



**Market Update: May 2024**

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# Overview

- April continued the weather patterns observed in the first quarter of 2024, with unsettled and wet weather accompanied by only 79% of the average sunshine for the time of year.
- The weather, along with the year-on-year comparisons reflecting an earlier Easter, meant overall garden centre sales were down -10% versus April 2023, but up +2% for the year to end of April.
- Within this, garden/gardening sales suffered (-14% versus April 2023), whilst catering (+7%) continued to perform strongly and boost non-garden/gardening sales (=0%) despite the absence of an Easter gifting occasion.
- Consumer confidence improved by two points to -19, with consumers more optimistic about their personal finances over the next 12 months as average wage growth (6.2%) continued to outstrip the rate of inflation (3.8%).
- Businesses continue to face delays to shipping from the Far East alongside shipping costs higher than the same time in 2023.
- But with the weather so far preventing many early Spring gardening tasks, demand for gardening and garden products is likely to be pent up going into the warmer months.

Read on for the detail...

# Key Points: April

**Overall April Garden Centre sales were down -10% vs April 2023**

**Catering sales were up +7% on April 2023**

**Consumer confidence went up 2pts to -19 and remains +14pts above April 2023**

**April 2024 saw 1.5 times the rainfall of April 2023 across the UK**

**Hardy Plants sales were down -6% for the year-to end of April vs 2023**

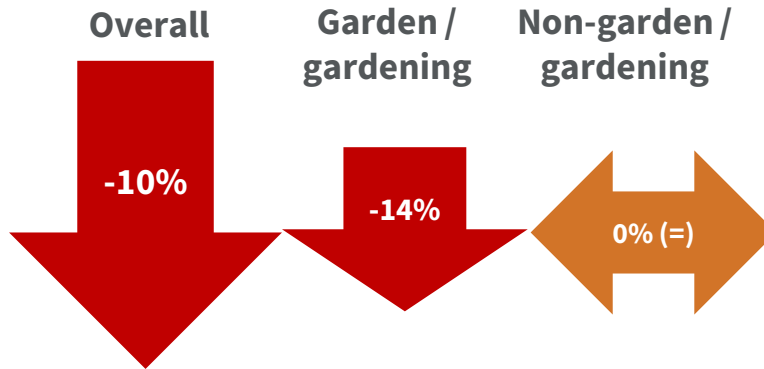
# Garden centre sales: April



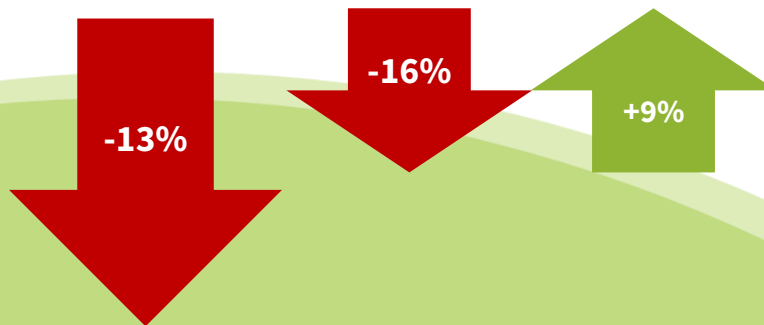
Overall garden centre sales for April 2024 were down -10% on April 2023 and -13% on April 2022. This is likely due to April 2023 and 2022 having the Easter Bank Holiday, versus April 2024 where Easter was actually in March. In particular, garden/gardening categories suffered, down -14% on April 2023, with poor weather reducing footfall in the garden centre and making it difficult to garden. Average transaction values were also down in the garden centre (see page 7). However, this lack of ability to go into the garden may develop a pent up desire to garden, as we move into the warmer months. Non-garden/gardening categories fared slightly better, April 2024 versus April 2023 staying level, and up +9% when comparing April 2024 versus 2022. This category included catering, which likely provided alternative days out to stay out of the rain and enjoy food and drink at the café/restaurant (see page 8 & 10).

## Apr 2024 vs Apr 2023

Note: non-garden/gardening includes catering



## Apr 2024 vs Apr 2022



(Figures reported are exclusive of VAT)

### 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)



# Garden centre sales volumes: April HTA

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. Overall garden centre sales were down -10% by value, but down -10% by volume too as footfall was affected by wet weather. The non-garden/gardening category comparisons showed sales flat by value but down -5% by volume, suggesting that price inflation is playing a role. This becomes more pronounced over a 2 year comparison period. Meanwhile in the garden/gardening categories sales were down -16% by value on April 2022 but down -10% by volume, suggesting again that lower ticket items made up a greater proportion of baskets this year (as reflected in the ATV analysis on page 7, and garden furniture category performance on page 9).

