



**Market Update: April 2024**

# Contents



3. Overview
4. Key Points: March
5. Garden centre sales: March
6. Garden centre sales volumes: March
7. March Transaction Numbers and average transaction values: In the Garden Store
8. March Transaction Numbers and average transaction values: In the café/restaurant
9. Garden centre sales: March garden/gardening breakdowns
10. Garden centre sales: March non-garden/gardening breakdowns
11. Garden centre sales: calendar year to end of March
12. Weather
13. Weather by region
14. Current reservoir levels
15. Forecast river flows
16. Forecast groundwater levels
17. Consumer confidence
18. Consumer Issues Tracker
19. Inflation and wages
20. Retail inflation on garden products
21. Retail inflation on plants
22. GB Fertiliser Prices
23. Shipping container prices
24. Vehicle fuel prices – petrol & diesel
25. Closing comments

# Overview

- March 2024 was a historically wet and dull month for the UK, with 127% of the long-term average rainfall. Nevertheless, garden centre sales were strong compared to March 2023; however these figures reflect an earlier Easter and March 2023 being a particularly dull, wet month. Garden/gardening categories were up +25%, with core plant sales performing strongly in comparison to March 2023.
- However, garden/gardening categories did less well when compared to March 2022, down -19% likely due to sunnier weather the same period two years ago.
- Non-garden/gardening category sales performed well in both year-on-year comparisons (up +11% versus March 2023, and up +13% versus March 2022), with food-related categories such as catering and food & farm shop contributing greatly to these sales percentages.
- We saw consumer confidence stall at -18 points, but a glimmer of hope was seen in consumer ratings of their personal financial situation, which was finally in positive integers for the first time since December 2021. Though, the Economy and Inflation remain in the top 3 issues concerning the UK public.
- Oil prices crept up once again as the situation in the Middle East remains uncertain and crude oil prices increased in response. Shipping container costs were considerably higher than the same period last year but are on a downward trajectory.
- Should the weather for the remainder of spring be favourable, garden centres may benefit from pent up consumer demand for gardening.

Read on for the detail...

# Key Points: March

**Overall March Garden Centre sales were up +22% vs March 2023**

**Catering sales were up +17% on March 2023**

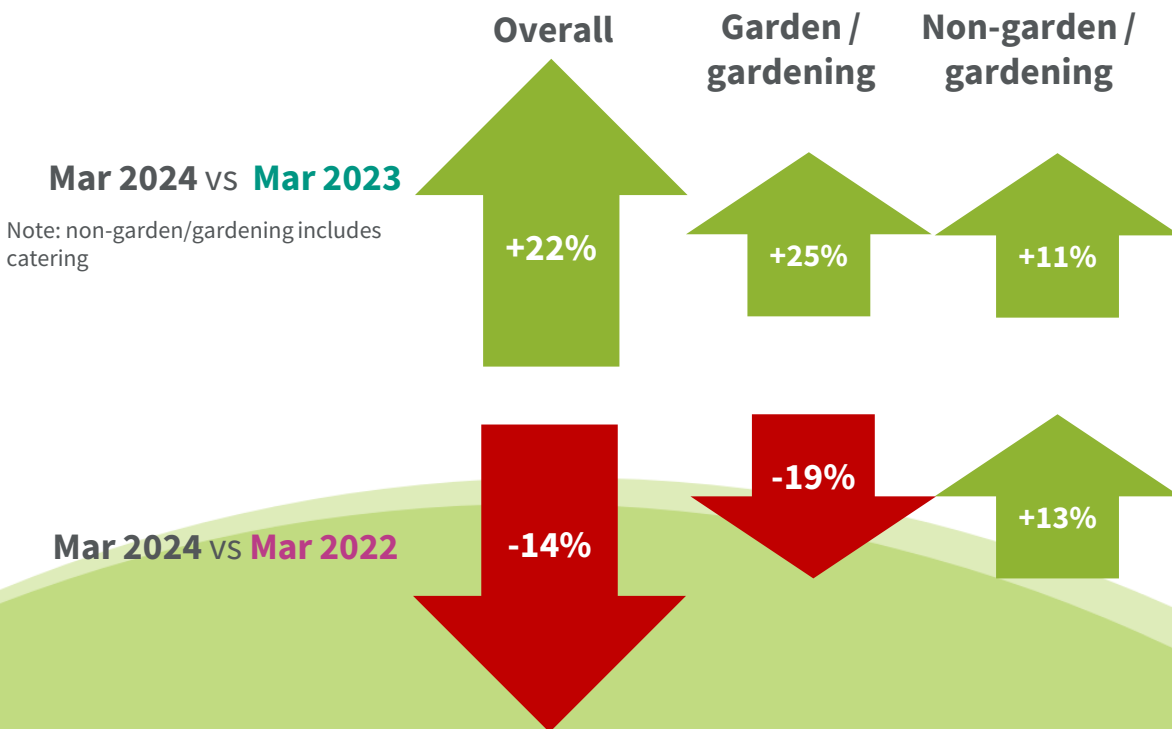
**Consumer confidence stalled at -21 but remains +15pts above March 2023**

**March 2024 saw 127% of the long-term average for rainfall March 2023 across the UK**

**Bedding Plants sales were up +43% vs March 2023**

# Garden centre sales: March

Overall sales were up +22% when comparing March 2024 with March 2023, yet down -14% compared to March 2022, where the weather was much sunnier as reflected in the garden/gardening comparisons. However, Easter 2024 landed a month earlier than in 2023 which may lead to a reversed impact on sales figures in April. We saw garden/gardening categories and non-garden/gardening categories up +25% and +11% respectively when compared to March 2023, and footfall was strong for both comparisons between March 2023 and March 2022 (see page 7). We must bear in mind that we did not have a bank holiday in March last year and the weather too was worse, potentially inflating the view of 2024 performance. We also saw some variation amongst retailers, aligned with weather variations in different regions of the UK.



