



This month we return to our business to give you a bit more of a flavour about what we do and why.

As we introduced ourselves in the June newsletter you will already know we are a core team of three and at this moment in time we are a very tired team. Even as the busiest time of the year is coming to a close - there is so much to do before the plants go dormant. This is where a nursery differs from a purely retail operation as the sales stock we don't sell need to be nurtured in preparation for the 2008 season. Our Collection plants also need attention and splitting where necessary - indeed this autumn our workload has increased dramatically due to the excellent growing conditions we have experienced this year.

The nursery is the hub of our business operation and consists of 3 elements:

1. The Collection

New varieties are added to the Collection every year but the decision as to which varieties to add is always a difficult one as there are so many we would like. Newly introduced cultivars can fetch exorbitant prices and some new introductions prove to be so difficult to grow they may never become commercially available. Collection plants are grown on until ready for splitting - this can take a number of years for some slow-growing varieties. Occasionally some varieties do not survive and we usually try again, if we can obtain another plant, but this isn't always possible or desirable as some plants will only ever be collector's pieces.

2. Sales plants

When we are confident that a variety is doing well in our collection we begin to propagate the plant through root division. Using this method means it can take a number of years for us to propagate sufficient plants to offer them for sale generally, as we only start with a single plant of a new variety.

Although we prefer to propagate sales plants through root division we cannot always satisfy demand through this method, especially for some of the newly introduced cultivars coming out of Europe. As a consequence we source some of our stock from tissue culture and bring these plants on at the nursery before we sell them. This allows us to ensure all varieties are exhibiting their correct characteristics by the time we offer them for sale. Occasionally we are asked for a specific variety and, if we cannot initially supply it, we add the customer's name to a waiting list and let them know when we have stock available. It is always worth speaking to us if there is a specific variety you are interested in as we are more than happy to try to accommodate requests.

3. Exhibition Garden

A new feature under development is a 1 hectare garden which is currently being prepared and landscaped prior to planting with split Collection hostas.

Our year is divided into two main seasons:

1. April to September: marketing season when the plants are suitable for sale

This is our busiest time of year when we take our plants on the road for display and sale. This is where we meet the majority of our existing customers and seek to attract new customers, many who have yet to experience the pleasures of hosta

Our aim is to sell strong plants that are showing signs of their expected growth characteristics, and that we are confident will do well for our customers.

Take a look inside...
(click on the images to get a better view)

Our entrance with the bungalow on the side of the drive:



Looking towards the Collection tunnel from the front of sales tunnel 1



The next three images were taken looking clockwise from the end of the main body of the Collection tunnel..



growing.

The show season is an intensive period of hard work to bring our customers the best quality plants possible and to exhibit as many different specimens from our collection as space allows. We try to tailor our exhibit to the plants we have for sale whilst at the same time introducing new varieties and reminding visitors of old favourites.

Throughout the show season we also need to do a considerable amount of nursery work alongside opening the nursery to visitors. This is why we only open Thursday through to Saturday (as shows allow). However, we are happy for you to visit outside of these times by prior arrangement.

2. October to March: preparing for the marketing season

This is when we need to do as much preparation work as possible to maximise the opportunities the marketing season presents. This work includes essential nursery and vehicle maintenance, new building projects, stock building through splitting, care of the emerging plants, pest treatment, stock control, accounting, website updates, brochure creation, and a wide range of other activities.

We also like to squeeze in some vacation time, usually tied into HEA seminars and other horticultural meetings around the country to keep up to date with developments.

Plants do not always grow as expected. One of the biggest issues we face is balancing registered characteristics with those we experience as plant growers. Doing this enables us to better advise our customers on what to expect.

Not only do we need to physically care for our collection plants we also need to maintain our knowledge base. Last winter we spent a good deal of time cataloguing the collection, which involved classification according to registration data and parentage information, among other aspects. This has helped us considerably in the day-to-day running of the business as an initial reference point. The more we know, the more we find we need to know!

Supporting our business is our website, which was created in 2001 to share our fascination about hostas and to provide new and existing customers with more information about the genus.

The site is deliberately simple to navigate, and doesn't use frames or elaborate effects, to cater for those of us not blessed with fast broadband connections, or the time to spend learning where everything is.

Perhaps the most eye-catching element of the website is the leaf library, which came about as a way for customers to identify cultivars they may already have, as well as to see what they might like to add to their collection. This library also acts as a virtual herbarium for our NCCPG Collection.

Creating the leaf images is quite a long process, involving colour adjustments to ensure the image you see on your screen is as true to the colour of the actual leaf as possible. The resulting images are as detailed as possible, without overloading the site, and we hope the supporting Hosta Library links provide just the right amount of information needed to make hosta identification easier.

PSST... we only list plants we actually have in our collection.

We try to make it clear which of those plants are available for sale through our 'Availability List' and quoting a price (or £POA Price On Application) in the plant description.

Next month: Over-wintering your hostas and preparing for next year...

The advice and opinions contained within this monthly newsletter have been formed over more than 30 years of experience with the Hosta genus. We are constantly learning and refining that knowledge and would welcome any suggestions that readers of this newsletter would like to make so please [contact us](#).

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... towards the end of the sales tunnels 1-3...



... and down to the main tunnel entrance.



One of the nicest functional elements of the nursery is the reservoir - and the following is a shot from the top of the bank:



The reservoir is stocked with fish and over the years the banks have naturalised with all sorts of plants. It is a lovely spot that attracts a lot of wildlife, especially dragonflies.

If you would like to know more about our operation why not give us a visit - we will be [open](#) until the end of September and then again next spring.