

Gardener's Supply Ch 11; Ball's Big R&D Move; June 21-22



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News and Commentary from GrowerTalks Magazine

COMING UP THIS WEEK:

Will Gardener's Supply be sold?
Ball restructures R&D operations
June 21-22: Another heat dome
At the 12th Darwin Perennials Day
- Stop Stressing About Perennials
Van Belle Bloomfest live stream
Envu to launch 10 products!
Free herbicide live stream coming
Sign up for the Penn State Trials



Gardener's Supply files Ch 11; Gardens Alive! submits bid



Burlington, Vermont-based **Gardener's Supply Company**, an ESOP (employee-owned) company with a strong bent toward supporting gardening-related community programs and organizations, has filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in Delaware, telling a Vermont television station, "Despite cost-cutting measures, the challenges posed by increased competition, rising shipping expenses, tariffs and escalating marketing costs have proven insurmountable."

Another source mentions "the retail environment, a problematic fulfillment software rollout and ongoing stock option obligations to employees."

The filing lists assets between \$1 million to \$10 million and liabilities between \$10 million and \$50 million. They owe more than \$4.5 million to 30 creditors. Some well-known names in the greenhouse business are on the unsecured creditors list in the low- to mid-six figures range.

The company is pursuing a going-concern sale, not a liquidation sale, meaning they're looking for a buyer who'll keep the business operating. Sources say that Gardens Alive!, a catalog business based in Indiana, has submitted a \$9 million bid to buy the company.



Founded in 1983 by Will Raap and Alan Newman, the company grew to include six retail operations in Vermont, New Hampshire and Massachusetts, plus a shipping and online business. In 2009, Will sold the majority ownership to its employees through an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP). He passed away in 2022.

Here's a **GOOD RECAP** of the situation.



Ball announces restructuring of its R&D operations

Ball Horticultural Company has announced a strategic restructuring of its U.S. Research & Development (R&D) operations in order to streamline its active breeding projects, supporting its mission to deliver more innovative products quickly to market.

One of the steps included in this process is to wind down operation of its facility in Santa Paula, California. This will be done in phases starting in December 2025, culminating with all activities ceasing by the end of 2026.

According to Jason Jandrew, Chief R&D Officer, the closing of the Santa Paula facility allows Ball and its R&D division to increase their investments at fewer innovation stations. This focus will also provide greater access for all breeding companies at Ball (Ball FloraPlant, Darwin Perennials, PanAmerican Seed and Star Roses and Plants) to new breeding and technology.

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Moving forward, Ball will have two “centers of innovation” in North America—in Guadalupe, California, and in Elburn, Illinois. Both facilities have similar functions across breeding and trialing, and will continue to be supported by Ball Helix—the company’s state-of-the-art research division.

“Building greater, more diversified breeding communities allows for more cross-pollination of ideas and increased creativity,” Jason explained. “Concentrating those breeders at R&D locations with strong Ball Helix support also promotes more collaboration and ingenuity to go after more exciting R&D targets.”

The closing of the Santa Paula facility is part of a years-long strategy to consolidate R&D investment and breeding teams within Ball. This began with the integration of PanAmerican Seed breeding projects, moving activities from Denmark to its facility in Venhuizen, the Netherlands, and Elburn in the U.S. And, currently, operations at the Arroyo Grande facility are being integrated into the Guadalupe location.

Staffing at the Santa Paula facility has also been organically transitioning for a few years. Breeder retirements have been filled at other locations and field production operations have scaled back as production has shifted to other locations. Some current employees are being offered roles in other facilities and Ball is offering job placement support for those not taking part in the transition.



PanAmerican Seed's Santa Paula, California, facility.

“We look back fondly on Santa Paula’s rich legacy in breeding and product development that dates to our acquisition of the site from Burpee in the early 1990s,” said Scott Roskuszka, president of PanAmerican Seed. “Flagship products like Amazon Dianthus, Potomac Snapdragons, Matrix Pansy, and Akila and Serenity Osteospermum were developed at the site. We’re confident that the breeding programs still active in Santa Paula will successfully transition to new homes at other breeding locations.”