**How are these figures calculated?**

The national sales figures we report each month come from the HTA Garden Retail Monitor (GRM) system. We've now moved over to a newer GRM system where sales data from submitting garden centres is automatically uploaded to a secure server via the EPOS system. These garden centres can then login to the portal to benchmark their sales against regional and national averages for a variety of sales metrics. We're looking to sign up more garden centres to the system, allowing us to include more reliable detailed breakdowns of trends in sales in these Market Update reports.

If you're interested or for more information visit: [hta.org.uk/grm](https://hta.org.uk/grm)

(Figures reported are exclusive of VAT)



# Garden centre sales volumes: March

Due to the high levels of price inflation in the current economic climate, we report on the quantity of goods sold in addition to sales values, to assess the level to which year-on-year comparisons are reflective of end-goods price increases or change in demand. Inflation was more pronounced in the March 2024 versus March 2022 comparisons, in particular overall sales saw sales values down -14% but volumes down by -9% indicating increased costs of goods. However, a slight increase in demand of garden/gardening goods was seen in March 2024 versus March 2023, where sales values were up +25% and volumes were up +28%. This is likely to be due to marginally improved weather compared to March 2023 and Easter landing in March this year.

Mar 2024 vs Mar 2023	Overall	Garden/gardening	Non-garden/gardening
Value of sales (£, exc. VAT)	+22%	+25%	+11%
Volume of sales	+20%	+28%	+11%

Mar 2024 vs Mar 2022	Overall	Garden/gardening	Non-garden/gardening
Value of sales (£, exc. VAT)	-14%	-19%	+13%
Volume of sales	-9%	-17%	+4%

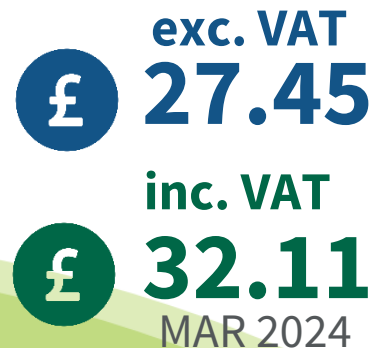
# March Transaction Numbers and Average Transaction Values (ATVs): In the Garden Store

The long Easter Bank Holiday encouraged greater footfall into garden centres (despite the weather which varied region to region), with transaction numbers in the garden store up +13% on March 2023. The British Retail Consortium Footfall Monitor of retail parks and high streets showed footfall to high streets and retail parks down -1.3%, as garden centres once again fared better in comparison. However, footfall remained flat in comparison to March 2022 when the weather was much sunnier, and this is reflected in garden/gardening category sales not performing as well across the two year comparison (see page 9). The Average Transaction Value was £27.45, which was up +6% compared to March 2023, but down -11% on March 2022. The latter may be due to nicer weather the same period 2 years ago, covid lockdowns being lifted, therefore encouraging more items into consumers' trollies. More discussion about inflation of garden products can be seen on page 20 & 21.

## Transaction Numbers: Garden Store



## Average Transaction Values (ATVs): Garden Store



VS MAR 2023 (exc. VAT)	VS MAR 2022 (exc. VAT)
<b>+6%</b> <b>(£25.92)</b>	<b>-11%</b> <b>(£30.74)</b>

# March Transaction Numbers and Average Transaction Values (ATVs): In the café/restaurant

Footfall in the café and restaurant was up +10% on March 2023, and up +17% on March 2022. The average transaction value for March 2024 was £10.89. The boost in ATV of +5% compared to March 2023, may have been partly due to March 2023 being wetter, and once again inflation affecting catering goods, combined with the lipstick effect. This is where in times of economic downturn, consumers may turn to indulge in smaller treats rather than bigger expenditures. In contrast, the ATV was flat compared to March 2022.

## Transaction Numbers: Café/restaurant



MAR 2024 vs MAR 2023



MAR 2024 vs MAR 2022

## Average Transaction Values (ATVs): Café/restaurant

exc. VAT  
 **10.89**

inc. VAT  
 **12.98**

MAR 2024

VS MAR 2023 (exc. VAT)	VS MAR 2022 (exc. VAT)
+5% (£10.40)	0% (=) (£10.87)



# Garden centre sales: March garden/gardening breakdowns

In March 2024, garden/gardening categories did well, up +25% compared to March 2023, likely boosted by Easter bank holiday gardening projects. However they were down -19% compared to March 2022, when the weather was much more pleasant.

All reported categories were up on March 2023. Core garden categories, such as Bedding plants and Hardy plants did exceptionally well, benefitting from the Easter trading period, with sales up +43% and +38% respectively, compared with March 2023. However, this was not reflected in March 2022 comparisons. All categories were down except for Indoor plant sales which were up +13% versus March 2022.

Year to end of March comparisons were also positive, all up on the year to end of March 2023. The top 3 performers were bedding plants (+25%), bulbs and outdoor containers (both up +20%) though sales in these categories may balance out in April as the effect of an earlier Easter is removed.

Category	Mar 2024 vs 2023	YTD Mar 2024 vs 2023	Mar 2024 vs 2022
Bedding plants	<b>+43%</b>	<b>+25%</b>	<b>-4%</b>
Hardy plants, shrubs & trees	<b>+38%</b>	<b>+19%</b>	<b>-15%</b>
Indoor plants	<b>+7%</b>	<b>+8%</b>	<b>+13%</b>
Seeds (excl. grass seed)	<b>+5%</b>	<b>+3%</b>	<b>-7%</b>
Bulbs	<b>+15%</b>	<b>+20%</b>	<b>-9%</b>
Plant care products	<b>+33%</b>	<b>+15%</b>	<b>-3%</b>
Garden tools & equipment	<b>+29%</b>	<b>+11%</b>	<b>-18%</b>
Garden features & structures	<b>+32%</b>	<b>+17%</b>	<b>-23%</b>
Outdoor containers	<b>+32%</b>	<b>+20%</b>	<b>-21%</b>

YTD – Calendar year to end of March

# Garden centre sales: March non-garden/gardening breakdowns

March was a strong month for non-garden/gardening category sales, up +11% when compared to March 2023, and up +13% when compared to March 2022.

