

**Press Pack: Plant Fairs Roadshow RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2024
KENT/SUSSEX/HERTFORDSHIRE/BATH**

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The Plant Fairs Roadshow (PFR) returns to the Floral Marquee in 2024 with new nurseries joining the co-operative for the first time.

- **Derry Watkins (based in Bath) to return to Chelsea after 25 years**
- **Micro-nurseries (not usually at the large flower shows) able to come to Chelsea thanks to the support of the PFR**
- **To include an educational display on how to grow and propagate acers from seed**
- **Two of the nurseries are completely 'off-grid' without mains electricity or water**
- **'Contemplation' and mental health a theme, as well as sustainability and growing exotics off-grid**

Returning after 25 years away from Chelsea, celebrated nursery woman Derry Watkins (*Special Plants*) will join small and micro-nurseries from **Kent and Sussex** as part of the Plant Fair's Roadshow (PFR) co-operative display with her collection of unusual hardy and tender perennials plants from around the world.

The PFR put on the first ever cooperative stand in the floral marquee in 2023 in order to help nurseries who wouldn't otherwise have exhibited at the world's most famous flower show.

After capturing the public's imagination, and attracting new nurseries to join them, the collective of smaller nurseries will commandeer a larger corner of the Marquee this year and provide a space for even micro-nurseries to exhibit their world-beating plants.

As part of the PFR, nurseries will include Daisy Roots (*Hertfordshire*), Pelham Plants (*E Sussex*), Plantbase (*Kent*), Swallowfields Nursery (*Kent*), Miles Japanese Maples (*W Sussex*), Special Plants (*Wiltshire*) and The No Name Nursery (*Kent*).

A Chelsea veteran, Annie Godfrey of Daisy Roots in Hertfordshire, who is coordinating the nurseries says: "Chelsea offers an invaluable platform for us as individual businesses and as a group and we are hoping to build on the success of last year.

"In fact 2023 was a first time for many of the nurseries involved in the Plant Fairs Roadshow exhibition and we used smaller stands, however for 2024 we are going bigger - doubling the size - with 3 metre circle stands (7.3metres squared each) and filling our space with even more plants."

Paul Seaborne of Pelham Plants in West Sussex was a first-time exhibitor in 2023 as part of the Plant Fairs Roadshow cooperative, he says: "it's going to be wonderful to return in 2024 and show the huge variety of plants and specialist expertise that our plant fairs cooperative can bring to venues across the South East, from drought tolerant planting schemes to spring woodland and more."

Last at Chelsea in 1999 with her 'Special Plants', Derry Watkins is known for her umbels, salvias and tender perennials, she says: "It's fun to be involved in 2024 - doing it with the Plant Fairs Roadshow makes it much more do-able (it's exhausting doing it on your own) and I'm coming back to Chelsea purely because I can do it as part of a team."

Members of the exhibition team are 'micro nurseries', who set up and run their successful small businesses from their back gardens. Miles Japanese Maples run by Miles Hayward, near Arundel in West Sussex, is just one of the micro's involved. Miles went to Chelsea in 2023 for the first time with his maples and is looking forward to building on the experience in 2024. Alongside him will be Rachael Castle of Swallowfields, another micro nursery owner, from Ashford in Kent. Rachael's shady plants wowed Chelsea visitors when she created her first ever exhibit as part of the Plant Fairs Roadshow last year (2023).



The Plant Fairs Roadshow will be in the Floral Marquee in 2024.
For further information, images and interview, contact Vikki Rimmer
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IMAGES: <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/1htaeejnxylbfdv7tu59e/h?rlkey=e8cj48q7aseiophb5ybxxyzcj&dl=0>

Derry Watkins 'Special Plants' - Cold Ashton, Wiltshire
Returning after 20 years away from Chelsea. Derry specialises in umbels, salvias and tender perennials from her beautiful nursery near Cold Ashton in Wiltshire. Fantastic views from the site.

Daisy Roots - Annie Godfrey - Hertford in Hertfordshire
Showcasing a selection of drought tolerant perennials and grasses. Daisy Roots nursery celebrates their 21st birthday this year.

Plantbase - Graham Blunt - Wadhurst, Kent
Producing a display featuring plants that can grow in drought, flooding, cold and boiling climates. Graham's nursery is 'off-grid' (with no mains electricity) in Wadhurst, Kent.