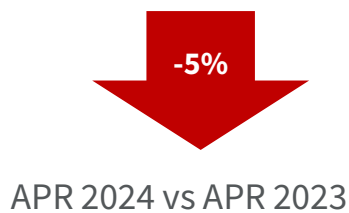
<b>Apr 2024 vs Apr 2023</b>	<b>Overall</b>	<b>Garden/gardening</b>	<b>Non-garden/gardening</b>
<b>Value of sales (£, exc. VAT)</b>	<b>-10%</b>	<b>-14%</b>	<b>0% (=)</b>
<b>Volume of sales</b>	<b>-10%</b>	<b>-13%</b>	<b>-5%</b>

<b>Apr 2024 vs Apr 2022</b>	<b>Overall</b>	<b>Garden/gardening</b>	<b>Non-garden/gardening</b>
<b>Value of sales (£, exc. VAT)</b>	<b>-13%</b>	<b>-16%</b>	<b>+9%</b>
<b>Volume of sales</b>	<b>-6%</b>	<b>-10%</b>	<b>0% (=)</b>

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

Average transaction numbers in the garden store were down -5% on April 2023, and down -1% on 2022 as the poor weather and earlier Easter bank holiday period impacted footfall comparisons year-on-year. The British Retail Consortium's Footfall Monitor of retail parks and high streets showed overall footfall traffic down -7.2%, highlighting the importance of the garden centre catering offering for attracting customers when the weather is less favourable. The Average Transaction Value for April 2024 was £27.94 (exc. VAT), down -6% on April 2023 and down -14% on April 2022, as consumers ability to carry out many spring gardening tasks was dampened by the weather. Lack of any early season sales of higher ticket items like garden furniture (sales down -15% vs April 2023, -44% vs April 2022) will also play a role in lower basket values.

## Transaction Numbers: Garden Store



## Average Transaction Values (ATVs): Garden Store

exc. VAT  
**£ 27.94**  
 inc. VAT  
**£ 32.75**  
 APR 2024

VS APR 2023 (exc. VAT)	VS APR 2022 (exc. VAT)
-6% (£29.66)	-14% (£32.56)

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

Despite the wetter weather, footfall to the garden centre cafés and restaurants remained strong, with transaction numbers up +5% on April 2023 and up +13% on 2022. The Average Transaction Value however remained flat on April 2023 at £10.92 (exc. VAT) despite any inflationary price increases. For example, our inflation analysis (see page 21) shows prices of hot drinks increased by an average of 10% year-on-year. This suggests that whilst customers may be visiting cafes and restaurants in greater numbers, the number of items purchased may be lower, or smaller treats are making up a bigger proportion of sales which continued to perform strongly in April.

## Transaction Numbers: Café/restaurant



APR 2024 vs APR 2023



APR 2024 vs APR 2022

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

exc. VAT  
 **10.94**

inc. VAT  
 **13.05**

APR 2024

VS APR 2023 (exc. VAT)	VS APR 2022 (exc. VAT)
0% (=) (£10.94)	+6% (£10.32)



# Garden centre sales: April garden/gardening breakdowns



In April 2024, garden/gardening departments overall were down -14% on April 2023 and down -16% on April 2022. The figures reflect poorer weather impacting ability to garden and an earlier Easter artificially increasing sales in March before tapering back in April year-on-year comparisons.

All garden/gardening categories were down on April 2023, with sales of BBQs and heating (-32%) and plants and core gardening particularly affected by the weather – bulbs and hardy plants were down -22%, whilst bedding plants and seeds were down -16%.

Year to end of April sales comparisons give a truer picture of sales performance, removing the impacts of differences in Easter timings. Sales of plant categories year to end of April 2024 were on par or slightly behind the same period of 2023, with bedding plants sales flat, indoor plants sales up +1% and hardy plants sales down -6%. Sales of bulbs however performed particularly strongly in 2024 so far (up +13%), along with sales of outdoor containers (+7%) and garden features and structures (+9%).

As we move into late spring and the warmer months, pent up demand for gardening could help to shift plants in stock.

Category	Apr 2024 vs 2023	YTD Apr 2024 vs 2023	Apr 2024 vs 2022
Bedding plants	-16%	0 % (=)	-7%
Hardy plants, shrubs & trees	-22%	-6%	-11%
Indoor plants	-13%	+1%	-4%
Seeds (excl. grass seed)	-16%	-2%	+5%
Bulbs	-22%	+13%	-21%
Plant care products	-8%	+3%	-1%
Garden tools & equipment	-12%	-1%	-16%
Garden features & structures	-3%	+9%	-26%
Outdoor containers	-7%	+7%	-23%
Garden Furniture	-15%	-7%	-44%
BBQ and Heating	-32%	-27%	-46%

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

In April 2024, non-garden/gardening department sales overall were flat on April 2023, and up +9% on April 2022, largely buoyed by strong catering performance (+7%).

Catering sales were up +26% on April 2022, and up +11% for the period of year to end of April as customers continued to enjoy a treat in the café/restaurant.