Ball’s long-term strategy includes a strong focus on collaboration—internally between every division, and externally with their customers and suppliers. Consolidating its R&D efforts into fewer and larger facilities will help the company prioritize breeding projects that are focused on the needs of the industry.

“This approach allows us to better support our teams, promote deeper collaboration and build a stronger culture of innovation,” said Al Davidson, president of Ball Horticultural Company. “With concentrated resources and prioritized projects, our breeders and Ball Helix scientists can spend more time developing cutting-edge ideas and leveraging advanced technologies that will shape the future of our industry.”

The Santa Paula facility has been the site for Ball’s California Spring Trials stop for many years and it will host CAST in Santa Paula for the last time in 2026. For CAST 2027 and beyond, the company is currently exploring other options.



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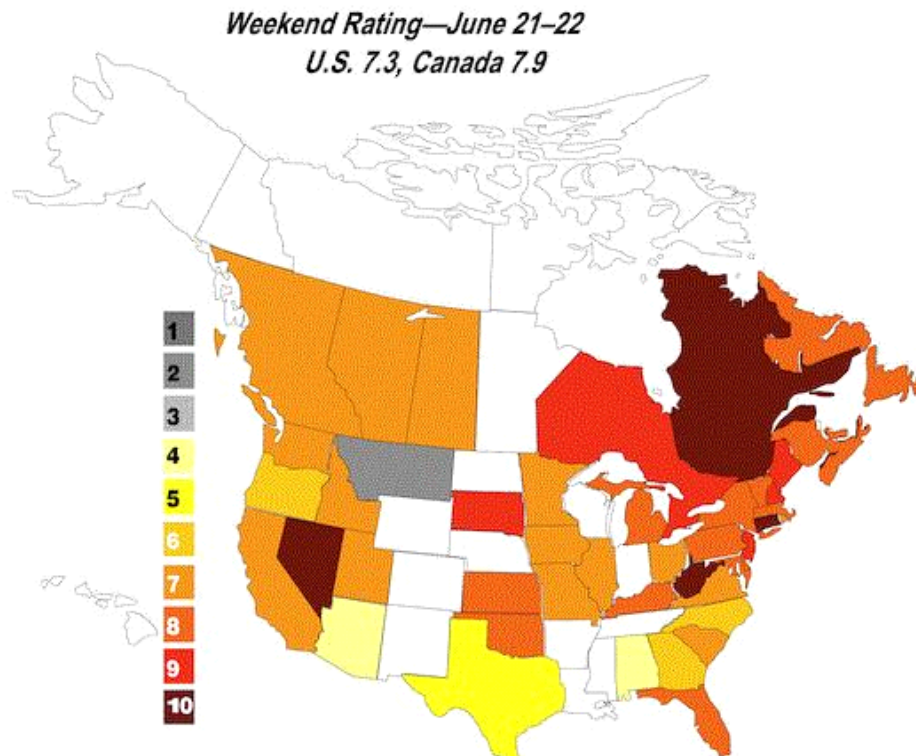
Last weekend: Another heat dome?

Just as one did this same weekend in 2024, a “heat dome” put the lid on sales in some areas of the country. I led off my 2024 summary of June 22-23 with this quote from one of you: “It’s hot! All early momentum gone.”

This year, the same weekend was “Hot, hot, hot” in Iowa and “Too hot” in Illinois. In Kentucky, it was “Better than anticipated, with going from torrential rains to tropical heat.” And in Alabama, “The fat lady has sung ... spring is over! Let the heat begin!”

In spite of the heat, sales remained strong, adding up to above-average scores of **7.3 in the U.S.** and **7.9 in Canada**. The eight-year average for the third weekend in June is 6.7 in the U.S. and 7.5 in Canada. The U.S. beat 2024 (6.0) by a country mile; Canada, you did NOT beat last year’s great score of 8.4, which was second only to the pandemic 2020 score of 8.6 (the U.S. scored its best for this weekend, 7.7, that same year).

