### ORGANIC CUT FLOWER GROWING

by Arjen Huese

Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> January 2012 2 pm Organic Producers Conference Birmingham

### WHO IS ARJEN?

- Biodynamic grower since 1995
- Living in the UK since 2002
- Teacher organic
   horticulture at
   Biodynamic
   Agricultural College
- Growing cut flowers since 2006





# INTERNATIONAL CUT FLOWER TRADE

- Total retail value £26-39 billion
- Consumption: Germany (22%), US (15%), UK (10%), France (10%), Netherlands (9%), Japan (6%), Italy (5%) and Switzerland (5%)
- 2004: 64% of all value traded in Netherlands, 14% in Colombia and 7% in Ecuador
- 80% of Dutch flowers are exported







### FACTS AND FIGURES UK

- Average spend on flowers: £28 per person per year, up from £8 in 1984 (in Europe: £60-100 per person per year)
- Supermarkets have increased their share from 4% in the mid-80's to 65% in 2007
- Florists mark their flowers up 100-200%
- Total UK cut flower and pot plant market is worth £2.2 billion (music industry: £2 billion)
- 90% of cut flowers sold in the UK are imported up from 80% in 2000 and 55% in 1990



## WHY WOULD WE GROW ORGANIC CUT FLOWERS?

- Increasing awareness of "flower miles"
- Increasing awareness of human and environmental misery of cut flower production in Kenya, Colombia and Ecuador
- Growers going out of business in the UK and the Netherlands
- Fuel prices rising, flower prices rising
- Euro : Sterling exchange rate: price increase
- It is fun!

Lake Naivasha in Kenya, or what's left of it after 60 flower farms used it for irrigation...



# UK (2006) BEST SELLING:

- 1. Rose
- 2. Carnation
- 3. Lily
- 4. Chrysanthemum
- 5. Narcissus/Daffodil
- 6. Tulip
- 7. Freesia
- 8. Sunflower
- Alstroemeria
- 10. Gladiolus

#### MOST POPULAR:

- 1. Rose
- 2. Lily of the Valley
- 3. Freesia
- 4. Sweet Pea
- 5. Alstroemeria
- 6. Gerbera
- 7. Tulip
- 8. Narcissus/Daffodil
- Dendrobium orchid
- 10. Hyacinth



### MARKETS

#### You can sell to:

- Consumers
- Retailers (florist's shops)
- Wholesalers / supermarkets





# HOW TO APPROACH FLORIST/WHOLESALER

- Ring first, ask for good time to visit
- Be prepared, look professional
- Bring photographs, samples, list, prices
- Agree how you make contact (phone, email) and how often (weekly, twice weekly)
- Agree on packing and transport
- Agree on invoicing and payment



#### WHAT FLORISTS FIND IMPORTANT:

- 1. Species
- 2. Stem length
- 3. Colour
- 4. Vase life
- 5. Scent
- 6. British grown
- 7. Locally grown
- 8. Organic



### TOP SPECIES WEALDEN FLOWERS:

Sweet Peas: 30% (41%)

Mixed Buckets: 21%

Sunflowers: 14% (8%)

Peonies: 5% (12%)

Dahlias: 4% (8%)

Sweet William: 4% (2%)

Roses: 3% (2%)

Hydrangea 3%

Stachys 2%

Zinnia: 2% (7%)

Antirrhinum (snapdragon): 2% (4%)

Amaranthus: 1% (3%)

Hypericum: 1% (2%)





### DIFFERENT TYPES OF CROPS:

- Bulb flowers (tulips, alliums, gladioli, etc)
- Annuals (sunflowers, sweet pea, zinnia, etc)
- Biennials (sweet william, Canterbury bells)
- Perennials (peony, eryngium, delphinium, etc)
- Hardy shrubs (hypericum, roses, senecio, hydrangea, lilacs, etc)



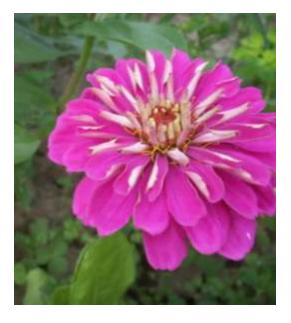


### ANNUALS

- Sweet pea, sunflower, zinnia, amaranthus, celosia, antirrhinum, etc
- Grown like vegetables: usually sown in modules, transplanted, weeding, harvesting
- Need to buy seed every year (unless growing some of your own seeds), but usually profitable and easy crops









### BIENNIALS

- Sweet william, Canterbury bells, etc
- Grown from seed in year 1, overwinter in the ground, flower early next year
- Early flowers
- More work and chance of outwintering (frost, drowning)







#### PERENNIALS

- Peony, eryngium, delphinium, achillea, etc
- Popular, high value flowers
- Can be grown from seed or buy plants
- Seed grown will usually take two years or more before flowers appear
- Weeds can be a big problem: recommended grown in mulch fabric









### HARDY SHRUBS

- Roses, hypericum, hydrangea, senecio, lilac, etc.
- Foliage or flowers
- Can be grown from cuttings or buy plants
- Weeds can be a big problem: recommended grown in mulch fabric or apply large quantities of organic mulch
- Roses very difficult market









### PROFITABLE?

As always, this depends on many factors:

- markets markets markets (florists, wholesalers)
- choose the right crops, varieties, colours
- don't be sentimental: rotavate in what doesn't work
- be professional: sleeves, buckets, pricing, consistent quality, reliable service
- did I mention markets?