With the exception of catering, all other non garden/gardening categories were down on 2023, including gifting (-14%) and food and farm shop (-6%), for which comparisons are likely to have been skewed by the earlier Easter. Year to end of April sales in the food and farm shop department show strong growth (+11%).

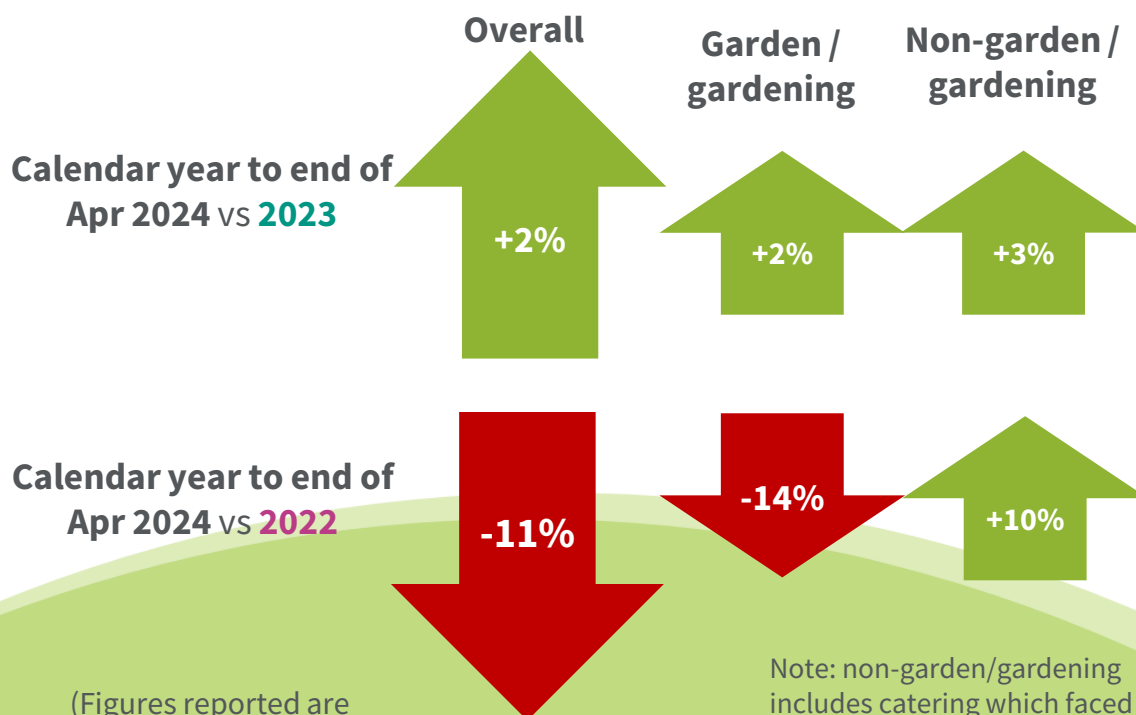
Category	Apr 2024 vs 2023	YTD Apr 2024 vs 2023	Apr 2024 vs 2022
Indoor living & homewares	-11%	-3%	-10%
Gifting	-14%	-4%	-13%
Wild bird care	-6%	+1%	-6%
Pets	-12%	+2%	-1%
Food & farm shop	-6%	+11%	+6%
Catering	+7%	+11%	+26%

YTD – Calendar year to end of April

# Garden centre sales: calendar year to end of April



The year-to-end of April 2024 compared with 2023 was up +2% overall, and down -11% on the same period in 2022 when the weather was considerably more favourable and the COVID pandemic effects were lingering. Garden/gardening categories performed modestly well compared to year-to-end of April 2023, up +2%. This was likely thanks to sales in bulbs and garden features/structures (see page 9). Non-garden/gardening sales also fared well in YTD comparisons to 2023, thanks to food and farm shop and catering categories (see page 10). In contrast, garden/gardening sales were down -14% when compared with the year to end of April 2022; however non-garden/gardening categories were up +10%.



(Figures reported are exclusive of VAT)

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

## How are these figures calculated?


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# Weather




April continued the theme of the first quarter of 2024, seeing unsettled, wet and dull weather, considerably more so than April of 2023. The UK overall had around 1.5 times the rainfall of April 2023, with Scotland and northern England particularly wet (see page 13). After a warmer start to the month, the second half was considerably cooler than average for the time of year. Meanwhile, sunshine hours were only 79% of the long-term average for April, impacting appetite for gardening and early Spring gardening results. However, pent up demand for gardening as we move into typically warmer months may deliver a boost to sales.

	Apr 2024	Apr 2023
 Hours of sunshine	<b>122.9</b>	<b>158.2</b>

	Apr 2024	Apr 2023
 Rainfall (mm)	<b>111.4</b>	<b>69.8</b>

	Apr 2024	Apr 2023
 No. of rain days	<b>16.0</b>	<b>12.2</b>

	Apr 2024	Apr 2023
 Mean temperature (Celsius)	<b>8.3</b>	<b>7.8</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.

