



## Poinsettia

The poinsettia growing season has been unremarkable this year and most of the crops are coming up to specification. With the changes in plant passporting being brought in during the marketing season it has been quite a job for all to change the marking of the plants and labelling prior to dispatch to conform with the new regulations. In addition, this season there has been a number of identifications of *Bemisia tabaci* at the retail stage as well as on the nursery. With a very low tolerance to any signs of the pest at despatch, in depot or at retail, it has been very difficult for some growers to maintain an even flow of product to the market.

As we know, approximately half of the plants sold in the UK during the season, originate in Holland



and are packed under strict control; they will be marked as 'clean plants' prior to the despatch to the UK.

Where growers have experienced difficulty in getting clearance to market their crops they have had to remove any traces of pest prior to packing. This is increasingly difficult using currently established practise due to the limited availability of active ingredients that are useful for the job, the difficulty of applying chemicals to a mature crop and the expense. Most growers are employing IPM methods using a range of predators and this is also complicated when it becomes necessary to apply chemicals at short notice. The selection of chemicals has become increasingly difficult due to the potential affects on IPM programmes and the need to stay within the guidelines laid down by the retailers.

### Looking forward

Where does this bring us then in the coming season, with strict controls on pest numbers and no tolerance and little or no knock

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Growing together™

December 2019

## Spring Conference 2020 Peterborough

In a departure from tradition regarding the location of the event, this year's Spring Conference will be in Peterborough on Tuesday 14th January to work better with the poinsettia meeting and to help members wanting to visit both events.

The theme for the technical conference presentations will be :

### New Concepts in Pot Plant Culture

We have been arranging a series of exciting, international speakers on a range of topics. Opening the conference will be Brian Whipker from North Carolina, well-known for his research and extension work in all areas of floriculture but especially for growth regulation and plant nutrition. Eric Forschelen will join the speakers on pot bedding culture. With over 25 years of experience in pot plant culture, latterly with Goldsmiths' Seeds and Syngenta, Eric is an acknowledged expert on all things to do with pots and in particular cyclamen nutrition and crop protection. Now with his own consultancy, Green4ce, he contin-

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Spring Conference 2020  
14th January-  
Peterborough

# Chairman's notes

The autumn season has been good in parts and the sales of viola and cyclamen quite solid whilst pansy has trailed behind a little and nobody appears to be sure why. With all the attention on Christmas marketing, particularly of poinsettia, we are still conscious of build up to the spring and even matters as necessary as boiler maintenance in readiness for the new season.

The trials and tribulations of peat extraction in Ireland (or more to the point, the lack of) continue to cause concern. Where will the industry be if the Irish cannot obtain the licences required to extract meaningful amounts of growing media and how will the peat free boys cope with the increased demand. This is especially worrying, given the fact that much of their wood raw material is now being burnt to replace the traditional peat products.

I am looking forward with excitement to the conference and meetings around it. We will have the opportunity of taking up the technical matters around pot plant production and it is followed by the poinsettia meeting at Neame Lea Nurseries for whose support in this area we are most appreciative. Again we will have forum for dis-

cussion of the poinsettia crop, crucially important for the sector and especially its seasonal cash flow, together with the opportunity to raise all other relevant issues.

I am keen also that we should get a good attendance at the AGM which will be held after the conference on Tuesday 14th January.



James Alcaraz

This should be a short, business-like meeting which gives the members the occasion to review the activity of the Association and express an opinion on its priorities and budget for the new year as well as attending to the procedural matters such as the elections to the committees.

At the end of the year, I would like to add my personal thanks to

those who have made great efforts on our behalf again this year. Our new technical secretary, Chris Need, has begun the task in the last year, of bringing new focus to the activities of the technical committee, organising the first regional technical workshop and developing the agenda and speaker programme for the upcoming conference. In relation to the Association finances, we have seen the treasurer, Lyndon Mason, take up this role and thank him for his willingness to get involved. We are grateful also for the most supportive work of our colleagues outside the BPOA, in the AHDB at the technical committee and in the NFU for their attention to lobbying on behalf of growers. This you will see in the area of plant passporting, noted elsewhere as a most important issue for us all in ensuring improved biosecurity in the industry, as well as the continual lobbying with government on labour supply in horticulture.

On behalf of the committees of the Association, I wish you and your families, friends and colleagues a HAPPY CHRISTMAS and healthy and productive New Year in 2020!

James Alcaraz

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## Spring Conference

ues to assist growers in resolving problems and optimising production techniques.

Eric will add his input to the discussion of plant nutrition, taken from his extensive knowledge and experience in advisory work throughout Europe.

## Conference Information

- The conference will take place at the Kingsgate Conference Centre, Staplee Way, Orton, Peterborough PE1 4YT
- The full programme is published on the homegrownplants.org and NFU websites: <https://www.homegrownplants.org.uk/spring-conference-programme-2020/>
- Booking via the website <https://www.homegrownplants.org.uk/booking/>
- The BPOA AGM 2020 will be held at the end of the technical presentations on Tuesday 14th at Kingsgate, commencing at 16:30.
- The AHDB/ BPOA Poinsettia meeting will be held at Neame Lea Nurseries in Spalding on Wednesday 15th January. (Booking via the AHDB website.)
- There is group reservation for BPOA for the night of Tuesday 14th January at the Radisson Park Hotel in Peterborough. The hotel is approximately 9 minutes drive from the conference centre.
- There will be an opportunity to meet members and speakers at dinner on Monday evening at Park Inn.