With the exception of gifting (down -1%), all non-garden/gardening categories were up compared to March 2023. Food & Farm Shop sales flourished, up +32%, as food-related gifting may have played a role with Mother’s Day and Easter both in the same month. As well as catering, pets (up +10%) and Wild bird care (up +5%) categories also performed well when compared to March 2023.

When sales performances were compared against March 2022, all categories were up on two years ago. Once again, Food & Farm Shop was the top performing category up +49%, and besides catering, this was then followed by Pets (up +19%) and Wild bird care (+13%).

Catering continued to perform excellently when compared to March 2023 and March 2022, up +17% and up +42% respectively. Our analysis of sales volumes indicates that this is reflective of increase in demand rather than solely price inflation (see page 6 & 8).

All categories excluding gifting were up on year-to-end of March comparisons.

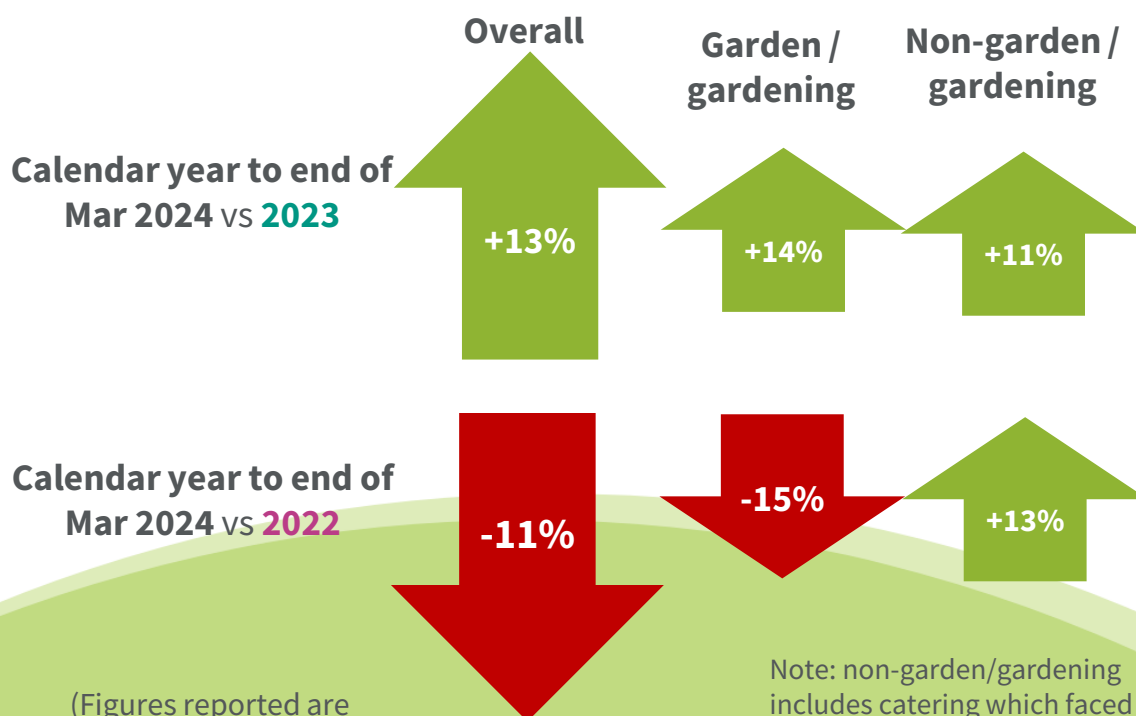
Category	Mar 2024 vs 2023	YTD Mar 2024 vs 2023	Mar 2024 vs 2022
Indoor living & homewares	+3%	+2%	+6%
Gifting	-1%	0% (=)	+4%
Wild bird care	+5%	+2%	+13%
Pets	+10%	+7%	+19%
Food & farm shop	+32%	+19%	+49%
Catering	+17%	+15%	+42%

YTD – Calendar year to end of March

# Garden centre sales: calendar year to end of March



Year-to-end of March 2024 compared with 2023 was up +13% overall, and down -11% on the same period in 2022. Year to end of March garden/gardening sales (+14% vs 2023) were boosted by strong plant sales (see page 9) likely because of the Easter bank holiday falling earlier in the year; meanwhile non-garden/gardening sales (+11%) were buoyed by strong catering and food & farm shop sales (see page 10). Sales will likely rebalance in April, as the Easter weekend was in April in 2023, likely giving a better reflection of year-to-date performance.



(Figures reported are exclusive of VAT)

Note: non-garden/gardening includes catering which faced restrictions across the UK

## How are these figures calculated?


The national sales figures we report each month come from the HTA Garden Retail Monitor (GRM) system. We've now moved over to a newer GRM system where sales data from submitting garden centres is automatically uploaded to a secure server via the EPOS system. These garden centres can then login to the portal to benchmark their sales against regional and national averages for a variety of sales metrics. We're looking to sign up more garden centres to the system, allowing us to include more reliable detailed breakdowns of trends in sales in these Market Update reports.

If you're interested or for more information visit: [hta.org.uk/grm](https://hta.org.uk/grm)

# Weather





March 2024 was unsettled, and although drier and sunnier than March 2023, the month was historically wet and dull. We had 82% of the rainfall compared to March 2023 and 1.2 times the sunshine hours of the same period last year highlighting how bleak March 2023 was weather-wise considering that March 2024 itself had 127% of the long-term average rainfall for March. The wet weather was largely concentrated in the south, whilst Scotland was relatively drier than average. The wet weather has posed challenges for professional plant production, disrupted travel and consumers ability and appetite to garden. However, should the weather for the remainder of spring be favourable, with pent up demand for gardening garden centres could be well positioned.

