



126 YEARS OF THE  
NATIONAL  
*Sweet Pea Society*

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SPRING  
BULLETIN



— 2026 —

Registered Charity No: 226802



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# NATIONAL SWEET PEA SOCIETY

Registered Charity No: 226802

## SPRING BULLETIN 2026

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The opinions expressed by contributors are their own and may not necessarily coincide with the opinions of either the Society or the Editor

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## **2026 Dates for your Diary**

NB correct at the time of editing, subject to change

Please check the website for regular updates, any changes and other news

Tuesday 17 February	<b>Committee meeting via Zoom</b>	Committee members
Saturday 7 March	<b>AGM &amp; Spring Social</b>	All NSPS members
Wednesday 29 April	<b>Committee meeting</b> Face to face meeting	Committee members venue tbc
Wed 17 & Th 18 June	<b>Early National Exhibition</b> RHS Wisley Gardens	Members' Competition Display & Bureau
Sunday 28 June	<b>Chiltern S P S Show</b> Lacey Green Bucks	Members' Competition
Sat 11 & Sun 12 July	<b>Late National Exhibition</b> RHS Bridgewater Gardens Worsley	Members' Competition Display & Bureau
Sat 18 & Sun 19 July	<b>Wem Sweet Pea Show and Festival</b>	Members' Competition and town festival
Mon 20 – Thur 23 July	<b>Royal Welsh Show</b> Builth Wells	Open Competition Display & Bureau
Fri 31 – Sun 2 July	<b>North West Regional Show</b> At Chorley Flower Show	Members' Competition Display & Bureau
Thurs 20 – Sun 23 Aug	<b>Southport Show</b>	Display & Bureau
Thursday 2 Sept	<b>Committee meeting via Zoom</b>	Committee members
Thursday 11 Nov	<b>Committee meeting via Zoom</b>	Committee members

### **Deadline dates for submitting copy for 2026 publications:**

**ANNUAL 2026**

**Autumn Bulletin 2026**

**Spring Bulletin 2027**

ASAP to Caroline please.

by **1 September 2026** please.

by **31 December 2026** please.

## Introduction/Editorial

At the deadline date for receiving copy for this edition - 31 December 2025, it looked (unlike for the last few editions) very much as if you would be receiving a very thin and very official looking Spring Bulletin!

Thankfully, after a general ask to the committee, many extra articles and photos were received. We should all be very appreciative to those who do spend a little (& more in some cases) time to engage with the whole membership. It also makes my role so much more enjoyable. I will always attempt to ruffle a few feathers in order to stimulate conversations and feedback; please take that in the way it is intended and remember, we are all volunteers, so there is no room for any unpleasantries to, or about, anyone who has anything to do with our Society, hobby and passion.

Also, a huge thank you to those who understand the reasons why it is very helpful if you set your default (for articles to be considered for inclusion into the Bulletins) language to **English UK** and not **US**. You will have read this from me on many occasions but I still receive articles where this hasn't been done. If I do not immediately spot this and as soon as I copy it into the draft Bulletin, the whole is immediately changed back to US English (I believe this is because Microsoft is inherently US). It is also helpful if you set the size to A5 and margins to small. Almost everyone is now sending pictures separately (and not imbedded – let me do that please!) which is a huge help. Thank you once again to all who continue to contribute.

## ERRATA

There is one small error which has crept into the audit of the Early National show. Sir Jimmy Shand is shown classified as white!

There is also an error in the 2026 Classification List; funnily enough, the same error appears in last year's classification list but nobody spotted it!

Please be aware that 'Heaven Scent' is shown in the 2026 Classification List as both 11 (pale pink, cream ground) and 11a (salmon pink, cream ground). It should only be listed as 11a (salmon pink, cream ground). Please accept our apologies for any inconvenience."

## **Annual General Meeting 2026**

Notice is hereby given that the ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY FIRST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the Members of the National Sweet Pea Society which will be held on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> March 2026, at Kings Court Hotel, Kings Coughton, Near Alcester, Warwickshire B49 5QQ for the purpose of receiving Reports and the Balance Sheet as of 31<sup>st</sup> October 2025 and the election of Office Bearers for the coming year.

Mrs Carole Tate General Secretary NSPS  
22 Lime Grove, Chorley Lancs PR7 3JA  
07961 477137 [caroletate10@gmail.com](mailto:caroletate10@gmail.com)

### **AGENDA**

1. Chairman's welcome
2. Apologies for absence
3. Minutes of meeting held on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> March 2025
4. Matters arising
5. Committee Reports (the Chairman's and Secretary's Reports are printed in the Spring 2026 Bulletin) and Trials Reports
6. Election of Office Bearers and Members of the Committee
7. Election of Independent Examiner
8. Presentation of the Jack Davis Award
9. Presentation of the FC Harriss Award
10. Any Other Business (that has been sent, in advance, to the Chairman and Secretary)

*It is to be noted that all office holders are willing to continue in office for another twelve months except Laurie Burrell who has resigned from the committee. Nominations for any of the officer positions to be received by the secretary by Saturday 28th February 2026.*

*The following Members of the General Committee retire under the three-year rule and are eligible for re-election: Phillippa Cooper.*

The Society's accounts will be published on the website (<https://sweetpeas.org.uk>) and any questions or representation on them must be received by the General Secretary by 5pm on Friday 7 March 2026.

## PROGRAMME

- 10.00 Registration and coffee
- 10.30 AGM
- 11.30 Presentation “Exhibiting at Chelsea” by Phil Johnson
- 12.00 Lunch
- 14.00 Results of Plant and Photograph Competition
- 14.15 Non “Oasis” demonstration workshop and discussion
- 15.30 Questions (submitted in advance)
- 15.45 Raffle and auction (donations much appreciated – see separate article)

There will be a payment of **£12** please to cover coffee and a sandwich buffet lunch. There will be a raffle (prize donations appreciated) and sundries to purchase on the day.

It is requested that members have cash with them at the AGM please, as electronic payments (to the NSPS) may not be available on the day and even if they were, a percentage is deducted by Sum-up.

Payments direct to the venue are of course separate to this.

A special overnight room rate at the Kings Court Hotel has been negotiated; please book direct and not through the NSPS.

