

Showing the Hardy Plant Society off to perfection

In 2015 several Local Groups took stands at horticultural shows around England to let visitors see aspects of what the HPS is about. Here, in date order, we take a look at their themes and displays, and celebrate their considerable achievements!

The West Yorkshire Group explored 'hardiness' at Harrogate

Twice yearly the Group exhibits at the North of England Horticultural Society's Spring and Autumn Flower Shows in Harrogate in the Specialist Societies section. We are judged under the Educational and Scientific criteria and have to meet strict guidelines regarding information/interpretation and exhibiting/display, as well as the overall impression.

The theme *What Is a hardy plant?* was based on the leaflet published by the Society.

We trawled the RHS website and, as their website was being updated to include hardiness ratings for the *Plant Selector* and *Plant Finder*, we followed the links to plants/trials and awards/award-of-garden-merit/ to download their Award of Garden Merit (AGM) database and the Temperature guide to hardiness ratings.

As the RHS couldn't provide a full list of hardiness ratings, we researched each of our chosen plants individually. From this information we created our display, which was divided into three sections:

1. RHS Hardiness ratings

We defined each hardiness category H1–H7 and included a large photograph of a plant of that type. For example:

- H7
- Minimum temperature < -20°C
- Very Hardy
- *Helleborus x hybridus*

2. What is a hardy plant?

We listed the temperature/survival ratings and gave examples of hardy, half-hardy, frost-hardy and tender plants. For example:

- Hardy plants can survive a temperature of -15°C

3. Definitions of types of garden plants

We gave definitions of hardy perennial, hardy biennial and hardy annual plants, and

included a photograph of one of each type. *Euphorbia sikkimensis* was our example of a hardy perennial, using one of Don Whitton's excellent photos of his National Collection.

A copy of the RHS AGM database along with the Society's leaflet *What Is a hardy plant?* completed the display.

Finally, a board promoted membership of the HPS, showing some of the benefits, and eye-catching pictures of our Group's activities.

We gained a Silver-Gilt Medal and a commendation for the educational element of the display, and with visitors numbering 40,000 the *What is a hardy plant?* leaflet was so popular we soon ran out of copies!

Allan Mitchell



Each plant was labelled with its botanical name and its hardiness category.

© Allan Mitchell

The Worcestershire Group celebrated the new Shade and Woodland Plants Special Interest Group and the latest HPS booklet

The Malvern Spring Festival celebrated its 30th anniversary this year and welcomed over 90,000 people. The HPS mounted a small publicity display in 1988 and has continued to have a presence there in most years.

The new look meant we moved from the 'cattle sheds' to a dedicated marquee for the specialist societies. The grass 'floor' became increasingly damp with torrential rain and high winds buffeting the showground.

Our pitch was 9m x 6m, allowing us to showcase several aspects of the work of the Society. The main plant display celebrated the formation of the Shade and Woodland Plants Group, the newest of the HPS Groups.

We wanted to demonstrate the wide range of hardy herbaceous perennials that grow well in shady areas, as gardeners often see these as problem spots.

The border at the back of the stand contained plants that would do well in dry shade, such as that found at the base of a wall (front cover), whereas the other border had a woodland setting at one side and plants that again were tolerant of dry soil, but with dappled or part shade, moving to plants that enjoy a rich moisture-retentive soil in shade on the other side. Star of the show, as in

previous years, was *Podophyllum versipelle* 'Spotty Dotty'; other plants attracting attention were *Ranunculus aconitifolius* 'Flore Pleno', thalictrums and *Mellitis melissophyllum* 'Royal Velvet Distinction', a new introduction.

The launch of the new *Geraniums* booklet, written by Dr Margaret Stone, a Worcestershire Group member, took place at the Show. A display board listed the Specialist Groups and showed the distribution of Local Groups around the country. Many visitors were interested to see whether there was a local group in their area, and we were able to show them and encourage them to look at the HPS website for further information.

Another storyboard highlighted the Seed Distribution Scheme, just part of the way in which the HPS fulfils its charitable objective to ensure that garden-worthy perennials remain in cultivation.

The Group was awarded a Gold Medal. The judges were particularly impressed by the way information about the HPS was presented, and the educational content of the planting and display boards. The RHS photography team chose our stand to feature on the RHS website report on the Malvern Spring Festival.