	Mar 2024	Mar 2023
 Hours of sunshine	<b>95.2</b>	<b>81.1</b>

	Mar 2024	Mar 2023
 Rainfall (mm)	<b>107.8</b>	<b>132.0</b>

The figures reported are national averages for the UK. To view the figures on a regional basis: [click or tap here](#) to visit the MET Office website and view the year ordered stats by month.

	Mar 2024	Mar 2023
 No. of rain days	<b>17.8</b>	<b>20.4</b>

	Mar 2024	Mar 2023
 Mean temperature (Celsius)	<b>6.7</b>	<b>5.7</b>

# Weather by region



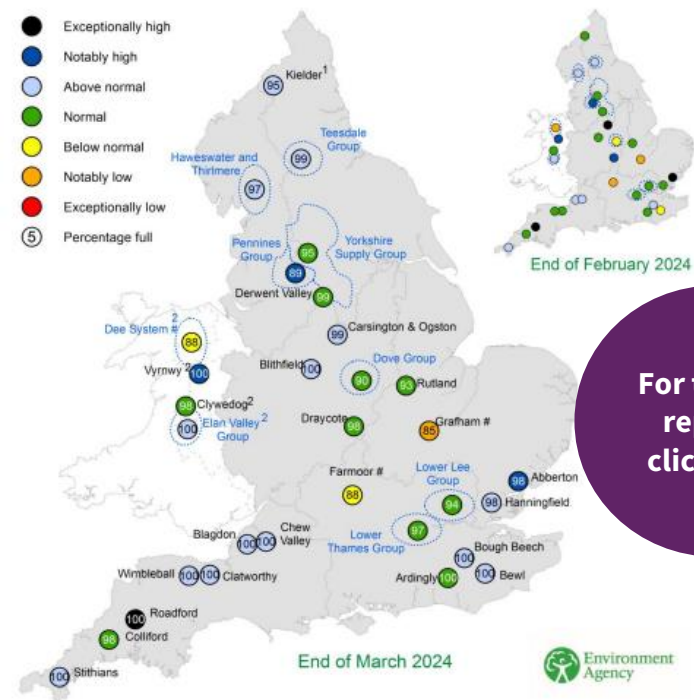
Region	Mean Temp (Degrees Celsius)	Sunshine Hours	Rainfall (mm)
Overall	6.7	95.2	107.8
South England	8.2	95.0	95.6
North England	6.9	90.4	92.4
Wales	7.0	86.8	158.2
Scotland	5.0	101.4	112.7
Northern Ireland	6.6	88.9	129.2

March 2024 was a dull, wet month for most regions, however Northern England saw 83% of the rainfall than March 2023; and Scotland was comparatively drier. In the South, it was slightly warmer than average, with the mean temperature 1 degree Celsius higher than the same period last year.

# Current reservoir levels

Reservoir storage increased to 95% at the end of March, where a third of reservoir groups saw their total reservoir storage increased. Majority of reservoirs were categorised as either above normal or higher for the time of year, with the wet weather having continued in March.

This could change at any time as Summer approaches. We encourage responsible water use and for businesses to consider water-saving and recapture throughout the year and especially during drier months.



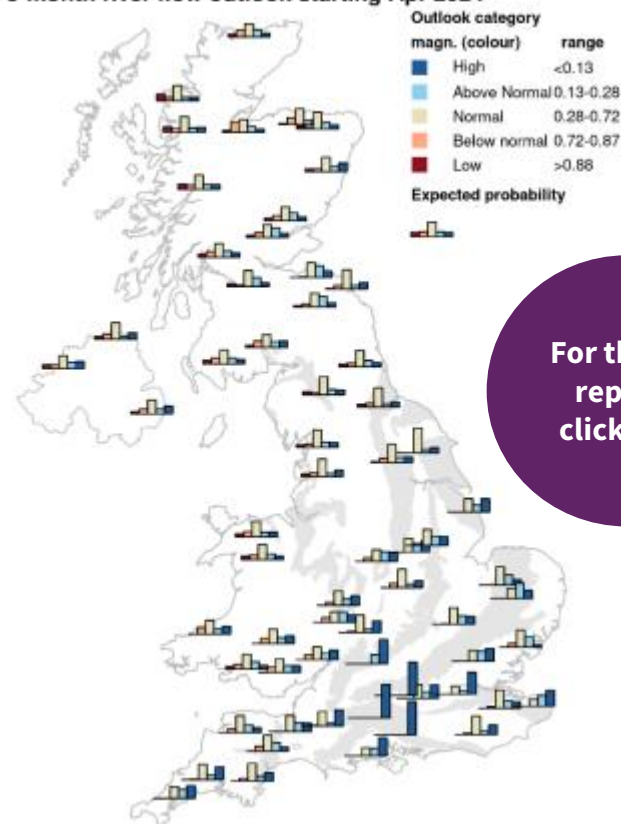
**For the full reports click here**

# Forecast river flows

In the 3-month outlook starting April 2024, river flows are expected to be above normal across the South of the UK, with some catchments likely to have high flows.

To interpret the infographic, the higher the bars shaded red or orange, the greater the likelihood is in that area of river flows being at low or below normal levels. The higher the yellow/fawn bar, the greater the chance of river flows in the normal range.