Double room Bed & Breakfast £105

Single room Bed & Breakfast £90

**All questions and to register to attend the meeting, which is for fully paid-up members only, you must email the General Secretary on [caroletate10@gmail.com](mailto:caroletate10@gmail.com) well in advance of 28 February 2026**

## **AGM Plant & Photography Competition**

Please use the following page (scan/copy) to indicate by ticking the classes you wish to enter into the AGM plant & photography competition by emailing this form to the General Secretary on [caroletate10@gmail.com](mailto:caroletate10@gmail.com) before 28 February 2026

**Only 1 entry per person in each class please!**

**Sweet Peas**

- 1. Autumn sown - 6 plants, max. pot size 5"/13cm
- 2. Autumn sown - single plant in any container
- 3. Spring sown - 6 plants, max. pot size 5"/13cm
- 4. Spring sown -single plant in any container

**Lathyrus species**

- 5. Lathyrus Vernus - max. pot size 10"/24 cm
- 6. Lathyrus Vernus - 7 stems, flowers and foliage, own vase

**Spring Flowers**

- 7. Daffodil - any variety, 1 specimen, cut stem, own vase
- 8. Daffodil - any variety/varieties, 3 cut stems, own vase
- 9. Daffodil - miniature, 1 variety, 3 cut stems, own vase
- 10. Container - any size, growing bulbs, any variety/varieties
- 11. Mixed vase of any cut spring flowers, own vase
- 12. A flowering pot plant in bloom, max. pot size 10"/24cm

**Photography**

A photograph taken by you in the last 12 months depicting "Sweet Peas in my Garden" – max size 7" x 5" (175mm x 125mm)

IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO ATTEND THE AGM BUT WOULD LIKE TO ENTER THE PHOTOGRAPHY CLASS, PLEASE ATTACH YOUR ENTRY WITH THE APPLICATION EMAIL.

A certificate will be awarded for the winner of each class and a sponsored prize for the most points in all classes Prize winners will be featured in the 2026 Annual

Name (print).....

Telephone.....

Email (print).....

Please return this form to [caroletate10@gmail.com](mailto:caroletate10@gmail.com) before 28 February 2026

## AGM Raffle and Auction

Laurie Burrell and Jenny Morgan

The NSPS Committee have agreed to hold a raffle and if suitable donations are forthcoming, an auction, at the AGM on Saturday the 7th of March, to which all our members are invited to attend and take part in the proceedings.

As in previous years as part of the AGM and Spring Social, a raffle and auction will be held to help offset costs and to support the activities of the Society. The prizes for the raffle have always been generously donated by members who attend this important annual event. As I have been tasked by the Committee, together with Jenny Morgan, to organise the raffle this year and we are politely asking for contributions; for example, Sweet Pea and gardening related items, bottles, biscuits, chocolates and any other suitable items as prizes.

If you have or are willing to donate a prize it would be greatly appreciated by Jenny and me on behalf of the Committee, and we ask that you email or phone either one of us with brief details of the donation (particularly if it is likely to be of interest for auctioning).

Our contact details are:

Laurie Burrell - [Laurie.burrell48@gmail.com](mailto:Laurie.burrell48@gmail.com) 01932 564556

Jenny Morgan - [jlmorgan178@gmail.com](mailto:jlmorgan178@gmail.com) 07944 079350

It is also suggested that members have cash with them at the AGM in order to purchase tickets to take part in the draw, as electronic payments may not be available on the day.

Thank you in advance for your support, Laurie and Jenny.

# General Secretary's 2025-26 Report

Carole Tate

As we prepare for the 2026 Annual General Meeting of the National Sweet Pea Society, I am pleased to present the Secretary's Report, summarising some of the key activities and achievements of the Society in the past year, 2025. It has been another year of growth, engagement, and community for our beloved Sweet Pea enthusiasts, and I am honoured to share highlights with you.

In 2025, the Society saw a continued increase in membership, with a notable growth of 7.2% in membership compared to 2024. This reflects a growing interest in the cultivation and appreciation of sweet peas across the country. I was delighted to see an increase in our on-line membership of 56% and an additional 5 new affiliated societies. We have added class 1.7, The Affiliated Society Challenge in our 2026 Early and Late National shows to build on our engagement.

Our membership base remains diverse, with both seasoned growers and new enthusiasts contributing to discussions, events, and activities.

The Society's annual events continued to be a cornerstone of our activities. In 2025, we held several well-attended events, including:

- **The National Sweet Pea Society Early and Late Shows:** Held at Webbs @ Millets Farm, Frilford, Oxfordshire in June and RHS Bridgewater, Worsley, Manchester in July. Both shows were a resounding success. We saw over 300 vases, bowls and decorative arrangements across various classes and had excellent feedback from the public. A special thank you goes to our exhibitors, volunteers and judges, whose dedication made these events possible.
- **Regional Events:** Across the regions, many local affiliated societies and specialist groups (often led by members of the NSPS) held shows, put on displays, information bureaux and held other events. Our North West Region show held at Chorley Flower Show being a prime example. These provided members with the opportunity to share their experiences, techniques and answer questions. These informal events helped strengthen community ties and foster a sense of camaraderie amongst members.

- **Members Workshops:** We expanded our online presence in 2025 by offering virtual workshops and discussion groups covering topics such as advanced sweet pea cultivation techniques, peat free growing and exhibition flower arranging. These Zoom presentations were attended by over 300 participants and have been recorded and made available on our website for future reference.

2025 has been another remarkable year for the National Sweet Pea Society, and I want to extend my sincere thanks to our members, volunteers, and supporters who have made all of this possible. The Society continues to grow in both numbers and spirit, and I look forward to seeing what we can achieve together in 2026. Thank you all for your continued dedication to the beauty and joy of sweet peas.

## Chair's 2025-26 Report

Alison Shreeve

This year proved to be another challenging one horticulturally as we dealt with weather diametrically opposite to last years! We will have to get used to these extremes of weather and never knowing exactly what to expect. Most of us have already moved the date of our Autumn sowings back several weeks and I have made two sowings again to hedge my bets about the best time to sow.

The 2025 growing season was remarkably short. The hot, dry conditions being a bit too much for our lovely Sweet Peas. In addition, we had a terrible infestation of aphids and although we had an abundance of ladybirds, they came too late to prevent the spread of virus which also helped to bring about the untimely demise of most of the crop.

There were several positive sides to the year though. I chaired my first face-to-face AGM which was a wonderful occasion. Although slightly unnerving for me it was a great opportunity to meet members from all over the country. We had a very stimulating debate about the future of Shows initiated by the paper written by Caroline Ball and circulated before-hand. Those who couldn't attend were invited to send their thoughts and we duly took those into consideration as we explored issues in three breakout groups.

The bullet points were taken forward to a working group which I chaired and the outcomes summarised and published in the Autumn Bulletin. We will continue with the two National Shows for the time being but we do need to try and encourage more young people to enter and stage exhibits.

It is important to the society to be present at as many public occasions as we can. We were delighted to exhibit at the Royal Windsor Rose and Horticultural Show again. This is very early in the season for us and we were helped out by some blooms from English Sweet Peas, as well as seeds to sell from which we receive a percentage for the Society. Here we met many people who loved the display and reminisced about Sweet Pea growers they had known. It is one of the most evocative of flowers bringing back many memories for many people. We also answered lots of questions and introduced people to the lesser known annual species.

