




Canada's Big Weekend was Big! Plus Flower Notes from Orlando



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COMING UP THIS WEEK:


- Canada scores 9.4 (US was 2 points lower)
- Comments from happy folks
- Meanwhile, it was wet here
- Are weekends losing their edge?
- From the theme parks
- SunPatiens rule Epcot
- Where Disney missed out
- SeaWorld cuts back
- Finally ...

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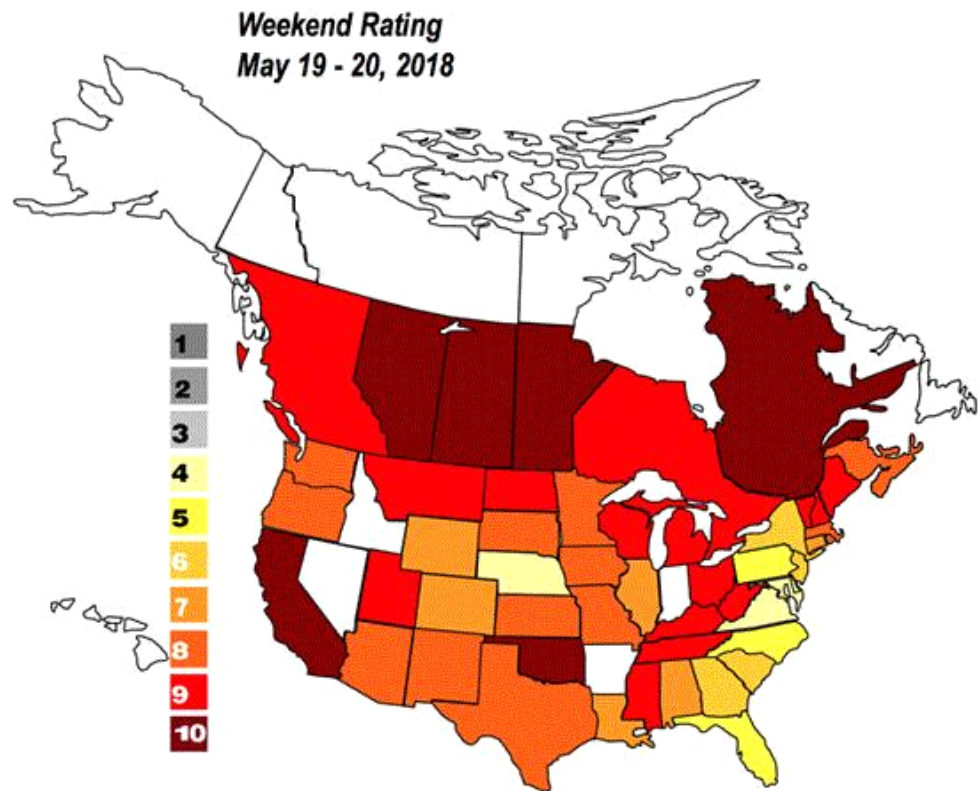
THE BIGGEST GREENEST TRADE SHOW IN THE WEST

REGISTER

AUGUST 20-22

We weren't terrible down here in the States (7.4), but last weekend's most positive news comes from Canada, where they enjoyed a three-day holiday weekend (Victoria Day) that scored a whopping 9.4 out of 10—two full points higher than us. That's just 0.1 behind their two best weekends ever, which were the Mother's Day weekend prior (May 12-13), and Mother's Day 2012. The only "low" scores sent in were a pair of 8s, one from the Atlantic provinces and one from British Columbia.

Here's the map:



That's based on 117 scores from 44 states and 7 provinces.

Happy Canadians

Here are a few comments from our happy Canadian friends:

Ontario: "The best weekend we have had in years!! The weather was perfect. Couldn't have asked for anything more. Let's hope this continues."—Denise Huck, Colour Paradise

Manitoba: "It was a perfect weekend. We had 1 in. of rain Friday and a wonderful sunny weekend. Saturday was unbelievable, and Monday was the same. So much gratitude for the rain and then the sunshine."—Rodney Wohlgemuth, Green Oak Gardens

Ontario: "Chilly on the weekend, with frost, but sunny and warm on Monday. A great weekend, and things are really coming together. It's great when plants leave while they're in top shape!"—Joanna Steckle, Steckles Produce & Flowers

Stan Vander Waal of Rainbow Greenhouses in Chilliwack, BC, ships across the region, and so he provides scores for four provinces (thanks, Stan!). He called it "Simply the Best Victoria Day ever!"

Hyperbole? I don't think so, as Stan bases his scores on sales percentage compared to previous

year. Here are his ratings, comments, and sales:

British Columbia: 8

"Gave some back, as weather was okay and consumers have majority of gardening done (weekend performed at 92% of 2017)

Alberta: 10

"Absolutely awesome. Weekend performed 116% over 2017. We are 40% ahead of 2017. [However,] we are going to give some back over the next month—not enough product in the greenhouse to hold onto the 40% comp growth."