3-month river flow outlook starting Apr 2024

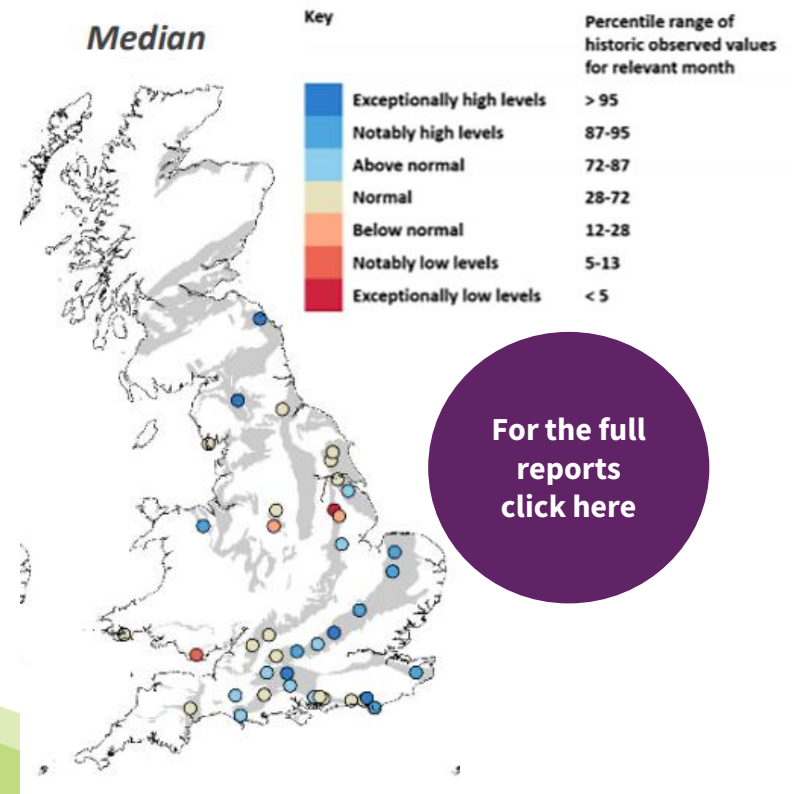


For the full reports [click here](#)

# Forecast groundwater levels

## Three-month groundwater outlook starting March 2024 (based on median rainfall forecasts)

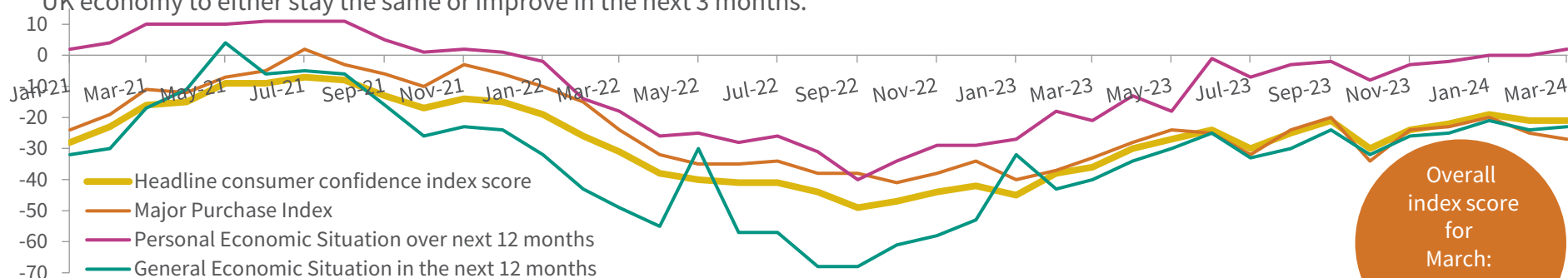
Under median rainfall conditions, groundwater levels are predicted to range from above normal to exceptionally high in the next month. This is except for parts of central, Northern England and South Wales where normal levels are anticipated. However, levels are predicted to decline in the next 3 months.





# Consumer confidence

Despite Consumer Confidence stalling at -21 for March 2024, it is still remarkably higher than the same month last year, up +15 points. Notably, the personal Financial Situation score was positive for the first time since December 2021 at +2, as consumers became cautiously optimistic for their own financial outlook for the year ahead. The savings and Major Purchase Indices were down, which would indicate that although consumers may not think now is a good time to make significant investments, they may be more willing to spend over save. In addition, the British Retail Consortium's consumer Sentiment Tracker showed hope with 53% of consumers said that they expected the UK economy to either stay the same or improve in the next 3 months.



Measure	Relative score (March 2024)	vs. February 2024
<u>Personal financial situation:</u> during last 12 months <b>over next 12 months</b>	-13 <b>+2</b>	1 point higher <b>2 points higher</b>
<u>General economic situation:</u> during last 12 months <b>over next 12 months</b>	-45 <b>-23</b>	2 points lower <b>1 point higher</b>
Major Purchase Index	-27	<b>2 points lower</b>
Savings Index	25	<b>4 points lower</b>

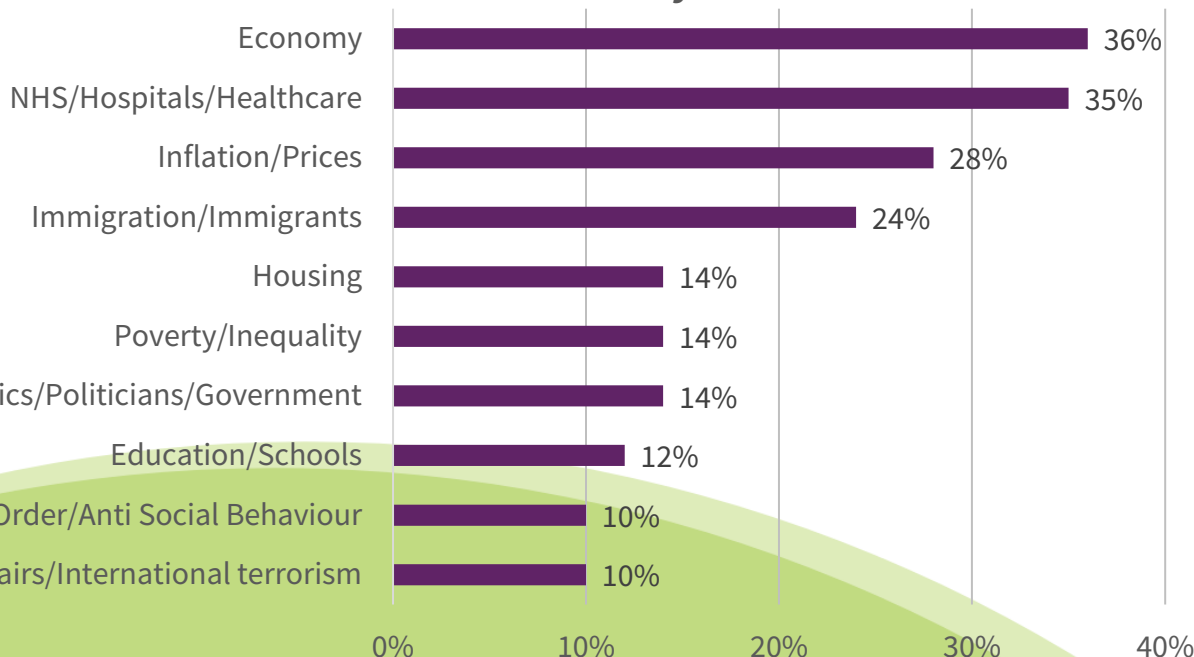
**\*this is the same score as Feb 2024**

