

J & A Growers Ltd

Nursery Blog – April 2019

Welcome to the eleventh edition of our Nursery Blog.

Please enjoy some time out from Brexit as that is the only time it will be mentioned or even referred to in this blog!!!!

The last blog was written in May 2018, with no others last summer as there didn't seem to be much positive news to share from then on, from a nursery perspective. The wet spring turned into summer overnight and temperatures soared. The balmy conditions soon took their toll and despite constant watering and trying everything possible to keep the crops growing it just wasn't happening like normal.

It was an unhappy feeling going into the autumn knowing that crops were unusually small for that time of year and were now running out of time to catch up. The situation was the same across the whole of Europe, so smaller trees for customers through the supply chain was the reality. Thankfully the initial conversations with customers were easier than one first feared, growers knew the situation first-hand and traders were understanding.

We knew the Scottish market was going to be strong with woodland creation grants fully allocated for the 2018-19 season, so it came as no surprise that there was an early demand for plants. Some crops were sold before sowing and others well before harvest began. With demand outstripping supply for almost all species, there was an urgency from customers wanting to secure stock, so a strain was put onto growers to be good at their stock takes. Oh my, it was hard enough predicting the number of saleable plants in the crop, never mind trying to predict the size split, there was more variation than ever before.

Hedging sold well and good planting conditions for most of the winter maintained a constant demand. The smaller plants were in demand too as they tend to be more tolerant to drought so an easier sell when some huge losses were being reported from the previous year's plantings. There is a fear that this summer will be even drier than last year as we haven't had the winter rainfall required to bring things back into balance.

The AHDB held a SMARTHort event on 6/7 March 2019 in Stratford-Upon-Avon which was very well attended by the horticultural industry, as well as engineers and academics at the forefront of industrial mechanisation and robotics. It was a thoroughly interesting two days and packed with information from the guest speakers. The rate at which technology is moving in the robotics world is astonishing and having robots working alongside humans in the horticultural workplace will undoubtedly be common practice within the next ten years. Mechanical and robotics engineers are keen to engage with growers to start looking at areas where there is scope to introduce labour saving technologies. There is a massive realisation that manual labour is becoming more difficult to secure. Many horticultural growers reported a big increase in the number of 'no-show' casual workers, and stated they are less willing to stay for the full duration of a placement. See the live stream recordings: <https://ahdb.org.uk/smarthort>

On the Nursery

Harvesting conditions were good for much of the winter with lower than normal rainfall between October and February. There was some welcome rain in mid-October which was needed to soften the ground and it created perfect harvesting conditions which lasted through until early December. This was very fortunate as wet conditions would have made the small plants too challenging for mechanical harvesting which relies upon sufficient top growth for the belts to hold plants whilst the soil is shaken from the roots.

The recent dry weather in March allowed the land to be worked and beds to be raised in good conditions ready for seed sowing. The Oak seeds were first to be sown and we are ready to keep moving as and when the weather allows. Waking up to frost a couple of times this week reminds us there is no mad panic, we want seedlings to emerge then thrive rather than getting a shock and stopping growing.



Nursery beds ready for sowing

Summer Events

Confor NPG AGM (12th & 13th June)

The Nursery Producers Group will be meeting at FERA in York for the annual AGM and a plant health focused meeting with DEFRA officials. It is vital that we all work together within the industry to try and improve biosecurity and reduce the risk of importing diseases such as Xylella.

HTA Tree & Hedging group AGM (25th & 26th June)

The AGM this summer will be held in Warwickshire and during the two days, there will be a tour of Valefresco who are salad producers, growing both under glass and in the field and supplying the supermarket chains through contracts.

Baumschultechnik (27th – 29th August)

Several members of the HTA Tree & Hedging Group will be going on a study tour to Germany. There will be a day of nursery visits followed by a day at the Baumschultechnik show where the focus is innovation.