Here’s the map for what I consider the last weekend of spring:



That’s based on 75 scores from 37 states and nine provinces.



Regionally and some states

Not a ton of scores this time on which to base my analysis—last year I received 81, the year before that 78. But I'll take what I can get at this late date!

A few interesting points: You sent in 13 perfect 10s—that's 17% of you. Last year, just 2% sent in 10s. The year before, 10% of you rated it perfect. So a good weekend!

Now, I usually add in the 9s, too, as that's almost as good as a 10, but I only see two in the U.S. and three in Canada. But bunches of 8s—in fact, fully 24% of you rated the weekend an 8. Not bad for the third week of June!

And, yes, there were low scores of 5, 4, 3 ... even a 1 from Montana—all weather-related. You reported it to be cool, dreary and rainy in Montana, cool and rainy in Washington, a washout in Oregon, cold and rainy in Alberta, rainy and windy in Saskatchewan and too hot to shop in Ohio. But many of you still gave decent scores in spite of indecent conditions.

Last year, the top regions were the Mountain states (7.5) and the Northwest (7.0). This year, the top regions were New England (8.3) and the East (8), while the Mountains and Northwest took the bottom two spots. What a difference a year makes or so they say!

New England	8.3
East	8.0
Plains	7.8
Midwest	7.2
West	7.1
South	6.9
Northwest	6.7
Mountains	4.5

Last time, the South, at 6.7, came in third. This time, at a better 6.9, y'all slipped to sixth. Only meaning that the rest of the country had a better weekend; you're wrapping up spring in the heat, which your customers are used to. (Like last weekend, I spent this weekend roasting and sweating to get more plants into our nascent Orlando landscape.)

As for bright spots for states with multiple scores, Maine takes it with 8, 10 and 8.7 for an 8.9 average. New Hampshire got 8, 10, 10 and 7 for an 8.8 average. Vermont was behind due to a 4 along with its 8, 10 and 9 for an average of 7.8. It's about time New England caught a break after so many rainy weekends! One of my key reporters up there told me retail growers had the better time of it compared with wholesale growers. But then there's the Gardener's Supply bankruptcy, which certainly hit a few plant suppliers hard ...

Alabama, where it's full-on summer, scored a pair of 4s. Montana, which briefly reverted to winter ("January"), scored 1 and 3 for an average of 2. Oregon was just so-so, with a 5 and a 7 for an average of 6.

Meanwhile, up in Canada ...

Uniformly good up in the Great White North. The lowest scores were 7—in BC, Saskatchewan and Alberta. The Atlantic provinces and Newfoundland/Labrador scored 8. Quebec scored 9 and 10 for a 9.5 average. Ontario scored 8, 9 and 9 for an 8.7 average.

Alas, not once this season did I get a score for the Northwest Territories, Nunavut or the Yukon. Maybe the bridge to Yellow Knife is still out ...



A few comments from across the board

Nevada (10). "Much better than expected, despite weather and other activities working against a surprising revenue performance."—*Bruce Gescheider, Moana Nursery*

Ontario (8). "Not a May sort of 8, but a strawberries-are-ready-and-the-market-is-open 8. And I marvel at how many people need hanging baskets when told they are BOGO!"—*Joanna Steckle, Steckle's Produce & Flowers*

Illinois (8). "With temperatures above 90F it was not super crazy busy, but we had way more customers than expected. Lots of customers still looking for vegetables and perennials are still going strong. Good season all in all. Mums are on the field for the next season."—*JP, Countryside Flower Shop, Nursery and Garden Center*

Kansas (8). "Sold a little more than last year, but it's pretty much over for spring. It's time to get cleaned up and ready for fall."—*Kathy Miller, Sedan Floral*

