

Scotland's **GARDENS** Scheme OPEN FOR CHARITY

Plant Sales Information

Organisers sharing “How to” Advice

While you are planning for next year's activity, have you considered starting an SG Plant Sale for your district? Below in this information sheet are tips from other organisers about their experience running plant sales. Successful plant sales take a few years to establish, but can be very worthwhile.

HOLDING A SUCCESSFUL PLANT SALE, Sue Thornley Garden Owner from Dunbartonshire

The timing of a plant sale depends on what you are intending to sell. Some plants such as rhododendrons are in flower in May, others such as herbaceous material look best in summer and trees and some shrubs look best in early autumn displaying their new growth. It is always hard to sell plants that are dying back or yet to emerge from their pot unless they are unusual and sought after, such as erythroniums or trilliums. Of course good weather will encourage visitors but is difficult to plan for this in Scotland.

At Glenarn, we propagate many plants particular to the garden, with collector's numbers or good forms. The individual plant story is important – who collected it originally, when and where, how it grows in the garden and its good and bad points. We propagate for our own use, to give to friends and for sale rhododendrons, magnolias, paeonias and others, aiming to produce specialist plants rarely for sale elsewhere that will grow well in our local area. We also grow magnolias, acers, meconopsis and others from seed selected from specialist societies. We try to have a wide range of plants round our 'Glenarn' theme: trees and shrubs, herbaceous and alpine and several species of primula. These come in a range of sizes and prices, from £2 to £25. We do not sell plants from previous garden openings that can be battered, poorly labelled or are very run of the mill. After a successful sale it may take us at least 3 years before the stock of plants is sufficient to hold another.

Plants for sale must be well potted, clean or bagged if lifted from the nursery bed (rhododendrons) and clearly labelled. We try to give brief descriptions of the most expensive plants, with shape, height, flowering period and colour and any special requirements. Generally it is important to say if a plant is likely to be prolific or invasive or delicate, requiring care.

Two or three knowledgeable helpers are required on the day of the sale. They should be briefed on what is for sale; they do not need to know every plant but be able to understand the range for sale and suggest options for particular locations. Guidance can be provided by reference books, protected from inclement weather, both general and specialist for rhododendrons, acers etc. A sturdy lidded cashbox is essential with some additional labels

plus pencils, bags or boxes and a wheelbarrow for transporting plants to cars. A waterproof marker pen is needed to name bags for later collection.

Advertising the sale is hugely important, using Scotland's Gardens Scheme posters in local shops and centres. Try to place an article about the garden/ plant sale/ charities involved in your local paper a week ahead. Contact the local horticultural society and any specialist groups you may know.

A programme for the 2 months before the sale is essential and calms any rising panic. All timings assume a core stock of plants raised from cuttings, layers or seed or split clumps of herbaceous or alpine material.

- 8 weeks: check the plants and draft a broad list with approximate numbers
(I try for 100 rhododendrons + same number of others, large/small)
- 6 weeks: pot on anything needing it and feed
gather the plants into a holding area (deer proof)
start labelling, create a plant list with sizes
- 2 weeks: inspect rhododendrons and decide which to lift, label when fine
- 1 week: Lift and bag, pot if small
- 1 day: start moving plants to sales area and group into species. (We use the gravel area by the house, tables for small plants, grouping all rhododendrons, trees, shrubs etc)
check everything is labelled (we use pencil)

Check final list, note numbers and sizes with prices (need 2 copies of this)
Group smaller plants into price bands (we don't price the plants individually)

- Afterwards: Thank all the helpers for their support and send a follow up article to the local newspaper with a photograph.

We serve simple teas with cream scones to raise additional funds and hope many of the visitors will also include a walk round the garden.

Julia Young, Area Organiser from Fife

A harbinger of Autumn each year in Fife is the Plant Sale at Hill of Tarvit, the National Trust property outside Ceres.

It is held on the first weekend of October and people travel from far and wide to snap up bargain clumps of perennials, bulbs, potted plants and shrubs. Several plant nurseries set up stalls with their own stock and pay SG a percentage of their takings at the end of the day. We also get several trolleys of beautiful potted plants from Highland Lilliums which we sell on a sale-or-return basis.

A small sub-committee is formed to run the sale made up of committee members from the Fife branch of Scotland's Gardens Scheme and the head gardener and manager from Hill of Tarvit. The National Trust supplies huge tarpaulins on which we pile up and split the clumps of donated plants as well as trestle tables and a marquee to house the people who man the tills on the Sunday.

Prior to the sale, an appeal goes out for fertiliser bags or potato sacks into which we put the hundreds of donated plants which we split into generous sized clumps. We use big black indelible pens to put plant names on all the sacks and it is worth remembering that felt pens, indelible or not, do not work on plastic bags which are wet! It has been known to rain on the days prior to the sale! There is a certain competitive element in examining a large clump of stems and muddy roots and being the first to identify it correctly! And spell it correctly!

On the Friday and Saturday, a small army of volunteers helps split, divide, bag and label the huge selection of plants donated by keen gardeners who find themselves with surplus at the end of the summer, as well as by other National Trust properties. Knowledgeable people (otherwise known as “hortinerds”) are also on hand to help the public with advice about the “right plant for the right place.” We have two types of bags for bare-rooted plants – big bags (fertiliser bags or potato sacks) for clumps of big perennials which, in 2015, cost £5.00 per bag and smaller bags for smaller plants which cost £3.00 each. Previously we could always rustle up piles of old carrier bags but, of course, they are not so easy to come by these days. Spar Supermarket in Ceres very generously gave us dozens of unused carrier bags last year.

