



Greg Berger shares his cut flower garden.

NHPGA Summer Meeting at Spring Ledge Farm

The NH Plant Growers Association held its annual Summer Meeting on July 23rd at Spring Ledge Farm in New London. Greg Berger was an excellent host and tour guide through his 40 acre facility. His farm stand and garden center sell produce and bedding plants grown on site. The parking lot was teeming with cars, with most visitors stopping for his famous ripe tomatoes while picking up other farm fresh goodies.

The afternoon began with introductions of the NHPGA Board members as well as the evening's speaker, Grower Talks Editor Chris Beytes, and an over view of the day's agenda. Greg then led a tour of his operation, beginning with the cut flower garden. Spring Ledge sells cut flower bunches grown in their fields as well as cut your own cut flowers by the pound, including annuals such as zinnias, snapdragons, cosmos, calendula and even castor beans as well as perennial flowers including ornamental grasses, peonies, lavender and phlox.

The tour continued to his field grown vegetables. The garlic crop was ready to be harvested and cured. This year's rainy June was proving difficult for some crops, including the heat loving sweet potatoes. Tomatoes are grown nearly year round both in greenhouses and in the field, ensuring a constant harvest from June to October. Other edible crops include blueberries, strawberries, cabbages, peppers, melons and squashes.

Greg also showed the assembled plant growers his main greenhouse range, affectionately dubbed the "Taj Mahal," for its towering 14 foot peaks and 96 foot length. This greenhouse is open year round and serves as the head house for germinating seeds, grafting tomatoes to root stock and growing seasonal crops. His poinsettia crop was recently potted and looked great, but Greg was most proud of his micro-greens crops, which are produced year round in flats, generating \$42.00 per pound, sold in 1 oz. packages in the farm stand.



Plant Growers tour the fields at Spring Ledge Farm.

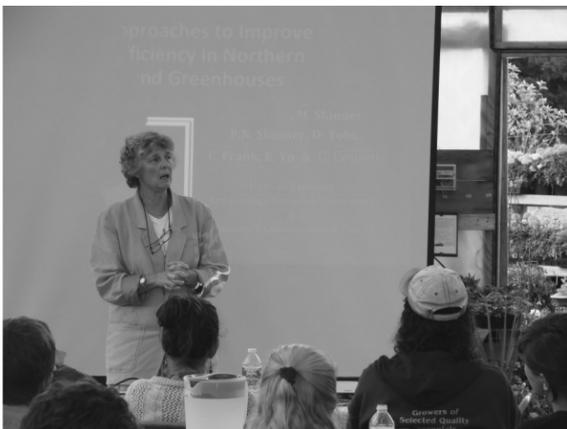


Ripening tomatoes at Spring Ledge Farm.

We saw more tomato houses up close as well as the ornamental houses. There is a clear distinction between the retail farm stand and garden center and the production houses. This split allows only the best products to be showcased for retail sale. All the plants looked fresh, despite the recent rainy weather we had been suffering in New Hampshire.

We returned to the retail house that had been set up as our meeting space. This allowed members to buy raffle tickets which benefitted the NHPGA Scholarship Fund. Nearly \$300 was raised to be granted for scholarships to eligible students pursuing a career in horticulture. Prizes were generously donated by Van Berkum Nursery, Griffin Greenhouse Supply, Pleasant View Gardens, Northeast Greenhouse & Nursery Supply, Ball Seed, Vaughan's Horticulture, Grimes Seed, D.S. Cole Growers, Four Season's Nursery, The Robert Baker Company and OHP.

Chris Beytes was given the floor for his exciting talk Acres Online Live (The New Hampshire Version) where he said both "heck!" and "darn!" Following Chris, Dr. Margaret Skinner, Research Professor, University of Vermont, presented a summary of her research which had been funded by the NH Horticultural Endowment. Her research is entitled, "Novel Methods for Energy Conservation in Northern New England Greenhouses."



Margaret Skinner presents her research.

The final business of the meeting was the election of the Board of Directors of the NHPGA. Ballots were cast by attending members and the following slate of officers was elected. Chris Schlegel will serve as President, Jeffrey Meulenbroek will serve as Vice-President and Members of the Board of Directors include Brett Andrus, Matt McElroy, Michael McPhail, Robert Demers, John Gedraitis and Linda Zukas. Brian Krug will continue to serve as liaison with the UNH Cooperative Extension.

Finally, dinner was served. Attendees enjoyed an assortment of salads and sides prepared with vegetables produced onsite at Spring Ledge as well as hamburgers made from beef produced at nearby Star Ledge Farm in Springfield, NH.



Chris Beytes takes the stage for his talk.

Chris Beytes Acres Online Live!

Chris Beytes, editor of Grower Talks magazine, and writer for the popular industry e-newsletter, Acres Online, was the guest speaker at the NHPGA's Annual Summer Meeting at Spring Ledge Farm in New London. He presented, "Acres Online Live!" news and commentary on the industry, including some things he wouldn't dare to put in print!



Chris Beytes presents his lively talk.

Chris began with a regional recap of how spring sales at greenhouses and garden centers were this season. He reported on his readers' gut feeling based on a 1 through 10 scale as reported to him by growers and garden centers. Weather still can be the number one effect on spring sales. However, industry consolidation ripples through and can affect the little guy, namely the independent growers and garden centers that dot NH. However, Chris shared (borrowed) wisdom from Anna Ball, President & CEO of Ball Horticulture, "For every trend, there's a counter trend." Chris assured attending growers and retailers that innovative businesses will succeed as the economy continues to recover. He then provided attendees with hot trends and examples he has gleaned from innovative businesses during his world travels.

Sales of dyed plants, from poinsettias to orchids to dusty miller and succulents, continue to increase and artistry improves. Cool ideas included creatively using cheap, readily available materials such as concrete cinder blocks, pallets and old window panes for retail sales and display areas. Color trends from Europe include the color gray, from shiny, metallic displays, to round or square tall pottery. Purple, used in vibrant containers or accent walls at retail, as well as mustard yellow. All three colors pair well together. Also, get ready for Froschkonig, frogs wearing crowns as colorful garden accents, the latest trend from Germany.

Chris also reported on his recent trip to Montreal to witness Mosaicultures Internationale 2013. Mosaicultures Internationales® is at once an international mosaic culture competition, an exhibition of horticultural art and a chance for the representatives from parks, gardens and green spaces around the world to exchange ideas. Mosaic culture is a refined horticultural art that involves creating and mounting living artworks made primarily from plants with colorful foliage (generally annuals, and occasionally perennials). The colorful two- and three-dimensional drawings, designs, sculptures and reliefs thus created employ a wide variety of flora. This multifaceted and complex discipline, an ornamental art, draws on numerous practices: on sculpture for its structure and volume, on painting for its palette, and on horticulture in its use of plants in a living, constantly changing environment.

If you want to follow Chris and see what he has to say every week, join the email list for Acres Online at www.ballpublishing.com.

**Learn More about the
NHPGA, visit NHPGA.org**

