

Media release for the Garden Centre Association

Weather affects plant sales while non-traditional categories soar

GARDEN centres across the country saw sales of clothing and catering soar while fluctuating weather saw plant sales rise and fall during March (2015) according to the Garden Centre Association's Barometer of Trade (BoT) results.

Houseplants were up 5.50% while sales of outdoor plants fell -13.76%. Clothing sales were up 9.16% compared with the same month in 2014 and catering was up 5.87%.

Iain Wylie, GCA Chief Executive, explained: "This time last year we experienced some fantastic weather, which led to some impressive sales figures at the garden centres. It was always going to be tough to beat this year as the great British weather is so unpredictable so we have seen sales of plants rise and fall throughout the month.

"When our traditional categories are being affected like this it's great to see sales of our non-traditional categories pick up the pace. Despite the rain it looks like garden centre customers made sure they were kitted out in the latest gear and stopped off at cafés and restaurants during their visits for a spot of lunch, dinner or a cuppa and cake."

During the month food hall and farm shop sales reached 2.88% up.

Ben Thompson, Director at Garsons Esher and Titchfield, said: "Catering continues to grow at our Titchfield centre, where our restaurant was refurbished just over a year ago. March sales were up, restaurant sales achieved a 16% growth year on year for 2014 to 15.

"The improved offer has driven site visitor numbers up, with general food and butchery sales performing very well also."

The BoT results are the only official GCA trading figures to be released.

The GCA BoT reports are compiled using actual sales figures and provide an up-to-date trading position statement. They are made available mid-month following the end of the prior month after all member garden centres have submitted their results.

The reports allow members to compare their trading positions with other centres.

Tammy Woodhouse, Managing Director at Millbrook Garden Centres, said: "We have actively targeted to grow our clothing sales this year having seen some good growth last year. We benchmarked ourselves against other similar sized centres using the BoT and realised there were opportunities out there. Using the BoT we then contacted these centres, for example St Peter's in Worcestershire.

“They shared with us the suppliers and sales they were getting from each area. Using this information and working with AIS we have introduced new clothing ranges and given this area more space which has resulted in increased sales.

“This is the strength of the GCA and the BOT to learn and share information to grow our own centres and this is a great example of this in action.”

St Peter’s Garden Centre saw sales of clothing rise 32.26% during March.

Dennis Espley, Managing Director at Squires Garden Centre, said: “It was a disappointing month in all gardening categories, particularly sundries, trees and shrubs. There was encouraging interest in furniture and BBQs, particularly when there was a sunny day. Catering and gifts performed well, particularly on Mother’s Day weekend. Fortunately trading since Easter Monday has been excellent.”

The GCA represents nearly 200 garden centres nationwide.

Julian Winfield, Chief Executive at Haskins Garden Centres, said: “Plant sales in March were ok. Looking at our largest centre, Haskins Ferndown, they were down 10%, but the weather last year was better. However, if you look at our average plant sales over the last five years, Ferndown were down 4% and substantially down on sales in 2011, which suggests the trend is down.

“It is still early and I am encouraged with what has happened so far after a good gardening season last year, but we never know until mid-June.”

Through sharing information and its inspection programme, the GCA helps members to achieve high standards in customer service, plant quality and reliability.

Will Armitage, GCA Chairman, said: “Again the weather has put a slight dampener on what is proving to be a fantastic start to this year’s season. The general election may put a bit of a downer on customer confidence in the run up to polling day, but as we all know, if the weather is on our side, we’ll be busy.”

For further information, please call 0118 930 8918. Alternatively, please visit www.gca.org.uk, log on to www.facebook.com/pages/GardenCentreAssociation or follow the organisation on Twitter at www.twitter.com/GC_Association.

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Photograph caption one: Iain Wylie, GCA Chief Executive.

Photograph caption two: Tammy Woodhouse, Managing Director at Millbrook Garden Centres.