

## How Was Easter?; FlowerTrials Canceled; Find Me This Plant



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#### COMING UP THIS WEEK:

How was Easter?  
- Your comments  
- Meanwhile, up in Canada  
- Notes from New England  
- Twas the Night Before Easter  
FlowerTrials canceled again  
Field to Vase gives virtual a try  
Finally ... find me this plant



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**How was Easter?**

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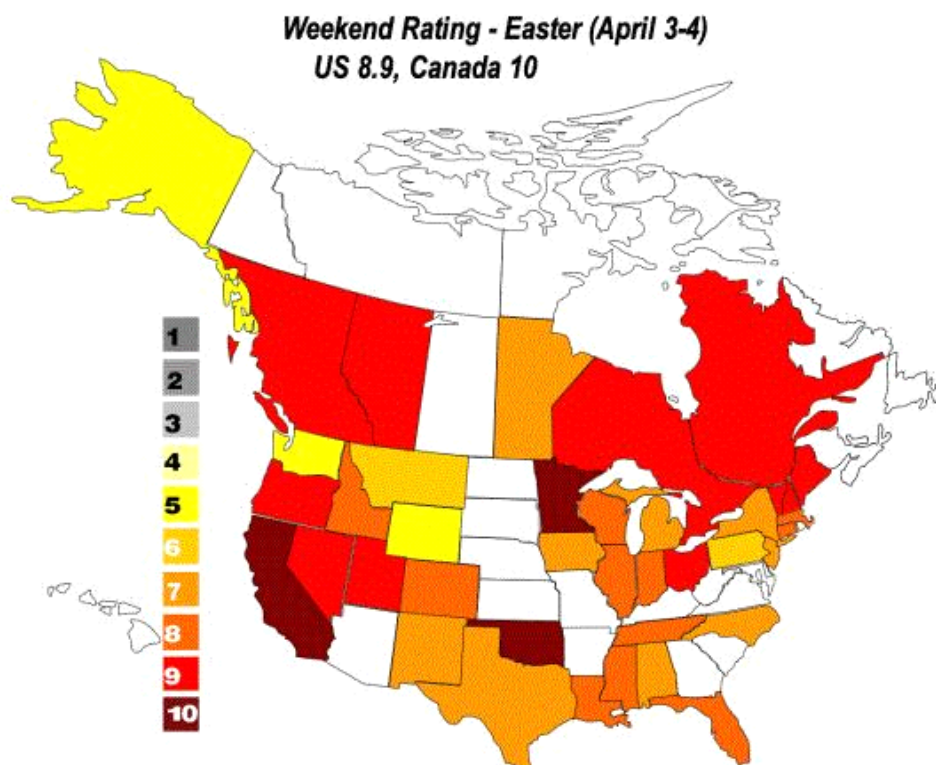
What if  
the person  
you need  
is **not** looking  
for a job?

**Florascarch, Inc.**

To borrow a word from a Seinfeld episode, "Spectacular!" Not only compared to last year, but compared to every year since 2011 that I've been doing this survey.

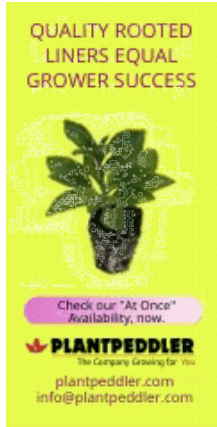
The score? **8.9** in the U.S. and a whopping, grand, amazing, spectacular perfect **10** in Canada (granted, there were just six scores from Canada, but still!). That's based on 54 scores from 30 states and 5 provinces. Thirty-one of those scores (57%) were perfect 10s. Not bad for the first weekend of April, even if it was Easter weekend.

Here's the map:



For comparison, last year's first weekend of April scored 5.7/3.8. And Easter 2020, the virtually non-existent pandemic Easter (which was April 12) scored 6.0/5.3. But even going back pre-pandemic, the best Easter score ever was in 2017, with a rating of 8.3/6.9. That fell two weeks later, on April 16.

Of course, not everybody had a killer Easter week/weekend. Cold weather struck my readers in New



York, Connecticut and Kentucky, resulting in some scores of 5 and 6. Nowhere to go but up!



## Your comments

As always, your comments from the front lines tell the tale of the start of Spring 2021:

**South Dakota (10).** "A solid 15 out of 10. It was the BEST first Saturday of April we have ever had, exceeding sales of even mid/late April days in previous years. Customers were buying everything: bareroot trees, potted shrubs, houseplants, pottery, seeds and even a coleus floor pot (we did our best, but the customer insisted on taking it home). Our weather was fantastic overall last week and Saturday was 70-plus degrees with no snow on the ground in South Dakota. We are blessed and the phones are





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ringing off the hook today! Now, if only we could get not only everything we have ordered, but also when we wanted it; we are staying thankful for what we have already received, however. Here we go!"—Laura Kalfs

**California (10 ... but he scored it a 14).** "Thursday was the biggest weekday we have ever had; Friday was almost the same ... veggies were crazy ... wagon loads [of money] for the bank."—Tom Courtright

**Nevada (10).** "Following a very strong March, Easter week and weekend were more than double a year ago."—Bruce Gescheider

**Oregon (10).** "Spring-like weather and no sign the gardening bump is subsiding in these parts!"—Ed Blatter



My state of Illinois scored a giant 9.2. After visiting about a dozen independents and box stores, I can confirm that Chicagoland was jumping. Platt Hill's Carpentersville location was stocked and ready.

