

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

6/1/2019

Testing a Retailer's Sanity

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Platt Hill Nursery in Carpentersville, Illinois, lying quietly under a fresh blanket of snow, makes a picture-postcard winter scene ... except this photo was taken on Sunday, April 28, more than a month after the official first day of spring! By the next day, however, warm temperatures had melted the freak snowfall, leaving nothing but a weekend of lost sales and benches of plants to move back outside.

The 6-in. snowfall in Carpentersville may have been a late-season record for the western Chicago suburb. It was definitely a record at O'Hare Airport, where 2.5 in. was measured—the most since 1910 to fall this late in the season, according to AccuWeather Senior Meteorologist Alan Reppert. The small storm system hit northeast Iowa, northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin with snow, sleet and rain, and temperatures at or below freezing. It was the second late-season snowstorm for the area in three weeks; on April 14, more than 5 in. was measured at O'Hare, the second most for that date since 1961.

We caught up with owner Platt Hill to find out how he dealt with the unexpected snow at his two garden centers. Platt told us the first thing he did was take some photos and text them to his friend and fellow garden center owner Larry Thalmann of Chalet, another Chicago-area garden center.

“Larry texted back, ‘Did you lose anything?’ I texted back, ‘Only my sanity!’” he said with a laugh.

“These kinds of things happen,” he continued seriously. “It’s not unheard of for us to have a late snow ... the snow isn’t as bad as the cold is.”

What do they do about it? Scramble to put plants in the greenhouse and take down shade cloth so it won’t be brought down by the heavy, wet snow. (One that was left up did collapse; he said it was older fabric, so it didn’t matter as much).

“The challenge is that the temperature got down to about 26 or 27 degrees, which is cold enough to damage the roots, not just the tops.” He worries that some woodies that came in from warmer climates may have been damaged.

As for the lost sales from the lost weekend, Platt has grown philosophical with experience.

“Over time, I’ve realized that April, May and June, you look at those three months together and don’t worry about one specific day or one specific weekend. Don’t get discouraged, don’t quit, take care of the customer and take care of the product ... by the end of June it has a way of working itself out.” **GT**