The pinnacle of the day was the King being presented with a buttonhole of Sweet Peas by our treasurer, Caroline Ball. King Charles asked Caroline if she had grown all the flowers in our “marvellous” display; she was honest and owned up that they had come from a number of members, including herself! On a personal note, Alan Titchmarsh presented me with a cup for one of my Sweet Pea exhibits! Horticultural Royalty himself.

All the shows around the country at which our Society has a presence are dependent on many people who help with setting up, with growing and donating blooms, being present during the shows to answer questions and with helping to clear up afterwards. I would like to extend an enormous thank you to all of you in all areas of the country, particularly the North West, who have helped to spread the word about our wonderful flowers and how to grow them successfully.

All the shows rely on teams of people to make the magic happen. Thank you to all of you who have done that this year. If you are interested in finding out more about these events, please don't hesitate to contact one of the committee or your local District Reps, who do great jobs each year, supporting local members and societies and providing a valuable link back to the committees.

2025 was the 125<sup>th</sup> celebration of the founding of the NSPS. We had two wonderful visits; to Barnsdale Gardens and West Dean where we had a cream tea at each venue, as well as a chance to see their beautiful gardens of course! At West Dean we were also shown the Sweet Pea Trials where new cultivars are grown and evaluated. We met with some new members as well as long standing members and supporters of the society. A very interesting visit indeed.

The additional celebratory classes in the two National Shows were very well received and the Triple, a class requiring growers to demonstrate their breadth of lathyrus growing proved popular, though challenging, to several would-be exhibitors because of the difficult conditions this year. By popular demand, we have decided to include a version of that again in the show schedules. See the show reports and your new Schedule to see what that entails.

We commissioned a special banner for the Society to celebrate its 125<sup>th</sup> Year and this was designed by Tami Marsland, the partner of one of our committee, so a big thank you to her for her skills. We will continue to use the banner where we can.

We have also continued with the Zoom talks and discussions not only in the winter as originally envisaged.

We met one technical problem with Darren Everest's equipment which meant we had to abandon it early, for which we apologise, but other talks went well and new topics come to the fore. Graeme Hollingdale talked about what the Judge was looking for at shows and how to present exhibits for showing. He did get a little carried away with vases of 15 stems(!) so, prior to our next shows we will probably get him to present vases of smaller numbers of flowers (5, 7, 9) to encourage exhibits for the smaller growers amongst us! We reviewed the year and its problems, sharing ideas for coping and getting the best from our erratic weather conditions.

With the ban on peat at RHS venues we had a very timely discussion on using Peat Free composts with the added experience from Nick Hamilton from Barnsdale who kindly joined us for the evening. If you were unable to make the evening talks these have been recorded and can be found on our website under Members Area/Zoom Recordings. Each is listed with a link and a passcode to enable access to the recording of the session.

We hope that you will be able to come along and meet some of the Committee at shows in the coming year and I wish you all a very pleasant and successful growing season.

## Lathyrus Pubescens

Caroline Ball

Having a clear out of old seed I found some *Lathyrus Pubescens* that went out of date in 2021. I sowed all five seeds and was delighted to get four to germinate. The plants grew on heartily. Some of the plantlets I decided to grow outside in a huge terracotta pot and the remaining plants remained in the greenhouse. It was interesting to note that the outside plants seemed to grow much more slowly to start with but once established romped away and I even got a flower in August.



*Lathyrus Pubescens*

*Pubescens* is a perennial *Lathyrus* of a magnificent clear blue but thought to be not fully hardy in our climate. The large terracotta pot is too big for little me to move, so those gorgeous plants are taking their chances outside this winter. They benefit from the shelter of the house and when it's particularly cold, a small amount of bubble wrap. I'll report in a subsequent journal as to how both the outside and cold greenhouse *Pubescens* have fared. Fingers crossed that I will see the magnificent blue blooms again in 2026!

# Latvian-bred Sweet Peas

Roger Parsons

A surprise Christmas present arrived with me in December 2025. It was a book on Sweet Peas written in Latvian:

“Ar un Par Pukuzirniem” (With and About Sweet Peas) written by Martins Maltenieks and published in 2024. Some members may remember that Martins had previously written articles on Sweet Peas in Latvia, which were published in Sweet Pea Annuals of perhaps fifteen or twenty years ago. His new book is beautifully illustrated.

I had not heard from Martins for a long time. He is a year older than me, so I presumed he has retired. Not a bit of it. From the book, I was able to glean, with the help of Google Translate, a list with descriptions of Sweet Peas raised by Martins and his business partner Valdis Dubovkis (1948-2011) trading as Maza Darznieciba, Jaunpelsi, Salaspils, Latvia <https://www.mazadarznieciba.lv/>

Many familiar cultivars are included because Martins has very kindly sent seeds in the past for inclusion in the National Collection seedbank. I have been very impressed with those of his cultivars that I have grown because of their large flowers with good form, excellent flower size and placement and long stems. Martins is concerned about what will happen to his cultivars when he does retire but hopefully, we will soon be able to add them all to the seedbank.

Martin’s Sweet Peas all have Spencer flower form. Many are summer-flowering but he has also produced early multiflora cultivars for the cut flower trade. I think the following represents a complete list of Maza Darznieciba cultivars:

‘Agra’	a very delicate flush, possibly striped
‘Aija’	salmon rose, summer-flowering (already in seedbank)
‘Amber’	salmon pink, summer-flowering
‘Anda’	Perhaps a rose pink flush cream ground (early-flowering)
‘Austra Pumpure’	pink striped, summer-flowering (The name translates as “oyster mushroom”)

'Balerina'	white, or almost so
'Bille'	deep salmon, semi-dwarf, duplex blooms,
'Bruno'	dark maroon, summer-flowering
'Daina'	magenta or purple, early-flowering
'Dinars'	flaked pink, summer-flowering
'Dzintra'	cream picotee, summer-flowering (already in seedbank) Introduced mid-1990's
'Edzus'	looks very pale blue or lavender flush, early-flowering
'Egils'	mid blue or mauve, early-flowering
'Erna'	rose pink / marbled magenta bicolour, summer-flowering (already in seedbank)
'Evita'	early-flowering
'Guna'	orange red, summer-flowering
'Inese'	salmon flush on cream ground, early summer-flowering
'Inta'	carmine, early-flowering
'Kurts'	maroon, early-flowering
'Latvian red'	scarlet (already in seedbank)
'Lienite'	cream, semi-dwarf, duplex blooms
'Marks'	carmine red stripe, summer-flowering
'Mikins'	white, semi-dwarf, duplex blooms
'Mirdza'	cream (already in seedbank) Martins says of this in his book: "There are only more or less saturated cream-colored flowers, for example, the abundantly flowering Valdis Dubovska variety 'Mirdza'" Introduced in mid 1990's
'Niks'	pale blue or lavender flush, early-flowering
'Pecis'	lavender, introduced in mid 1990's
'Reinis'	lavender, early multiflora type
'Riga 800'	maroon stripe white ground, summer-flowering (already in seedbank) Raised by Valdis Dubovskis and named to celebrate the 800 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Riga city
'Ruta'	pale salmon pink cream ground, summer-flowering (produces small, wrinkled seeds)
'Velta'	ruby red, summer-flowering
'Venta'	deep blue, summer-flowering
'Vija'	introduced in mid-1990s
'Zefirs'	rose pink, white ground, early-flowering, duplex blooms



Dzintra, a cultivar from Martins Maltenieks and Valdis Dubovkis

## **An update from your Membership Secretary**

Julia Beardmore

The NSPS want you to make the most of your Membership, and to keep everyone informed as much as possible; here a few updates and ways we can help each other.

