

September 2021



Changes of plans and project update

Autumn is fast approaching with leaves beginning to turn and autumn colours starting to show themselves. The hostas are no different, and once they have flowered they start the journey to dormancy, usually much slower than this year.

As a consequence we took the decision to shut the nursery to visitors a month early. It will be a challenge to have varieties in full leaf for the remainder of our plant fair and 'talks' commitments but we will do our best. Needless to say we will take the decision to remove leaves that are turning from mail order plants, so don't be surprised if they arrive without leaves. Never fear the leaves have done the work required to produce sugars to feed those all-important shoots for next year.



Now the nursery is closed we can turn our full attention on the various projects we have underway...

Tunnel refurbishments

Roy has already been working on replacing the polythene on tunnel 3 by stripping back the net skirts, and supporting woodwork. He has also decided to replace half of the benching, which has meant us having to shoe-horn all the stock onto the remaining benches and into tunnel 2.

The net covers for tunnels 1 and 3 are on order so we will strip the polythene off both and replace the covers later on this autumn.

Nursery maintenance

David is currently trying to complete his work commitments so he can be free to resume nursery work. He has been supporting us with routine mowing and strimming and keeping the place looking tidy. He has also managed to fit in some further field clearance, which has now become an essential part of our new projects.



The south garden

This video (click on the image above to view) is almost 18 minutes long but takes you through the garden to the rubber rockery and highlights how each plant is doing, as well as identifying changes made in the spring.



Rubbery rockery and existing beds

Both these garden elements have done well this year, although I have had to admit defeat on the 'Galapagos' beds under the oaks. The hostas struggled to fight for adequate moisture due to the juvenile oak trees taking everything. Elsewhere the hostas are developing well, if still a little stunted in places where they are obviously lacking sufficient moisture. We still have some tree thinning to do, which should help. The three ginkgos we planted are doing great with lots of new growth.

The rubber rockery is flourishing and the plant movements made at the start of the year have proven worthwhile. The shrubs are also getting their roots down and thickening up.

What have I learned so far with this experiment?

- Some small varieties of hosta can get quite agoraphobic in too much space, and prefer a bit of company, until they establish.
- Snail trails show up really well on the tyres, so I am at eradicate them when I notice activity.
- The plants need more water in tyres exposed to more sunny conditions. This is most likely due to the colour of the tyres and the fact that they warm up in the sun.

The photo banner at the head of the newsletter shows, left to right: [*H. nigrescens*](#), [*H. 'Old Glory'*](#), [*H. 'Ruffed Up'*](#) and [*H. 'Abby'*](#). The video in the side column gives you a tour of the garden. Although it isn't looking as good as it was a few weeks ago, I hope you can get a feel for what it was like.

Reservoir garden

If you watch the video in the side column you will see I have made the decision to scale back plans to plant into the reservoir following a wet winter and the unexpected depth of water. Wet winters are something that may become more frequent and knowing the reservoir still works quite efficiently is good to know.

Having been completely dry for a period of time has allowed the mud and sediment to settle into the base and the rainwater is beautifully clear. Quite a lot of plants have established in the water and the lilies are thriving despite being left high and dry last year.

We still plan to open up the west end of the reservoir for

As ever, the video isn't a polished performance, rather my usual informal format!



Reservoir and north field

This video is shorter and shows the current state of play of the area we are planning to attack over the next few years.

Click on the image to view. Future newsletters will contain project progress, weather permitting, and visitors to the nursery can see the changes.



Hyde Hall Flower Show

I must confess, I was a little reluctant to break off from nursery work to embark on a full blown show after so long away from exhibiting.

However, it was a change to get back to building a display and manning a stand for a week. It was lovely to catch up with regular customers and meet lots of new ones during the show. The video is of the display, click on the image above to view. I walk you round the display and name the plants we used to create it.



better access and remove the top 2-3 feet of the surrounding banks. Leaving it natural is probably best for the wildlife in any case, and potentially makes it a more easily maintained space given our plans to landscape and plant the north field.

