

RIP Egon Molbak; The Last Weekend of Spring; Ball's New CAST Home



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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

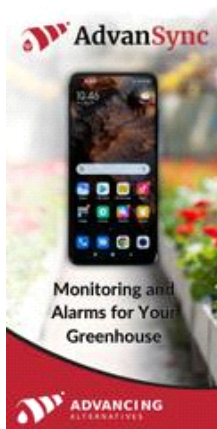
- RIP Egon Molbak
- What happened to the store?
- Spring's last weekend: Strong!
- Where it was good
- Meanwhile, up in Canada ...
- Your comments
- Dutch VAT news
- Ball's new CAST home
- Finally ...



In memoriam: Egon Molbak

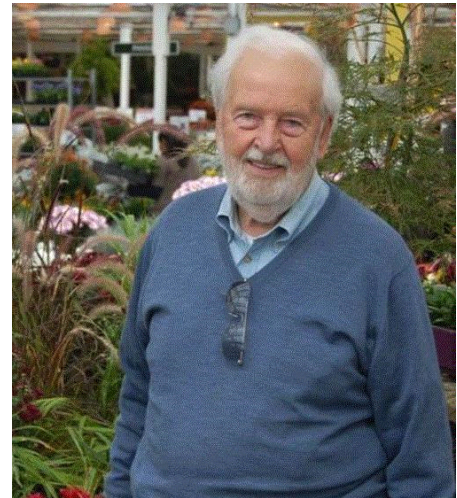
We lost the garden center that bore his name a couple of years ago, and now the man himself is gone: Egon Molbak, founder with his wife, Laina, of Molbak's Garden + Home in Woodinville, Washington. Egon passed away June 22 at the venerable old age of 100 after a long and influential career in the garden center business. That business, founded in 1956, went on to become one of the most important independent garden centers in the world.

As his obituary stated, "His life was a testament to vision, hard work, generosity, and a deep



appreciation for the beauty and wonder of nature.

Born in Denmark, Egon first came to the U.S. in 1948. He returned to Denmark to marry Laina in 1950, and they immigrated to the United States immediately after. In 1956, they bought five little glass greenhouses in Woodinville, a rural area on the east side of Seattle, where they began a small flower-growing operation. Through decades of dedication, innovation and effort, they transformed that modest nursery into Molbak's Garden + Home, one of the most respected and beloved garden centers in the country, hosting more than a million visitors each year.



Egon's influence reached far beyond Woodinville. In addition to local awards, he was recognized with numerous national and international honors. In 1990, he was inducted into the Floriculture Hall of Fame by the Society of American Florists, one of the industry's highest distinctions.

A Memorial Service will be celebrated at 3 p.m. on Wednesday, July 29, at St. Augustine in the Woods Episcopal Church in Freeland, Washington (Whidbey Island).

I met Egon a few times over the years and visited Molbak's several times, but the most memorable was with my wife, Laurie, when we were given a personal tour of the business from the great man himself. During our walk, Egon mentioned that he liked a garden center that encouraged you to just "poke around." Laurie was thrilled to hear him say that—she uses that exact same term herself to describe the fun of exploring a well-laid-out garden center. We call it "poke-around factor" and Molbak's had it in spades.

Rest in peace, my friend!

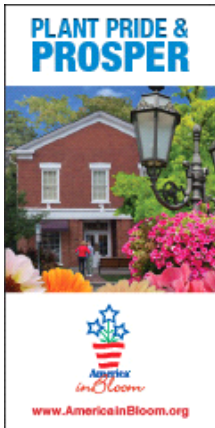


What happened to the garden center?

Molbak's earned many awards, including Washington Family Business of the Year. And as mentioned, it was a favorite among Seattle gardeners and the garden center industry in general. But the company did struggle in its later years, coming close to bankruptcy in the early 2000s before Egon and Laina's son, Jens, bought the business from the family. Jens, who has an MBA from Stanford, had become extremely successful as a founder of Coinstar, the kiosk machine



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that counts your loose change.



An early photo from the family archives.

In 2008, Molbak's sold the land under the store to a developer, which was planning on rebuilding a new Molbak's store as the centerpiece of a 19-acre development to be called Gardens District, which would have included apartments, retail stores and restaurants. But those plans fell through in 2023, leaving Molbak's no choice but to close. [HERE](#) is an article about that.

The only thing left of Molbak's is [THIS WEBSITE](#), which offers garden accessories, décor, books, garden gifts and seed. The Our Story section says this:

"When Molbak's closed in 2024, the loss was real for Woodinville, for Western Washington gardeners, for the family and employees. Now in 2026, we're relaunching Molbak's. It's a continuation of the project Egon and Laina started, not a reinvention. Same family, same standards, same focus on tending both plants and an enjoyment of life. We're starting small—a considered shop of garden-loving goods, and a few new ways to help you in the garden, wherever you happen to be."

