

Andrew Hodson
Lesley Hodson-Kersey
Mike Barley
HortPlus N.Z. Ltd
andrew@hortplus.com
www.hortplus.com

It has taken a long time but spring is here at last. Our plums are flowering and the wind machines have started. At this time of year we usually reflect on the winter and think about the implications for growers. Winter chilling and flowering are big issues. The following information comes from the HortPlus climate database. This database covers the whole country and includes nearly 20 million records. Information comes mainly from Campbell Scientific loggers located in the major horticultural areas. These loggers are either owned by Plant and Food Research, HortPlus or private growers. 68 active stations all up. Quite a unique and large network. The other sites owned by NIWA and the MetService tend to be clustered around airports. Not much use to growers. You can see weather stations managed by HortPlus in your area by going to the internet and looking at <http://www.hortplusgis.com/spraywatch2/weatherstations/> As far as I am aware, these weather stations are regularly calibrated and well maintained.

Figure 1 show a temperature comparison for Hawkes Bay compared with previous years. From this figure we can see that winter has been about 1 degree cooler than previous years, followed by a slightly warmer August.

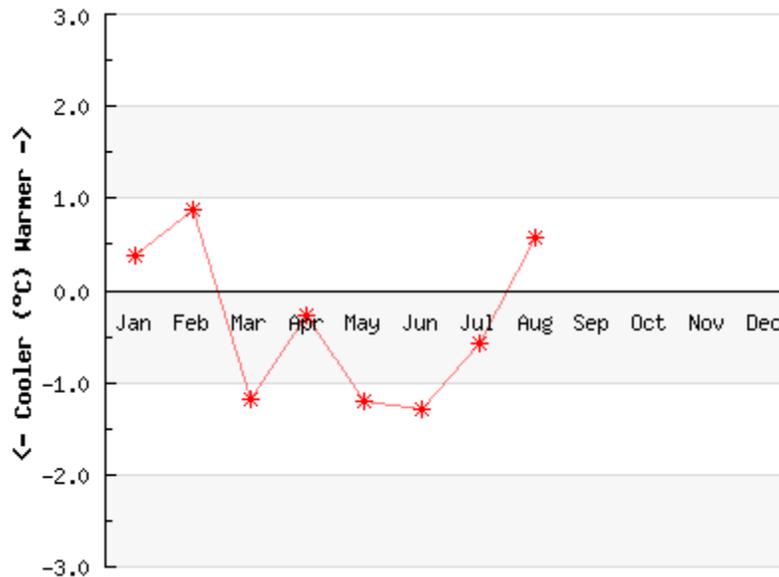


Figure 1 : A Temperature Comparison for Hawkes Bay

Table 1 shows a summary of values around New Zealand. The trends over the whole country were very similar. A very cold May, followed by a cooler than average June and July, followed by a warm spell in August. Nelson and Marlborough had a particularly cold winter compared to normal, while the warm spell in August was very pronounced in Central Otago. We have analysed this data and a warmer or cooler spell of 3 degrees is a 1 in 20 year event, while 2 degrees is a 1 in 10 year event.

Region	May	June	July	August
Northland	-2.05	-1.13	-0.50	1.54
Waikato	-2.03	-2.32	-0.42	1.11
Bay of Plenty	-2.39	-1.58	-0.61	1.26
Poverty Bay	-1.85	-1.16	-0.50	0.90
Hawkes Bay	-1.19	-1.29	-0.58	0.81
Marlborough	-2.53	-2.19	-1.05	1.78
Nelson	-2.39	-1.16	-0.84	1.11
Canterbury	-2.16	-0.86	-1.04	1.70
Central Otago	-1.52	-1.61	-0.67	2.98

Table 1 : Winter Temperature Around NZ Shown as Degrees Above or Below Normal

As you might expect, chill have been well up. Figure 2 shows a 4 year summary of Richardson chill units in Hawkes Bay. Quite high. The situation in Northland deserves special mentions. The values at the Kerikeri research station are quite high indicating a cool year but this wasn't reflected in the other Northland sites run by NIWA at Kaikohe, Whangarei an Purerua. These sites show it was an ordinary year.

