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One Nurseryman's Perspective on the Changing U.K. Nursery Trade[®]

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How you create a nursery business depends on individual circumstances: what one has to work with, how much money is available, how hard one is prepared to work, how tolerant or helpful one's partners are, how old one is, and what one's aims and ambitions are.

I had two starts with my own nursery. The first was in equal partnership with a financial partner. When that partner decided it was time to sell, we parted company and I bought a field and continued the business on my own. I had enough money to put up my first greenhouse and brought some polytunnels, stock, and equipment with me from the earlier business. I was prepared to work hard, and my wife was tolerant. I was 40 years old and at last had achieved my ambition of owning my own nursery.

However, owning the nursery was not enough in itself. I had started the first nursery with the aim of being a rhododendron specialist, grafting rhododendrons and propagating dwarf rhododendrons and azaleas from cuttings. I widened the crop range first to camellias then magnolias. My idea for the future of the nursery was taking shape, with the aim of offering a wide range of choice plants in small numbers to retailers. I recognised the risk of growing plants because I liked them, rather than because they would sell.

Each year I added to my plant list by making contact with people in New Zealand, Japan, the U.S.A., and Europe. I sourced plants that I believed would have potential in the U.K. market to add to my catalogue — I believed the future for my business lay in a range of taxa rather than in large numbers. This has continued, so that recently I have been grafting a number of exciting new *Hamamelis* cultivars such as 'Aphrodite', 'Harry', and 'Rubin'.

As there are already large numbers of cultivars of subjects such as clematis and rhododendron, I tend to concentrate on genera that have received less attention. I have for some years been sowing seed and selecting seedlings of *Lavatera*, *Choisya*, *Spiraea*, *Caryopteris*, and *Ceratostigma* and have introduced several selections to the market, such as *Lavatera* × *clementii* 'Burgundy Wine' and 'Candy Floss'; *Spiraea japonica* 'Candlelight', 'Firelight', and 'Whitegold'; *Caryopteris* × *cladonensis* 'First Choice', and *Ceratostigma willmottianum* 'Lice', Forest Blue™ Chinese plumbago.

I have also spotted sports such as *Choisya ternata* 'Lich', Sundance™ Mexican orange, though all I found was a very small leaf with an incomplete white edge. I rooted the piece and eventually forced a growth out of the leaf axil and out came a

golden shoot. I have many new plants from various sources currently being evaluated and aim to continue to introduce new and exciting plants to the industry.

There is no point producing plants without having a target market. My own customer market has been developed over many years, and although I do not meet all of the nursery's customers myself now, I still like to talk to as many as I can because it is through these conversations that I hear what kinds of plants are wanted and can try to meet these demands. It is important for any nursery that wants to make a business of introducing new plants to bring potential customers to visit their trials and obtain the market's reaction to potential introductions.

If the climate changes as predicted as a result of global warming, then the industry may well need to grow different crops. In recent years the bedding plant industry has introduced many new species that have been taken up by the gardening public. This has also happened to a lesser extent in the herbaceous market but less so with trees and shrubs. The crop mix may also have to be modified in the light of future restrictions on, for example, the use of peat in growing media or the amount of irrigation water that can be used either on production nurseries or in our customers' gardens.

One thing that remains constant is that this industry is still an exciting one. Our products are bringing a great deal of pleasure to and improving the lives of a vast number of people.