



RHS

RHS Chelsea Flower Show's Great Pavilion: Tips and Trends Report



Introduction

A long-held staple of the 113 year old show, the Great Pavilion exhibits world leaders in horticulture, curating some of the most interesting, unique and innovative plants and florals that is now the centrepiece of RHS Chelsea Flower Show.

Holding several National Collections and individual specimens of huge importance and research, visitors to the Great Pavilion have consistently been captivated by the colour and variety brought into the space. Growers and nurseries go to great lengths, employed a variety of tactics and travelled huge distances to ensure their blooms are ready for the show.

This year, the RHS has compiled a report of trends that Growers and Nurseries exhibiting at the 2026 Show have seen and are anticipating, as well as their own tips on how home gardeners can create their own RHS Chelsea Gold Medal gardens in their own spaces.



Guy Barter Chief Horticulturist at the RHS:

The Great Pavilion holds an amazing array of specialist plant nurseries, National collections of garden plants, astonishingly lavish floral displays from around the world and informative exhibits of horticultural science.

The nurseries and collections use many ingenious and skilled tricks involving coldstores and greenhouses to hold back and advance their plants to be sure of peak quality for late May.

Cosmos

British Cosmos

Treat 'em mean keep 'em keen

Cosmos are perfect for home gardeners – despite being none-native, they are able to flower as early as April, going right up until the first frosts. This has the hugely beneficial effect of extending the pollinator season.

A common problem faced by growers is Cosmos failing to flower – British Cosmos advises that a likely cause of this is too much feed with nitrogen. Nitrogen stimulates rapid vegetative growth, which tricks the plant into focusing energy on growing taller rather than producing blooms. Treating Cosmos meaner can combat this issue.

Did you know? Cosmos have the unique and unusual ability to cut methane in cows when fed to them.

Jonathan Sheppard

jonathan@britishcosmos.com

Delphiniums

Home Farm Plants

The changing climate has meant that the flowering time of delphiniums has also shifted. Traditionally delphiniums are at their peak flowering time mid-June, but excessive heat can make them go over within 2 weeks.

Slugs are a common topic when talking about Delphiniums. Good husbandry helps with slug control i.e. thinning delphiniums growth, using grit and generally keeping an eye out of pest damage.

Delphiniums need staking. Home Farm Plants recommends using three canes around the leaf line tied up with twine therefore forming a cage which allows movement. Using grit at the base of the plant deters slugs. When a mature delphinium has many potential flower spikes, removing the weaker stems can offer more opportunity for the thicker stems to mature.

Graham Austin

homefarmplants@gmail.com

Peonies

Letham Plants

Usually two separate forms, Intersectional Peonies offer a cross between a tree (woody) peony and a herbaceous peony and provide advantageous traits. The low growing and spectacularly floriferous peony combined with the tree peonies which are rangy shrubs result in a robust herbaceous peony. Introduced in the 1970s after a breeding programme started by Dr Itoh in the 1940s, the plants don't need staking and the foliage lasts through to the autumn.



Paeonia 'Bartzella'

The yellow Bartzella is one of the better-known yellow varieties and produces a side bud which extends through the flowering season and has huge supporting double flowers.

Caroline Samuel

lethamplants@hotmail.co.uk

Primrose Hall Plants

Patience is a virtue

A frequent problem faced by peony growers is trouble flowering which could be several problems – and solutions! Peonies need to be planted shallowly- too deep or with the crown covered may leave them struggling to bloom. Peonies can thrive for 90-100 years and don't tolerate shade well, so preventing surrounding plants from blocking sunlight is important for ensuring flowering. Finally – this flower can take up to five years to flower reliably, so when purchasing it's advisable to spend on a plant that's at least five years old.

Primrose Hall Plants' most popular bloom is *Sarah Bernhardt* – a highly recognisable sugar-pink flower with a delicate raspberry frill edge, its highly fragrant variety. Often thought of as an “heirloom” plant, passed down through generations and closely tied to special moments like wedding bouquets and family celebrations.