Water tank

Due to the wet winter we were unable to do any groundwork so our water tank project had to be delayed. We are still planning on doing this as soon as possible.

New projects

Following our successful application for post-Covid funds, which we mentioned back in July, we have a new set of projects requiring attention:

Field clearance

Before we can fell trees, fence or start landscaping, we need to complete the land clearance and 'disc' the field to remove all the warrens and holes created by our wildlife inhabitants over the past 30 plus years.

Poplar felling

We have made the decision to take down all the poplar trees along the west and north boundaries. We will also either fell, or seriously lop the ones on the east boundary too. Poplar trees have a short lifespan and are notoriously shallow rooting. This makes any poplar tree over a certain age at risk of falling over.

Our trees are of indeterminate age but were already mature in 1975 when we moved to the property. Robin was always intending to get the trees felled but we didn't want to lose our windbreak. He used to get really nervous in strong winds, not only because of the damage it can do to tunnels, he didn't want the poplars coming down in an uncontrolled way.

Fencing and windbreak planting

Once the field is clear and the trees are down we can commence fencing. We are putting in paddock fencing and at the same time we are planting a new windbreak of trees, consisting of purple and green beech, hazel, holly, and sea buckthorn. This combination will make an attractive windbreak, rather than a thick, rambling hedge, and should still provide an excellent habitat for nesting birds.

Did anyone recognise the screens we used round the booth?

Roy made them 9 years ago for the last time we staged an exhibit outside at Hampton Court. Having been unsuccessful in getting into the marquee for the umpteenth time, we were assured we would have a prime spot in the plant village (see photo above).

Yes, we had stand number 1, right beside the Thames entrance. Unfortunately, in those days when there were many more exhibitors, the Thames exit was in a different place. As a consequence, everyone who said they would see us on the way out, didn't. Many customers subsequently asked us where we had disappeared to!

We were opposite Jekka McVicar, suffering the same problem. We both vowed that would be the last time we paid for expensive outside space at an RHS show!



Roll on to Malvern Spring 2014...

Unfortunately, we were not informed that our application for the marquee had been unsuccessful until rather late.

By then we had already announced we would be at the show, both on the website and in our PR materials. We had already gathered pre-orders so couldn't really afford not to be there. A

Hard landscaping

Once the field has been prepared we can get in the digger to create a long, meandering ditch, which will open out into a handful of ponds. The top edges of the ditch will be planted with hostas and the arboretum will be designed around the ditch. Once this is in place I can start designing a planting plan.

Planting

We are hoping to begin planting next year, probably in the autumn to give the plants the benefit of the autumn weather before winter. We will need to phase the planting as it is a large area to cover. We will prioritise the trees and start with large and giant hostas to get the spacing organised. We can then infill with smaller trees, shrubs and hostas in subsequent planting phases.

We are very excited about the planned work as it will help us open up the nursery and give visitors something new to see. As ever, we plan to do most of the work ourselves, so it will evolve gradually over time, which is the best way to create a more natural environment.



Next month...

As autumn is making advances I thought it a good idea to return to the topic of over-wintering your hostas. Lenore will be giving us her thoughts on the subject, so together we should have some good tips to share.

Speak soon,

Team Mickfield Hostas

rival nursery was allowed into the marquee instead and then they cancelled at the last minute. So much for loyalty to their long-standing exhibitors!

As our favourite show we thought we would take the risk and anyone wishing to know the story can take a look at the [newsletter review](#) of the event. The reason I mention this is that we used the screens a second time to create a really inviting space. The judges agreed and ironically awarded us the '[Best in Plant Village](#)' award, with a fabulous glass vase.

Once again we had used our screens and had a less than successful show...



Dare I use the screens a third time?

My decision to use the screens at Hyde Hall this year was a risk. I really didn't want to cast a 'hoodoo' on the event but the theory of 'third time lucky' actually worked, and we had a great show.

Visitors loved the light airy space and appreciated the effort we had made to create a space they felt confident to enter at this rather strange, socially distanced, time.

If we do Hyde Hall again, look out for the screens as I feel rather emboldened to use them again. Besides they are a work of art.