## **Membership Area**

Our Web Designer has recently made some changes on the Login screen, and re-arranged headings in the Membership area, hopefully you will find this easier to access. Please also see Alison Shreeve's detailed article on pages 36 and 37 in this Bulletin.

Please let me know if you require a Password reset. If you have never registered, you may require a link to do so. If you have emailed me and do not get a response, keep a look out in your Spam/Junk/Bin inboxes. Occasionally, I do not receive emails, if this may be the case, and you don't receive a response to your message please send me a message through the website. Also, if you type rather than copy and paste an email address, it is very easy to confuse certain letters due to the fonts used; always check really carefully please.

## **Emails via Mailchimp**

We have been using this system to communicate information to you, this may be inviting you to a Zoom presentation, information about shows, or the AGM competition in March, we promise we will not bombard you. If you have not been receiving these emails it maybe that we do not have your current email address, please let me know.

## **Gift membership**

We have recently added an option to purchase a membership as a Gift for a friend or family in the UK, please see the Article by Alison Shreeve.

## **Joint membership**

We have a number of members who joined online as family members, unfortunately I only know one of the members names, I do want to mail members correctly and include everyone rather than mail-out as Joe Bloggs and partner, please do let me know your partner's name.

## **Gift Aid**

We are a registered Charity under the Charities Commission, and therefore Members who are eligible as a UK tax payer can complete a Gift Aid form online. This enables the Society to claim back 25p for every £1 you have paid for your subscription and/or any donations you may have made. This is the link to the form. <https://sweetpeas.org.uk/gift-aid/>

Please consider if you are able to help in this way. Gift aid helps the Society in many ways, one of these is to keep membership fees as low as we can. Using Gift Aid, which is now a long established way of assisting Charities by reclaiming funds from HM Treasury, not only does it not cost you anything but if you keep a record of how much you donate in this way, when you input this figure into your Self-Assessment Tax return each year, you will also benefit!

### **Suspended payments**

There are sometimes instances when your Automatic Renewal fails; the majority of these are where the payment card you originally used to set up your automatic payments with has been replaced at some time over the last twelve months, and therefore the PayPal platform is unable to collect your payment. If your payment is declined, you will be notified, the system tries again a second time five days later, and again for a third time; if it is unable to collect on the final attempt, it will then suspend your payment. If you have a PayPal account you can update your replacement card through there, just search how to update your automatic payments. If you don't have a PayPal account, please contact your Bank to amend Payments on your card. For a suspended payment, please go to the website and click the "Join Us" tab, then select "Renew your subscriptions".

### **Renewal to NSPS Bank Account**

If you make your payment to our Bank account, would you please drop me a short (one-line is sufficient) email, just to confirm this and make sure I have not missed it.

Like all your committee members and officers, I do the Membership Secretary as a voluntary role, no fancy office, just my dining table, If I am not able to respond to you the same day, then please try to understand why; I do really appreciate your patience.

Thank you, Julia.

Tel: 07557 950014

Email: [julia.nsps@outlook.com](mailto:julia.nsps@outlook.com)

## For those who may not know:

Lee Haley

Once upon a time, around 12,000,000 years ago, species from the **Lathyrus genus** evolved around the eastern Mediterranean region. These were **annual species**. Around 6,000,000 years later the Mediterranean Sea became landlocked. The basin dried up and became the hottest place on earth. 200,000 years later the continents separated once again at the Gibraltar strait, and water came pouring in (at one point forming the largest waterfall that the world has ever seen, but that's another story). It took a few hundred years for the Atlantic to gush in and refill the basin. This point in history seems to coincide with the evolution of the **perennial** Lathyrus species, and they then began to distribute further afield, adapting to less specialised environments.

The annual species *L sativus* has been cultivated for many thousands of years as a fodder crop for animals, and sacks were even found inside the burial chamber of Tutankhamun. All our modern sweet peas are cultivated from a single annual species; *L odoratus*. Perennial sweet peas used in gardens are usually *L latifolius* or *L sylvestris*. However, there are many more interesting species to choose from, most of which climb and some of which happily dwell on the ground. **Garden peas**, with which we were all familiar, have for many years masqueraded as *Pisum sativum*, and have now been reclassified as *L oleraceus*.

Fast forward now to 1699 when the monk Cupani sent the first sweet pea seeds to the UK. Robert Uvedale showed many of his friends his specimens in his garden at Enfield. He must have shared seeds, because before long others were growing sweet peas of their own, and were developing interesting sports, such as "Painted Lady".

Later in the late c19, Henry Eckford developed many more types, which we called "**grandiflora**", because of the larger sized flowers. As the flower size has diminished over the years they are now commonly referred to as **old-fashioned** types, although they are still sometimes called grandiflora, which can be confusing. NSPS publishes a list of old-fashioned types, all pre-1910, which can be entered at national and regional shows. These types are still favoured for their scent and for their profusion of flowers.

Around the turn of the year 1900, the sweet pea performed a spectacular miracle by mutating into a new form, more showy than earlier varieties. This happened simultaneously in 3 different regions at the same time. These are now well known as **Spencer types**. While they are less scented, they are still the preferred kind to grow for exhibition or for cut flowers.

We now use the term **cultivars** to different types of the same species, instead of **varieties**. The term **Modern grandiflora** is sometimes used to describe newer, less traditional types such as those bred by Keith Hammett. This innovative New Zealand based breeder has been for years been working to produce unusual colours and effects. Now we have an inter-specific *Lathyrus* **hybrid** species (*Lathyrus x hammetii*) in which the genes from the annual *L. belinensis* seem to have introduced some new colours and qualities to the sweet pea. Having said this there are many cultivars described in old catalogues which were lost. The reverse bi-colour which we now have once again, is believed to have existed in the time of Henry Eckford.

Many amateurs enjoy breeding sweet peas, although this can take many years. There are over 3,000 registered cultivars, with, many new and interesting cultivars still being created, so it doesn't hurt to have a few categories and classes to get our heads around them.

