

November 2021



Landscaping the nursery...

Lots of things have happened to change the landscaping plans we have been sharing over the past couple of years, so this month we bring you up to date with developments.

One of the most obvious will be the removal of the poplars lining much of the north field - see photo below, taken from the field to the west of the nursery. The poplars are nearing the end of their short life ([typically 50 years](#)) and need removing before we install the boundary fence.



Landscaping plans

As we mentioned in our [July newsletter](#), we were fortunate to secure funding from Mid Suffolk District Council to fence our open boundaries and purchase trees for our proposed arboretum.

This has meant a revision of landscaping plans for the nursery, which is very timely, especially in regard of the reservoir garden.

Reservoir garden

We have gone back to the drawing board with this project after the really wet winter of 2020-21, which saw the reservoir refill considerably from completely drying out over the summer of 2020.

The complete emptying and refilling has helped the reservoir to regenerate and, as a consequence, we feel it would be much better to shelve plans to cultivate the space. Instead we plan to manage it to maintain its use as a reservoir and wildlife haven. The grant we received has enabled us to move forward with our long-held desire to plant up the north field as an arboretum and hosta garden. This negates the need to create the garden within the reservoir and it would have been quite a challenge dealing with the fluctuating levels of water on maintaining the space.

The removal of many of the reservoir willows, over the past couple of years, has greatly reduced the demand on



Goodbye poplars

Here is a short video clip of two poplars being removed from the west bank of the reservoir. The wind carried much of the sound away but none of my exclamations - sorry about that!



Recycling the poplars

Some of the spindly branches were chipped as a base for log storage. Some of the upper trunks were placed in an east-west line to allow airflow and then the logs are stacked cross-ways in layers to enable airflow throughout the stack and help dry the timber.

the reservoir water. When the four large poplars, on the west bank of the reservoir, were taken down they were full of water so their removal will also help maintain the water level in the reservoir.

Although the reservoir plans were exciting, the new arboretum and hosta garden is even more so...

Fencing and windbreak

This is a major piece of work as it involves a lot of clearance. The poplars needed attention and we decided their complete removal would be better than cutting them down to a much shorter height to encourage lower growth. Their age means that we would need to remove them within the next decade anyway, so better to do it now. It wasn't a tough decision from the perspective of the management of the nursery but an emotional one as we named the place 'The Poplars' because of them.

Aside from the poplars, much of the growth along the boundary, has become strangled by bramble, blackthorn and large parts have died back. The removal of everything will expose the nursery to the prevailing westerly winds, which are considerable as we live in one of the highest points in the region. As a consequence we decided to replace the poplars with a selection of trees, rather than with a tangle of hedging. This will have a number of benefits:

- it will provide an interesting backdrop, and valuable windbreak, for the nursery and arboretum
- it will make the nursery a more attractive feature in the surrounding landscape
- it will help us identify, and remove, any encroaching bramble more easily
- it will help us ensure the poplar stumps and roots die back rather than shoot, adding nutrient to the soil as they rot.

The trees we have selected are hazel, holly, green and copper beech, and sea buckthorn. Obviously, they will need time to grow before the effect can be realised so initially the fence will dominate the scene.

We have started clearing the rear of the tunnels along the west boundary and will start installing the fence and planting the trees during November.



Bio char

The photo above shows approximately two poplars worth of timber - there are at least another 70 trees to come down of varying heights/widths. There is considerable wood to recycle and poplar isn't a particularly good timber to burn on an open fire as it burns fast and spits. It will, however, make magic stuff called [bio char](#).

Essentially, to create bio char you cook the timber in an oven, removing water and impurities until you are left with pure carbon.

Although burning isn't ideal, this method produces considerably less carbon dioxide and monoxide and so is much less environmentally damaging than open burning. What you are left with is a product that not only locks up carbon for at least 100 years, it has been made in situ using timber from the nursery. You can't get more local than that!



Congratulations to Dalefoot Composts

We would like to take this

Arboretum and hosta garden

The creation of a wood in our north field has been a dream for many years. This part of the nursery has always been under-utilised, although we did grow some crops on it in the early years. The north field is just under two hectares in size, so large enough to create a modest sized wood. We have taken to calling it an arboretum because we plan to plant more specialised trees than our native species. What we need is a more open, dappled canopy to grow hostas under.