**Kansas (10).** "Spring is off to a great start. We started shipping a couple of weeks early and demand is great. The weather has also been awesome so far this spring."—Kathy Miller

**Louisiana (10).** "I would have to say it was a 10 for the last month in Lafayette, Louisiana. We have been in business for 17 years at this location and are breaking sales records. Believe it or not, our sales are better than last year." —Michelle Mayeux

Even those folks who didn't score the week/weekend a 10 still reported good results, with just one or two factors bringing down their scores:

**Illinois/Missouri (9.5).** "I would say 10 but many of our retailers were closed for Easter Sunday. Thursday through Saturday [were a] 10, the boxes stores were also a 10."—Amy Morris

**New Hampshire (8).** "Would have been better if the church business was at 100%."—Matt McElroy

**Montana (7).** "Steady traffic all day, good weather on the weekend—snowed and rained Monday. We are still selling A LOT of houseplants and foliage and tropical plants, but seeds, potatoes, onions, seed-starting supplies, pansies, etc. were selling well. Nursery yard was very busy. A hint of what's to come ... some folks paid full price for mixed hanging baskets that were just to the edge. I'm low on production space, so I sent hanging baskets needing to be spaced or hung up to our retail side and had to price them because they were selling."—Jeri Zirbel

**Kentucky (5).** "Three nights of cold (24F, 19F, 26F) in a row Wednesday through Saturday killed things. Wholesale was only bright spot. Sales were WAY down from prior three weekends."—Jesse Shelton



## Meanwhile, up in Canada ...

A perfect 10 this time of year is crazy for Canada. I can see it in BC where the weather can be mild, but Alberta? Saskatchewan?

**Alberta (10).** “Last year, we were closed to indoor traffic and plants were chosen by looking through our store windows at the sample racks we had set up. This year, we decided to open up our perennial lot to foot traffic (about two weeks ahead of schedule). People were very excited to see the start of our perennial lot offerings and picked up a lot of seasonal and annual flowering plants. Soil and compost were also a big purchase of the weekend. Let’s hope this continues throughout the season!”—Kristen Busse

**Rural Saskatchewan (10).** “Incredible! We have never had sales like this in our area.”—Leslie Cornell

*(Question from the editor: Isn’t “rural Saskatchewan” redundant?)*

**Victoria, British Columbia (10).** “Since the last week of February until present, we are running two to five times our normal customer counts, with no sign of it slowing down. Biggest challenge this year will be getting enough stock both in plants and dry goods. Most annual growers are having a challenging time getting seed, cuttings and plugs. Nursery stock growers were already selling this year’s stock last year. Dry goods suppliers are no better off, with supply chains broken and some pricing going up bi-weekly. Making for a challenging year, and for the first time for me, weather is not the No. 1 factor as to how well we will do.”—John Derrick

All in all, I think the results from the first weekend of April are a positive sign for how spring could shape up to be. Now we have to see if we’re as weather-resistant as we were last year and, also like last year, if “every day is a Saturday.”



## Notes from New England (which scored a 9.4 for the region)

First-time *Acres Online* contributor Lowell Halvorson is from **Liberty Family Farms** of Ludlow, Massachusetts—with 151 locations throughout New England, plus the Hudson Valley and Long Island—sent in a score of 10 for every state the company serves, saying of his first-time participation, “Okay, we’ll bite. The boss likes to read your surveys.” (Thanks, boss!).

Here’s Lowell’s report on the early start to spring in New England (and New York):

### *Some background*

“Liberty Family Farms sells outdoor plants through retail stores in 151 locations throughout New England (Hudson Valley to Cape Cod, from Maine to Long Island), so we have a pretty broad overview of the region. Our locations were defined as grocery stores in all states last year, so we also have actual year-over-year sales results to compare. My job is to pull the sales data twice a week, yank the trends and problems out, then turn over the results to the growing and distribution staffs to celebrate or solve the issues. I’ve been doing this for about eight years.”

### *The Easter results*

"2021 was a 19% improvement over last year's deployment, but not because of pandemic issues. Sales started about one week earlier due to milder weather this year that overlapped an earlier Easter. Last year, we had a cold and dim start to the season. We also didn't 'feel' the urgency because it wasn't Easter yet. This year, the weather pulled for us instead of against us."