### References:

*Lathyrus: the complete guide*, R. Parsons, G. Kenicer, RHS, 2021

*Sweet peas: An essential guide*, R. Parsons, Crowood, 2018

*Otherlands*, Thomas Haliday, Penguin, 2022

NSPS website: [sweetpeas.org.uk](http://sweetpeas.org.uk)

For the love of sweet peas; Facebook page

## Barnsdale 2025

Stephen Marsland

This story starts at the end of the 2024 sweet pea season. It wasn't a great year as at Barnsdale; we had a gloomy spring and during the summer it just didn't stop raining. The plants were healthy enough and grew quite well but until the early autumn, there were very few flowers. Later on, the plants made up for it a little, but my seed stocks were severely depleted. Luckily, I'd got enough to re-sow for planting out the following year plus a few for sales.



It was only my second season growing sweet peas at Barnsdale and (in my mind) I'd yet to prove that I was any good at it. The conditions in 2024 didn't help, but at least I could blame the weather!

For the 2025 season I decided I would sow my first batch of seeds when we returned to work after Christmas. The germination was fairly quick and I had good sturdy plants out in the cold frame by the end of February. All was going well. “They might think I CAN actually grow them” I thought to myself!

As if I'd had a premonition of what was to come, as well as the usual ground preparation (trenching or digging a hole 2 spades deep and filling with compost) I installed some underground seep hose where the Spencer cultivars were to be planted. I'd used this method at Easton Walled Gardens for many years with great success.



The early onset of spring warmed the soil nicely and I planted my first plants out in mid-March and after their usual grumpy phase of sitting there and doing nothing, they started growing away well. “Finally,” I thought, “it's going to be a decent year”.

My second sowings were planted out in early June when the first batch of plants, despite their good size and being watered every other day, were starting to show signs of stress and were slowing down. So, I increased the amount of the watering but the days just got hotter and drier. As we all know, there's nothing quite like getting watered from the sky.

“Windsor” was the first Spencer to flower for me in 2025 and that was about all it did. The rest weren't much better. I'd usually bank on getting 3 or 4 good bunches of flowers every few days but the plants, apart from “Frances Kate” (16 Fancy - Stripped) which did really well for some reason, refused to grow and refused to put out much in the way of flowers; any flowers that did come were small and didn't last very long.



Varieties such as “Macmillan Nurse” didn't get much higher than a couple of feet. Very few cultivars reached my minimum acceptable height of the second wire, which is placed at around 6ft from the ground. My grandifloras and semi-grandifloras (which I grow on chicken wire drums) failed to even cover the wire; I'd usually be tying-in and having to pinch the tops out as they went berserk over the drums.

My only comfort last summer was hearing that many others were struggling too and it was of some reassurance to our sweet pea growing visitors to know that it wasn't just them having these problems and not necessarily something they'd done wrong. Of course, we had some visitors whose sweet peas had done really well and took great delight in showing me pictures of theirs!



Looking ahead to 2026; I had planned to go again because surely it will be a better year? However, as I am now no longer at Barnsdale, I won't be growing sweet peas for a while. I do wish everyone success and hope you have a better growing year in 2026."

# STAGING MATERIALS

## Oasis Renewal

Neal Hatch

As mentioned in the NSPS 2025 Autumn Bulletin, there is now a new plant-based foam staging material called Oasis Renewal. I didn't have any sweet pea stems at the time of writing, but I couldn't wait to give it a try (I wrote this in November). I bought a box and performed a couple of quick experiments. You may already have seen a photo on the Facebook NSPS members' chat room page.

At first sight, the new foam looks promising. It is a dark brown colour, turning darker brown when wet so it won't detract from displays, in terms of its appearance in the vase/bowl. It feels and handles a lot more like traditional green foam (or the green 'bio' foam) than the fully compostable Agrawool/FibreFloral blocks; it has a more uniform texture, like traditional green foams, rather than the layered composition of Agrawool. It doesn't behave very differently from traditional foams to cut, so I approached this in the normal way. It does feel, perhaps, a little more 'brittle' than traditional foams, especially in the small amounts/sizes we need to fill a sweet pea show vase. It seems to behave fairly well when in the vase and, on first use, doesn't behave very differently from traditional foams when inserting stems. It doesn't require pilot holes/slots to be 'drilled' – which you do need to do with Agrawool.

I did not have any sweet peas to try it with at this stage of the year, so 15 split canes were used in an experiment. I used 15, as I thought this would be the hardest test – 5, 7, 9 or 12 stems should be easier with more room for manoeuvre. These canes are pretty much the same width as a really strong sweet pea stem (in fact, the canes are probably wider than the stems on most cultivars). I did not attempt to 'sharpen' the ends so the blunt ends were simply pushed into the dry material for this experiment. The experiment seemed successful, with the sticks (in lieu of stems) being held in a similar sort of 'grippy' way that traditional foams do and with the same sort of difficulties, if you happen to need to reposition/replace a stem in proximity to existing holes!



A fan of 15 'stems' in Oasis Renewal

You can see from the second (brutal) close-up that I've experimented by moving a couple of the canes, and again, it felt similar to using traditional foams. What you can't see from this picture is that I was extremely economical with the cone of material used here; it doesn't go very far down into the vase, only about 30 mm. Again, this was done deliberately as a really hard test of the material; would it hold with stems only pushed in a very short distance (for those of us without the luxury of really long stems to play with)?

I did try an experiment with a few live dahlia stems in a larger (12") vase, staged with wet Oasis Renewal. That experiment also went well, suggesting that it behaves quite like traditional foams when wet (unlike Agrawool, which is best staged dry and then water added). Those stems were pushed in much further than the sweet pea 'sticks' used above and seemed to hold well when the vase was lifted and waved around to simulate rough handling! To be honest, it felt very similar to using traditional green foams.

These simple experiments suggested that Renewal is going to be a viable alternative to Agrawool/FibreFloral or other methods, for those of us keen not to use petroleum-based foams.



Close-up of the 15 'stems' in Oasis Renewal

I will have no qualms in taking it to try at 'live' shows in 2026. I will aim to use it for many of my show vases (including sweet peas) but I will also continue to use my own 3D-printed Staging Rings for some of my large-vase exhibits and also continue using Agrawool/FibreFloral for large display bowls (where rings aren't practical). My guess, at this point, is that I may stage roughly 1/3<sup>rd</sup> Renewal, 1/3<sup>rd</sup> Staging Rings and 1/3<sup>rd</sup> Agrawool in 2026. Reality might prove otherwise; I will have to see how it goes.

I should mention the cost, without getting into specifics (as prices will, no doubt, change). You are probably aware that Agrawool and FibreFloral are roughly double the price of traditional green foams when they were introduced a few years back. I was surprised to see that the price of a box of Renewal was roughly the same as a box of FibreFloral/Agrawool – until I realised that each box contains 12 blocks compared with the usual 20 for traditional foams and Agrawool!

