



British Alstroemaria and the UK cut flower industry by Ben Cross

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Ben's great grandfather started the family business after being involved in a program run by the [Land Settlement Association](#) which was set up in 1934. The LSA had 20 locations around the country where those leaving depressed industrial areas could make a new start in agriculture. Ben's family moved to Sidlesham, south of Chichester, the largest of the LSA sites.

Come 1957 the family moved to Arundel on part of the old Barnham Nursery site and began to grow alstroemaria, of which there are over 50 types. They are what's termed a 'cool' plant to grow in that they only require heating to +13°C in order to succeed; ideal when oil for heating was cheap. Flowers are grown in 30m by 1-2m greenhouse beds and the plants can last 20-30 years. That reduces the amount of replanting required and thus saves on sterilisation processes and labour. Regulations have now banned the use of substances like bromine and so alternatives such as Basamid are used.

Licences have to be paid for each plant that is grown; it's not permitted to split the plants nor sell the flowers without one as the genetic rights belong to the plant breeder.

The greenhouses don't use any artificial light, so the flowers grow up towards natural sunlight, occasionally reaching 7'. Maintenance involves cutting, tucking the plants back in the wire supports, thinning and weeding. Growth peaks come in the spring & autumn; the heat and dryness of the summer limit development.

The nature of the business has also changed over the years. Less is sent to supermarkets these days and there are more direct orders to the nursery, with next day delivery available. Harvested flowers are stored at 6°C, not 0.5°C as done by many other organisations in order to artificially prolong the shelf life. Chemicals are not sprayed on to them either, nor onto the packaging. Those techniques of maximising shelf life often fail with the result that stems end up mouldy and rotten.

Ben also brought along some wonderful blooms of various colours for the audience to buy. The ones we bought lasted over two weeks, a real benefit of having them cut that day and not kept in chilled storage. We certainly wish him well with his passion for producing high quality English flowers with minimal impact on the environment.

Leycester Whewell, EHADPS secretary, 5 Oct 2018