Some volunteers choose to help in the preparation and setting-up of the event while others prefer to man the tills on the day of the sale - both jobs equally important. Some volunteers can only spare a couple of hours while others are able to devote three days to help. The help of all these volunteers is invaluable. The queues at the tills on the Sunday are reminiscent of the January sales at Jenners!

Each year Kettle Produce generously donates boxes of fresh vegetables for sale.

The Hill of Tarvit Autumn Sale raises a large amount of money each year for Scotland’s Gardens’ beneficiaries and the gardening public go home with car loads of fantastic bargains, so it’s a win-win situation. And, almost as important, is the wonderful atmosphere on the lawn in front of the house on the day of the sale with people rushing around with wheelbarrows (provided by us and also carefully marked with our names!) piling in bags of bargains, only to reappear and fill up the barrows again! It would be possible to plant up a whole garden with plants from the sale. There is always someone on hand to help people take their booty up to the car park.

At close of play on the Sunday there is a huge sigh of relief and a great sense of a job well done!

Judy Nichol, Area Organiser from Perth

Following is a list of pointers that we have found very useful in the past:

1. Gather your donated plants well in advance when friends will be potting on and splitting plants in the Autumn or spring.
2. Encourage your friends to have the plants in pots with labels
3. Advanced setting up of the plant stall is very time consuming and will need several people who know about plants to organise the plants in various categories i.e. Boggy

plants, herbaceous, Herbs, annuals, shrubs, trees. The plants are better displayed on trestle tables where possible. All this is better done the day before the sale or two days before the sale so receive your plants as soon as you can.

4. Colour labels can then be placed in pots to correspond with a chart displaying the price of the plants. I.e. A purple label for £5, a blue label for £4 etc . Individual plants that might need a specific price will need their own price in the pot.
5. Helpers on the day:
 - a. Several people to help the shoppers.
 - b. Two people on the cash desk, one to remove coloured labels and give price to the second person with a calculator adding the total and taking the money.
 - c. Someone with a barrow to help ferry the plants to the persons car.
6. A good supply of boxes or bags for the plants.
7. Remember the plant stalls are always busy and the helpers will need a cup of tea!
8. All money taken on a plant stall can be gift aided!

Georgina Seymour, retired DO from Peeblesshire

We had a small committee and spread the load over three charities. Each charity provided helpers on the day. Plants with a flower attached are helpful or picture of one. And also suggest a bit of blurb of where it does best, hardy, herbaceous etc.

PLANT SALE HINTS from Trish Kennedy, retired Chairman, Midlothian

- Network re Team – they like to have specific responsibilities – hopefully well spread geographically and socially for max exposure
- Network re Venue – some possible cover a big plus
- Network re plants – talk to everyone and if possible hand out flyers/cards anything to remind people
- Regrettably most buyers really do like plants to be performing – preferably flowering! Choose date carefully and **STICK TO IT** – it will become a feature in gardeners' calendars
- Network re publicity – SG book plus website of course – but individual social media can have a big impact and is much cheaper
- Do not expect huge results in the first year or two – aim to increase every year – keep a careful record of everyone who contributes, in whatever way and however small, they can be contacted in the future and will form the foundation of the all-important data base

Plant sales, by Willie Campbell, garden owner from Stirlingshire

Each year we have a Sunday opening for Scotland's Gardens Scheme and in 2017 this will be the 16th year where we have opened the Garden at Gargunnock House near Stirling. That first year in 2001 I put on my first plant sale, encouraged by Maud Crawford and Helen Younger (who incidentally still run the sale on the day for me, so I can "meet and greet").

Very soon I realised that the plant sales made lots more money than the gate, so each year I prepared more and more plants for the big day. It's essential that plants look healthy (not just potted the day before) and if possible in flower or in bud just ready to flower. Plants must be named and the plant sellers aware of any unusual plant conditions plants may need. Its no good supplying a tender H2 rhododendron to someone living in the highlands,

We grow lots of unusual plants at Gargunock, rhododendrons, azaleas and magnolias to name a few and its true to say some visitors return every year to stock up. Meconopsis is another good seller in Spring, but you will not sell many in Autumn, so you soon realise that if its blooming in the Garden people will ask for it. This year if I was asked once, it was a dozen times for Azalea luteum, the scented yellow azalea. So we have been taking layers of the plants for next year, ready for the next sale.

So what do visitors buy most, we sit down at the end of summer and plan for our plant sales the following year. Hardy geraniums are always a big seller, delphiniums, lupins, campanulas in fact most hardy perennials sell well if and it's a big if in good condition. Hostas, primulas if in flower, know good putting a primula species with a fancy name if not in flower as most will not know it.

So we plan ahead, split and divide in Autumn, take cuttings, plant bulbs in pots, make sure the compost has some slow release in the mix, blood, fish and bone is good. Pot up in spring in decent size pots and put the label in to name that plant.

Because we plan ahead, we now take stalls at other open days, where we sell our specialist plants.