Trees for the arboretum

As mentioned, we have selected varieties of tree to create year round interest and to form a dappled canopy for the hostas, during the year.

The photo above shows some of the more mature trees we purchased from [Barcham Trees](#). We will use these to form the framework of the arboretum/garden design. Smaller trees and shrubs were purchased from [Miles Japanese Maples](#), [Bluebell Arboretum and Nursery](#) and [Hedgehog Plants](#).

The trees are currently tethered to the side of the sales tunnel but will be moved to the side of the packing shed wall when we replace the polythene.

Garden design

Put simply, the design will consist of an extended, meandering ditch, starting and ending in ponds. The hostas will be planted in the top of the ditch walls. This will enable the plants to drain freely while sinking their roots to the ditch. The ditch will be quite deep in places and will be allowed to dry out and refill as the weather permits. We plan to plant a pipe tailing back to the new water tank to enable us to flood the ditch in times of drought.

Once the field has been cleared, turned over and seeded,

opportunity to congratulate one of our suppliers, who has just received a Sustainability and Environmental Impact Award for their excellent peat-free compost products, and their work restoring damaged peatlands.

We use [Dalefoot Compost's](#) sheep's wool and bracken product as an essential ingredient in our peat-free compost mixes and were involved in supporting their stands at RHS flower shows across the UK, when they first started promoting their range of products. The national final of the Rural Business Awards will be announced in February 2022 so we have our fingers crossed that Dalefoot Composts can turn their Sustainability and Environmental Impact Award from a regional award into a national one.



Hooked on Hostas

A few months ago we asked for stories about how you became 'hooked on hostas' and I thought it would be nice to share one of these.

At the start of the year we were contacted by a long-standing customer asking if we would like to take his collection of hostas off his hands. Naturally we were delighted to accept and made plans to collect the plants in the autumn so he could enjoy them for the season.

I was somewhat over-confident we could fit all the plants into a

we will dig the ditch. Once the ditch is in place we will create a planting plan. This is the exciting bit but planting might not happen until autumn/winter 2022, depending upon the weather and progress on the hard landscaping elements.



The photo above shows a few more plants, at the moment the hostas and garden plants are rather squished into a tunnel and a half. We covered tunnel 3 back in September and Roy has been doing all the framework alterations, preparation, etc. The tunnels look so much neater now and will enable a much better airflow. The sales tunnel is next but there is a lot of preparation work needed for that one - not least of all re-locating the trees lining the side. We are hoping to share photos of the tunnel work, and first stretch of fencing in the January issue.

Mail order deadline

We have decided to call a halt to sending out mail orders at the end of the coming week. If there is anything you desperate for this year then please order by Friday 5th November as our last posting will be on Monday 8th. You can always pre-order for 2022 and we will hold your order on file ready to send out in the spring, when we will take payment.

Next month we reflect on 2021 and share our insights. Lenore is also planning to add her reflections on the year, so it should be an interesting read.

Until then, take care

Team Mickfield Hostas

single load but we managed it - just! At least we now know how many hostas you can cram into a VW Transporter.

When we were loading, and during a couple of reviving cuppas, we chatted to Brian and learned that it was Robin who had piqued his interest in hostas. Brian was building a display at The Royal Show at Stoneleigh, many years ago, and Robin came across him on a walkabout during build up. Robin inspired Brian into buying his first hosta, [H. 'Moerheim'](#). I cannot recall ever taking this cultivar to a show, which is sad because it is yet another that has fallen out of favour during the rapid influx of modern cultivars. However, thanks to Brian, we now have a lovely specimen for our new garden. There wasn't time to do much looking at what we were loading so imagine my surprise when I took a closer look at a bonsai pot back at the nursery to find an old label in Robin's handwriting stuck in it saying [H. 'Green With Envy'](#) (see photo at the start of this piece). Dad must have thought a lot of Brian to have been persuaded to part with what must have been a part of a display and probably wrote the label there and then so Brian would know what variety was in the pot.

It was a very enjoyable job going through the plants and I would like to thank Brian very much for his support over the years, and his generosity in offering the plants back to us - perfect recycling!