

IPPS young propagator exchange program[©]

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EXCHANGE PROGRAM – VISIT TO DENMARK

The 2014 International Exchange Program offered through IPPS Southern Region was hosted in Denmark 20-27 September. This opportunity is afforded to a Southern Region members age 35 and under. Thank you for selecting me to be the 2014 representative. This experience has enriched my career immensely.

This paper is dedicated to three IPPS Southern Region members who have influenced me greatly through active membership: Mr. Bob Black, Mr. Tom Saunders and the late Mr. Wayne Sawyer. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my hosts Mr. Bent Jensen and Ms. Marianne Bachmann Andersen who welcomed me into their homes and made my experience authentic and engaging. The European Region members instantly welcomed me and have continued to serve as knowledge sources and inspiration for me.

My tour began in Copenhagen and over the 10 day stay I visited Køge, Sorø, Helsingør, Nyborg, Svendborg and Odense, Denmark and Helsingborg and Malmö, Sweden. Denmark is a fascinating country with a storied history dating back to the Vikings (Figure 1). Often held in the highest esteem for its environmental and energy policies, this society of just over five million residents is a global leader in design, architecture, farming, green technology and pharmaceuticals.



Figure 1. Map of Denmark.

The Danish strive to maintain healthy ecosystems by designing new and sustainable ways of living, environmentally friendly transportation, green infrastructure expansion and renewable energy sources such as wind turbine generated electricity. This ecologically sensitive approach to development has influenced Danish agriculture in many ways.

Denmark has the highest market share of organic products in the world with organic food making up 8% of the total food market. Some 7% of Danish land is used for organic

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farming with a goal of reaching 15% organically farmed land by 2020. Many horticulture producers are following suit by developing environmentally responsible growing systems and utilizing bio-controls for pest and disease management.

Retail garden centers of the Scandinavian region have many interesting innovations that could be applied to the independent garden centers and box stores in the USA. Cross merchandising for the outdoor lifestyle was a dominant feature. Furniture, garden art, grills and cooking supplies were all included in displays with traditional plant material. Halloween decor was highlighted including costumes, makeup, lights pumpkins and gourds. Haunted houses were created within greenhouse spaces attracting a broad demographic of customers including young families.

Plant material was consistently labeled thanks to an initiative of the Danish Nursery Association (Figure 2). The commitment to develop a unified marketing strategy includes education and community outreach from wholesale growers to garden centers ensuring that all horticulture professionals play a role in educating the consumer.



Figure 2. Consistent labeling of plant material.

Morten Sloth, production manager at Gunnar Christensens Plantskole and IPPS European Region member explains “It is a big job to market plants, but we are constantly trying to come up with little things that can bring attention to those plants which we produce.” Morten has created a pocket guide describing the many cultivars of strawberries, rhubarb and blueberries grown at the nursery. These are supplied to the employees at garden centers providing proper advice and a pleasurable buying experience for the customer.

Other noticeable trends in the garden center market included potting soil with a plant specific mixture of substrates. Organic fertilizers were featured through-out displays and ornamental edibles such as 1-gal pots of turnips (Figure 3), figs, blueberries and greens were incorporated with woody ornamentals as Foodscape vignettes. Through this cross merchandising technique consumers can visualize how a bio-diverse collection of plants will work in their home garden.



Figure 3. Ornamental edibles as foodscape vignettes – turnips in 1-gal containers.

One of the most striking products featured at garden centers and public gardens were the potted living willow topiaries (Figure 4). The tightly woven branches of a range of *Salix* species create high impact architectural detail through every season. These trained art pieces add dimension, novelty, and extravagance to the landscape while adding a unique interest to container gardening.



Figure 4. Topiaries of containerized living willows.

Coppiced deciduous trees and conifer specimens such as *Abies*, *Picea*, *Thuja*, and *Juniperus* were pruned into topiaries reflecting the manicured Danish design aesthetic. These stylized plants are ideal for consumers of any age and are well suited for small spaces

including patios and balconies.

Local produce, fresh cut flower bouquets, and indoor plants were heavily represented in retail outlets from small town markets to box store garden centers. House plants are an important market for Danish retailers and the creative displays of uniquely grown specimens and colorful selections make it a delightful section to browse through.

A diverse range of production facilities were highlighted during the IPPS Europe tour (Figure 5). Nursery innovations were featured at Gunnar Christensens Plantskole where a series of rotating presentations included strategies to reduce liverwort by using pre-formed wool top dressings. Bio-controls and beneficial insect applications were demonstrated. The use of conifer windbreaks and strategies to efficiently and sustainably develop nursery properties added great value to my experience.



Figure 5. Greenhouse production facilities during IPPS Europe tour.

Bio-dynamic farming and organic herb production were explored at Kiselgården a family run operation. This facility embraces a holistic approach to growing edibles with a diversified, balanced farm ecosystem that generates health and fertility from within the farm. Serving world renowned Michelin star restaurants like Noma and Geranium – the delicious produce is appreciated by the elite foodies.

New plant selections in an extensive trial garden at Gasa Young Plants gave insights to the future of global plant production. Innovations such as automated transplanters and high spectrum lighting were discussed while touring Gartneriet PKM, the world's largest producer of *Campanula*. Organic fruit production was the focus at Aqua Vitae Sydfyn, a Danish snaps distillery.

Møllegårdens Planteskole featured two brilliant growing strategies to make landscape installation more cost effective. Prima Færdig Bunddække® is a ground cover system consisting of plants that have been grown in a ready-made rolled mat, much like sod (Figure 6). These instant groundcovers are easy to install and reduce weed pressure by providing immediate ground coverage upon installation. Prima Færdig Hæk® is a high quality large hedge system developed to provide on the spot screening in new landscapes. With a wide range of plants in production these exclusive lines are very popular across Scandinavia.



Figure 6. Prima Færdig Bunddække® ground cover system of plants that have been grown in a ready-made rolled mat, much like sod.

The IPPS meeting revolved around the theme The Digital Nursery. The presentations provided many insights into the opportunities and challenges we face as plant producers in a time of rapidly changing technology. Anticipating the needs of the millennial consumer and adopting technologies to enhance the educational component of gardening is paramount.

Horticultural production is diversifying globally to include planting strategies that fulfill ecological needs, food production, urban infrastructure and a changing aesthetic value. The International Plant Propagators Society offers valuable resources for nursery professionals to develop their careers with collaborative influences. The International Exchange Program is an ideal platform to promote and expand membership with young professionals.

