

**VISIT TO BLOOMS NURSERIES LIMITED,
BRESSINGHAM, DISS, NORFOLK
ON THURSDAY, 8TH JUNE 1972**

A. B. MACDONALD

*Hadlow College of Agriculture and Horticulture
Hadlow, Tonbridge, Kent*

Over eighty members and their guests attended the one-day meeting at Blooms Nurseries of Bressingham, near Diss in Norfolk. Blooms is one of the five nurseries within the well-known Anglia Group. The nursery produces 1½ million alpines, 1 million herbaceous plants, 200,000 dwarf conifers, 200,000 ground cover plants and 150,000 heathers; besides these, other lines include a varied range of taller growing conifers and ornamental grasses.

A warm welcome was first given to members by Adrian Bloom, and everyone received the new well-designed Anglia Group catalogue which was just 'hot-off' the press. The next stage was a tour of the nursery, and three groups were efficiently guided by Adrian Bloom, Maurice Prichard, manager of their herbaceous department, and Lawrence Flatman, manager of alpine and container departments.

The alpine section was very impressive and we were able to see many operations in progress, including some of the propagation techniques used. Plants, such as *Lithospermum* and *Penstemon*, were grown in polythene-clad structures, equipped with fan ventilation, at a temperature of 65° F; a softer and earlier cutting is obtained, which was found to root better under mist than cuttings taken from outdoor stock plants and, in addition, suitable material is available for a long period during the year. The rooted cuttings were potted off into a loam based compost, containing Vitax Q4 at 4-6 oz per bushel.

A talking point was the eye catching new alpine-plant display pack for garden centres, developed by Blooms. This non-returnable tray is made of white expanded polystyrene, in which there were five batches of seven varieties of alpines, each individually labelled. It was obvious to all that this should stimulate the public's interest in alpine plants and increase sales in garden centres.

The area designated to ground-cover plant production had just recently been completed. The design of the beds was interesting as they were arranged in pairs, divided by a path, in order that a polythene-clad structure could be erected if necessary in winter, should the plants require protection. The beds themselves are lined with polythene with a gravel base. A varied range of ground cover plants were grown, including large batches of the ever popular *Epimedium*, *Vinca* and *Pachysandra*. A point worth noting was that

Hypericum calycinum does best if lined out, rather than being containerised.

The demand for dwarf conifers has been rapidly increasing. The nursery roots their conifer cuttings during 2 main periods of the year. Firstly, from late June to October, when junipers and *Picea glauca* 'Conica' (*P. albertiana* 'Conica) are rooted in cold frames and, secondly, in January to March, where mist is used to root *Thuja* and *Chamaecyparis*. The rooted cuttings are potted off into peat pots or polythene sleeves and the plants are subsequently overwintered under 'milky' polythene structures; in the following year they are sold as two year plants in the autumn. Experience has shown that ventilation of these structures has proved difficult, resulting in some damping off of the soft growth. Clear polythene covered with a latex paint was to be tried as an alternative to milky white polythene film.

Heathers are another speciality of the nursery. The propagation programme commences in June with the ericas, using soft top cuttings. Later in the year heel cuttings are often used. Basically it is a one-year production system, and at the end of the selling season any plants which are left over are grown on to produce a two-year plant. We were told that there seems to be a considerable demand for a larger container grown plant.

Nutrition was considered by Blooms to be one of the most important factors to produce a high quality plant. The basic programme, where the liquid feed is injected through a Baggaley injection unit, commences in April using Vitax S, applied through overhead irrigation. Where possible this is carried out in the evening to minimise scorching. In June, Vitax 301 is used, and the programme is concluded with a high potash feed to harden off the season's growth.

Prior to lunch we were privileged to view the very attractive five-acre Dell Garden designed by Alan Bloom, also the private garden of Adrian Bloom, which was particularly eye-catching with its effective layout of conifers and heathers.

One of the features of the Nursery is the adjacent 'Steam Museum' which houses such famous railway locomotives as the 'Royal Scot' and 'Oliver Cromwell', and a variety of smaller engines which delight the enthusiast and brings crowds to the holding twice a week when they are open to the public. A narrow gauge railway circulates the nursery and, after lunch, Alan Bloom with his engine under full steam, gave his passengers a tour of the outside land to view the herbaceous production. Prior to bedding out the young plants, the beds were chemically sterilized with Dazomet (Basamid) at the rate of 1 lb/ 20 sq. yds. (cost £ 2/ 100 sq. yds.) In order to save the somewhat time consuming operation of 'sheeting' the treated ground, a liquid plastic substance called Vinamul 8114 (cost

£2/ 100 sq. yds.) is sprayed over the ground. We were told that it was essential that there were no undulations in the top surface of the soil prior to applying Vinamul 8114 — sold by Vinyl Products Ltd., Mill Lane, Carshalton, Surrey. The total cost for this sterilisation treatment was £4/ 100 sq. yds.

During the course of the afternoon we were able to view an interesting display of machinery used in the production of herbaceous plants. Maurice Prichard explained the particular merits of the machinery, such as the modified 5-row Accord planting machine, which could be used for both live and dormant material, and the Vicon Rotaspa which is preferred to a rotavator on light sandy soils as it prevents panning.

Planting distances are orientated to the bed system of production, which makes subsequent operations easier. Herbicide applications was essential for efficient production, and lenacil (Venzar) at 2 lbs/ acre is effectively used.

During the day a variety of production systems were seen which were geared to produce high quality plants. We all departed with a wealth of information and were extremely grateful for the warm reception given to us by Adrian and Alan Bloom, together with their colleagues.

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