Pelham Plants - Paul Seaborne - Laughton, East Sussex
Specialises in hardy herbaceous perennials and grasses that grow well in a clay garden. Including Geranium phaeum, Hucherella, Epimedium, Luzula and Athyrium hybrids interspersed with grasses.

Swallowfields Nursery - Rachael Castle, Ashford, Kent
A selection of unusual perennials that perform well in dappled shade; predominantly plants with a range of interesting leaf colours, shapes and textures. Bringing several different impatiens.

Miles Japanese Maples - Miles Hayward, South Downs, Sussex
Lindley educational display focusing on the cultivation and propagation of much-loved acer and maple trees.

No Name Nursery - Steve Edney and Louise Dowle, Sandwich in Kent (Experienced Chelsea exhibitors)
Exotic display of mostly hardy and half-hardy trees, shrubs and perennials focusing on leaf shape, colours and textures.

Short Q&A's with the exhibitors:

Paul Seaborne Pelham Plants, East Sussex

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Paul Seaborne is the coordinator of the Plant Fairs Roadshow. He runs his own 2 acre nursery Pelham Plants from the village of Laughton in the Sussex Weald.



Paul's Chelsea exhibit will take the theme of 'Contemplation' and illustrate Paul's own thoughts about mental health and the broader need for mental health awareness. Inspired by 'Sue Start-Smiths 'The Well Gardened Mind'', Paul will try to "represent in my allotted 3m diameter, a cool shaded glade where I can sit as an escape from the heat of the poly tunnels on the nursery and a distraction from the 101 jobs that need doing on my small nursery in West Sussex!"

The plant palette will be cool with soft-coloured flowers and calming greens of foliage and fern. A central bench will be partially hidden by the dense planting. You may find a cup of tea perched on the bench with a neglected 'To-do' list or well-thumbed copy of the above book perhaps.

“Most of the people involved in the Plant Fairs Roadshow are small nurseries and many are sole traders. You’ll find people who’ve taken a career change or sought escape (in my case from the classroom/office) to start their dream job. However, I/we all do need to be reminded that we changed our occupations for a reason, and to reflect on why we do what we do. I know how much I am motivated by the sight on the nursery of new seedlings, of emerging perennials and flower buds bursting to life. But I also know that at busy times I can be overwhelmed by the emails, calls and lists of jobs still to be done, to the extent that the joy of new life can go unheeded. Having a few moments in the garden is so important but may be less often experienced when your workplace is where you live. So, my Chelsea design will represent me taking time to clear my mind, watching the wildlife mind its own business, whilst I forget mine.”

Rachael Castle: Swallowfields Nursery

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Micro nursery near Ashford Kent

Rachael says: “I will be displaying plants that enjoy dappled-shade, and also using containers to show how you can create height. I’m always keen to show people that you



don't only need to use your patio pots only on the patio - they can be used effectively to create height in shady borders.”

Rachael is currently nurturing plants (on her micro nursery in Ashford) with interesting foliage. She says: “I am drawn to plants with interesting foliage like hardy impatiens. My display will be 80% green with 20% colour - in accents. I enjoy showing ground cover plants ‘elevated’ so that you can physically see the beauty of the underside of these often ignored plants. They have so much interest and colour.”

Rachael’s nursery is small but perfectly formed - It comprises of one large greenhouse which utilises the bottom half of her plot. The top half showcases the plants Swallowfields grows for the NGS.

Chelsea challenge: Rachael says: “To get interesting shady plants to flower on cue for Chelsea is difficult - and trying to keep the anemones back will be tricky!”

Miles Hayward: Miles Japanese Maples

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Storrington, West Sussex

Miles has been growing Japanese maples for over twenty years and in 2016, decided to set up his own micro-nursery in West Sussex. He specialises in *Acer palmatum*, growing over 100 cultivars, many of which are rare or unusual. In the last few years the range has increased to include a selection of other *Acer* species, grown from seed of known provenance and collected by Miles himself. The nursery has been peat-free and pesticide-free since its inception and now uses only organic fertilisers in the compost mix.