Finally, I can't comment on its chemistry - though it's supposed to have a lower carbon footprint as it is plant-based (not petroleum). So, it will be interesting to learn more about its biodegradability and whether it eventually gets approval by RHS for use at its shows/venues. I understand that further testing is currently underway. Oasis Renewal can't be used at the NSPS Early or Late Shows in 2026, as these are held at RHS venues and at present, the RHS have not announced any change in their policy. It is also worth mentioning that there are other potential products too – for example, I know that 'Phoam' has also been under development in recent years.

## Staging Mechanics

Caroline Ball

Oasis renewal foam is now available for sale in the U.K. A box of 12 blocks costs around £30-36. It is advertised as OK bio based by TUV Austria with the highest 4 star rating as but of course is yet to have any certification in the UK, so is not permitted for use at the NSPS shows this year at RHS Wisley and RHS Bridgewater. Smithers-Oasis says the certification process may take up to 3 years.

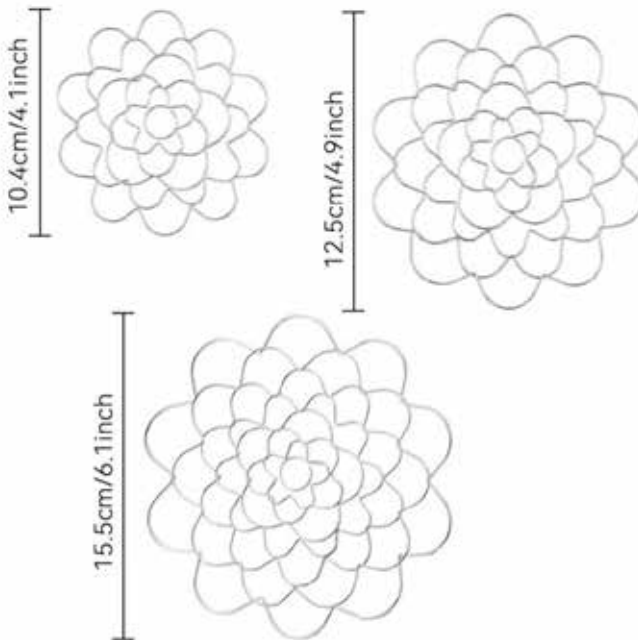
Another product of interest for decorative classes is the Oshun Pouch. This is a plant-based, and home-compostable alternative to traditional plastic floral foam, designed for sustainable flower arranging; it's a flat, expandable pouch filled with coconut coir and a gelling agent that absorbs water, expands, and holds stems securely, eliminating microplastic waste and enriching soil after use. It's a zero-waste system for florists seeking eco-friendly mechanics. I have not used this but have seen a review that says it is best used for 'on the day' arrangements or at a pinch the day before. It is also fairly expensive at £4.25 plus postage for a 13cm-13cm pouch.



The Oshun Pouch

The stainless steel frog mesh (pictured below) available from Amazon is a good choice for arranging in a vase. It gives support for the flowers and produces a pleasing natural type of arrangement. The downside is the sizing; they need to fit over the top of your bowl or vase. Cost is modest £6.99 for 3 of various sizes.

3 Pack Flower Frog Stainless Steel Wire Flower Arranging Tool Flower Lid Arranger Reusable Floral Grid Holder (Silver (4+5+6inch))



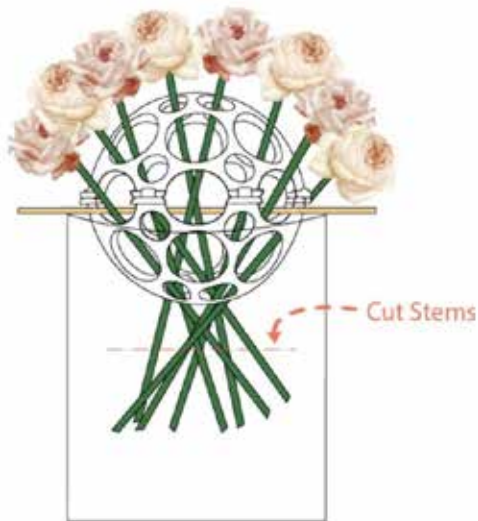
Stainless Steel Frogs

Oasis Fibrefloral would currently be my favoured choice for staging a traditional Sweet Pea vase. Widely available at around £2.55 a block it performs not unlike traditional Oasis, though you do need to ensure you are using it in the correct orientation and in addition, some people find they also need to make a pilot hole with a pointed stick to get their stems to penetrate into the material. It is a natural product based on volcanic basalt rock with a bio-based binder that is derived from rapidly renewable materials which takes up and holds water well. Plus, it is a permitted staging material at RHS venues! Oasis-Smithers advertise it as reusable.



Oasis FibreFloral Brick

I have also been given a Floraguppy to try. An ingenious recyclable and reusable plastic design which is mouldable to different vase sizes. It looks exciting for arrangements but doesn't solve the problem for staging a traditional vase. Costs £7.49 per guppy.



Floraguppy

## **Decorative Classes in NSPS Exhibitions (Tips on how to Stage an Exhibit)**

Caroline Ball

The decorative classes in our shows enable exhibitors the chance to show their flower arranging skills as well as the quality of our wonderful flower. I would like to encourage members to have a go, not least because the visitors to our shows love to see the variety of different arrangements as well as the spectacle of the rows of vases.

My top tip to anyone inspired is to closely read what the schedule says.

Many of these classes are in containers provided by the Society, e.g. the shallow Oasis saucers or 'bowls' of the grandiflora or species classes; the pedestal classes, e.g. the John Bishop or the Unwins Basket classes. For others, your own containers can be used, e.g. the Sydenham for 7 stems or the Driftwood classes.

The schedule will also specify what sort of foliage you can use; eg the Cornish Bowl allows grasses and Sweet Pea foliage only, and whether or not you can use flowers other than Lathyrus; e.g. the Unwins Basket allows other small flowers. If in doubt, I would strongly recommend that you ask the show manager for guidance in advance. The show managers are always happy to offer help interpreting the classes for you.

Make sure you check when preparing your arrangement whether there are any size restrictions on it. If there are, I put a table measure out on my staging table and prepare my exhibit with the dimensions firmly in mind.

It is important that whatever staging materials you are using that they are concealed by your flowers and foliage. Depending on which class I am entering, I might use FibreFloral (the acceptable Oasis substitute) or scrunched up chicken wire, which I find is very easy to use, produces pleasing arrangements and is reusable of course! I will often use a small Tupperware container within my chosen container (or that supplied by the Society for the class) with chicken wire to ensure I have enough water to supply my arrangement.

Certain types of Lathyrus, e.g. annual species, have very delicate little stems that can be tricky to get into solid foam. The trick that works for me is to use a toothpick in order to make a pilot hole, which this type of stem can then be inserted, or of course you can use chicken wire with them. Whatever staging material and container you use, I would recommend practicing your arrangement ahead of the show. This helps give you confidence and for me, speeds up how long the arrangement takes to complete.