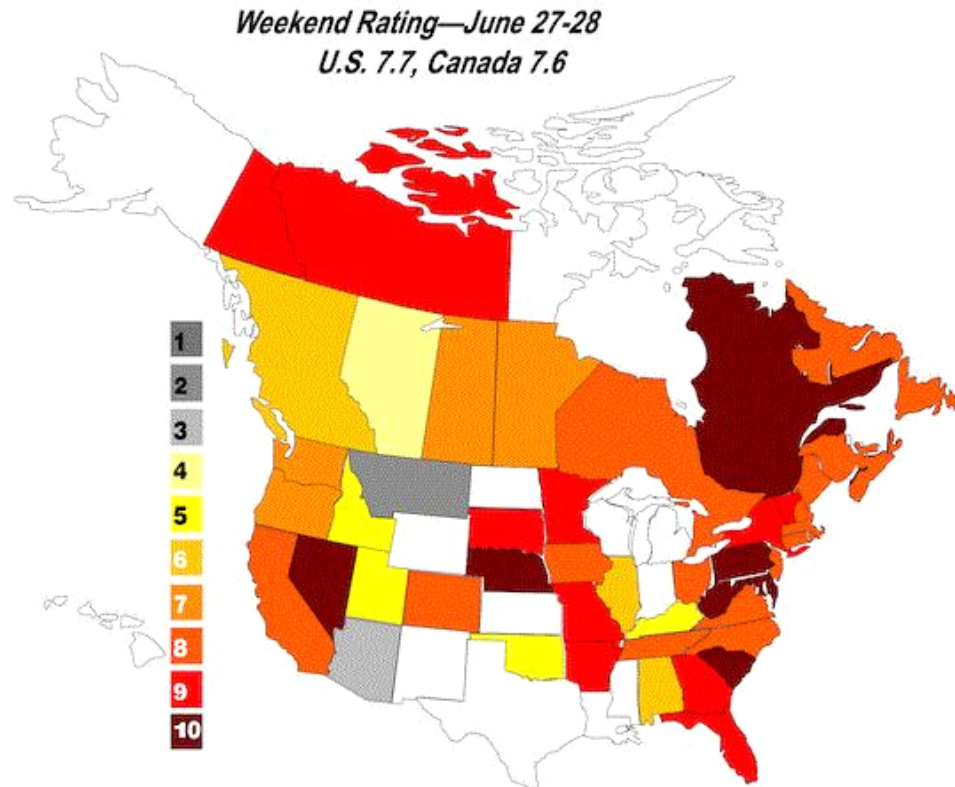


The last weekend of spring: A strong finish!

If you play golf, you know how the round always seems better if you finish strong rather than lose a ball on 17 and double-bogey 18. The same goes for spring: I suspect you'll be in a pretty good mood with the June we've had, and especially the last weekend of June, June 27-28. The score?

7.7 in the U.S. and 7.6 in Canada. That's nearly a full point above average in the U.S. and right on the average in Canada. Granted, I'm sure the dollars you took in pale in comparison to a weekend in May. But still, this is where the gravy is made, and lots of you report that it helped you cap off a good spring 2026.

Here's the map:



That's based on 77 scores from 38 states, 10 provinces and two territories—a decline from a high of 133 scores for Mother's Day, but that's okay—I appreciate those who've stuck with me! There were plenty of perfect 10s to go around this week: 19% (15 out of 77). Another 40% of you rated it 8 or 9—meaning three out of five called it a good to great week/weekend.

I'd compare this year to 2025 ... but for whatever reason, last year I didn't gather scores for the last weekend of June. In fact, I didn't start scoring the last weekend until 2018 (6.3/6.7). From now on I'll do from the first of April to the end of June without fail.

That still leaves us a seven-year average of 6.8 in the U.S. and 7.6 in Canada—showing just how good the last weekend of June was this season. Another indicator? In the U.S., we tied the crazy pandemic year of 2020 (7.7/8.6). That really shows how strongly we finished up.

2027 TOP PICKS

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Where it was good

Where would I have wanted to be doing business this week? New England (8.0) finally got the good weather it has long been waiting for. Vermont scored 8.5 (10, 8.1, 8, 8), Maine scored 8.2 (9, 8, 8, 7.8) and New Hampshire was close behind at 8.0 (8, 8, 7.9). The lowest score I got from

the region was a 7.5 from Connecticut.

