

ORGANIC CUT FLOWER GROWING

by Arjen Huese

Wednesday 18th 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
9. 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
9. Dendrobium orchid
10. Hyacinth

Source: Flowers & Plants Association 2006



MARKETS

You can sell to:

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



HOW TO APPROACH FLORIST/WHOLESALE

- ◉ 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: rotate in what doesn't work
- ◉ be professional: sleeves, buckets, pricing, consistent quality, reliable service
- ◉ did I mention markets?