# Weather by region



Region	Mean Temp (Degrees Celsius)	Sunshine Hours	Rainfall (mm)
Overall	8.3	122.9	111.4
South England	9.8	132.0	73.8
North England	8.3	117.5	107.5
Wales	8.5	113.3	135.8
Scotland	6.6	119.2	148.9
Northern Ireland	8.3	118.4	104.6

April 2024 was dull and wet across most of the UK. However, northern England and Scotland were particularly wet recording rainfall 176% and 160% of the long-term average for April respectively, with Scotland seeing its wettest April since 1947!

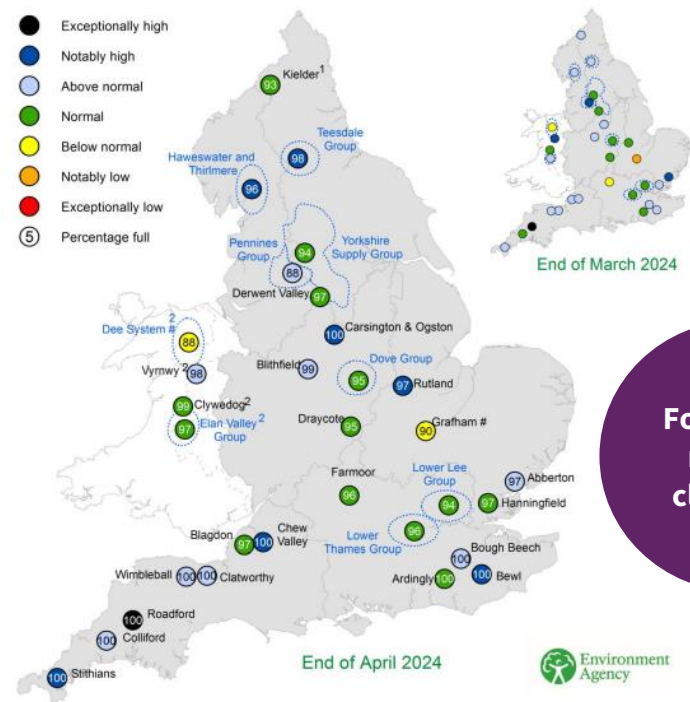
# Current reservoir levels

Reservoir storage remained at 95% at the end of April, where half of the reservoir groups slightly decreased from the end of March. Majority of reservoir groups were classified as normal or higher.

The National Drought Group confirmed England had experienced its wettest October to March on record, with the current water resource outlook suggesting there is low risk that hosepipe bans will be needed this Summer.

However they urge that this could change at any time as Summer approaches, and businesses and the public are encouraged to continue to use water responsibly as droughts can come unexpectedly, as in 2022.

Read the full update from the group here:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/national-drought-group-meets-after-record-wet-october-to-march>