We recruited at least 15 new members. As always it is a real pleasure to be able to talk to so many people about plants and to tell them about the HPS.

Jan Vaughan

© Sandra Hartley



The stand promoted the HPS and the new *Geraniums* booklet, but shade and woodland plants were centre stage.

At Chelsea, in *Over the garden gate*, the Kent Group showed the progression of plants through the garden, plants placed to flourish

'We love plants! We like looking at them, growing them and talking about them.' Kent Group's display depicted the garden of a typical Hardy Planter who enjoys propagating, growing, and passing on a wide range of plants, each placed in a position with sun/shade and dry/damp where it may best thrive.

The small plot was crammed with both exciting new introductions and old favourites collected over the years from fellow HPS members, plant sales and specialist nurseries, in all over 300 different plants.

Hardy Planters don't only collect plants – propagation is just as exciting, with the added benefit that surplus plants can be passed 'over the garden gate' to be swapped or sold to generate funds for the next 'must have' plant.

Our garden path started in the propagation area, where many happy hours are spent in the potting, or should it be pottering, shed. Seeds are sown, plants divided, cuttings taken and the cold frame used to protect the new plants. The green roof on the potting shed was another area for plants, but with the added advantage of

providing rainwater, trickling down chains into watering cans. Gravel provided an excellent medium for self-seeders, and the unexpected can and do appear.

Into the garden, through a rustic 'hobbit' gate, between fences home to scrambling climbers, and plants spilled over from the **warm and sunny area** on the left and from the right the **shady and cool part** of the garden.

The plants we grow in our gardens came originally from all over the world and have evolved to grow in many different environments. If possible, we try to give them growing conditions as close

as possible to those in their natural habitat. So in this Chelsea garden each was planted in the area where it would have the best chance to thrive.

Reaching the picket gate, the plants that were surplus to requirements had been passed 'over the garden gate' – given, swapped or sold to other keen gardeners. Hopefully, the new owners would get as much pleasure from them as the Hardy Planter who grew them.

The HPS Kent Group was awarded a Silver-Gilt Medal.
Colin Moat

See www.hardy-plant.org.uk to see the Chelsea 2015 Blog and the full plant list.



The shady side of the garden gate.

HPS Cheshire and Friends showed fabulous foliage in *Fifty shades of green* at Tatton Park

A year ago at one of the committee meetings of our group, which I had recently joined, I took on the challenge of designing a display on behalf of the society and managing the volunteers team that was going to build it.

I had been to several RHS shows over the years, and I knew that most displays are designed around flowers, to make perfect pictures composed of plants at the peak of flowering. But what about the rest of the year, when all you are left with is foliage? What about ferns and grasses that lack proper 'flowers'?

With this in mind, we set out to showcase foliage in all its variety. Different shapes, different sizes, different textures and most certainly different shades of green, different colours even. Our

display showed that one can have a beautiful garden, packed with interesting plants without flowers.

We included the obvious green plants like ferns (*Asplenium trichomanes* and *A. scolopendrium* Cristatum Group), grasses (*Miscanthus floridulus* and *M. sinensis* 'Flamingo', *Hakonechloa macra*) and many hostas (*Hosta sieboldiana* var. *elegans*) but also red-leafed *Cotinus coggygria* and dark purple *Cryptotaenia japonica* f. *atropurpurea*, lime green *Heuchera* Key Lime Pie and yellowish *Luzula sylvatica* 'Aurea'.

A nice specimen of purple-tinged-leaved *Davidia involucrata* supplied height for our display, while plants like *Saruma henryi*, *Mukdenia rossii* 'Karasuba', and epimediums were planted

underneath to mimic a woodland setting.

Our star plants, about which we had most comments or questions, were *Ajuga reptans* 'Arctic Fox' (white leaves with a dark green shiny edge), *Athyrium niponicum* var. *pictum* in pots, and *Heliopsis* 'Summer Green' (dark stems and variegated leaves).

Our display was awarded a Silver Medal. Our title, *Fifty shades of green*, often brought smiles to people's faces. Even better was the positive feedback from the general public. Some said they also grew most of the 250 plants we used, others were surprised at how much colour there was despite the lack of flowers; a few even went as far as saying it was the best display they've seen.

Razvan Chisu

© Razvan Chisu



Wonderful foliage in fifty shades of green.