You might have decided to use your granny's favourite bowl for your arrangement when you are using own containers. How wonderful; but do make sure the main feature is your flowers and not the bowl itself. This goes for classes where the containers are provided too, except for the pedestals where you don't need to conceal the 'stem' part of the pedestal. Pedestals do lend themselves to showing off the delicacy of long stems together with trailing foliage and produce wonderful arrangements.

There is a great class in the schedule which is a stepping stone between the vase classes and the decoratives. This is the ER Janes class which is an arrangement staged in the normal Society 2 inch green vase, which Spencer type vase exhibitors are familiar with. This creates lots of interest with the public, especially since we now allow them to judge it. It gives you free rein as the class rules allow any number of stems and any foliage. The vase is small so it should not be too scary to attempt!

I do hope this brief article encourages people to have a go at the decorative classes. If you have any questions about areas not covered here please do get in touch and I'll try to cover it in a subsequent article.

## **NSPS Late Show 11 & 12 July 2026**

Carole Tate Show Manager

I am delighted that I have been asked to manage the 2026 Late Show, being held at RHS Bridgewater Gardens, Worsley.

We will again be holding this event in the Show Marquee, which has a large display area and plenty of room for the public. Access to the Marquee for staging is gained on arrival at Bridgewater; pass through the green gate and take the first left. You will then come to a coded gate (code will be provided with confirmation of entry). Follow the road down and to the left, parking is next to the Volunteers facilities. There is a gate out of the car park to the marquee, and help will be provided to carry exhibits the short distance if required. Access for direct unloading in front of the marquee will be before 10am and after 6pm only.



The Show marquee at RHS Bridgewater from the outside

I would appreciate it if entries could be sent by email to [caroletate10@gmail.com](mailto:caroletate10@gmail.com) and I will confirm receipt of your entry. If you send your entry by post, I will ring or email to confirm receipt. If you are late entering, please phone through your entries (as a last resort) but emailing, if possible, is the preferred option.

Bridgewater, along with other RHS venues have a “no oasis” policy. I will have a supply of Agrawool blocks for use in our NSPS vases. If a suitable eco-oasis alternative is sanctioned by the RHS for use at events on its premises and can be sourced in time, we will endeavour to offer it for sale on the day.



The judging well underway in 2025

If you want further details, please don't hesitate to contact me. I am looking forward to lots of entries which I know will always be weather dependent but don't worry, just bring what you've got! One vase is better than nothing. Please note, staging is up to 9.15am on Saturday which gives members with fewer entries, time to stage on Saturday morning. We will be presenting the awards at 1pm that afternoon.

As always, we need helpers and volunteers to ensure a well organised show. Please consider being a Judge or Steward and let me know if you can assist in other ways on the day. We plan on offering a Members Stand and Information Bureau for visitors, where we can exchange hints and tips on growing sweet peas and lathyrus species.

This is an excellent venue for a show and I am sure it will be a sight not to be missed. We have good lighting, tables for staging and catering in the marquee. All members can access the gardens free during the weekend on production of your pink membership card, on entrance.

Good Luck growing your sweet peas this season. I look forward to seeing you in July 2026 as a competitor, helper or a visitor.



All ready to open for the public!

## Changes to the Website

Alison Shreeve

Over the last few months, we have been examining the website and have made a few changes. There is now an additional tab under the *Sweet Peas* heading: *Sweet Pea Gardens Network*. This is the place where you can find details of interesting gardens and places to visit and see Sweet Peas growing. This is in its infancy and we hope to increase the number of places we promote each year. Please have a look and see if there is one listed near you and plan a visit. If you have a favourite place to go and see Sweet Peas please let us know and we will do our best to persuade them to join our Network.

The biggest changes have been to the Members area. Remember, you have to be logged in first to gain access – either via the first page of the *Members* area or through the *Log In* tab on the menu bar. Once in you will find that we have reorganised the resources into different headings because we had an increasing number of items. For members who are online only this is essential as they can only access the Annual and Bulletins through the website.

These publications now have their own pages: *Bulletins* show past copies from Autumn 2021 to the current issues. *Annuals* run from 2022 to the current issue. *Shows and Showing* has resources to help with planning for events and exhibiting at shows plus the most recent/forthcoming National Show Schedules, the Judges Rules and latest Classification list.

The *General Resources* label contains information on Peat Free growing, Lathyrus Species, some useful video links and the online version of the publication of 'Enjoy Sweet Peas'. *Zoom Recordings* contains all the recordings of the Zoom talks that we have held on a variety of topics and are well worth watching if you have not seen them. You will need to copy the access code *before* you press the link to take you to the Zoom web page with the recording. In order to see the session you will need to paste in the code when you see the prompt. The *AGM* tab is self-explanatory and has paperwork for the upcoming AGM so that you can access this if you want to place a question before the committee and can't get there in person. *Gift Aid* has detailed forms for you to submit to us if you would like to make any of your payments liable for Gift Aid tax rebates for the Society.

Finally, we have added a new page which enables people to buy a *Gift Membership* for someone they know as a special present. To find this facility you need to look under the *Join Us* tab on the Menu bar. This will enable you to purchase membership for someone you know for a year, either single or joint membership. We hope you will take some time to familiarise yourself with the changes we have made and if you have any suggestions to improve the website we would be delighted to hear them. Please use one of the Contact Us Buttons on the website.

## The Triple Class

Caroline Ball and Alison Shreeve

Having observed many Sweet Pea classes over the years, some stick in the mind as more novel than others. At Wem last century I entered Sweet Peas in a picture frame and a class which required a vase of Spencers, a vase of Old Fashioneds and a photo of the grower! The latter class stuck in my mind all these years as something fun and different! When we came to deciding on the 2025 schedule, we wanted to include special classes that celebrated 125 years of the Society. The Wem trio came to mind alongside how it could be made into a class that could potentially show the breadth of the Lathyrus genus; hence the Society Triple was born.

It was definitely a challenge requiring 3 elements of at least 1 vase and 1 saucer from the list comprising:

- A vase of 12 mixed Spencer cultivars
- A vase of 12 mixed Modern Grandiflora/Semi Grandiflora cultivars
- A vase of 12 mixed Old-Fashioned cultivars
- A saucer of mixed Spencers, any foliage
- A saucer of mixed Modern Grandiflora/Semi Grandiflora, any foliage
- A saucer of mixed Old-Fashioneds, any foliage
- A saucer of mixed Annual Lathyrus species, any foliage
- A saucer of Perennial Lathyrus species, any foliage.