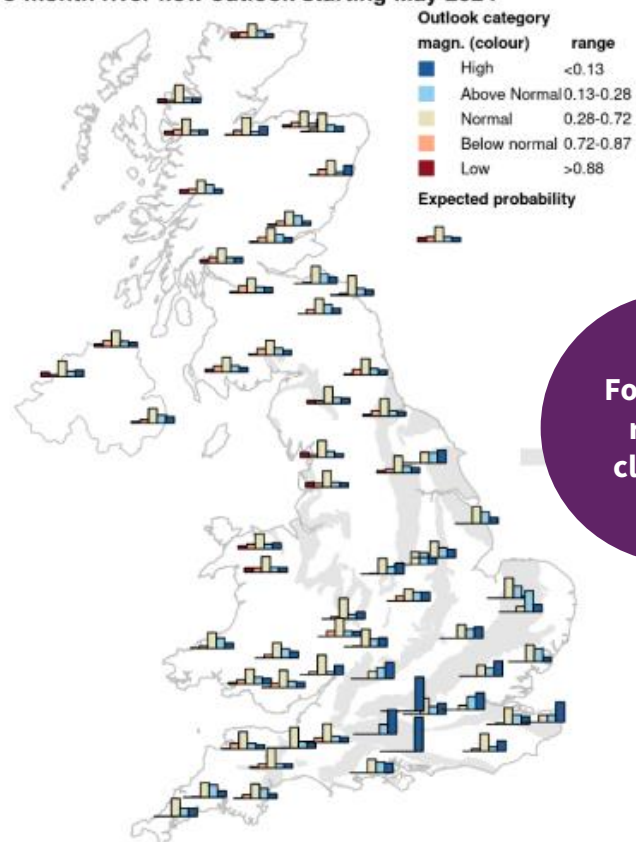
**For the full reports click here**

# Forecast river flows

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

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 May 2024

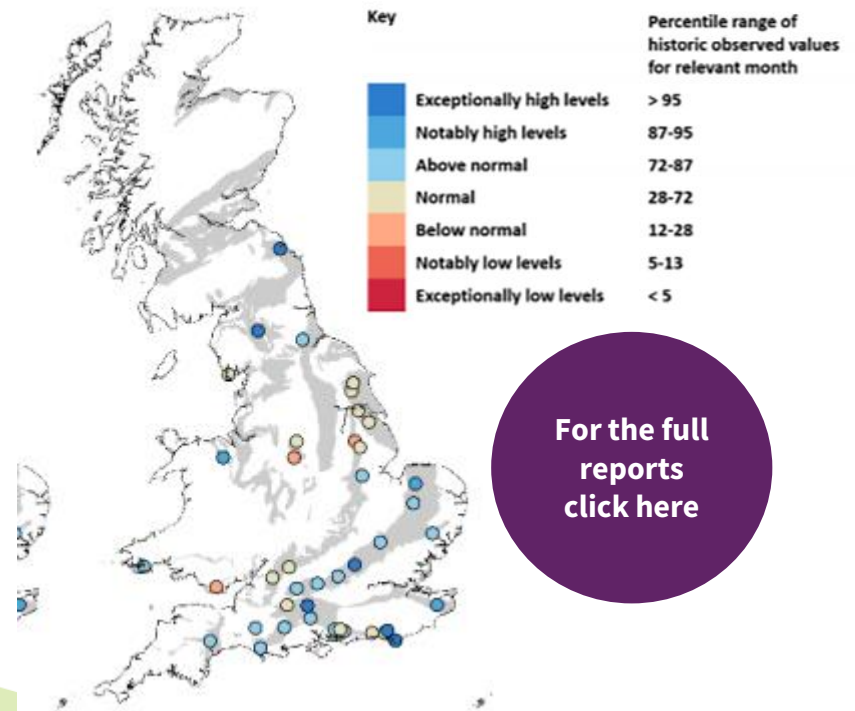


For the full reports click here

# Forecast groundwater levels

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

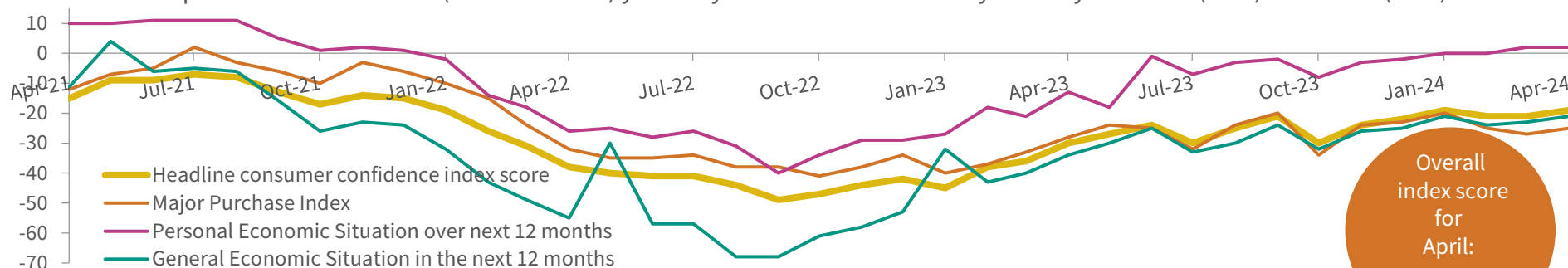
Under median rainfall conditions, groundwater levels are predicted to range from above normal to exceptionally high in the next month. This is except for parts of central, Northern England and South Wales where normal levels are anticipated. However, levels are predicted to decline in the next 3 months.





# Consumer confidence

April's consumer confidence score went up 2 points compared to March 2024. The score is also +14 points higher than April 2023, showing significant improvement. All measures except personal financial situation over the next 12 months had increased. Despite consumer ratings of their personal financial situations remaining stable since March 2024, it is good news that the measure stayed in positive territory. Consumers were still more inclined to save rather than spend lavishly, as the economic situation has remained uncertain and difficult. Echoing this uncertainty, the British Retail Consortium's Consumer Sentiment Tracker showed that 22% of consumers believe that their finances will improve in the short term (next 3 months) yet many consumers believe they will stay the same (53%) or worsen (22%).