# Walter Back

Many members fondly remember Walter, who was a long-standing member of the Association and supporter of the Home Grown scheme which he employed in all his product labelling. A winner of the Allen Hendy award presented by the



Walter receives the Home Grown Grower of the Year in 2015 at Four Oaks Show with Kate Lowe, Editor of HortWeek, and Tracey Dunn of BPOA



association for achievement in bedding plant production in 2012, he also won the HG Grower of the Year in 2015.

His family issued the following statement:

*"We are sad to report the death of Walter Back, 86, of Wophams Lane Nursery, Birdham, West Sussex following a short illness. Well-known and respected in the industry, Walter was a talented grower who built a successful horticulture business, providing employment for hundreds of people over the years. He started in Sidlesham with the LSA, and later moved to Wophams Lane Nursery in Birdham, where he set up Blue Rib-*



Walter with Ian Riggs in an earlier shot, for the caption competition.

*bon Plants. It will not surprise those who knew him that Walter continued to work within the business right up to the end, issuing planting instruc-*

*tions even from his hospital bed! His niece, Jan Devos, Business Manager at Blue Ribbon Plants commented: "My uncle was, quite simply, a legend who lived and breathed grow-*



*ing. The best tribute we can pay him is to continue and expand the business he loved."*

*Walter was born in Devon in 1933 and married the love of his life, Anja, in 1959. They had two children: Robert - who takes over the reins at Blue Ribbon Plants with immediate effect - and Liisa, a talented artist who lives in Australia. The family plans to hold a celebration of Walter's life early next year to which friends and colleagues will be invited. Anja, Robert and Liisa would like to thank everyone for their kind wishes, and for their continued support for Blue Ribbon Plants under the new management team" -*

Tributes and donations in memory of Walter can be made online:

<https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/Ian-Devos>

(The nominated charity is Perennial.)

# Dutch Auto-Study Tour

It can be most impressive watching the 'magic' of modern technology in action as with the plant spacing robots in the eastern US. What is more interesting is when systems of production are introduced that harness the valuable



Automated cuttings sticking

innovations into a coherent system and help growers to engineer out labour peaks, operator error etc and increase product quality and reliability. This can only be done when the production unit and process system has been conceived as a whole and appropriate automation employed to complete the picture. The recent study tour in Holland gave growers the opportunity to study the implementation of automation systems. In future, it will be possible to move from the automation of specific tasks to a scenario where the use of artificial intelligence and machine learning allow robotic arms to learn a number of functions that replace human input, not just in terms of physical effort but also automating work areas. You can read more at <https://www.homegrownplants.org.uk/blog/automation-study-tour-holland-september-2019/>

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## Poinsettia

down possibility at the end of the crop and prior to marketing? Certain factors are due for review and one must be the requirement to maintain nil tolerance of a pest which has been managed using biological methods. This becomes especially important when growers are annually re-infested from sources outside their control and often imported directly on young plants. No bio-secure regimes have been seen that can guarantee 100% freedom, so growers cannot obtain reassurance there.

We have been dealing with whitefly in poinsettia crops forever and *Bemisia tabaci* at least since 1990. Despite regular findings over the years, it is not regarded as endemic and does not appear to spread or cause the feared losses in other crops.

### Discussion meeting

Next January 15th, the day following the spring conference meeting, the poinsettia shelf life day will consider the results of the work on deficit irrigation and variety trials. The meeting will also afford the opportunity of hearing, first hand, of grower experiences this year with a response from PHSI/ Defra on current thinking.

## Martin joins NFU HortBoard

Martin Emmett, Director at Tris-tram Plants, part of the Farplants group and Binsted Nurseries, has been elected to the NFU Board for Horticulture and Pots, attending his first meeting in November. As well as being chair of the HTA Ornamentals committee he is leader of one the three Ornamental Horticulture Roundtable discussion forums on careers and training.



Martin Emmett

Martin is conscious of the need for strong representation of grower

needs and commented:

*"It is important to recognise that the BPOA, NFU and HTA are membership organisations, dependent on our support to do work on our behalf. Each organisation has its relative strengths and I hope to use my position to ensure that the efforts of our trade bodies are as co-ordinated as possible.*

*The Ornamental Horticulture Roundtable Group is one forum that already helps achieve this; but it is useful to also have a direct involvement in setting the strategic priorities from within these organisations. I know that James Alcaraz shares the same view about how we should be working together and I am very much looking forward to working alongside him."*

Martin joins James Alcaraz of Bryant's and Tim Edwards of Boningale Nurseries in representing the ornamentals production sector at HortBoard.



## Plant passports

The following guidance is taken from the latest information on the NFU website and you are advised to check this for updates: <https://www.nfuonline.com/sectors/horticulture-and-potatoes/hort-and-pots-news/the-new-plant-health-regulation-what-does-it-mean-for-you/>

*"Defra have also provided more guidance on what trade units would have to have a plant passport attached, clarifying that if plants are supplied boxed, the box could carry a single PP label instead of a label on every plant. Similarly if multiple pot plants were supplied in a tray, the tray could carry the relevant PP. Scaling-up, if the consignment of plants were supplied on a trolley then the PP can be attached to the trolley (if the consignment was split, the separate packages would need new PPs to maintain traceability). For cases where the smallest trade unit has mixed plants e.g. mixed baskets then a single plant passport listing the different plant species can be used.*

**UPDATE December:** Defra have confirmed that a PP can be attached to a trolley of mixed species, even when those species are in separate pots or other units but only if that trolley is going directly to retail and traceability is maintained for all the plants and plant products on that trolley. In such cases the PP must be attached to the trolley and not travel in the cab with the delivery driver."



BPOA is a specialist producer group of the NFU

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