

IPPS European Exchange 2018

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Summary

“Too seek and share” is not only the motto of the International Plant Propagation Society (IPPS), but a foundational principal that the horticulture industry has cultivated for many years. The SR-IPPS (Southern Region of North America) embodies this message with

its “Early-Career SR-IPPS Professional Exchange Program” with the IPPS European Region (ER-IPPS). In 2018 I was selected to represent the SR-IPPS as their delegate. This paper is my report.

INTRODUCTION

“Too seek and share” is not only the motto of the International Plant Propagation Society (IPPS), but a foundational principal that the horticulture industry has cultivated for many years. The SR-IPPS (Southern Region of North America) embodies this message with its “Early-Career SR-IPPS Professional Exchange Program” with the IPPS European Region (ER-IPPS). In 2018, I was selected to represent the SR as their delegate. It was an honor to be chosen and my experience was

one I will cherish for a lifetime. The relationships built and knowledge that was shared will benefit me throughout my career in horticulture.

The program is a two-week exchange where you are hosted by several industry members and given the opportunity to see different elements of horticulture in Europe. It concludes at the annual European IPPS conference. In 2018, the conference was located in Breda, Netherlands. The exchange program began in the United Kingdom and

my hosts treated me with tours and visits to many nurseries and gardens on our way to Breda.

The trip was scheduled to begin on Monday October 1, 2018, but as an avid traveler, I decided to take extra time to visit a friend, and fellow plantsman Colm O'Driscoll in Dublin, Ireland. Colm was a delegate from the ER-IPPS that visited Virginia and the SR-IPPS in 2014 and spent some time at Saunders Brothers. I flew through the night on Friday and he picked me up from the airport early Saturday morning. After a day of exploring Glendalough and the Wicklow Hills NP, we drive over to see the personal garden of renowned gardener, Jimi Blake. His garden is a stunning collection of rare and novel plants, combined in many different styles, including a walk in the woods that leads to a view of the Wicklow Hills.

After my weekend in Dublin, I caught a flight to London and a train out to Worcester to meet my first host, Karl O'Neil. After a lovely dinner, I got to explore the charming town of Malvern. The following morning, we went to Brandsford Webbs Nursery where Karl and his wife work. We were joined by Sophie Lewis, who had been the ER-IPPS delegate to the SR-IPPS conference the year before. Brandsford Webbs was an impressive nursery and greenhouse operation that specializes in *Hebe* production and breeding. Most of their plants were sold to garden centers or other retailers. It was interesting to see how different the market was and how plants were branded in the United Kingdom. Unlike the U.S., there is a lot of in-house branding rather than major national brands.

After a lovely tour, I left with Sophie as we headed to her home in Shropshire, stopping at garden retailers on our way. One of the garden centers we stopped at was Webb Garden Center which is a major buyer of Brandsford Webbs Nursery. Garden centers in the U.K. are much larger and more product-diverse than garden centers in the U.S.

Many of these retailers had clothing, food and other products for sale.

The next morning, we visited Stokesy Court Estate where a husband and wife had turned the old walled garden into a cut flower nursery. Sophie has a special interest in cut flower production, so we both enjoyed learning about it

We left Stokesy Court and went to Frank P. Matthews Nursery where Sophie works full time. Frank P. Matthews is a tree nursery that grows fruit and ornamental trees for retailers. There were acres and acres of trees waiting to be grafted, or freshly grafted. Nick Dunn, a plantsman that has been part of Frank P. Matthews for many years took Sophie and I up to his experimental block of apple varieties where I tasted some of the most delicious and most unique apple varieties I've ever seen!

From Frank P. Matthews Nursery we went to Sophie's "flower patch" which is a small nursery that she is producing cut flowers in her spare time. It was stunning, and you could see how dedicated and passionate she is about horticulture.