Fourteen Southern/Eastern states (average of all: 8). "Solid week and weekend even with the 'Heat Dome,' as it waited until Sunday to get here. The Weather Channel predicted gloom and doom all weekend, but it is hot every summer; and, second, consumers still find ways to garden early and late in the day to mitigate the heat. Also, any federal holiday helps sales and June 19 fell on a Thursday (versus Wednesday last year), so you could see some of that in the numbers."—*Abe VanWingerden, Metrolina Greenhouses*

British Columbia (7). "Well, Friday was great, but then the weather changed, and rain—although welcomed for the gardens—does not make for great sales." *John Derrick, Elk Lake Garden Center*

Washington (7). "Friday night into Saturday was cold and rainy, which was much-needed precipitation, but put a damper on sales for the weekend."—*David Vos, Vander Giessen Nursery*

Minnesota (7). "Average—which, with another 90F-plus weekend, it's hard to complain about average. Composting of leftover product is now in full swing and we are moving along to the next crops. Poinsettias arrive Wednesday ..."—*Jay Holasek, Fred Holasek and Son Greenhouse*

Virginia (7). "A typical late June weekend—slow and steady—but we're right about where we ought to be for the month."—*Gary Garner III, Gary's Garden Center*

Iowa (7). "Hot, hot, hot! But we still had a decent turnout for our Pollinator Party event on Saturday (mostly in the a.m.). Sales were good on perennials and shrubs, and kids loved our activities, pollinator crafts, photo ops and two different scavenger hunts. (Also, we filled our slushy machine with pink lemonade to give out, which makes everyone happy.) High 80s and 90s with extreme heat advisories all week are going to officially end the spring season for us. Looking forward to a busy summer."—*Kate Terrell, Wallace's Garden Center*

New York (6). "Just another rainy weekend—#15 without any skips!"—*Sig Feile, Atlantic Nursery*

Oregon (5). "Saturday was a washout, cold and wet."—*Ed Blatter, Cornell Farm*

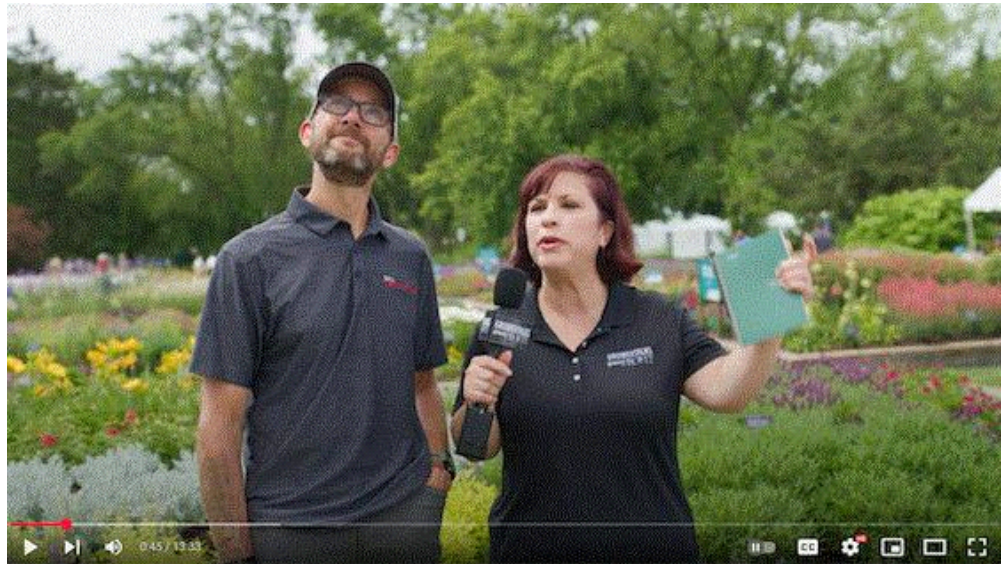
Montana (3). "Rain all weekend with snow in the mountains. We had high temps as high as our lows were earlier in the week!"—*John Campbell, Delaney's Landscape Center*