In 2023 Miles exhibited at RHS Chelsea for the first time as part of the Plant Fairs Roadshow, with an educational Lindley display titled ‘*Acer palmatum*: From seed to tree’ which aimed to encourage and inspire visitors



to try growing their own maples from seed.

The display was well-received but Miles he said: “there were a lot of general questions about growing and caring for *Acer* and so my RHS Chelsea exhibit for 2024 will also be a Lindley display but this time, the focus will be on the cultivation and propagation of these much-loved trees.”

Miles adds: “From propagation by seed or grafting to how to prune or when to re-pot, I hope to create a display that will give visitors the confidence to grow more trees and care for them in the best possible way.

“I have more space than last time, nearly double the size of last year, so I’ll have a nice feature tree in the centre to provide height and interest to the display, around which there will be other maples at various ages along with plenty of information, tips and ideas about how to grow these beautiful trees successfully. My main problem is going to be fitting it all in!”

Derry Watkins ‘Special Plants’, Cold Aston Wiltshire

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Returning after 25 years away from Chelsea, celebrated nursery woman Derry Watkins (Special Plants) will join the Plant Fair's Roadshow(PFR) co-operative display with her collection of unusual hardy and tender perennials plants from around the world

Author of two books on greenhouse gardening, Derry has introduced many new plants from her trips to South Africa. She also runs courses from her nursery in Cold Ashton, Wiltshire.

For the first ten years of her gardening life Derry grew vegetables, then she began growing flowers and “quite quickly there weren’t so many vegetables any more”.

“I like tall plants, and plants with lots of colour. I find plants all over the world, wherever I go, I go looking out in the wild, talk to people.”

Derry grows a lot of plants from seed and uses annuals in her garden. Derry’s nursery and garden near Bath in England was purchased in 1996 as a derelict barn surrounded by muddy fields, she has since converted it into a thriving garden, home and business.

Known for her umbels, salvias and tender perennials, Derry says of her return to RHS Chelsea: "It's fun to be involved in 2024 - doing it with the Plant Fairs Roadshow makes it much more do-able and I'm coming back to Chelsea because I can do it as part of a team.”

Annie Godfrey, Daisy Roots Nursery, Hertford

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Hertford, Hertfordshire

Annie will also be unveiling a plant that will hopefully be in the Plant of The Year competition in the pavilion "every year there is a Plant of The Year competition in the floral marquee and in partnership with a breeder we are introducing a new scabious ; Scabiosa Kudo Blue and that will be seen for the first time in our display and judged against other new plants this year."

Annie is a garden designer and owner of Daisy Roots Nursery in Hertford.

Annie describes the nursery as “an eclectic collection of plants in a field on the outskirts of Hertford.” She runs the nursery with her ‘long suffering partner’ Steve Machin.



Annie has a lovely garden with sprawling summer perennials with intense colour, a wide gravel path and pots with resting plant combinations.

Annie will be taking her plants and eye for colour to RHS Chelsea as part of the Plant Fairs Roadshow.

Annie says: “Chelsea offers an invaluable platform for us as individual businesses and as a group and we are hoping to build on the success of last year. In fact 2023 was a first time for many of the nurseries involved in the Plant Fairs Roadshow exhibition and we used smaller stands, however for 2024 we are going bigger - doubling the size - with 3 metre circle stands (7.3metres squared each) and filling our space with even more plants.”

Graham Blunt/ Plantbase Wadhurst, Kent

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Graham Blunt runs his nursery Plantbase in the village of Wadhurst in Kent - it's 'off-grid' and isn't connected to mains electricity. Which is surprising as he is a specialist grower of exotics.



Graham will be exhibiting his exotics as part of the *Plant Fairs Roadshow* co-operative stand at RHS Chelsea Flower Show in 2024.

Graham's exhibit will take the form of a 3x3 metre circle that he says will "feature plants that can take drought, flooding, freezing and even boiling! They are plants of horticultural interest only as I'm not there to sell but to showcase.

Always a challenge preparing for the shows, Graham says: "The weather is always a challenge - we are off-grid at the nursery. That combined with being skint at the moment!"

Desert plants and exotics aren't a staple at the Chelsea Flower Show so Graham is well-known there among the plant-growing community for pulling out the stops.

Graham on the PFR: "there are 8 of us, working together to create something special that showcases each of our specialities and also illustrates our love for each others work and the fact that at the end of the day, we are friends who see each other throughout the plant fair season and it's only right that we see each other through Chelsea!"

