

# Spring 2003 *in a Nutshell*



*For the most part, spring was profitable for U.S. growers, who made multiple turns and shipped a good amount of product.*

Some of your peers' answers to that classic question:  
How was your spring?

By Carrie Burns

**A**h, spring — birds chirping, light breezes blowing, the smell of fresh cut grass; actually it's more like, tight orders, unpredictable weather, customer service, price increases. Spring brings out the best and worst of our industry, and *GPN* found out what those were for 2003.

On a positive side, everyone *GPN* talked to raised their prices from last year, and most of them held that mark throughout the season. However, on a slightly sour side, some growers said the demand for commodity crops was low. And of course, the weather is always an issue, but this year's seemed a little better than last (for growers).

So let's get down to business. Here is what your peers had to say about the spring of 2003:

## **WHICH VARIETIES PERFORMED BETTER THAN YOU ANTICIPATED?**

"Herbs in general performed very well. Growers Select Festival Gerberas performed brilliantly this year. We just had absolutely awesome gerberas, from week one right on through to the end of the season. We had an exceptionally good run on Bloomingdale ranunculus this year — beautiful ranunculus all year long. They were just fabulous. We also had a very good season on component plants in general. But those are varieties that we're propagating."

— **Lloyd Traven, Peace Tree Farm, Kintersville, Pa.**

"Anthuriums seem to be getting hotter and hotter, so we're doing more Anthuriums. We've always got a few new things going — a few varieties of bromeliads especially — that looked good, so we made room for them."

— **Tony Godfrey, Olive Hill Greenhouses, Fallbrook, Calif.**

"I had a lot of new varieties that I haven't grown before because we did the Miracle Grow program here for the Northwest. I was impressed with the performance of a lot of that product, specifically New Guinea impatiens, the Diva fuschias and the new varieties of coleus from Ecke."

— **Don Spence, Smith Gardens, Aurora, Ore. ♦**

## management

### WHICH VARIETIES PERFORMED WORSE THAN YOU ANTICIPATED?

“You know, I’m relating some of my surprises to either coming in too late or too early just on planting times. Actually, one thing that really turned out bad was our bacopa. That was probably a little on our side, keeping them too wet. Then I started drying them out more, and they started looking okay. But the bacopa is a tricky one for me.”

— **Jason Cox, Busch Greenhouses Inc., Denver, Colo.**

“The vegetative snapdragons were awful; they just never grew and didn’t react well at all. Calibrachoa did not perform well, across the board. It didn’t matter whose they were, it just did not do well for us this year.”

— **Lloyd Traven, Peace Tree Farm, Kinterville, Pa.**

### HOW DID THE WEATHER IN YOUR AREA AFFECT YOUR PRODUCTION?

“It affected it daily. The season was very drawn-out; it had its very fast and furious points, and it had the points where you were standing around looking at each other. So I guess to sum it up: the frequency of stopping and starting was all basically directly related to the weather. When people had the opportunity — the window of opportunity — to plant, then the retailers were very aggressive.”

— **Lee Steffensky, Meiring Greenhouse & Farms, Carleton, Mich.**

“It affected production through sales. In the northwest, April and May are typically peak sales months, and in April, I believe we set a record for consecutive days of rain. There were 29 straight days of miserable rain. That took up one full month of the two peak months, which meant I was forced to hold on to quite a bit of product and, at the same time, continue to plant for May and June sales. So, the issue was being creative with square footage, trying to find space for the new product we needed to plant, as well as maintain the product we already had on the benches that wasn’t moving because of the April weather.”

— **Don Spence, Smith Gardens, Aurora, Ore. ▶**



According to one grower, anthuriums have become more popular over the last few years.

## management

“It really helped us, because early in the spring a lot of moisture finally came our way. And we finally got our water above zero capacity. It was above a certain number where people could start watering again. That really was a wonderful thing for us.”

— *Jason Cox, Busch Greenhouses Inc., Denver, Colo.*

### **HOW WERE YOUR PRICES THIS YEAR COMPARED TO LAST? DID THEY HOLD THROUGHOUT THE SEASON?**

“This year’s prices were on par or probably a little higher than last year. They held longer. We tried to maximize our dollars as far into June as you possibly could. Then I think the retailers realize that they also have to maximize. But if you miss May or April, depending on where you are in the country, you still have certain dollars everyone has to meet.”