The normal principles of decorative arrangements apply to this class (see article elsewhere in this Bulletin). You might like to consider catching the judge's eye by incorporating colours of the individual elements that coordinate or contrast or by making a bold statement. For examples, it is worth looking at the Eckford bowl winners across the years. Sometimes a tonal arrangement has won and in others a riot of all colours of Sweet Pea has been successful. Whatever colour pallet you choose make sure all your flowers are in top condition, since quality has equal weighting with decorative effect.

When reviewing the year, I noted that the concept, in my head at least, had been very much to show the breadth of Lathyrus, so the 2026 schedule positively encourages the use of different types of Lathyrus in the three elements of the trio; this will be taken into account during judging alongside quality and decorative effect.

Thus, to maximise your chances of success in this class, you could show a vase of say Spencers, a vase of Modern Grandiflora and a saucer of Annual species or a vase of Old Fashioned, a saucer of perennial species and a saucer of Spencers or any combination. As long as you have three distinct types of Lathyrus in one exhibit, staged in at least one saucer and one vase, with the third element staged in either a vase or saucer, you will have conformed to the schedule requirements.



Two examples of staging this type of class from 2025  
(one being at the Early National and one at the Chiltern Show)

It is worth mentioning that the staging provided (tiered or flat) for this class has been left unstated and at the show manager's discretion, according to space and total numbers of entries received for the show. If this makes a difference to your plans, then just drop a friendly email to your show manager and ask what the decision might be in each case. It really is a charming class that showcases the entire genus and it would be marvellous if it encouraged people's interest across all types of Lathyrus.

# **Food for Thought or on a Downward Spiral? It may well be up to us to decide!**

Facebook conversations (anon)

On the NSPS Members only Facebook private group, which is slowly gaining traction, the following was posted recently. I thought that as not every member uses this form of social media, it was something that all members needed to be aware of and possibly send in their thoughts to me for a broader article in the next (Autumn 2026) Bulletin.

I have kept the names anonymous but it will be easy to find the people concerned. I also followed up with a request to expand for this article. I have also subtly edited the original comments. In some ways, these contributions from members are a continuation of the discussions held at the 2025 AGM and subsequent sub-committee's work. Perhaps these could be continued beyond the 2026 AGM through the pages of the Bulletins?

A long time ago Show Violas and Show Pansies (though in fact, they are all violas) were all named cultivars. They were part of the 300 year old FLORIST movement. As they had to be propagated via cuttings to be true, eventually as those prepared to do so declined, they just became mixed; which they remain today. The judging rules were even far more precise than our sweet pea ones!

In my opinion, when Sweet Pea exhibitors and shows decline further, the need for named cultivars will not be required, so inevitably they will be replaced by mixed packets of seeds.

This may take a long time to happen but again, based on my experience with the now defunct Viola and Pansy Society, which sadly became defunct the year it celebrated its 100 years of existence. This flower, which is now much more popular than it ever has been, arguably because seed companies can get a far better return using only mixed packets of seed, there being no need for the intense work of rouging and naming, to abide by the strict breeding rules.

The author expanded a little on this with the following:

I was the Chairman and a main exhibitor and growing article supplier of the yearly Annual of this 100 year old National institution. The main reason that it folded was because of the problem of getting named stock. The Society breeders did cross plants but never went down the long path of selecting until true. They stopped at the F1 stage and then took cuttings. This worked well when there were gardeners, who grew and showed.

Established Horticultural businesses, decided just to cross and sell the resulting seed, perhaps determining its worth in year one and then just kept producing this mixture to feed the market.

Showing at the Annual Show held in Bridgenorth Shropshire, brought dedicated growers from Scotland, down to Cornwall, who rarely numbered more than a dozen and didn't attract many others. Probably consequently, the membership had dropped to about thirty, country wide.

Named plants were brought to the show by the few people who could master the technique of growing from cuttings. I had myself purchased a DEWPOINT propagating cabinet, which was hundreds of pounds, to try to ensure a high success rate of viable plants but still had failures.

The Society even held a display in the then new centre at RHS Wisley to try to attract new members, but though hundreds passed through and admired the plants, not one new member enrolled. Even though this was not a competitive show, it did open my eyes to the time and effort which seemed to have been wasted.

I feel as I have suggested, that sooner or later for so many reasons, Horticultural Societies at National Level, are in the hold of commercial profit making businesses. Trials for new named cultivars, breeding and showing, seems to be on the wane.

I include some reflections from two other NSPS members, who made some significant comments.

Showing Sweet Peas has been the driver for the maintenance of existing varieties whilst progressing the development of new ones for many years.

The limited number of seed merchants, and with some charging up to £5 for 10 seed is only accelerating the decline of the shows as it simply makes it unviable. To put this into context, anyone growing for the Mail for the first time, has to buy all of their seed; costing around £750. Fertilisers, canes etc would be on top of this. Who, realistically, is going to start with those costs?

The lack of breeders along with a lack of seed merchants is limiting the number of new cultivars. Those that are making their way onto the market, are not those that an exhibitor would look to grow. Looking at the 2026 classification list, there appears to be only a total of 4 new Spencer cultivars, suitable for exhibition for the coming season. I predicted a few years ago that anyone wishing to show in the future would need to maintain their own seed, as exhibition cultivars would soon become unavailable or too expensive.

Sweet Peas remain immensely popular to the regular gardener, but with limited choice available, a mixed packet to those growers will be the most appealing, as they provide a bit of everything.

Roger, and now Phil, have done great work in building up the national collection, but I fear that one event could wipe out a lot of historical cultivars. It would therefore be prudent, in my opinion, to have seed of those varieties spread across various members. Whilst, as is now, the collection remains in its entirety with one person, if a catastrophic event occurred, there would be back-ups with others, which could preserve the collection.

As a teenager in the late 60s, I joined the National Pansy and Viola Society and received excellent encouragement. They supplied me with many named exhibition pansies and violas. These were superb, especially the stunning violas, which were as large as the pansies, with a diameter of about 3.5 inches. The exhibition varieties were not available commercially, so the Society played a crucial role in distributing plants and cuttings to members, preserving these wonderful heritage varieties. Sadly, the Society no longer exists and those exhibition pansies and violas are now extinct.

Our larger sweet pea seed producers are already favouring mixed packets over single variety packs. This makes commercial sense because producing mixed seed is much less labour-intensive. Sowing and harvesting mixed seed can be done by machinery, with far less human involvement. For example, Kings Seeds has posted videos showing how they sow and harvest mixed seed in a 5-acre field. They sow by tractor in drills outdoors in late September and harvest the seed by mini combine harvester in late June the following year, all with minimal human intervention.

Perhaps it is time for our Society to consider the long-term impact of mixed seeds and what efforts our members can make to conserve stocks of single-colour varieties. I am sure most of us would want these to prevail.

Any thoughts, comments; do you wish to contribute to the discussion?

Then please send them through to me your editor (you can be anonymous if you wish; just make that crystal clear to me)



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