



April showers rain on sales but catering continues to shine

THE GARDEN Centre Association's (GCA) Barometer of Trade (BoT) results for April (2012) have revealed catering and clothing sales were up at member garden centres despite footfall being down due to the rain.

The results, which are compiled using members' sales figures and provide an up-to-date trading position statement, revealed a 4.5% increase in catering compared with April 2011.

Phil Slinger, GCA Chief Executive, explained: "Despite April being a difficult month for most retailers, with customers preferring not to venture out in the rain, catering sales were up again and the year to date figures now stand at 6.22% up, which is a great result.

"Unfortunately, the wettest April on record had a negative impact on sales in other areas. With footfall down 26% as compared to April last year, this was inevitable. Consumers' interests in outdoor products were washed away by constant downpours, with furniture and barbecues down 52% and outdoor plants down 48%.

"It must be noted that the changing timing of Easter always makes analysis difficult in March and April. This April's comparison is with a very strong month last year, which included all four days of Easter, as compared with two this year."

Other areas that saw a fall in sales were seeds and bulbs, down 19.2%, and hard landscaping, down 31%.

Phil continued: "Many garden centres had an excellent month in March, with overall sales up 11.5%, which will have helped to protect against a fall in April.

"Due to the mixed spring weather the season is a couple of weeks behind. With warmer weather anticipated, we believe that garden centres will have a much more successful May and will hopefully recoup any sales they may have lost in April.

"In March the industry had to worry about impending hosepipe bans and drought warnings, however we can all be thankful for the rain in April that has helped with easing this situation.

"The heavy rain has created ideal planting conditions for this time of the year so garden centres should be capitalising on the extra window this has provided for people to continue buying and planting this late in the season. Current conditions also mean that stock is looking fantastic and lush, so there certainly are positives."

The BoT reports produced by the GCA allow member garden centres to compare their trading positions with other GCA garden centres.

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Phil continued: “Members are keeping everything crossed that a feel-good factor from this summer’s events, including the Queen’s Jubilee and the Olympics, kicks in soon and spending picks up again.”