

GARDENING SCOTLAND - REPORT TO THE MECONOPSIS GROUP by SHARON BRADLEY.

It took a little while for me to decide to take on the role of Gardening Scotland organiser as I work and the preparation time coincides with the hours I am actually working at The Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh, where I tutor students in Botanical Art.

My predecessor was Geoff Hill so it was big shoes to fill as Geoff had put on excellent displays for previous years. I visited with Geoff and talked about the show and Geoff gave me away the photographs and other display material that had been used before. I sought permission of the committee to alter these to make my preparation easier and quicker.

I decided the best way was to prepare as much as I could at home and lay out and pre mount all the photographs on to larger foam board display boards and add Meconopsis Group banners. These could be 'hung' quicker at Gardening Scotland when I finished work on the Wednesday afternoon. I also made up some promotion boards to highlight the background of The Meconopsis Group and the offer which was available should anyone wish to join at the show. All of these photographs were attached using Velcro so that the displays can be changed around for other shows.

I made labels for the pots of Meconopsis that I thought would be ready for the show and secured them on to narrow green garden canes. I did stand back at a distance away from these boards and labels to see that I could read them clearly so that the public would be able to read them as well. All of this display work was then stored in to the cardboard boxes that the foam board sheets had arrived in.

Whilst the thinking and planning of the wall displays was going on the plant material was also being checked. I am very fortunate to have good storage behind one side and the back of my garage and this is where I kept the big pots of plants that had been potted on or dug up from the garden. It's a sheltered spot and has always been used to tidy pots away over the winter.

Consideration had to be made for the rabbits that were getting in to the garden from the next door neighbours garden. It's not necessarily that they would eat the plants but they, like the big pigeons, can damage the young new shoot as they walk over them in the pots.

All the smaller plants located around the garden, in the cold frame, the greenhouse and other little corners that have some shelter were gathered together as the forecast was for frosts, wind and snow and just at a time when they were starting to grow really well. This is when I visited my local Aldi store as they were advertising very cheap green polythene 'greenhouses'. They certainly did the trick for the purposes I needed them for but I would not use them for any other purpose. We did secure them to the ground with the pegs supplied but we had to resort to several bricks all around to ensure they did not blow away.

The first year John Mitchell was able to provide some pots of plants as it was difficult to confirm anything would be in flower on time. Ian Christie's extra plants from The SRGC stand were also loaned to us to bulk up the display. The following year though the weather

could not have been better and there was a good choice of plants. The earlier flowering varieties like *Meconopsis* 'Mop Head', 'Mildred' and 'Susan's reward' were already slightly over by the show weekend so they did not make it. Thinking back to the previous year and *Meconopsis* 'Mildred' was at her best as was awarded a Preliminary Commendation from The Scottish Rock Joint meeting held at the show. That year *Meconopsis* 'Strathspey' also received the same commendation.

In order to put on a good display and to bring the display eye level up from the floor, I had to keep the cars out of the garage for a week and get my husband Jim to help me with some boxes and table display material. Jim made the table display boxes and borrowed the Christmas parcel display boxes from his work and these were used to raise plants from the floor and to display the smaller plants on the table and to give us somewhere to sell the seed from. These had to be re painted to ensure they were lovely and white.

By this time the big pots of *Meconopsis* had been moved out from behind the garage and were all out on the patio. This area of the garden is quite sheltered so we were able to leave them there for us to enjoy looking at from the window of the house. When they are all together like that it is really quite spectacular. On the Wednesday afternoon when I return from Ingleston I am able to start to sort out the pots that would be going to the show. The easiest way to do this was to take away the ones that looked as though they would not last the weekend or had already been flowering for a little while. Some pots were still in tight bud so they were not chosen to go to the show either. The big pots of plants and the display boxes were loaded on the van on the Wednesday evening.

I also dug up some *Meconopsis* 'Quintuplinervia' from the border and put that in to small pots for the table display. I already had several plants of *Primula Alpicola* and some *Meconopsis* 'Punicea' ready to go as well. These were loaded in to my car along with all the bits and pieces need for the weekend.

This is when I have to call on the help again of my husband Jim as there is no way I could load plants, deliver and set up the display on my own. Fortunately Jim has been able to get the Thursday and Sunday off work to be the delivery driver. There is no guarantee though that he will always be able to do this. Last year we had to hire a van to transport everything to the show and this is where I could use some help in emptying the van and bringing the pots in to the stand and returning them on the Sunday evening. My dear friend Linda helps enormously to set up the stand and she is not even a member of the Group but having her there means that we can set up the display and be away for the 3.30 timeline set up by Gardening Scotland.

When we return on the Friday morning is very gratifying to see your effort recognised and both years we have been awarded a Gold medal for the display.

When the doors open the stand becomes busy very quickly and the public seem to be in a rush to ensure that they get seed and a good chat to the members on duty at the time. Those helping out on the stand are all members and without this help we would not be able to be represented at Gardening Scotland. Several of those members who have been able to help out in the past cannot do it this year as they are away on other business. I would urge

anyone who can help out for a few hours on one of the days of the show to please get in touch with me and we can get them booked in with a time to suit them. If you are able to do a stint for a few hours on the stand you do get a ticket to access the show for the rest of the day.

The seed sales are extremely important to the group as it covers all the expenses to promote the Group at Gardening Scotland and I cannot thank Ian Scott enough for all the work he puts in to packeting up all the seed. He even sat at the table last year packeting up extra seed as we knew we were about to run out of it with still another day and a half to go. We did run out of seed by 2.30 on the Sunday afternoon and sold over £700 worth of seed by then.

Sunday comes around all too quickly and the whole process starts again and the display has to be dismantled and transported back to Biggar. The plants are placed back on the patio and by this time they are quite long and leggy as the lighting in the hall affects them. They have also lost some of the blue colour but this comes back after a few days outside. The boards all go back in the box and put back up in to the loft and the small pots are put in the greenhouse as we are too tired to put the plants back in to the borders.

The big pots remain on the patio, although tidied up to the side, and they remain there until the first frosts. They are then cleaned and tidied up a bit again and then it is full circle and they go back behind the garage for the winter. The patio gets hosed down and you would never know anything had been going on.

Ian Scott's seed exchange letter soon arrives and everything starts all over again. Pots are washed and seed is sown. Snow falls and seed germinates and Gardening Scotland gets in touch to see if we are taking a stand again this year.

It's then again that I need to secure enough members to help out to ensure that we can run the stand efficiently. The stand can sometimes get so busy we spill out on to the passageway. Without volunteers I cannot do it on my own so ask everyone to think how they may be able to help out. It may be by growing a species plant in a pot or providing some small plants for the table top display or coming along and do a few hours on the stand. Please do get in touch if you can help out.

Sharon Bradley