



## Review of the 2014 season

Here we are again reflecting on the highlights of another year of Mickfield Hostas on the road and at the nursery. The following are some of the highlights, together with a few low points to help balance things out...

### Tall orders

At the beginning of the season, we removed the roadside poplar trees, to allow us to widen the nursery entrance. This will enable easier access for large delivery vehicles and visiting coaches, once the task is completed. This was one of the highlights of Robin's year as it has been on his 'to do' list for several years. See our March newsletters for images.



The weather this year resulted in the hostas flowering from May onwards. We had many varieties in full flower at Gardeners' World.



Another highlight for Robin has been the number of new visitors to the nursery. One lady arrived announcing that she intended to buy lots of plants, not because she has a large area to fill, but because she wants our nursery to survive.

The huge range of hosta cultivars we hold in our Plant heritage National Collection together with those we have available for sale, continue to amaze people. At the nursery Robin can recommend varieties to suit specific customer requirements and illustrate what they can achieve in their own gardens. This can be a frustrating exercise at shows, because of the limitations on time and space.

We offer potential show visitors the chance to order ahead, but find many still express surprise that we cannot take everything we offer at the nursery, with us, to the shows. We always aim to have good stocks of the plants in our displays, but demand is unpredictable, especially when we do not know the content of fellow exhibitor's displays in advance.

Yvonne also gets involved with nursery visits during the season, although she is usually in the office taking and processing orders. She makes and receives numerous calls every day, often answering queries and offering advice as well. She has enjoyed getting to know customers this way and it helps us offer a more tailored service.

Some calls can leave her a little flummoxed though, so she always makes time to listen to 'Gardeners' Question Time' on Radio 4 to restore her equilibrium. After all these years the panelists are still required to answer some strange questions.

Another of Yvonne's highlights each season is the end of the shows because it means we are all back together. The shows can be very stressful, especially if, despite putting

on a lovely display and having top-notch plants available for sale, show visitors lack enthusiasm. Roy and Mel check back to in every evening when they are away and this year Yvonne has been able to equal, if not beat, their sales for the day from a handful of customers at the nursery and orders. This is one of Mel's highlights, because this is exactly where we want the focus of our business to be and it does ease some of the frustrations of the shows.

As for Mel and Roy, their highlights are mainly show related, as this is where they spend most of the season. They enjoy the chance to get to know fellow exhibitors and regular visitors. The tight deadlines which exhibitors are subject to, leaves little time for socialising and you only tend to interact with those sited closest to you. Each year, show organisers change our positions within the marquee, and this

### Shows summary

This year we managed to squeeze a few more shows and plant fairs into our calendar, which made for a very hectic schedule.

One of the notable events was our own local Hadleigh Show. We had a very enjoyable time there and were amazed at how much was squeezed into a single day.

Another was the Great Comp Plant Fair, which we thoroughly enjoyed. Our thanks to William Dyson for inviting us to attend and we hope to include the event in our calendar next year.

Regular events in our calendar include Helmingham Hall Spring Plant Fair, which continues to attract visitors and exhibitors from far and wide.

Although the dates for the Plant Heritage Spring and Autumn Plant Sales at Hyde Hall clashed with other commitments, our application for space at the Summer Show was accepted and we were able to have a presence in Essex again this year. Unfortunately, the dates clash again next year but we will apply for space at the Summer Show and keep our fingers crossed.

Only the large shows have the requirement to stage displays and this year we almost managed a clean sweep of Golds, the Silver Gilt at Gardeners' World was our lowest award this year, which was still an excellent award to receive.

Here is a run-down of our best year to date for awards:

**Harrogate Spring  
Flower Show  
Premier Gold**

gives us the opportunity to appreciate fellow nurserymen and their approach to displaying and selling a wide range of different plants.

At the Suffolk Show we experimented with a spiral layout for our display. It was very well received at the show and by Tatton Park, we had perfected the design. The plants we used reflects what we try to do at each show, which is to mix older and newer varieties and allow some lesser known cultivars to show off. The photo bottom right shows a perennial favourite, *H. 'Sum and Substance'* underplanted with *H. 'King Tut'* and *H. 'Wide Brim'*, which rarely get an airing. The top photo shows the other side of that plant mound featuring two relatively new varieties; *H. 'Beckoning'* and *H. 'Cold Heart'* - click on the photos to view a larger image.



Tatton Park 2014



A Gold Medal at Hampton Court, was one of Mel's highlights, closely followed by 'Best in Show' at Malvern. Despite the trials and tribulations experienced at that show this year, we really appreciated this recognition of our efforts. We are also delighted to have had our application of space in the Floral Marquee accepted for 2015.

One of Roy and Mel's 'low-lights' are exhibitor facilities at shows and campsites, which often leave a lot to be desired. For example, one campsite's answer to a non-functioning mens toilet was to cover it with a black plastic bag! Some show organisers don't consider access to functioning toilets out of show hours to be their concern because once visitors have left the toilet doors are shut and the water turned off - crazy, especially when exhibitors are still clearing down at the end of a show. Some organisers should hang their heads in shame, or better still, try the exhibitor life for a few shows to see what we have to put up with, and how they could make improvements.

A very recent highlight for Mel was the feedback she received from her first talk given to the Wickham Bishops Horticultural Club in Essex. This was something she had approached with trepidation but she is now encouraged to do more. She was especially pleased to be able to showcase some exciting plants and share ideas away from the shows.

**Next month:** We take a closer look at the species *H. hypoleuca*...

### Malvern Spring Festival Best in Show



### Suffolk Show Gold and Notcutts Salver



### Gardeners' World Live Silver Gilt

### Royal Norfolk Show Gold

### Hampton Court Flower Show Gold

### Tatton Park Flower Show: Gold

### Harrogate Autumn Flower Show Gold

The challenge for 2015 will be to better this tally...

The advice and opinions contained within this monthly newsletter have been formed over more than 38 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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