At the 12th Darwin Perennials Day

A contribution from the prolific Jen Zurko who, along with Tech on Demand Senior/Digital Editor Bill Calkins, was on hand to cover the event and make our annual video with producer Osvaldo Cuevas behind the viewfinder:

Bill and I were able to squeeze in a bit of video coverage between thunderstorms during the 12th annual Darwin Perennials Day last Wednesday, June 18. But the rainy weather didn't keep people away because there were about 550 attendees who came to the Gardens at Ball to look at hundreds of perennial varieties and talk to more than 30 suppliers in the Ball Seed supply chain network.



Bill did double duty as an on-the-ground reporter AND as a moderator for the expert panel, which discussed dealing with perennial production challenges (more on that below).

Watch [OUR VIDEO](#) to get a glimpse of what attendees saw, meet Darwin's new sales and marketing manager, and say so long to an old friend.



Stop Stressing About Perennial Production! (A panel discussion)

Bill Calkins wrote me this recap of the panel he moderated:

The latest Tech On Demand podcast (brought to you by *GrowerTalks*) is a live recording from a panel moderated by yours truly at the Darwin Perennials Day event in The Gardens at Ball on June 18, 2025.

Episode 187 is titled STOP STRESSING ABOUT PERENNIAL PRODUCTION and you can find it on [Apple Podcasts](#), Spotify, [YouTube](#) and most other major podcast apps.

The topic was error correction—common challenges in perennial production that can be easily fixed to avoid running into the same issues year after year. The panel included Chris Fifo from Darwin and PanAmerican Perennials, Drew Koschmann from Walters Gardens, and Dr. Nathan Jahnke from Ball Seed Technical Services.

Some of the frequent pitfalls discussed included best practices for overwintering and bulking perennials, why input selection is critical, evaluating perennial plug and liner quality, managing tough environmental conditions, and new research into no-pinch production strategies.

About 10 questions from the audience were also answered by the panelists covering a range of topics—from overwintering perennials in large patio pots, pollinator attractors and lighting echinacea in production to how speed to market is impacting trialing and changing climate zones. You'll want to listen all the way to the end to hear all the great info shared by such a knowledgeable and experienced panel.

If you missed this year's event, that's sad, but okay because Darwin hosts it every year! Circle Wednesday, June 17, 2026, on your calendar and come check out the Gardens at Ball with thousands of perennial plants in bloom. As the event date draws closer, you'll find all the details [HERE](#).