Measure	Relative score (April 2024)	vs. March 2024
<u>Personal financial situation:</u> during last 12 months <b>over next 12 months</b>	-11 <b>+2</b>	2 points higher <b>equal</b>
<u>General economic situation:</u> during last 12 months <b>over next 12 months</b>	-41 <b>-21</b>	4 points higher <b>2 points higher</b>
Major Purchase Index	-25	2 points higher
Savings Index	26	1 point higher

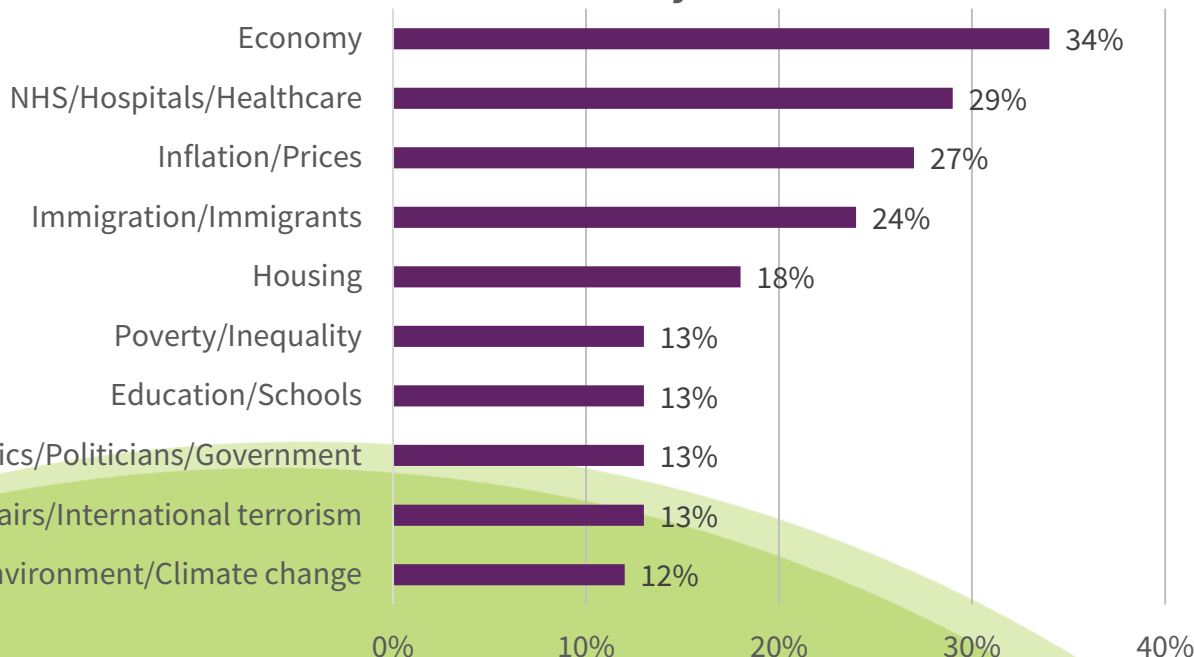
**\*this is 2 points higher than Mar 2024**

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: April

In April, the top 3 consumer concerns were the Economy, the NHS and Inflation, remaining the same as March 2024. Although consumer confidence shows some glimmers of hope, finances are still a concern for many. Even with the rate of inflation decreasing, prices and the cost of living are still going up. For more on garden retail inflation, please see pages 21 & 22. The NHS was in 2<sup>nd</sup> position, as the service continues to face pressures that are visible to consumers as they try to access healthcare services themselves.

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

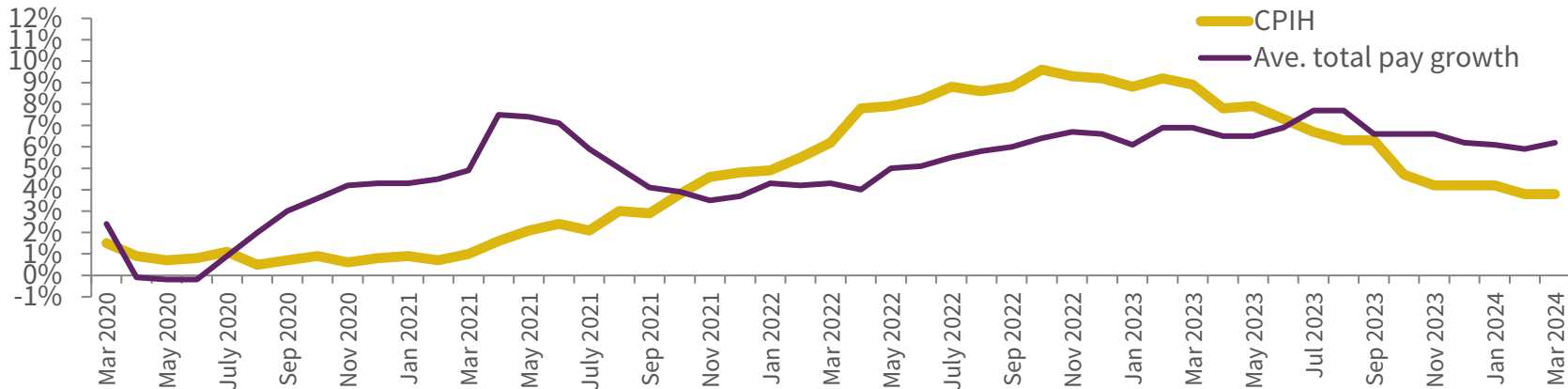


Change since Apr:	
%	Position
-2	=
-6	=
-1	=
0	=
+4	=
-1	↓-1
+1	↑+2
-1	↓-1
+3	↑+2
+2	↓-1