***Paeonia lactiflora* 'Sarah Bernhardt'**

Louisa Hopwood

louisa@amandaaustinflowers.co.uk

Pelargoniums

Greenways Pelargoniums

Plants need the heating on too

Pelargoniums are diverse group of plants blooms with scented leaves that have grown in popularity over the last 5-10 years, while a new appreciation for the rarer members of the genus has evolved over the zonal forms otherwise known as ‘bedded geraniums’ that have flooded garden centres over the last 200 years.

Keeping the plants frost free and on the dry side is very important when the weather is cooler. App controlled thermostats are great choices for having great control of the heating in greenhouses. It can be useful to optimise the natural light level in the winter, however, they need shade in the summer if kept indoors.

Luci Skinner

luci.greenways@gmail.com

Kevock Garden Designs

Joyful colours sell increasingly well – shades of tangerine, lemon, pinks and pastels remain popular with customers who are using florals for mood boosters. Kevock's most asked about flower is the *Meconopsis* – the Himalayan blue Poppy that grows in the mountainous landscape of the Himalayas and is suited to northern UK climates.



***Meconopsis betonicifolia*
(Himalayan blue poppy)**

Flower Farms

Flowers from the Farm

Ranunculus has a reputation as being tricky to grow – however planting them in relatively free-draining soil and keep the frost off leaves them as excellent focal flowers for a spring cut flower garden. When struggling to get them to sprout, the answer is to soak the claws (corms) overnight in cool water before popping them in a tray of light compost to sprout – once they have a small head of green leaves they are ready to plant out.

Blush and apricot tones have been popular for several years and continue to be so. Many flowers grown from the farm go into wedding bouquets and the popularity of the blush theme for weddings is not relaxing.

Did you know? Ranunculus is called the Rose of Spring as they fill the spot in floristry while florists wait for actual roses to bloom.

Georgie Newbery
georgie@commonfarmflowers.com

Roses

David Austin Roses

Strong waters grow deeper roots

Gardeners are increasingly being drawn to softer colour palettes such as blush pinks, warm apricots and creamy whites. There is a strong demand for pollinator-friendly varieties.

For best blooms, home growers are advised to water deeply rather than little and often to encourage strong roots that grow downwards in the soil. To encourage generous flowering and strong growth, position roses in a plot where they will receive a minimum of four hours of sunlight in midsummer.

help@davidaustinroses.com

Clematis

Raymond Evison Clematis

The colour popularity of Clematis varies by region – in the South East England, pale and white Clematis remain extremely popular whilst other regions in the UK prefer brighter tones such as reds and purples. The reduction in the average garden size over the decades has not been a problem for Raymond Evison Clematis as the plant is perfect for containers and only grows to around 1-1.5 metres.

Hostas

Jonathan Hogarth's Miniature Hosta

A Slug Masterclass

Tackling slugs and snails is a persistent problem many gardeners face, but there are ways to manage them. A method using a terracotta pot includes lining it with either a smell pedal bin liner or painting the inside with a 'toy safe' clear varnish used for painting children's toys (its plant-friendly). Plant the Hosta in the pot and filled up with compost 20mm from the rim. According to the nursery, since the terracotta pot is always kept dry by the varnish coat inside the pot or bag, slugs and snails cannot climb the pot as the mucus trail used to climb is absorbed by porous terracotta. This also prevents terracotta absorbing moisture when watering so all water is directed to the Hosta.

Miniature Hostas are increasingly becoming popular as gardens become smaller. Blue Mouse Ears are recommended as it's a fast grower, has thick leaves and does well in garden soil and a pot. In Autumn Hosta leaves die off and it becomes dormant – a top tip is to not let the soil completely dry out – keep it moist and the plant will revive in Spring.



Hosta 'Blue Mouse Ears'

minihostaman@gmail.com

Mike's Hostas

Small is Mighty

Mike's Hostas, in the process of becoming a National Collection and has similarly noticed an increasing interest in miniatures as people with smaller garden spaces get into gardening. In fact, Mike looks to dispel the myth that size is everything. 140 varieties are classified as 'fragrant flowers' which are promoted by the nursery, and with over 7,000 registered varieties and 20,000 unregistered varieties, there are certainly a lot to choose from.