— *Lee Steffensky, Meiring Greenhouse & Farms, Carleton, Mich.*

“We increased [prices] about 5 percent. They held right towards the end. With Memorial Day being earlier this year, most people — garden centers — thought it was over sooner, when it really shouldn’t have been.”

— *Dick Shreve, Shreve Greenhouse, Perry, Ohio*

### **DO YOU HAVE YOUR OWN BRANDING PROGRAM OR GROW BRANDED PRODUCT? HOW EFFECTIVE WAS IT THIS PAST SEASON?**

“We bring in Proven Winners, but we don’t have our own brand as of yet. I’m getting set up where we can start doing some of that. We’ve got a printer in now, and I’m trying to get the inventory system up and operational, and once we get those pieces and parts in place, we’ll be able to deal with that.”

— *Steve Mercer, Preston Greenhouse, Louisville, Ky.*

“We do a little bit. I think it’s steady. It’s like everything else in this business, it has its good points and its bad points, and the public seems to still be sorting it out.”

— *Lee Steffensky, Meiring Greenhouse & Farms, Carleton, Mich.*

“We’re looking very carefully right now, trying to find the right pot producer who can put our label, logo and name on a very classy-looking pot. We’re looking to create that as part of our selling point, because quite frankly, what we sell is us. I am not very negative, but I do not believe that the national brand is going to be long term successful — there may be one that comes through. Miracle Gro is the perfect example — that’s the one brand that people come into a garden center and ask for by name.”

— *Lloyd Traven, Peace Tree Farm, Kinterville, Pa.*

### **HOW WERE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR CUSTOMERS?**

“Great. As a matter of fact, we gained some customers. We have good customer service. It probably has a lot to do with being available a little later, doing our best to make sure that the quality is good and making sure that they receive orders on time, and if not, to get a call to tell them that we’ll be late. Just that extra step.”

— *Jason Cox, Busch Greenhouses Inc., Denver, Colo.*

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“I think because the market has been down, we’ve all had to produce better plants. In the long run, the end consumer will be more likely to come back and buy another plant. Garden centers — family-owned garden centers — are doing better because people are more quality oriented. Even the box stores are having a look at quality hopefully more so than price.”

— **Kenny Stewart, Stewart’s Greenhouse Inc.**  
**Mount Dora, Fla.**

### WHAT WILL YOU DO DIFFERENTLY NEXT YEAR?

“We’re trying to go after new business. We have tried to cement some relationships within our broken network to get us more business. We are actively doing a little more traveling to actually go see customers than we have in the past. We know there’s some business [next year] that’s going to have to be made up, so rather than just rely on the brokers to bring us new business, we have gone out and sought some new business on our own, which is not our forte. We support our brokers very strongly, and we don’t do direct business. So, we are visiting them with the idea they will place their business with us through a broker.”


— **Steve Mullen, Knox Nursery Inc.,**  
**Orlando, Fla.**

“More larger containers. There was [a demand this year], and the trend is going back

to more and more unusual, not just a standard New Guinea or geranium. We won’t really change any of the varieties, just grow less of the basic stuff and more of the unusual.”

— **Dick Shreve, Shreve Greenhouse,**  
**Perry, Ohio**

“We’re learning we can sell our edgy varieties very well. We don’t need calibrachos, bacopa, argyranthemums and items like that to have a successful spring. We have our varieties of coleus and varieties of exotic begonias that nobody else has. We just do a great job on the quality of herbs and crops, which nobody can beat. So, we’ve got a nice production scheme, we do what we do. We focus on what we do well and efficiently and profitably, and we don’t try to do the other stuff.”

— **Lloyd Traven, Peace Tree Farm,**  
**Kinterville, Pa.** 

*Carrie Burns is associate editor of GPN. She may be reached by phone at (847) 391-1019 or E-mail at [cburns@sgcmail.com](mailto:cburns@sgcmail.com).*

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*The trend seems to be heading toward more unique items, such as coleus.*