Saskatchewan: 10

"Absolutely awesome. Weekend performed at 123% over 2017."

Manitoba: 10

"Absolutely awesome. Weekend performed at 170% over last year (we had bad weather last year). YTD is 93% of 2017. Still behind in this market—we should catch up this week.

"Overall, it's safe to say officially: Spring 2018 has been a huge success! I can't remember a year we have had all markets perform so well and no winter stores or cold in the prairies!

I keep pestering Stan for reports and scores from Whitehorse and Yellow Knife (in the Yukon and Northwest Territories, respectively). He says sales have just started up there (a week later than last year) and so far are "going great."

Now, if I could just get a report from Nunavut ... that is, if the bridge isn't still out.



Meanwhile, down in the great wet South ...

Coming off a strong 8.8 for Mother's Day, I guess we were entitled to catch our breath. But 7.4? In late May? That's because of rain, pure and simple. I got comments such as "Tough Saturday on the East Coast with rain all week spreading into the weekend" and "Could have been a 10 but it rained most of the day Saturday" and "Here it is mid-May and I haven't turned on my sprinkler system. This time rain is a pain!"

The weather led to lots of 6s and 7s (and even some 2s and 3s), which pulled down the average of those of you fortunate enough to score the weekend a 10 (9% of you). The wettest spots in the country? Most of the east coast, from Florida up to Massachusetts, and in pockets across the Ohio Valley, Midwest and Mountain states (mainly Saturday).

North Carolina was hit hard. Reader and regular score contributor Judy Mitchell of Mitchell's Nursery & Greenhouse is hardly a pessimist, but she scored her weekend a 2, writing:

"We have had 7 1/2 in. of rain since Wednesday evening. Showers, torrential rains and thundershowers every day. Hot and muggy when the sun comes out."

Interestingly, some of you reported strong sales in spite of the weather:

"I could repeat my comments from last week: Another rainy May Saturday, but people still came, and sales were up significantly from last year's week after Mother's Day."—Kim Grant, Strait Gate Greenhouses, Hicksville, Ohio

"People are spending money despite the weather. Average sale is up almost \$4 and customer count is up considerably.—Chris Williams, K&W Greenery, Janesville, Wisconsin

"We are closed Sundays, so my weekend is Friday/Saturday. Despite rain being forecast for Saturday, and an hour-long rain event just before lunch and a second rain starting around 4, we somehow managed to only miss last year's sales by a couple of hundred dollars. Not sure what would have happened if the weather had been sunny all day.—Chuck Lehotsky, Chuck's Greenhouses, North Jackson, Ohio

"Tempted to give it a 10 but .34 in. of rain between midnight and 10:30 a.m. got things off to a slow start, but at least it was a relatively 'warm' rain. Sunday was cloudy and cool with high of 55F. All in all pretty good considering less-than-ideal conditions."—Paul Begick, Begick Nursery & Garden Center, Bay City, Michigan

"Cool, cloudy and rainy but very strong steady sales. Lots and lots of perennials and shrubs and color still moving out the door."—Kate Terrell, Wallace's Garden Center, Bettendorf, Iowa

Next up: the three-day Memorial Day weekend! The forecast isn't looking good for the Southeast and Gulf Coast, where a tropical depression is trying to form (it's called a depression because you're depressed by the bad weather). That system could move into the mid-Atlantic and Northeast by Monday, so it may be a bit hit or miss. Some forecasters, such as in New Jersey, are saying Friday is going to be the best day of the weekend. Which leads to my next story ...



Are weekends losing their edge?

One of my readers, Ball Seed sales rep Bob Luczai, of Massachusetts, offers the following observation about how weekday sales seem to be keeping pace (or even replacing) weekend sales:

What we are finding in our area is that the buying habits of customers are changing. There are more families with one or more of the parents working from home one or two days per week. So what we see is that more customers are coming out during the week—especially on Thursday or Friday. These people want to stay away from the crowded weekend and avoid traffic. They also have all those kid activities on the weekend, so they get their plants prepping for the weekend. Our customers have commented that a nice sunny Thursday or Friday is sometimes better than an iffy Saturday or Sunday. Yesterday—Monday—it was beautiful here. Customers said that it was better (9) than Saturday (8), due to that rain factor.

Interesting observation, Bob. You'll recall a few weeks back that I published sales data by day of week from three readers (you can review that [HERE](#)). Now, in all three cases, Saturday was best, Sunday was second best and Friday was the third-best day of the week. The other days all averaged from 8% to 15% of weekly sales, regardless of type of outlet. So this data doesn't necessarily support Bob's observation.