Consumers are asked how the financial position of their household has changed over the last year and is expected to change in the next year, as well as that of the general economy. They're also asked if they believe 'now' is a good time to make major purchases or to be saving money. The first three measures in the table make up the overall index score. Whilst the Savings Index indicates whether consumers are looking to save rather than spend their money. **Relative scores are given as a comparative to when records began in 1974.**

# Consumer Issues Tracker: March

The economy was the topmost concern amongst UK citizens in March, closely followed by the NHS and Inflation. With the economic state occupying 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> spots on the Concerns Index, it's not surprising that consumer confidence has not changed since February 2024 (see page 17). Although inflation has started to ease, the effect on consumers finances have not yet been felt. The NHS continues to be of concern as waiting times for routine appointments have continued to increase and services are struggling to cope with demand.

## What do you see as the most/other important issues facing Britain today?

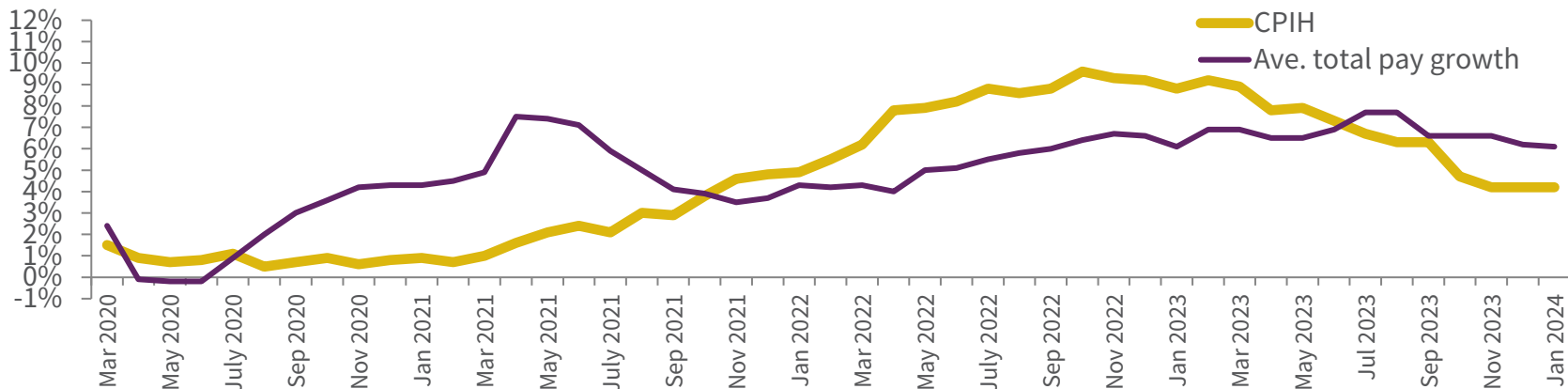


Change since Feb:	
%	Position
+7	↑+1
+1	↓-1
+2	=
+6	=
+1	↑+2
-1	=
+1	↑+2
+1	↑+1
+2	↑+2
-1	=

# Inflation and Wages



We explore some key indicators of the position of the UK economy, such as the Consumer Prices Index including owner occupier’s housing costs (CPIH), measured as a percentage change over a 12-month period. In addition, we also discuss the average pay growth (excl. bonuses) and the unemployment rate. We report on the latest CPIH rates available due to the newest update being released the same day as this publication. The CPIH rate in February 2024 came down 0.4% to 3.8%, demonstrating that rate of inflation has slowed, good news for costs of goods for consumers and their finances. Average pay growth (excl. bonuses) was 6.1% in January 2024, and sitting above the rate of inflation, which will have a positive effect on disposable incomes. April sees further rises to the National Living Wage which is positive for household incomes and discretionary spending on the garden, but a challenge for businesses managing overheads and pay differentiation. The unemployment rate was 3.9% in the November 2023 – January 2024 period, a figure that has generally remained stable over time and signifying a small available labour pool.