In the East, New York scored 8.8 (10, 10, 8, 7.2). Other single-score states pulled up the average; Delaware, Maryland and Pennsylvania all earned perfect 10s.

Even down South, where the season could have ended at Memorial Day, sales have continued—again, not at the volumes of May, but nicely enough to put a little jingle in your pockets. I saw 10s from Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina and a 9 from Georgia. Kentucky struggled due to flooding rain (6 and 4.5, for a 5.3 average), while Alabama wrapped up the season with a 7 and a 5 for a 6.0 average.

Only a few scores came in from the Midwest, and they were both good and bad: a 10 from Ohio but also a 5, a 9 from Minnesota, an 8 from Iowa, and an 8 from Illinois but also a 4. Both of those low scores were from folks who mentioned the heat.

The Pacific Northwest was steady but not great, scoring just 6.3—a shame, because it's a region that weather-wise can keep right on going. They may still make money in July. Washington scored 7.0 (8, 8, 5), Oregon a single 7, and Idaho, which suffered hail and cold, earned a single 5.



Meanwhile, up in Canada ...

The national average of 7.6 doesn't quite paint the overall picture, as it was weighted toward poor performance in the western provinces. Alberta (4) experienced historic flooding, BC (6) had rain and clouds most of the weekend and didn't deliver sales, while Manitoba (7) was a bit better. Saskatchewan also scored a 7 (8, 6).

Gratifyingly, the Yukon and Northwest Territories both scored 9. Said Jeff Nelson of Rainbow Greenhouses, which ships way up there, "The surprise of the week, with the strongest YOY comp of any region. Indoor was up sharply and Outdoor also had a strong positive result. The only reason this wasn't a 10 is that volumes are so low that it doesn't take much to have a strong statistical impact on the results."

Back east was better, with one of our perfect 10s coming from Quebec. Ontario scored three 8s for an 8.0 average; the Atlantic provinces also scored 8.

One factor was mentioned that might have slowed Sunday sales just a bit: Team Canada playing (and beating) South Africa in the World Cup.



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Your comments

Some upbeat comments this week, regardless of the score:

New York (10). "Another double-digit increase, although not as solid as the previous three weekends. Perennials have been strong the entire year, and surprisingly, trees are making a

good comeback after many years of decline. Annuals and vegetables are in strong demand. Finding good quality and selection this late in the season is not easy, but pays off. It is our most profitable category.”—*Sig Fiele, Atlantic Nursery*

Nevada (10). “Strong sales over an excellent 2025. Refreshed merchandising and events paid off!”—*Bruce Gescheider, Moana Nursery*

Nebraska (10). “Beautiful weather, positive sales. Our second Saturday of hosting a summer-long Farmers’ Market at the garden center, bringing in people who have not been to our GC before—very positive!”—*Miles Imel, Peaceful Prairie Nursery*

Minnesota (9). “Good last weekend of June for sales, nice weather Saturday, but now the heat and humidity we expect in Minnesota has arrived. Wrap it up and call it a season.”—*Jay Holasek, Fred Holasek & Son Greenhouse*

New England/New York (8). “Down just a touch last Friday going into the weekend and including that Friday still averaged out to up 11% for the full weekend. Saturday was the better day, Sunday was positive even with sporadic showers and thunderstorms throughout the northeast region. I’ve been waiting for beach season to arrive and we’re looking at 90–100F temps later this week through the coming weekend. Will be interesting to see how sales react to the most intense heat so far this year.”—*Chris Hallene, Casertano Farms*

Virginia (8). “Customer traffic and revenue was strong for the last Saturday in June. But we think it could have been stronger yet if it hadn’t been rainy/misting for a significant part of the day.”—*Duane Weaver, Milmont Greenhouses*

Colorado (8). “While we had hot, sunny weather, others in western Colorado had torrential rain, hail or fires. So our 8 may be another’s 4. I’m really reporting about an island.”—*Gene Pielin, Gulley Greenhouse*

Iowa (8). “Great way to end June. Ideal weather on Saturday (80F and partly cloudy) combined with a coneflower/pollinator event and a pollinator container workshop for an awesome sales day. Sunday was supposed to heat up but stayed pretty decent until mid-afternoon. Lots of perennials flying, as well as people coming in with plant issues to diagnose. Will end June up nicely from last year. Heat wave kicks in today, with mid-90s F for the whole weekly forecast and the holiday. It’s John Deere Classic (PGA tourney) week here, topped off with the Savannah Bananas playing nearby this weekend. Time to enjoy summer.”—*Kate Terrell, Wallace’s Garden Center*