However, the data is a snapshot that doesn't reveal any trends. Could the weekend be becoming less relevant over time? Are one or more weekdays becoming more important than they used to be? What do you think? Are you noting the same weekday garden shopping trend? Or is it a minor occurrence, with Saturday and Sunday still dominating sales for the foreseeable future? Weigh in [HERE](#) with your thoughts—and data, if you have any.



From the trials and theme parks

I can tell you that plenty of folks choose Wednesday to visit SeaWorld and Thursday to visit Epcot and the Magic Kingdom. I know, because that's where I was on those days last week, surrounded by weirdly dressed tourists and enough baby strollers to rival a New Delhi traffic jam. (Then again, I was dressed in khakis and a logo polo shirt, so who was the weirdly attired one?)

My purpose? Attend the Epcot Flower & Garden Festival—their 25th anniversary of the event—as well as the Florida Flower Trials (which is where SeaWorld came in; it was one of the stops on the Flower Trial bus tour). Here are a few takeaways:

Three diverse locations for the Flower Trials. I didn't stop to analyze any of the trial plantings, because everything looked good, as the weather had been favorable and there'd not yet been any heat or drought stress. But I do like that the three trial locations each serve a different audience.

For instance, Leu Gardens (below) reaches consumers, who get to see new annuals in sun, part-shade and shade conditions, enduring (or not) all the suffering that a Florida summer can bring.



The Orange County Extension trial (shot by Snoopy the drone) serves the trade, especially landscapers, who can view their large trial whenever they want.



Lastly, Disney's trial serves, well, Disney. It's behind the scenes, so not viewable without an appointment (and I missed that portion of the tour), but seeing how Disney is the state's biggest annual user, breeders are happy to get their varieties in front of Disney's horticulturists for a shot at making it into a theme park.

SunPatiens rule Epcot



The Flower & Garden Festival is colorful, no doubt about it, but I'll bet that at least 25% of the color comes from one variety: SunPatiens. They were ubiquitous! Especially Orange.

Beyond SunPatiens, leading crops in the flower beds included fibrous begonias, lime green ipomoea, French marigold, vinca, Salvia farinacea and bracteantha (Xerochrysum), to name the ones that jumped out at me.

In containers, I spotted a bit more variety, but not a whole lot more—angelonia, geraniums, caladiums, helichrysum, pentas, dusty miller and argyranthemum were common, with some other random annuals—plus at least one perennial, hosta, making an appearance as an annual.

Of course, they had their usual character topiaries, crafted from various creeping plants, ficus pumila, grasses, succulents and other interesting foliage crops. Here's Tigger, looking resplendent amongst the marigolds (shouldn't those be Bounce impatiens? Heehee!).



Italy, in the World Showcase, had massive displays of terracotta pottery, which would have excited my wife, who collects the stuff, but the plant material (mostly from the list above), was less than Italianate.



Much prettier, to me anyway, was this display sponsored by FTD, featuring the meanings of colors. I spotted Mona Lavender, torenia, hydrangea, brachyscome, tuberous begonias and orchids, plus the cuts. Nice!



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Where Epcot missed out

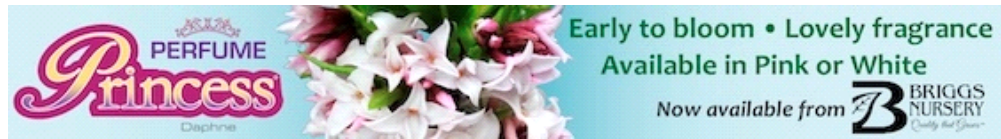
I can't believe I'm criticizing Disney, but the two places I expected to see flowers, especially during the Flower & Garden Festival, were on the exterior of the Rose & Crown pub in the United Kingdom, and on any of the buildings in Germany. But nope, nothing. In fact, on the Karamell-Küche candy shop, I saw plastic flowers in the window boxes! Ugh!



I'm fortunate enough to have been to both countries many times, and seen the real deal, and

those buildings at Epcot should be weighted down with lush cascades of flowers. Like these examples I pulled from my trip files:





SeaWorld: Cutting back on annuals

As I mentioned, the Flower Trials tour included a walking tour of SeaWorld to check out their landscape ... which, alas, has been turned over to more and more colorful perennial landscape plants instead of annuals. That's due to budget cuts, said horticulturist Jorge Delpalacio—the cost of labor, fertilizer and frequent change-outs. Instead, they're using annuals in containers and hanging baskets, generally presented in clusters. Annuals are grown on-site, too, instead of being bought from local growers.



SeaWorld has faced tough financial times recently, according to news reports, and is working hard to attract new guests. The most recent move? Free beer, just like they used to offer when owned by Anheuser-Busch.



Finally ...

Here's the weirdest display I saw at SeaWorld. I couldn't find anyone to explain it to me. My conclusion? It's a **Chihuly glass exhibit** on a budget.



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