

Plant Sale 2008

by Robert Auger

One of the major events in the Society's annual programme, the Plant Sale, took place Saturday, 17 May 2008, on a beautiful, sunny spring day. By all standards, the sale was a success: there were nearly 6,500 plants on the tables and volunteers put in more than 500 hours preparing for and staging the event. This year's sale took place earlier than usual and the risks of unwelcome frosts were still very present, yet the turnout was excellent (over 180 sales) although not as high as in some recent years.

To mark the 150th anniversary of our sister organization, the Russell Agricultural Society, it was decided to offer heritage plants, in addition to the standard fare of annuals and perennials. This meant that seeds for these older varieties had to be found and a grower identified who would agree to husband the seeds into sellable plants. The organizers found a company, Floribunda Seeds, which is dedicated to preserving old species of flowers, many of which are the parents of today's modern hybrids. These are the flowers of the English cottage gardens of the past, often salvaged from abbeys and monasteries in the middle ages.

Thanks to Cindy Cluett of Beyond the House, Serres Arundel, in the Quebec Laurentians, agreed to grow the heritage seeds to plant stage. The planting and growing were effective beyond all expectations and the plants on offer this year far outnumbered those of previous years. As a result, old varieties of creeping Gloxinia, tall Snapdragons, Nigellas, Tithonias, Chinese Pagodas, Calendulas ("Orange King"), Bells of Ireland and Zinnia took pride of place among the offerings. A selection of Rudbeckia was also chosen as this our society's emblematic flower. Several flowers suitable for drying were also on sale: Statice, Helichrysum, Gomphrena and Amaranthus. The tall Celosias were chosen over the shorter varieties as they are superb for presentation as cut flowers.

By taking plants from seed and focusing on heritage varieties, the RDHS was breaking new ground. Over this summer, many area gardens are going to produce great new showings of blooms and

colours which they will hopefully share by placing pictures on our website (www.russellgardeners.ca).

This year's sale had a good selection of shrubs available. As in the past, RDHS members contributed their own plants.

Financially, the sale is expected to net revenues in the same range as in past years (around the \$1,500 mark). All remaining plants are still for sale (at Plant Sale prices) from our President, Lindley McPhail. Whatever is left by mid-June will be available for the auction sale at the Society's meeting, Monday evening 16 June.

An event such as the annual Plant Sale is not simply useful in terms of producing funds for the Society. It generates interest and education in horticulture and, generally, encourages sale participants to experiment with new plants. It also brings goodwill to our Society within our community.

We are grateful to all those who spent many hours preparing for it and in particular the members of the committee that was responsible for it: Lindley McPhail, Karen Hewitt, Pegi Holtz, Kirk Othemer and Margaret Helliker.