British Columbia (8). “Weather was wet to start but finished with clouds/sun and no rain. Not a patio weekend for sure.”—*John Derrick, Elk Lake Garden Center*

Virginia (7). “A typical late June weekend: slow and steady.”—*Gary Garner III, Gary’s Garden Center*

Washington (5). “By and large, our customer base is just done planting their flowers for summer—even clearance sales over the weekend didn’t drive a significant increase in traffic. Here’s hoping for a solid last few days before the 4th to send a few more annuals out the door!”—*Davis Vos, Vander Giessen Nursery*

North Carolina (5). “It’s summer, but sales haven’t stopped, just slower.”—*Judy Mitchell, Mitchell’s Nursery & Greenhouse*

Ohio (5). “Hot.”—*Brian Sabo, Sabo’s Woodside Nursery*

Montana (2). “Cool, wet and rainy the entire weekend. Certainly not complaining, as we really need the moisture. Which, mind you, we received over 2 inches as of Monday afternoon.”—*Ed Hebbe, Circle H Grower*

Next week? Your GUT scores, and I reveal the average for the whole season.



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Dutch tax rate on flowers/plants could more than double

You've heard of "VAT"—value-added tax—that's a consumption tax that is charged on the value added at each step of the production and distribution channel, with the end consumer ultimately paying the full tax amount. VAT is widely popular around the world as a way for governments to collect revenue; it's used in 175 countries, including all of Europe (with a couple of minor exceptions).

That includes the Netherlands, where the government has proposed raising the VAT on flowers, plants, flower bulbs and tree and nursery products from 9% to 21%. The change is slated to take effect January 1, 2028.

Nine percent is the special lower rate charged on economically essential goods, including groceries and medicine, and also products that serve the common good, including flowers and plants. But I reckon the government sees the tax revenues it's losing at that reduced rate and wants to bump flowers and plants up to the standard 21% charged for most consumer goods.

In reaction, the big Dutch auction Royal FloraHolland, together with other representatives of the floriculture sector, has made a strong appeal to the government to abandon their proposed VAT increase. They argue it will negatively affect entrepreneurs and consumers and will also harm the Dutch economy and employment. They say the proposed tax increase also contradicts the government's ambitions to accelerate greening efforts, reduce heat stress and promote biodiversity—all of which require that folks buy plants.

A study by the business consultancy Decisio indicates that the higher VAT would lead to a loss of sales of more than 800 million euros, put thousands of jobs at risk, and weaken the competitive position of Holland's 9-billion-euro flower and plant market.



Dutch plants are already a bargain, at least by U.S. standards. Would customers really notice an 11% increase?

Now, the VAT would NOT apply to horticulture exports, allowing the sector to remain competitive with the rest of the world. But it would raise the prices of Dutch-produced flowers and plants within Holland. And it would apply to imported ornamentals, as well—meaning all plants would go up in price regardless of where they are grown.

If the Dutch VAT on flowers and plants rises from 9% to 21%, consumers would see retail prices increase by roughly 11%, assuming growers and retailers pass the full tax increase through to buyers. That would, no doubt, put a crimp on purchases. Which is what Pieter Bootsma, CEO of Royal FloraHolland, said in his argument to the government.

“Today we have provided the government with further insight into why this measure is fundamentally flawed,” he wrote. “The VAT increase will generate less revenue than is suggested, but will cause disproportionate damage. Entrepreneurs, particularly florists, will lose turnover, jobs will come under pressure and investing in green environments will become more expensive for consumers. That is a poor outcome for the Netherlands. The facts are clear. We therefore call on the government not to amend or soften this measure, but to scrap it entirely.”