\*Surge in income growth seen in spring 2021 is reflective of the year-on-year change to spring 2020 where many workers were on furlough and reduced pay

CPIH inflation (Feb)  
**3.8%**

Average pay growth (Jan):  
**6.1%**

Unemployment Rate (Nov23 – Jan24)  
**3.9%**

# Retail inflation on garden products

## Our March trolley

(March 2024 vs March 2023 price inflation)



Hardy plants,  
shrubs & trees  
**+5%**



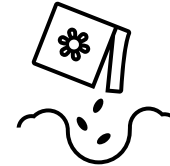
Bulbs spring/  
Summer **+3%**



Garden tools  
and equipment  
**= (0%)**



Growing Media  
**= (0%)**



Seeds  
**+3%**



Garden Gloves  
**= (0%)**



Plant Care  
Products  
**= (0%)**



Plastic pots  
**= (0%)**



Hot Drinks  
**+4%**

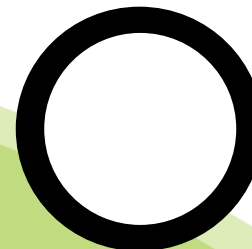
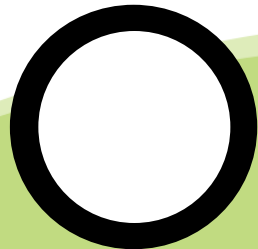


Lawn care  
**= (0%)**

Here we look at the price of individual barcodes transacted in garden centres in March 2024 and March 2023, to calculate a median average rate of inflation within each of the categories featured. Each month we select a 'trolley' of goods that are seasonally appropriate and track the level of price inflation. In the 12 months to March 2024, within our trolley, Hardy plants (+5%), Seeds (+3%) and Spring/Summer Bulbs (+3%), experienced price inflation, likely due to rising input and overhead costs.

In the cafés/restaurants, hot drinks experienced price inflation likely due to rising ingredient and staffing costs (+4%).

Growing media, garden tools and equipment, garden gloves, plastic pots, lawn care and plant care products, all maintained prices on a par with March 2023.



# Retail inflation on plants

(March 2024 vs March 2023 price inflation)



Shrubs  
**+5%**



Foliage houseplants  
**-4%**



Herbaceous  
**+2%**



Pack bedding **+5%**



Roses  
**+6%**



Climbers **+2%**



Flowering houseplants  
**-4%**



Fruit trees & bushes  
**+5%**

Here we look at retail price inflation across some of the plant categories specifically.

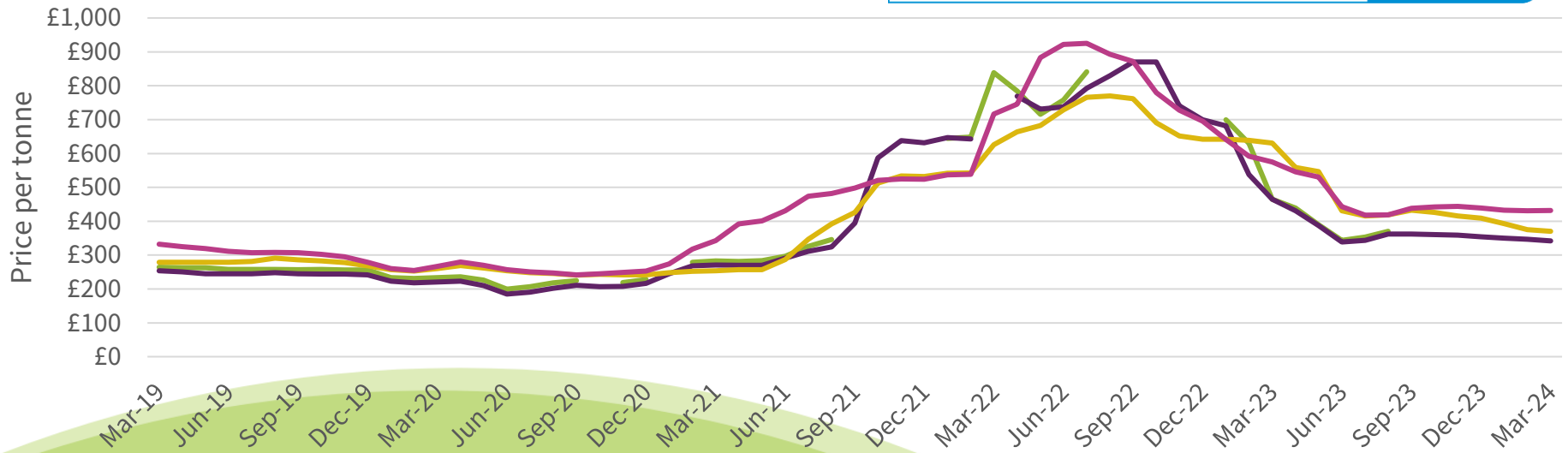
Roses (+6%), Pack bedding (+5%), Fruit trees (+5%), shrubs (+5%), herbaceous (+2%) and climbers (+2%) showed the biggest rise in prices year on year in the garden centre channel.

Flowering house plants (-4%) and Foliage houseplants (-4%) were the only two categories seeing reduction in prices consistent with February 2024 data which also showed price reductions. This could be due to discounting of these ranges.

# GB Fertiliser Prices

Fertilisers are a major input cost in plant production and rising prices could squeeze businesses' profit margins. Using data supplied by the AHDB, the below graph shows how straight fertiliser prices have changed since 2019. Whilst those included are not typically used in the production of container-grown ornamental crops, nor an exhaustive list of specialist compound fertilisers used by ornamental growers, the data gives a relative indication of N, P and K fertiliser price trends. Very little change in price was seen amongst fertiliser components compared to February 2024, ranging from flat to -1% decreases. When compared to the same period last year (March 2023) the biggest price drop was seen in Muriate of Potash, -41% compared to March last year. We continue to see components reduce in price which is good news for production costs.