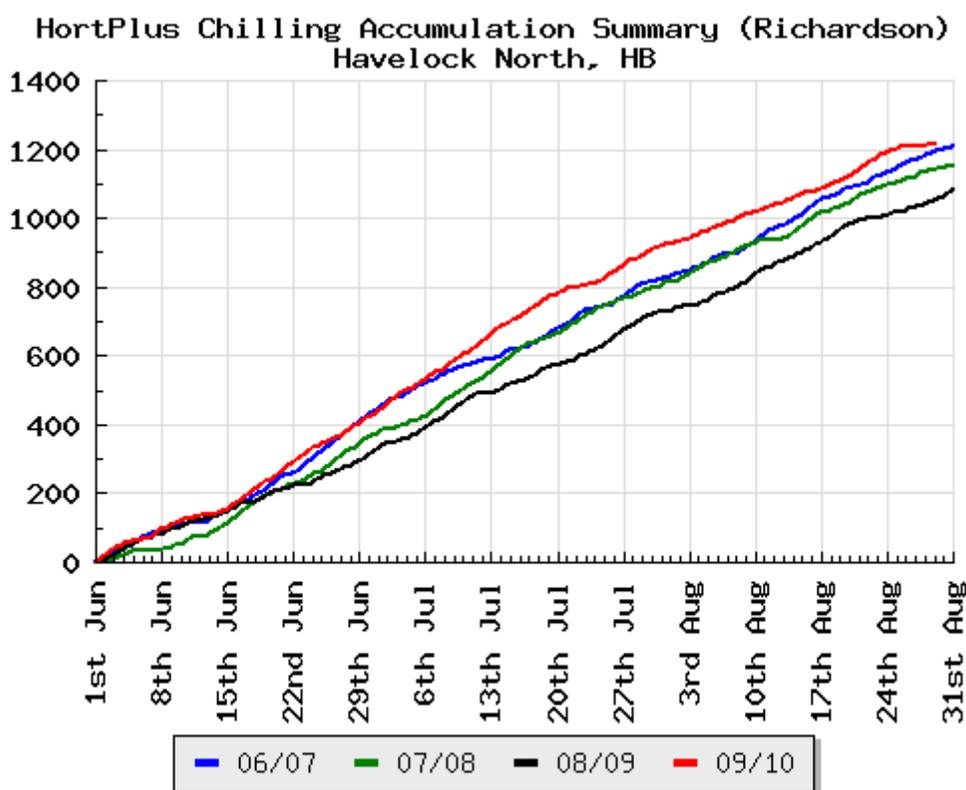


Figure 2 : Richardson Chill Units in Hawkes Bay

A rainfall summary is shown in Table 2. Quite a mixed bag with some months being very dry and others very wet. It is hard to extract a national trend but July looks quite dry.

Region	May	June	July	August
Northland	118	144	31	5
Waikato	128	111	112	113
Bay of Plenty	84	40	80	156
Poverty Bay	151	158	149	89
Hawkes Bay	84	184	106	122
Marlborough	59	136	60	136
Nelson	35	113	74	162
Canterbury	332	32	55	67
Central Otago	139	10	139	184

Table 1 : National Rainfall shown as % of Usual Amount



So, what does all this mean? Expect a rapid synchronised flowering. High winter chilling and a warm August should be good news for growers. This should lead on to a good harvest of fruit with uniform size, able to be picked with fewer picks. All this should help reduce costs. All districts have had at least 1 month of high rainfall. The season should start with soils at or near field capacity, reducing the need to irrigate early. For once the weather is working in our favour.

All of this information comes from HortPlus Metwatch Online. You can follow the progress of the season. We are happy to give any grower a free trial. Just send us an email and we will set you up. Also if you visit www.hortplus.com you will see that we sell temperature loggers. These loggers are ideal for frost monitoring on your property at this time of year.