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The Most Wonderful Time of the Year

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As I look out the window while writing this, it's a beautiful sunny day in The Land (a term of affection for Cleveland), with the promise of a warm-ish Mother's Day Weekend (and best of all, no rain). It's that time of year here, and it calms my soul every time, even as I'm in the midst of a whirlwind end of the school year—this year even more whirlwind than most.

As we pull together information from all our sources, early indications seem to show if the weather is good, consumers are turning out to buy despite the constant news drumbeat of economic turmoil. Perhaps I'm not the only one seeking the balm of plants to sooth a weary psyche.

And if you've noticed we haven't done a whole lot within the magazine related to tariffs, it's because every day (sometimes hour!) brings something new. By the time it gets into print, the story may be completely different. Heck, by the time you read this, you may be saying, "Oh, if she only knew when she was writing this!" Look to Ellen Wells' *buZZ!* newsletter for up-to-the-minute reports on the ever-changing economic climate.

But we can take a look at the data we have to see how spring went in the southern states, and was starting to go in other locations, and draw some conclusions. What's really interesting is, as we as an editorial staff talked about this recently, we were all coming from different perspectives (a life lesson, perhaps?). From his *Acres Online* weekly survey, Bossman Beytes pulls information from a variety of sources, including big box growers, (which are approaching their take on the season from a fully live goods-based perspective), growers for independents (again, live goods) and independent retailers (a range of live and hard goods). Generalizing from the responses he'd received so far, live good sales definitely seemed weather-dependent—when the weather was good to great, so were the sales.

We can also point to results from The Garden Center Group as they tally the Weekly Department Report, or WDR, which takes into account all categories of garden retail, as well as key KPIs like total revenue, transaction counts and average sale. While those are proprietary (if you'd like to find out more about tracking sales and comparison, consider joining the Group!), Managing Director (and self-described Chief Instigator) Danny Summers gave me the go-ahead to report on a more general basis that depending on the region, transaction counts were down in a couple of southern regions at the end of April (the exception was the Southwest). Average sale was mostly flat to up so far, resulting in a mix of YTD revenues, too. These numbers were right before Mother's Day, so things may change after that all-important holiday!

This issue, meanwhile, is all about garden decor, from lighting to fountains and water features, so let's put that in context with what we know so far. It's interesting that in many regions fountains and water features were already trending toward smaller pieces (except for Texas, where you go big or go home).

With lighting, manufacturers have found a sweet spot with high-quality, but affordable, outdoor lighting, which should appeal to customers looking to accent their yards without breaking the bank. And when it comes to water features like ponds, whether big or small, aquatic plants can be a beautiful addition that also brings wildlife. Matthew Olson gave us a great rundown. These plants can add on to ponding and accessory sales.

Taking a step back and looking at the bigger picture, we asked this year's fantastic crop of *Green Profit*/The Garden Center Group Young Retailer Award finalists to detail the top three things retailers can do in the coming years to be successful. Read their responses and meet them in person at the Unplugged Event at Cultivate'25 (July 14) in Columbus when we announce the winner (spoiler alert: they're all awesome, but our judges have to choose one).

I don't know where all these indicators will lead, but for now I just want all of you to know how much you are appreciated for bringing color and beauty to your part of the world.

Here's to a summer of bountiful blooms. **GP**