



Flower show exhibiting: Part two

This month we feature some of our more memorable show experiences during the last 13 years...



The killer rabbit from our Harrogate Flower Show display!

Welcome to Camelot, "it is a silly place".

Responding to the invitation from the Harrogate Spring Flower Show team to join in their 'west end shows' Innovative Display theme for 2010, we staged our display using 'Spamalot' as the inspiration. It quickly became one of our favourite displays because we had such fun with the concept.

Roy went into overdrive with the props so we could feature the cave patrolled by killer rabbits, a rather nice shrubbery, a pile of minstrel clothes (all that was left when they were eaten), the 'holy grenade of Antioch', complete with detonation instructions, plus lots of signs and quotes.

We wove the display round the theme and even used unopened tulips as spears. We were in stitches when we were docked a mark because they hadn't opened in time for judging. Getting involved with the Innovative Display concept was always risky as judging never seemed to quite buy into the idea.



The holy grenade of Antioch

Complete with detonation instructions.



The pile of minstrel's clothes



The spam hamper

At Camelot they eat ham and jam and spam a lot.

Click on the images in the side column to view more from this display. It was a shame we didn't get into the habit of making videos back in 2010.

Too much of a good thing

Unfortunately, as the judging system wasn't keeping pace with the Innovative Displays we decided not to bother again. We had already done a few but every time it affected our medal awards, which directly impacted our ability to get back into the show again, so it wasn't worth the extra work, even if we enjoyed the experience.

Enjoying the experience is so important in a packed show season when the demands to create interesting displays show after show often leave you feeling stretched. Creating displays of perfection is always a challenge on less than perfect, uneven staging under a vinyl tarpaulin in the middle of a field.

When we moved to staging educational displays we had to ensure our display boards were level, even if the staging was listing. Usually this wasn't too tricky when armed with a spirit level and a bag of wedges. However, it wasn't all plain sailing.

At Tatton Park Flower Show in 2017, minutes before completing the display ready for judging, an extremely strong gust of wind blew through the open section of the marquee and the display boards lifted out of their position and crashed down on the display, crushing plants and wrecking the layout. Mel had to re-build the display with the boards secured to the ground alongside the display, whilst the marquee was deserted apart from the teams of roaming judges - a very strange experience.

The funny thing was that on the first day of the show, we turned round from our sales table, which was facing the opposite direction to our display, to see two visitors had set up their chairs between the boards and our display, and were enjoying a picnic. It looked like they were sitting in our display. It was hilarious but we didn't want to embarrass them by taking a photo to record the moment. It does make you wonder why the visitors decided that would be a good place for a picnic but it was nicely sheltered from the brisk winds! Although it was good to be able to open up the marquee sides and create a more welcoming atmosphere, the weather usually had something to say about it.

You can see a [video of the display](#) on our YouTube channel.



Which way to Camelot?

Which way indeed for our future displays - we often feel we peaked at this point!



Can you see our stand?

Perhaps the most potentially disastrous show we attended was the year our application for the Floral Marquee at Malvern was unsuccessful. We weren't notified for some reason, so by the time we got in touch there was only one outside space available, in between the wings of the new Floral Marquee.

The plan was to open up the marquee sides and have a beautiful open space with a food court, a talks/demos area, and four exhibitor displays/sales areas.

We were dubious about taking the space as Malvern is known for having all four seasons in one week but we threw caution to the wind and bought into the idea.

Typically the weather was atrocious and we ended up

Whatever the weather

2013 was the year when the weather went from winter to summer and we were still needed a portable heater in our tent in June. It was really cold and everyone growing their own plants suffered from late emergence issues.

Rather than pull out of Harrogate we suggested we do an educational display (see image in side column) and Mel raided the nursery for as many props as she could to decorate the stand. All our plants were tightly furled but they still looked lovely as an early spring display. Although we were initially embarrassed at the lack of leaf, the judges thought it was wonderful (you simply can't guess what they will think). We received the Challenge Cup and a Premier Gold award. Read our [May 2013 newsletter](#) for photos and details.