# 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 at the time of publication. The CPIH rate in March 2024 remained at 3.8%, demonstrating that although prices are higher than a year ago, the rate of inflation has slowed which is good news for costs of goods for consumers and their finances. Average pay growth (excl. bonuses) was 6.2% in March 2024 (the latest available data), and sits well above the rate of inflation, which will have a positive effect on disposable incomes. The effect of April rises to the National Living Wage are yet to be seen in the figures, bringing further challenge for businesses managing overheads and pay differentiation. The unemployment rate increased to 4.3% in the three months to March 2024, a figure that has generally remained stable over time and signifies 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 (Mar)  
**3.8%**

Average pay growth (Mar):  
**6.2%**

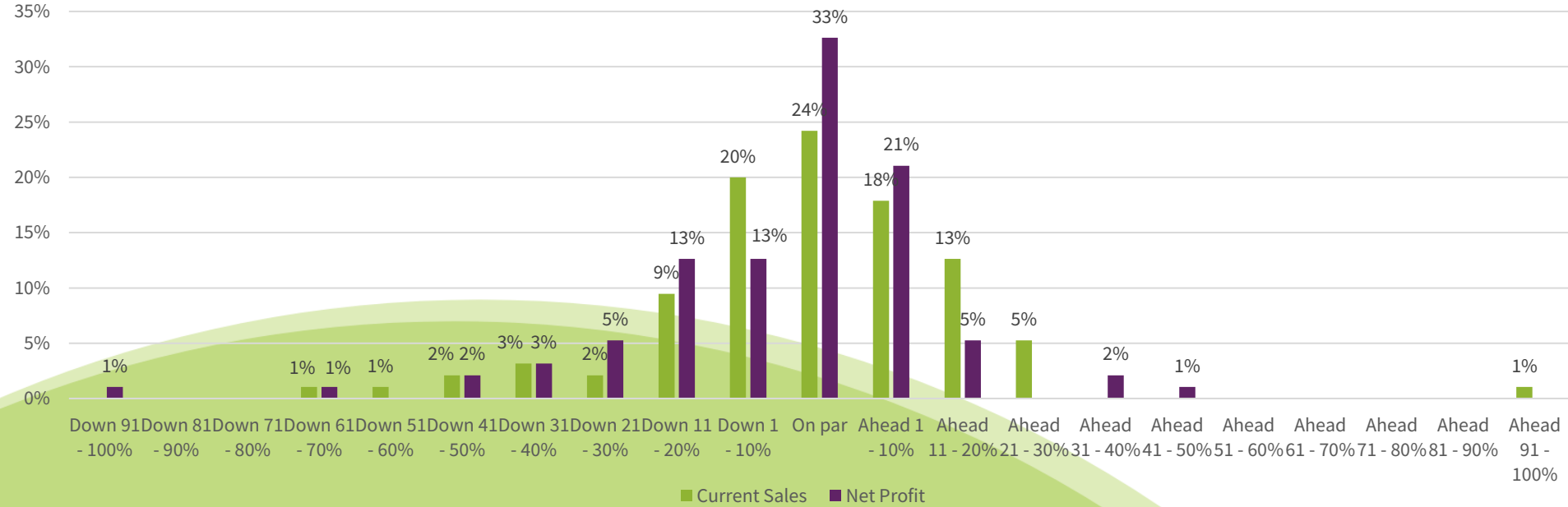
Unemployment Rate (Jan – Mar24)  
**4.3%**

# Business Barometer Q1



We recently launched the quarterly HTA & APL Business Barometer to assess the state of trade for members, including business outlook, sales and profit positions, and business investments. In terms of current sales/order book values, 39% of HTA and APL members were behind, 24% were on par, and 37% were ahead of where they expected or budgeted to be at the time of year. The greatest proportion of businesses were on par (24%) and on average overall, members were -1% behind, showing most businesses were close to their projections despite the challenging start to the year weather-wise. When looking at net profit position, in the poll reviewing Q1 38% of businesses were behind, 33% were on par, and 29% were ahead compared to budget. Most businesses were on par (33%), but on average businesses were -5% behind where they expected, highlighting the pressures businesses are facing on profitability. In terms of outlook, 73% of businesses felt positive about the next 3 months, and 62% of businesses were positive about the next 12 months. We will be releasing the full HTA & APL Business Barometer Q1 2024 results summary for members shortly.