### *The week to watch*

"Bear in mind that last year, New England was just sorting out its response to the pandemic. Even if grocery stores were open, minimal shopping was the behavior, so we didn't see any 'off-the-charts' spending. Sales parked themselves into a plateau until about the first week in May. That's when the lockdown relaxed, outdoor dining began and everyone had a palpable sense of 'coming out of the cave.' That's when revenues jumped three times and the REAL pandemic buying kicked in for us. First week of May—that's the week to watch."

Thanks for the detailed report, Lowell. And I agree that May will tell the tail.

Keep the scores and notes coming, everybody! I want all states and provinces represented. Watch for my email reminder on Mondays.

## **The Night Before ... Easter?**

Aimee Rohrbach, sales manager for Musselman Wholesale Foliage in Pennsylvania, celebrated a "fantastic" Easter 2021 by writing this bit of poetry for their weekly availability list:

*'Twas the night before Easter and bulb cooler was bare,  
As we look back to just a year ago when we were filled with despair.  
There were shutdowns across the country galore  
Making the Easter season for greenhouses very poor.*

*However, at the end of the tunnel there was light,  
As interest in plants and gardening grew out of sight.  
Perhaps a lesson we have learned in this world gone wacky  
Is that flowers and plants really do make people happy.*



## **FlowerTrials canceled for second year**

Now on to the bad news: The pandemic is still impacting horticulture, with the just-announced cancelation of the annual FlowerTrials (Week 24 Trials) in Europe. It'd been scheduled for its usual time slot, Week 24 (June 15-18) at two locations in the Netherlands and one in Germany. But "while the mood was still cautiously optimistic a few weeks ago, the ongoing and unstable situation in regard to the COVID-19 pandemic has led FlowerTrials to take the decision to cancel the physical event for 2021," wrote the disappointed organizers in a press release.





2019 FlowerTrials were rained on, but that seems trivial now, doesn't it? Photo: Hans Korbee.

Sakata's Gill Corless, Chair of the FlowerTrials, said, "Given the current circumstances, we feel that FlowerTrials cannot responsibly organize collective open days or encourage visitors to travel to different locations. We do not believe that by June vaccination levels will be high enough to ensure the safety of our visitors and staff. While we cannot predict what the situation will be in June with regards to lockdown regulations, with only 10 weeks to go to Week 24, cancellation is the only realistic option left."

The tough decision was made by a survey of the members, of which more than 75% opted to play it safe.

Of course, lack of an event doesn't mean the 60 member breeders and distributors won't introduce their new products. So FlowerTrials will be working on a digital alternative to the live event so you can learn about the latest bedding and potted plants. Stay tuned!

## Field to Vase gives virtual a try

Laurie and I have been to two of Certified American Grown's Field to Vase Dinners and enjoyed them immensely (that's Homer, Alaska, 2019 below), so I'm not sure how a virtual version will compare. But the organization is giving an online version a try, hosting a virtual Field to Vase event at the Flower Fields in Carlsbad, California, on April 24 as a fundraiser for the organization. Here's their plan:

For your ticket (which ranges from \$50 to \$225), you'll log on to a website, where you'll participate in a welcome reception featuring live music, then get a tour of the 50-acre Flower Fields by grower Mike Mellano, who'll tell you about all things ranunculus! You'll end the evening with a design demonstration with prestigious floral and event designer Shawna Yamamoto of Shawna Yamamoto Event Design.

The \$50 ticket gets you the above. Spend \$100 and you'll also get a farm-fresh bouquet, featuring ranunculus, and shipped in time so that you can enjoy it while you participate in the event. Spring for the whole \$225 package and you get flowers AND wine AND cheese to make it even more like the real deal.





Again, it's a fundraiser for Certified American Grown, so give it a look at [www.americangrownflowers.org](http://www.americangrownflowers.org). That way, CAG can get back to hosting live Field to Vase dinners like this!

### Finally ...

I need a kolkwitzia. Or Linneae, if you prefer the new genus. Actually, I need four of them. Unfortunately, they seem to be completely extinct in the trade. I've contacted every breeder and large grower I know, hoping to score some, but no dice.



*Linneae* (*Kolkwitzia amabilis*). Gorgeous, right? You can see why I want more. Photo: NC State Extension.

So I'm putting out this all-points bulletin: Have you got kolkwitzia in your inventory? I'll take most any size that can be shipped, from liner to 5 or 7 gallon. Heck, dig me your unwanted stock plants if you're not going to propagate the things! I have a spot in my garden where one is thriving and I want a few more



to go with it.

As for those of you who used to offer them, but no longer do, why is that? Hard to grow? Zero demand? You have a thing against beautiful arching hardy shrubs covered with pretty pink flowers? Let me know at [beytes@growertalks.com](mailto:beytes@growertalks.com).



See you next time!

**Chris Beytes**

Editor

*GrowerTalks and Green Profit*

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