Although it was a huge challenge to create the display, it remains a favourite of Mel's because of the visitor feedback.

What price perfection?

The level of perfection visitors see at a flower show can convince them that they could never achieve the same, so why bother. This is such a shame and is the main reason why we feel judging is counterproductive for shows and exhibitors alike. It presents a rather contrived and false impression, something exemplified at Chelsea every year and lauded by the media as the peak of perfection. The jeopardy they focus on is real as trying to organise nature to a schedule is fraught with issues, but is this something we should continue to do, especially in light of climate change?

Shows should encourage people to get into gardening, not put them off.

Plant Heritage displays

There is no doubt we had hit on a great formula with our educational displays, which we started doing in 2010 when exhibiting with Plant Heritage at Hampton Court.

Back in 2010 Plant Heritage used to share the Rose Marquee so our displays smelt delicious for the first part of the week. It was always great fun and a lovely camaraderie among collection holders each year.

In 2013 Plant Heritage celebrated its 35th anniversary with its own marquee near to the main floral marquee. That year we

being the only exhibitors in the empty space. The irony of receiving the Best in Plant Village award in the midst of the chaos was certainly not lost on all the customers who tracked us down, knowing we were there somewhere.

[Read more](#) in our June 2014 newsletter.



Harrogate Spring 2013

Our first educational display within a floral pavilion or marquee. The result of the coldest spring for many years - see opposite for more.

Awards

We have been honoured with many awards over the years, culminating in our RHS Lindley

Award for 2018. Our glass cabinet contains some lovely vases and behind each one is a tale to tell and fond memories to be shared. We consider ourselves blessed but the best recognition of all comes from our customers:

*A massive thank you
To all of you who have
supported us at flower shows
across the UK over the past 26
years.*

We are sorry we will no longer be at the larger events but we will continue to support the

staged a double display, part naturalistic and part leaf - [more details here](#). This was a great idea until we suffered one of the driest summers, which turned Hampton Court into a dust bowl. Our display was sandwiched between two entrances so the dust blew in and settled from two directions. In the end Mel had to re-stage the leaf display, clean all the black cloth and wash the glasses part way through the week - what a job.

In our educational displays, we featured tips and tricks we use at the nursery. We kept everything accessible and presented lots of information and ideas. Customers loved our practical ideas for pest control, growing ideas and especially our hanging baskets - which have taken on a life of their own. Although we repeated some of that content at each show, we chose a different focus for the display every year. We were planning a set of Japanese themed displays for 2020, which wasn't to be. We are hoping to reproduce many of the ideas we have used over time at the nursery in permanent displays instead.

We hope you have enjoyed the last two issues. Next month we look forward to 2021, including an interview with our 'pollen lady' Liz Burroughs.

Finally, with Brexit looming we have made the difficult decision to no longer export outside of the UK. We will also be issuing UK Plant Passports, rather than EU Plant Passports, after 31st December 2020, in line with the start of the post transition Brexit requirements - [more details here](#).

[We hope you all have the best Christmas you can in these strange times and speak again in 2021](#)
Team Mickfield Hostas

Suffolk Show and RHS Hyde Hall, if our applications are successful.

We are also planning to increase the number of regional plant fairs we attend and we shall continue to open our nursery every year whilst operating our mail order service. We plan to keep growing and selling our wonderful plants for many years to come and there is always a warm welcome awaiting fellow hosta-holics at Mickfield.

Why not visit Suffolk?

We cannot recommend Suffolk enough for a staycation, it is a beautifully understated county full of delightful villages and a few famous coastal resorts. Many of you will be familiar with some old Suffolk buildings in places like Bury St Edmunds, Lavenham and [Somerleyton Hall](#), which has featured recently in 'The Crown'. [Beth Chatto's famous garden](#) is just over the border into Essex, and there are lots of specialist nurseries, Plant Heritage National Collections and NGS Gardens to see. Visit the famous 'Castle on the Hill' at Framlingham and enjoy the best of Adnams and Aspalls, although technically you don't need to come to Suffolk for most of the wonderful local beverages, as we have found on our travels. [Check our website for more](#)