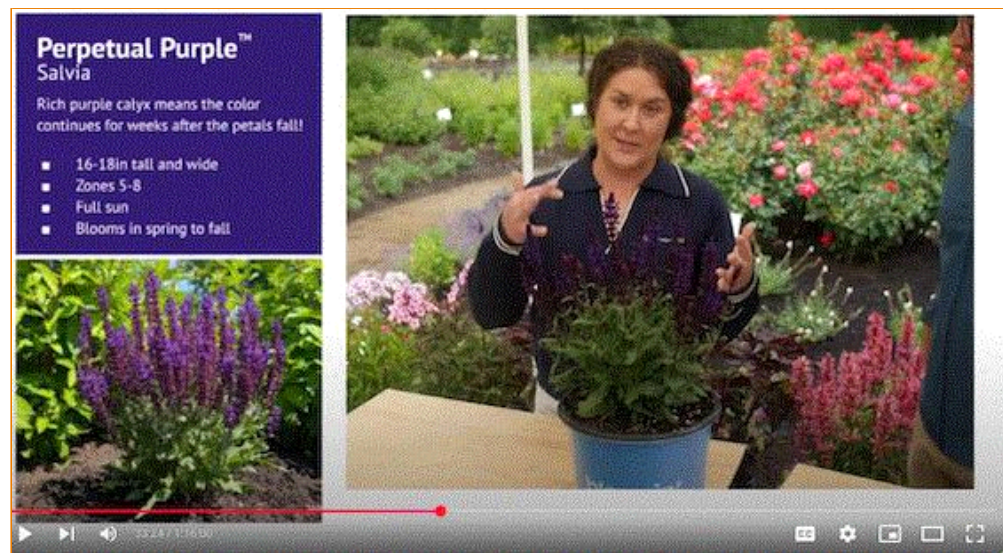
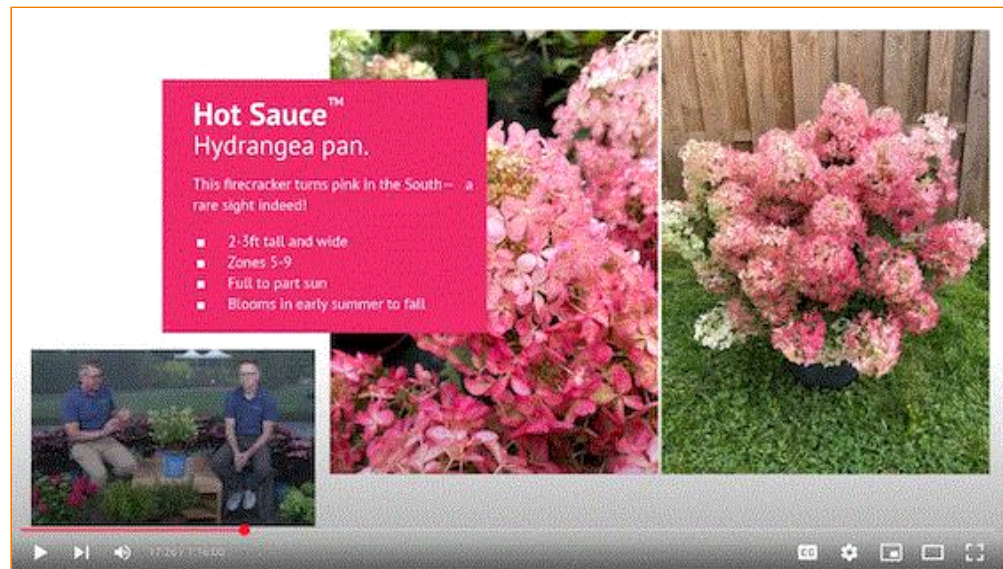


Van Belle BloomFest livestreams new varieties

I like seeing how greenhouses and nurseries utilize digital technologies and social media. [Van Belle Youngplants](#) up in Abbotsford, British Columbia, Canada, has been making fun videos for years. This year, they did a [YouTube lives tream event](#) (broadcast June 20) for their new Bloomin' Easy shrub and perennial introductions for 2026.

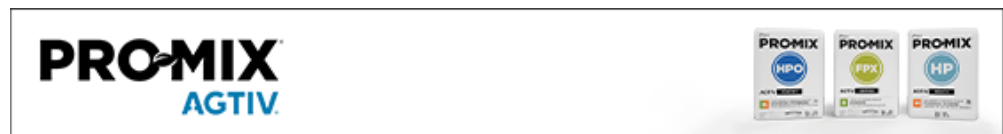
It opened and closed with their video version of Billy Joel's "Piano Man" remade as Perennial Man—"Show us the plant you're the Perennial Man, show us the plant today. Well, we're all in the mood for some beauty, Bloomin' Easy has shown us the way." Equal parts clever and goofy.

Then their on-air talent got down to business, showing varieties like *H. paniculata* Hot Sauce, which, as the name implies, takes the heat. It starts white then turns bright pink. And *Salvia nemorosa* Perpetual Purple, with deep purple calyx that make it almost look like it's flowering even when it's done.



Being live streamed, the video has some pregnant pauses as you wait for the next session to begin, but you can speed through those if you want to. But don't miss your chance to get the new varieties.

Said the Van Belle folks, "Get ahead of the game and place your orders before the excitement begins at Cultivate. Don't miss out on securing these standout plants for your lineup ahead of the buzz in Ohio next month!"