The next morning, I said goodbye to Sophie and caught a train to Chichester where I met my next host, Tim Lawrence-Owens. Tim and his Wife, Annette, welcomed me into their home., The next morning, I went to work with Tim at Walberton Nursery. Walberton is part of the Farplants group which oversees sales and marketing for four nurseries that are side by side. These four nurseries work together, each specializing in different types of crops. Many of them were highly mechanized and it was impressive to see what seemed like miles of conveyors and potting lines. All four nurseries ship from one main dispatch area. It was empty at the time, but you could imagine how busy it must get there in the spring.

The next day was a rainy Saturday, so Tim, Annette, and I went over to West Dean

Gardens and wandered through a stunning illustration of English style gardening.

Sunday morning, I said goodbye to Chichester and Tim and I went to the Royal Horticulture Society's Wisley Gardens outside of London where we met my next host, Richard McKenna. Although we only had two hours to explore this magnificent garden, I was still able to see a lot. One of the most notable parts of the garden was the "Thinking Outside the Box" knot garden.

Boxwood have been devastated in Europe over the past few years, first from Boxwood Blight and now from the Boxwood Tree Moth. Boxwood is one of my favorite shrubs, so I was fascinating to see an entire knot garden constructed with boxwood alternatives.

After Wisley, Richard and I went back to his home in Kent, where his wife Zaza and his three children Valentina, Luca, and Marco greeted us. We enjoyed a lovely evening at their house where we had a fire and roasted marshmallows. The next morning, I went to work with Richard to Provender Nursery, a re-wholesale nursery outside of London where many landscapers and retailers can come and purchase plants. It was a much different set up than I was used to, but it was fascinating to see.

The next morning, we left for the IPPS conference in Breda. We left by car and took the tunnel under the channel over to France. On our way to Breda, we visited three nurseries. Richard does a lot of buying of novel plants from different nurseries in Europe. Most of my horticulture experience has been with wholesale nurseries so it was interesting to see how different re-wholesale is.

My favorite nursery we visited was Van der Poel Nursery in Boskoop. This charming, little, Dutch horticulture town is set on channels where there are nurseries and greenhouses all lined up next to one another. William Van der Poel showed us around his beautiful nursery that was filled with unique

plants. He had been a breeder and worked with Proven Winners and he showed us his trial garden. We wandered around until the sunset and we left for Breda.

Wednesday marked the first day of the IPPS conference. The morning was filled with technical talks from growers and breeders all over Europe, followed by nursery tours in the afternoon. We visited two nurseries, the first specializing in tea camellias and some other perennials. One of the most fascinating part about this nursery was the fact that they had spent a lot of resources to establish a marketing campaign around their products, making them very desirable to the consumers and sold at a higher price point. One of these products was simply moss grown in containers, yet it was marketed to be used in fairy and terrarium gardens and they sold thousands. The second nursery was a tree nursery where they showed us how to dig and wrap trees that they shipped all over Europe.

The second day of the conference we enjoyed more talks in the morning. Many of the talks focused on sustainability and the use of plastics in horticulture and how we can use better material and reduce waste. The afternoon was filled with more tours including Florensis, a gigantic greenhouse operation that utilized very high-tech automation. We also visited a nursery that specialized in *Leucothoe* and were selling the for \$99 to the retailer. After our nursery tours we enjoyed a banquet as a group.

The next morning finished with a few more talks and then the conference was over. It was insightful to see different operations and understand the culture around the horticulture industry in different parts of the world. I found horticulture and gardening to be valued higher in Europe than in the U.S. It was eye opening and I hope these are lessons I can take with me throughout my career.

After the IPPS conference I spent more time in the Netherlands and Belgium visiting boxwood growers, and then took a train down to Tours, France to attend a Boxwood Pest and Disease Conference.

All in all, I spent a total of 21 days traveling around Europe, experiencing the horticulture industry in many facets. This was an experience of a lifetime and I am incredibly grateful to IPPS for supporting me and giving me this opportunity and am grateful for all my hosts. This was a truly unforgettable experience and one I will cherish forever.