

EVENING OUTING REPORT - The Plant Specialist Nursery.

Well, this was certainly a hit! The stunning nursery and garden at Great Missenden gave us all an absolute treat. We were warmly welcomed by co-owner Sean Walter, who explained that he was initially inspired by Hadspen House and its “colour wheel” garden. Having searched for a suitable site, they found the Great Missenden area and the land owned by the Dahl family. Despite misgivings, the family was prepared to grant a 5 year lease to try out a nursery specialising in new and unusual plants. They persuaded small growers to provide them with unusual specimens, and propagate 70% of the plants for sale themselves. The rest are plug plants which they then grow on. They are passionate about their plants, and this shows in the high quality and sturdy growth of those on sale. They also have a design and maintenance business which supports the nursery. They offer plants which are “tried and true”, often taking up to three years before a plant is considered worthy for sale. The majority of plants are grown on outside, using a special loam-based potting and planting medium that they developed themselves. This is sold at the nursery and is wonderful for containers. They use capillary matting which waters from beneath in their polytunnels and frames, using 20% less water. Surprisingly, Sean said that they rarely water the beds, unless there is a drought, as they want to sell plants that are strong and hardy.

The nursery took off, and the Dahl family sold them the land. An extra acre was bought from an elderly Polish man for a peppercorn, although a stipulation was that they must always keep chickens! They have expanded the car park area, and gained publicity through a recent article in *The Garden* magazine. They have delightful metal sculptures made by “Hammer and Tongs” blacksmiths in Tring. The sales area has plants in alphabetical order with excellent descriptions of the site necessary and the height and spread. Everyone seemed to want the dark red *Dianthus cruensis* which was a real show stopper. The nursery is closed from November to March, and is run by additional part-time staff and spouses. The display beds were glorious, with groups of stunning plants in unusual combinations, giving great ideas for something new. The beds are constantly changing, as each season progresses. The variety of shade-loving plants on offer was a complete eye opener. After our fascinating talk and guided walk, we all assembled in the covered area for Prosecco and strawberries, and tea and biscuits. We all loved this gem of a nursery, as evidenced by the number of plants being taken back to the car park. I am sure that we will be visiting again frequently, as here we found a real delight and some truly amazing plants to give us plenty of inspiration.