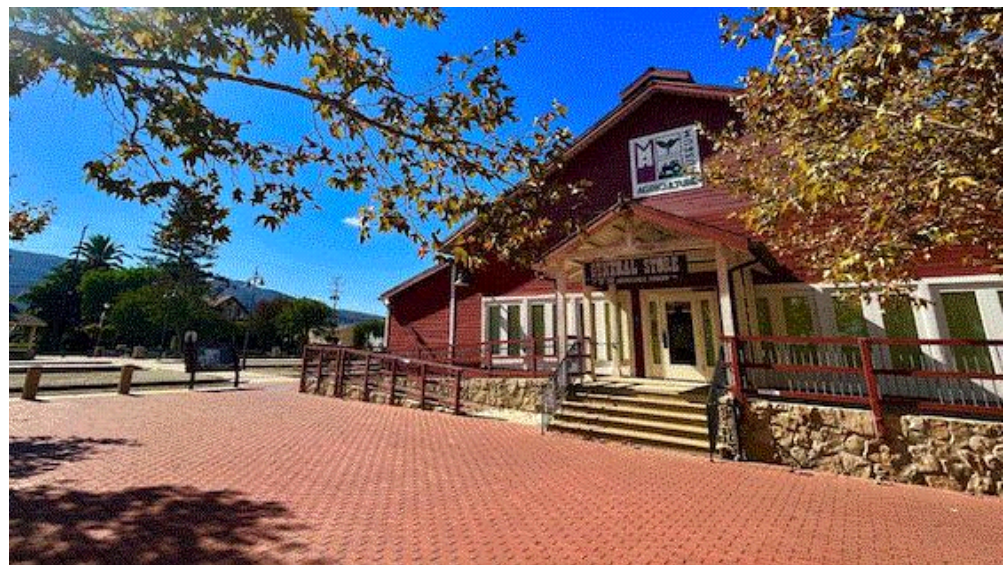
Any Dutch growers or retailers have knowledge of what this would mean to your sector? Weigh in [HERE](#).



Ball companies find new home for CAST

When they announced the closing and selling of their Santa Paula research greenhouses, we all wondered where PanAmerican Seed and its sister companies at Ball would exhibit for the California Spring Trials. Or, perhaps they'd take the opportunity to drop out of the event as several other companies have done over the years?

Nope! PanAmerican, Ball FloraPlant, Darwin Perennials, Selecta ONE and Morel will be at CAST 2027 at a new home: The Ventura County Agriculture Museum in downtown Santa Paula. The Museum “preserves and exhibits the region’s farming and ranching history and explores the present and future of the industry”—and seeing how PanAmerican Seed has been a part of that history for decades, it’s a fitting location for their Spring Trials!



“The Ventura County Agriculture Museum offers a strong fit for our needs to host a wonderful event for our customers and features both indoor and outdoor display spaces,” said Claire Josephson, Ball’s marketing communications director and CAST event organizer. “The museum aligns well with our company values of appreciating the past while looking forward to sustainable growth of our industry.”

Just as important, the new location supports the practical needs of attendees, including easy access, plenty of parking, tent options for displays and so on, allowing Ball to “maintain the high standards the company expects while ensuring a comfortable, welcoming and professional experience for all guests.”

And it’s just a seven-minute drive east from their long-time Briggs Road home.

CAST 2027 is scheduled for April 6-9.

If you want to see what you missed at CAST 2026, check out our [VIDEO PLAYLIST](#) on YouTube. And watch for our Shorts and Reels to pop up all over social media—give us a like!

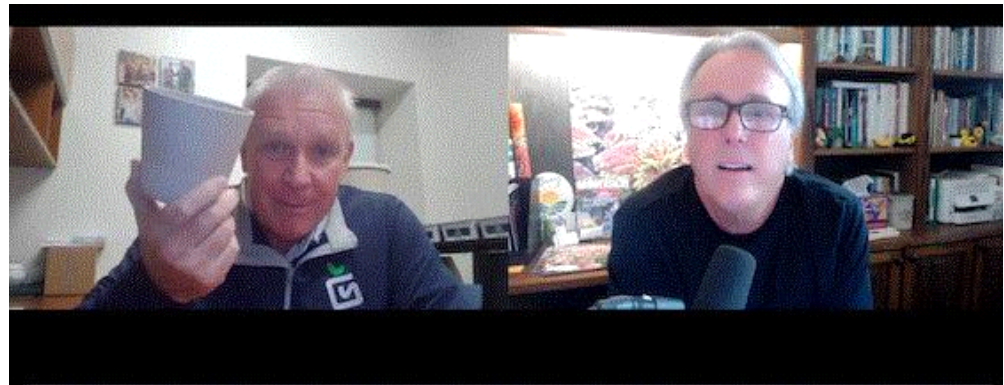


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Finally ...



Last week, I had a great conversation with the CEO of container manufacturer Growscape about all the things they’re doing to eliminate surprises from the supply chain. After all, when you need your pots, you need your pots! Or as Ed puts it, “... last I checked with my mom, there’s no way to move Mother’s Day back a few weeks.”

You can register to watch and listen to our full interview [HERE](#).

Now, just one note about the recording: About halfway through, Orlando got one of its epic electrical storms, and a lightning strike knocked my power out long enough to turn off my internet. It took me four minutes to get it booted back up and get back online to the Zoom call. So there’s this little blank section in the middle. Just scrub past that and you’ll pick up the second half of our discussion. (Also ignore the fact that I magically swapped sides of the screen with Ed.)

Enjoy!



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

See you next time!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chi".

Chris Beytes
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