Plants for climate change

Graham Blunt is the owner of Plantbase Nursery, a one acre site in Wadhurst on the Kent and East Sussex border. A founding member of the PFR, Graham grows his entire stock of plants completely off-grid with the help of solar energy. He grows plants that are both resilient to drought and flooding.

He says "my exhibit is about plants for climate change. My plants herald from around the world and I grow them in various categories: tropical, prairie, desert, jungle, waterside and Mediterranean. But the thing that unites and interests me the most are plants that can withstand prolonged climate extremes - drought tolerant, flood resistant, able to cope with both heat and cold. These plants are essential now more than ever with the threat of climate change."

Graham witnessed climate change first hand at the age of 12 on the outskirts of Rio De Janeiro in Brazil.

He explains "we moved to Brazil with my father who was working there. We lived two streets away from the Copacabana. Even as a 12-year-old I could see the impact we had on our environment - I could see on the outskirts of Rio the authorities cut down the forest to grow coffee, and how stupid it was as it was washed away. From that moment I became aware of our impact on the planet. That's what got me into growing plants."

Graham will be taking resilient cacti (*Echinocereus polyacanthus*) that thrive in clay soil outdoors, tough begonias (*Grandis evansiana*), a tea tree oil myrtle (*squamea*) that can withstand minus 23 degrees, and 'bomb-proof' weigelas. He says: "the weigela is such a brutal plant and easy to grow - you can put them literally anywhere and they'll survive!"

Graham explains why it's so important to work together as a group of nurseries: "it makes life so much easier, it's better to be cooperative rather than rivals or to be on your own. We can bounce off each other."

The group will be chasing medals, with the exception of Graham who says: “for me it’s not about the medal, it’s about the message...”

Steve Edney and Louise Dowle: The No Name Nursery Near Sandwich, Kent

Steve Edney and Lou Dowle are no strangers to the RHS Chelsea Flower Show - former gold medal winners and innovators, the duo will be bringing The No Name Nursery (they’re nursery in Sandwich) to RHS Chelsea 2024 with the Plant Fairs Roadshow.

In 2019 Steve and Louise bought a parcel of land 3 acres in size and set about creating their dream nursery.

They says “we are gardeners first and growers second.” They love to share their passion by selling via the Plant Fairs Roadshow events across the South East from February - September.

The creation of their Long Border (100m by 6m) at The No Name Nursery is something they’re incredibly proud of - planted in a limited colour scheme of purple and blues, planted for late summer and winter seed heads. The border isn’t cut back until March - providing structure year round.

Steve was the former head gardener of the award winning Salutation for 17 years in Sandwich. Holders of 4 national collections between them, their persicaria virginiana, dark leaved dahlias, pseudopanax and plectranthus show the pedigree of their growing skills.

The duo say: “we don’t want to be pigeon-holed into one group of plants but we have a real love of perennials and exotics so you’ll always see those in our display.”

Lou is dedicated to being sustainable and everything on site is recycled, including home-made green waste mulch which is applied to counter water loss. The nursery is off grid including their water supply which comes from a bore hole.



Giant elephant and largest pseudopanax in the UK

Already gold medal holders in their own right Steve Edney and Louise Dowle are the owners of the 'No Name Nursery' in Sandwich in Kent and this year they will be going big by taking the largest pseudopanax in the UK to display and also placing a giant elephant at the centre of their stand.

Louise explains: "the elephant has a hollow middle and we will be planting his belly!"

Support

Steve says "it's great to have the support of our fellow nurseries and to do this together, to bounce things off each other, Chelsea can be a bit much otherwise! There's so much riding on it. If we work together though we can relieve each other and go home and water our plants in our small nursery, ensuring our businesses keep running while we attend the most prestigious flower show in the world ."

Louise Dowle explains that it's not been plain sailing this winter growing for the show, with prolonged wet conditions affecting lots of nurseries. "it's been a difficult start to the season with very little sun but we are feeling positive about the pseudopanax from the National Collection and we will be taking lots of exotics with us for the stand."

IMAGES: <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/1htaeejnxyibfdv7tu59e/h?rlkey=e8cj48q7aseiophb5ybxyizcj&dl=0>

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