Mike Hosta
mike@hostas.co.uk

Cacti

Ottershaw Cacti

Prickly... and friendly

Aeoniums are extremely popular with Ottershaw Cacti's customers – the vivid stripes of variegation are very impactful and highly sought after. Species Green Witch, Pink Witch, Medusa and Variegated Firecracker are among the most popular. Many aeonium varieties can be bred in the UK and are happy outside during the summer, returning to a

bright location in a home during the winter They also don't need much water and can be left to dry out between waterings, but must not get bone dry.

Bark Free compost, which is mixed in-house by Ottershaw Cacti, is of increasing interest to customers – it is perfect for plants that are from a dry landscape where a rich bark filled compost is not right for them. These plants are looking for the stability that a more mineral rich compost delivers.



Aeonium 'Pink Witch'

Daniel Jackson

daniel.jackson@ottershawcacti.com

Malus

Frank P. Matthews

Many gardeners are unaware of the possibilities of growing trees in pots. Malus displays generate considerable interest as the public are unaware that with the right subject of Malus, which is perfect, it is easy to do and is emerging as a growing trend. Trained fruit forms such as Espalier and Fans are increasingly of interest to amateur gardeners.

Steph Dunn James

Steph@fpmatthews.co.uk

Vegetables

She Grows Veg Ltd

And so can everyone else...

Unusual vegetables that are different in looks and colour are a rising trend for those interested in growing vegetables at home. The bestselling colour for tomatoes, carrots and chillies is black, whilst in contrast, customers are also becoming attracted to pink chicory, purple cauliflower and unusual coloured radishes. A personal favourite for She Grows Veg is the Mangelwurz. Fun and easy to grow, it's also foolproof which has even given it a trend on social media.

Kate Cotterill

kate@shegrowsveg.com

Ornamental Grasses

Ashcroft's

Natural planting needs grassing up

As natural themed planting continues to become increasingly popular, Ashcroft's is seeing a surge in large structural grasses ordered in higher quantities. According to them, grasses provide the backbone for natural themed planting schemes, so customers now buy in tens rather than threes.

Chris Ashcroft

info@ashcroftsperennials.co.uk

Aquatic Plants

Lincolnshire Pond Plants

Green water? Your pond needs sunglasses

A common problem for gardeners that own a pond is how to cope with green water caused by algae. If a pond is less than 3m x 3m then sourcing a few bags of water cress from the supermarket and floating it on the top of the pond will clear it within two and half weeks. In larger ponds, a hint of pond dye is recommended as completely safe to all creatures and plant life and will provide 'sunglasses' to the pond. The dye prevents the sunlight reacting with the nutritious water, buying the plants time to work on eating all of the excess nutrients in the water.



Botomus umbellatus

Lincolnshire Pond Plants have noticed a rise in native plants alongside the increasing understanding of the importance of attracting wildlife into a garden. *Botomus umbellatus* is emerging as popular for dragonflies and native, while *Menyanthes trifoliata* is a rafting plant for frogs and newts.

Dawn Fisher

dawnfisher2019@gmail.com

Disclaimer:

The views expressed are that of the corresponding nursery and not of the RHS, unless specified. For further information on individual advice and information provided, please contact the nursery directly.

The RHS is not liable for the success or failure for any plant impacted by the advice given in this report.

For media enquiries, please contact showspr@rhs.org.uk.

About the RHS

We're the UK's gardening charity, helping people and plants to grow.

Our mission is to be there on people's lifelong journey with gardening – to bring happiness, health, stronger communities and a thriving natural world.

With 220 years of experience, we support gardeners of all ages with expert advice, community and schools projects, scientific research, professional qualifications, our five RHS Gardens, and events including the iconic RHS Chelsea Flower Show.

For more information visit www.rhs.org.uk

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