Home and Garden*

**Montana (1).** "I gave it a 1 because we had one customer. Actually one lookie-loo."—*David Lorenzo, Clinton Farms*



## Newest annuals from Proven Winners

It's a bummer that Proven Winners dropped out of the California Spring Trials because that's always our first formal opportunity to see and report on the new varieties for the coming season. However, Proven Winners appreciates the publicity this newsletter offers, and so two weeks after CAST they offered me a look at their newest annuals, perennials and shrubs at an Open House at Four Star Greenhouses. They did it last year, too, for just a day; that went well enough that this year some brokers and other visitors popped in for a tour, too, the day after us. I warned VP of Marketing Marshall Dirks that if he's not careful he'll have an event on his hands as big as their CAST display was!

Anyway, on April 3, I met editors Jen Zurko and Jen Polanz and publisher Paul Black in Michigan for this sneak peek. This time, I'll cover annuals. Next time, perennials from Walters Gardens,



followed by ColorChoice shrubs. You can find a video tour of all three categories on our [YOUTUBE CHANNEL](#). (Apologies to co-host Jen Polanz, who could barely get a word in edgewise with all my yammering!)

### **Stardiva Scaevola**







Scaevola is one of the brand's first offerings—remember Blue Wonder? Here's a new flower form in scaevola: instead of fan-shaped, Stardiva's is—as the name implies—star-shaped. Will consumers notice? Perhaps, as it does make a good full show of flowers across the top of the plant. It has medium vigor, growing to 10-in. to 14-in. wide. Comes in Pink, White and Blue.

#### **Virtuoso Dahlia**



Dahlia is a new class for Proven Winners, although it's been in the more regional Proven Selections lineup. Virtuoso is the first collection to be uniform and vigorous enough to make it to the big leagues of PW. It also exhibits good powdery mildew tolerance. Five colors: Carmine, Dayglo Yellow, Rad Raz, Vibrant Violet and Pinkerific (pictured).

#### **Space Age Begonia**





Another new genus for Proven Winners, this is a three-variety Rex begonia collection. Marshall told us they've wanted begonias in the lineup since the very beginning; it's cutting production issues that have prevented them from adding a begonia. But Space Age is said to beat those production problems. Three classic Rex patterns: Europa, Black Hole and Triton.

**Aromagica Purple Heliotrope**





Heliotrope is another variety that can be tough to produce, but Aromagica is better in production, with strong summer performance and good branching, they say. It's vigorous, too, growing 20% to 30% larger than competitors. Great fragrance, of course, and soft foliage for a sensory experience.





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## PW annuals (continued)

ColorBlaze Mini Me Chartreuse Coleus





The second in the Mini Me compact sub-collection of ColorBlaze Coleus, Chartreuse joins Watermelon. Needs no pinching or PRGs, and grows to between 12-in. and 20-in., making it good for your smaller upright combo planters. Also, they say the bright yellow foliage won't burn in the summer.

#### **Totally Tempted Cuphea**

I don't have a photo of this one, so I don't think we saw it, but it's a four-color series ... from seed! Yes, Proven Winners is not just vegetative annuals. Good for summer heat in both humid and arid climates, Totally Tempted grows 8-in. to 16-in. tall and 12-in. to 18-in. wide.

#### **Supertunia Tiara Blue, Pink Petunia**





"Tiara" indicates a new color pattern in the Supertunia line—a rich outer petal with a luminescent center radiating from a dark eye. Both intros are vigorous, spreading 18-in. to 24-in.

**Eco+ Quart and compostable tag**





Joining the Eco+ Grande compostable pot is a quart version. They've made some improvements to the pull tabs that let consumers remove the bottom for direct planting. Also, they've just added a tag made from the same compostable material. You'd never know it wasn't plastic! Some are available for this season; they'll roll out all varieties by next year. No word yet if they'll use the same material for hang tags and others, but it seems likely.

Oh, and the pots and tags are now BPI-certified. That's the [Biodegradable Products Institute](#), ensuring they'll break down the way Proven Winners say they will.





## Finally I ...

I've discovered two secrets to retail success, at least in Ohio:

**Ohio (10).** "Saturday was our season opening and we made it an event with free homemade doughnuts. The day started cool and windy, but the afternoon was beautiful!"—*Kim Grant, Strait Gate Greenhouses*

**Ohio (9).** "We had an event in which we offered the greatest plant in the history of the world—coleus. It went quite well."—*Chris Baker, Baker's Acres Greenhouse*

## Finally II ...



So THAT's what a "toonie" is!

Joanna Steckle of Steckle's Produce & Flowers, who scored her weekend a dismal 3, wrote the following:

"After being bombarded with toonie-sized hail followed by lots of rain and chilly weather, all but the most hardy gardeners stayed put."

She closed with:

"P.S. Do Americans ever have toonie-sized hail?"

Baffled, I replied, "I have to ask—what's a toonie?"

"It's the Canadian \$2 coin," she explained. "Our \$1 has a loon on it and ended up being dubbed the loonie. Years later when the paper \$2 was replaced with a coin, it sorta fell into place as a

toonie. It usually has a polar bear on it. I guess 'beary' doesn't have the same ring. Now I could really pull your leg and propose that Canadian folks have a different meaning behind the term 'loonie bin,' but alas it is not so!"

Feel free to email me at [beytes@growertalks.com](mailto:beytes@growertalks.com) if you have ideas, comments or questions.

See you next time!



**Chris Beytes**  
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