Current sales/order book value and net profit position for Q1 compared to budget (%)



Source: HTA & APL Business Barometer 2024 Q1 Base: 53 retailers, 14 growers, 24 landscapers, 1 manufacturers & suppliers, and 3 service providers (95 in total who responded)

# Retail inflation on garden products

## Our April trolley (April 2024 vs April 2023 price inflation)



Hardy plants,  
shrubs & trees  
**+3%**



Bulbs spring/  
Summer **+11%**



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



Growing Media  
**= -1%**



Seeds  
**+3%**



Garden Gloves  
**= (0%)**



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



Plastic pots  
**= (0%)**



Hot Drinks  
**+10%**



Lawn care  
**= (0%)**

Here we look at the price of individual barcodes transacted in garden centres in April 2024 and April 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 April 2024, within our trolley, Spring/Summer Bulbs (+11%), Hardy plants (+3%) and Seeds (+3%) experienced price inflation, likely due to rising input and overhead costs.

In the cafés/restaurants, hot drinks experienced high price inflation likely due to rising ingredient and staffing costs (+10%).

Growing media (-1%) was the only category that saw a drop in prices on average across barcodes. Garden tools and equipment, garden gloves, plastic pots, lawn care and plant care products, all maintained prices on a par with April 2023.

# Retail inflation on plants

(April 2024 vs April 2023 price inflation)



Shrubs  
**+4%**



Foliage  
houseplants  
**-3%**



Herbaceous  
**+4%**



Pack bedding **=(0%)**



Roses  
**+6%**



Climbers **+3%**



Flowering  
houseplants  
**-2%**



Fruit trees &  
bushes  
**+3%**

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

Roses (+6%), shrubs (+4%), herbaceous (+4%), Fruit trees (+3%), and climbers (+3%) showed the biggest rise in prices year on year in the garden centre channel.

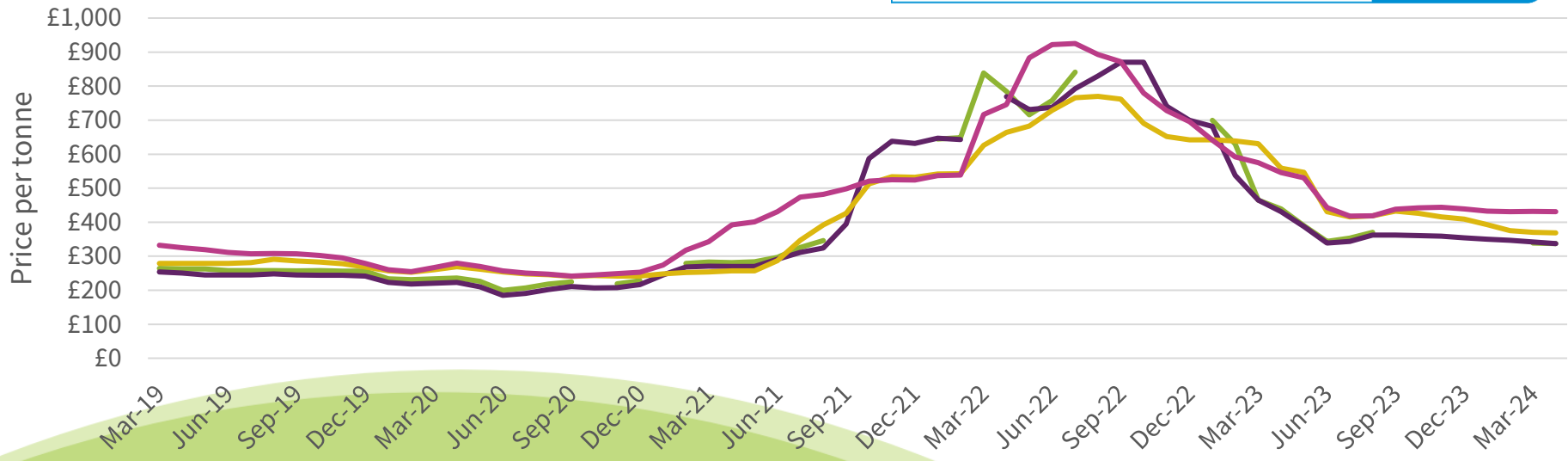
Pack bedding (0%) is the only plant category within our trolley that maintained prices on par with April 2023.

Flowering house plants (-2%) and Foliage houseplants (-3%) were the only two categories seeing reduction in prices consistent with March 2024 data which also showed price reductions. This could be due to discounting of these ranges around occasions like Mothers Day and Easter.

# 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. Fertiliser prices have been very slowly declining since the summer of 2023, and in April 2024 were averaging 20-30% lower than a year prior. This is good news for production costs, though prices remain slightly above the lows of 2020 and early 2021.

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 \$3511 for a 40ft container as of 16<sup>th</sup> May 2024, a small decrease of 1% compared to the week before (09/05/24). This represents an increase of 104% on the same week in May 2023, yet remains significantly below the peaks in container costs seen in the pandemic and the first half of 2022. Despite some stability seen within the Red Sea, shipping journeys continued to take alternate routes via the Horn of Africa, causing delays in supply of items shipped from the Far East.

Drewry World Container Index (WCI) - 16 May 24 (US\$/40ft)



**\$3511**

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



# 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)

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