



2015 season review

As we close the gate on the nursery for the season we reflect on what has been another eventful year...

Another very busy season

Once again we welcomed visitors to the nursery from all over the UK, some from Europe and America too.

It is always gratifying when visitors are visibly impressed by the range and quality of our plants as it is what we strive so hard to achieve.

Each year we gather useful feedback from our customers, which helps us guide our plans for the forthcoming season and helps us improve our service. This winter we plan another nursery reorganisation, which should make it easier for visitors to find the plants they are looking for.

Recommendations

We have had several enquiries this year from customers wanting us to recommend a selection of varieties for their garden. This is an enjoyable task as it offers us the opportunity to perhaps highlight plants customers may not have thought of, and suggest some exciting combinations, in rather the same way as we decide what to feature in a show exhibit.



Under-planting a sun tolerant giant with a shade loving blue at Gardeners' World

When customers give us a colour scheme or specific plant to work round, it is easier for us to come up with recommendations because of our experience with the plants. Many *Hosta* look quite similar as immature plants and only really come into their own as they mature, so we are better placed to understand which plants might be more appropriate for a specific scheme. It is one of the many advantages of visiting the nursery, as customers can see for themselves how the varieties mature.

A better mix?

Over the past four years we have been making a gradual move away from an emphasis on the show circuit, towards cultivating more of a presence at our nursery in Mickfield. We want to offer something very different, which we feel customers are increasingly appreciating. We are making all our changes with our core business in mind, so you won't find a coffee shop, or entertainment for the children, when there are numerous outlets catering for these activities locally. We feel others do this much better than we could hope to and it would be an unnecessary distraction from our plants.

Flower shows

This year we decided to move to creating container-based displays at flower shows, which have received lots of positive feedback from visitors.

We chose a copper colour scheme, which set the plants off very nicely but did confuse a lot of people, as they thought the pots were actually made of copper - if only we were that wealthy and strong enough to use the real thing!

The displays received a mixed bag of gold and silver-gilt awards - see panel on right.

Having spent the past eight years constructing time-consuming naturalistic displays at shows it was good to be able to do more of the work at the nursery, before leaving home.

2015 Awards
 Harrogate Spring: Gold
 Malvern Spring: Silver-gilt
 Suffolk Show: Gold
 Gardeners' World: Gold
 Hampton Court: Silver-gilt
 Tatton Park: Silver-gilt
 Harrogate Autumn: Premier Gold

Carnival atmosphere

This year we have enjoyed more entertainment at the shows, from local musical acts at Malvern, to a full carnival parade at Tatton.

We have enjoyed these little changes and thought you might like to see some of our photographs of the Tatton Carnival:



Even the stewards were getting into the spirit...





Container-based displays require more finesse and attention to detail and are far more exacting than garden-style displays. In a garden display you can hide the fact that a plant is slightly lop-sided and, if a plant suffers damage in transit, it is easier to mask the damage with props and infill components.

A big advantage of container-based displays is the fact that it takes considerably less effort to construct an exhibit, as there is no infilling required. Conversely, it takes more time to perfect the appearance of each plant, and a lot of care and attention to detail is required.

Moving to containers has meant we could experiment with ideas such as under-planting to highlight the differing growth habits of our numerous cultivars. We have had a lot of positive feedback about the container-based ideas we presented.

We saved the best for last with our Harrogate Autumn Show, where we staged an educational display - see image on left.

Once again it proved a hit with the judges, and show visitors, and has reinforced our belief that educational displays might be a good move for the 2016 season. Indeed, we have applied to do educational displays for the RHS Shows in 2016 and think we will do the same for all shows where a display is required.

More than anything our decision was based round the fact that 2016 will be the 40th anniversary of the start of Robin and Yvonne's Hosta hobby. This is a significant milestone to celebrate with something new.

What's next?

After planning to get started on the garden for the past few years, we are finally poised to get under way with our biggest project so far. It is so exciting to think of seeing some of the really large plants having space to show us what they are capable of and we look forward to sharing the progress with you along the way.

Thank you for all your support in 2015 and we look forward to another exciting season in 2016.

Next month: We feature blue variegated cultivars in our 'best of' series...



The bands were fantastic...



The procession went round the showground twice each day and on the last day they came into the Floral Marquee for a special set...



Mel now has wing envy!