Accurate, timely and independent data you can trust 



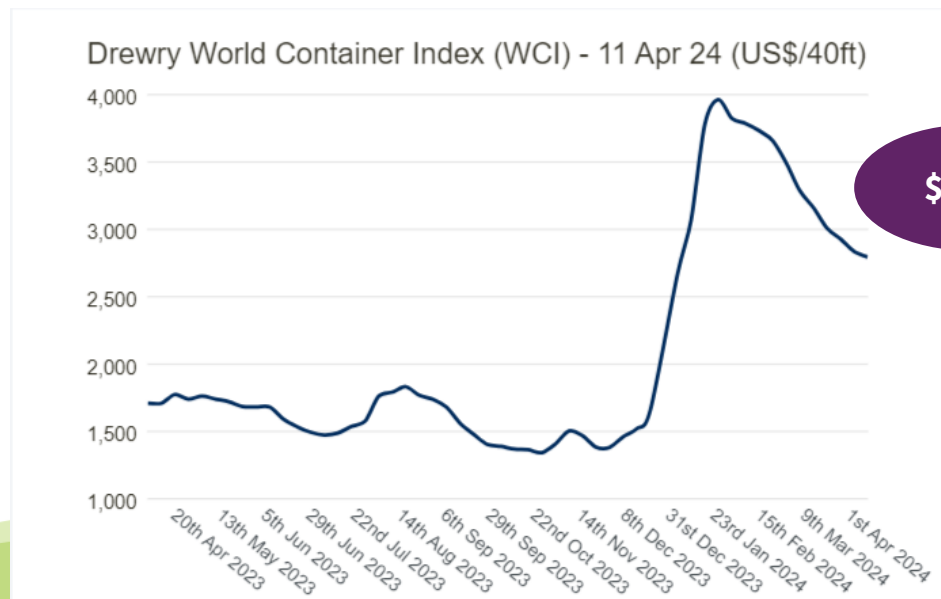
All prices are based on a price per tonne for:

- Full load
- Standard 28-day payment terms
- Bags delivered to site price
- Spot price: prices for delivery within a month (28 days)

— Ammonium Nitrate UK (34.5% N)      — Ammonium Nitrate Imported (34.5% N)  
— Muriate of Potash      — Triple Super Phosphate

# Shipping Container Prices

We report on a composite index which is an aggregate of shipping costs across various routes. The Drewry's World Container Index was at \$2795 for a 40ft container as of 11<sup>th</sup> April 2024, a small decrease of 1% compared to the week before (04/04/24). This was still 64% more than the cost of a container in April 2023. Suppliers were having to adapt to the changes in supply route brought on by the conflict in the Red Sea, but container costs have been slowly declining over the past few months. Nevertheless, the higher costs and product supply delays may still likely affect suppliers and indirectly, garden retailers.

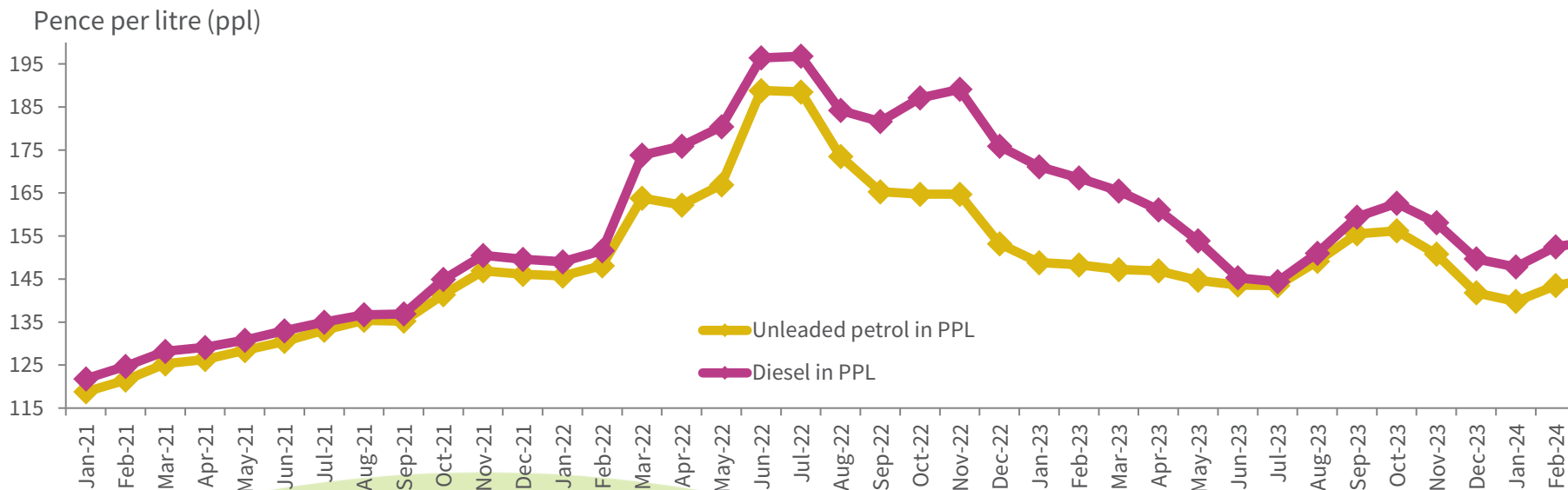


**\$2795**

*We are reporting on the aggregate of the major shipping routes.*

# Vehicle fuel prices

Vehicle fuel prices are monitored monthly to gauge the situation for consumers and businesses alike. Figures reported are national averages measured in pence per litre. For further variations by region, please click the link below to view the data. The average price for petrol was 145.3p/litre in March 2024, and diesel averaged at 153.9p/litre, as fuel prices continue to slowly increase. As the situation in the Middle East remains unstable, the price of crude oil remains high as a consequence, keeping up pressure on household finances.



Petrol (ppl):  
**145p**

Diesel (ppl):  
**154p**

[Click to view the full summary report and regional breakdowns](#)



# Closing comments

We hope you enjoyed the format and content of this Market Update.

If you have any questions or would like to see something else included, please don't hesitate to contact [marketinfo@hta.org.uk](mailto:marketinfo@hta.org.uk)

## **Notice and disclaimer**

This report is copyright to the Horticultural Trades Association (HTA) except where otherwise noted. To the extent permitted by law, the HTA will not be liable by reason of breach of contract, negligence or otherwise for any loss or consequential loss (including loss of anticipated profits, damage to reputation or goodwill, loss of expected future business, damages, costs or expenses payable to any third party or other indirect losses) occasioned by any person or entity acting or omitting to act or refraining from acting in reliance on this report or the data and/or information used to compile the same.