Envu to launch 10 new pest solutions at Cultivate

Speaking of Ohio ... Envu, provider of a wide range of insect, disease and weed solutions for the ornamental industry, will launch 10—yes, 10!—new ones at [Cultivate'25](#) in Columbus, Ohio, July 13-15. They include five insecticides, two miticides, two fungicides and a PGR. Amazing! I suspect some or all may be from the acquisition of FMC's Global Specialty Solutions (GSS)

division at this time last year.

Not too many details released on the new chemicals ... the insecticides cover greenhouse, nursery and tree production; the PGRs do what PGRs do; the miticides are said to give long-lasting control of multiple mite species across all life stages; and the fungicides combat persistent fungal and soilborne diseases caused by *Pythium* and *Phytophthora* species.

You'll find the new products AND the experts who can tell you how to use them at booth 1603.

In addition to the booth experts, you'll have two opportunities to hear from Green Solutions Team member Dr. Janna Beckerman during speaking sessions as she discusses the challenges ornamental growers face, specifically the disease pressures that put their work at risk.

- **"Disease Updates"**—Monday, July 14 at 9:30 a.m. Professionals will be brought together from across the industry to discuss the new control methods, products and innovations to help growers protect their crops.

- **"Root Rot and Ruin"**—Monday, July 14 at 2:00 p.m. The discussion will focus on the cultural and chemical management of the major root rot pathogens (*Pythium*, *Phytophthora*, *Rhizoctonia*, *Thielaviopsis* and *Fusarium*). You'll learn tactics and strategies that will improve plant quality and your bottom line.



Free live stream on pre-emergence herbicides

Speaking of Envu and Dr. Janna Beckerman, she and her colleague Steve Larson will be my guests for a live stream on the topic:

Spend a Little, Save a Lot: How the Timely Use of Pre-emergence Herbicides Can Save You Time and Money

And who doesn't want to save time and money?

It's slated for Wednesday, August 27 at 1:00 p.m. Eastern/Noon Central.

Here's what makes this herbicide live stream unique: Every grower likes the idea of using a pre-emergent herbicide, but many still don't. Envu has done the research to *quantify* the actual costs and savings you can expect from a comprehensive weed control program. I think the biggest eye-opener will be the cost of NOT having such a program!



Sign up [HERE!](#)



Stop and smell the latest flower varieties at Penn State

I've been to a lot of summer field trials and one of my favorites is the Penn State Flower Trials hosted by Penn State Extension at their Southeast Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Manheim. It's a classic!



You get nearly 1,000 annuals and perennials from some 30 top breeding companies from around the world, plus educational sessions on new varieties, disease management and pesticide safety. And, of course, morning refreshments and a buffet lunch! All that for just \$65. They'd like you to register, but walk-ins are welcome.

It's July 24 from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

More information is available on the [Penn State Extension website](#).

Hey, while in the Philly area, make a day of it in Lancaster, drop in on some of the great garden centers in the area and get a cheese steak. Or if you haven't eaten for a week, try the Shady Maple Smorgasbord in East Earl, said to be the biggest in the country. I thought I'd died and gone to home-cookin' heaven!



Finally ...



Check out the big displays of gorgeous summer cucurbit planters I spotted at Home Depot in Orlando. I hope they're not just relegated to Floridians because everybody needs one on their patio.

These were grown by Pure Beauty Farms in Miami, and what I want to know is, what variety is the red and yellow one? I've seen all manner of pink and white shades, but this one is new to me. I might have gotten one had they'd just a 6-in. pot of it, but these were in 18-in. \$50 tubs and I just don't have a spot for one that big.

Anyone know the variety? Let me know [HERE](#).

I suppose I could be a good investigative journalist and call the nursery ...

Feel free to email me at beytes@growertalks.com if you have ideas, comments or questions.

See you next time!

Chris Beytes
Editor-in-Chief
GrowerTalks and Green Profit

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