

New Project

PO 006

Hellebores for production under
protection

Project Number: PO 006

Title: Hellebores for production under protection

Start and end dates: 1st April 2011 to 30th April 2012

Project Leader: H M Kitchener, HK Consultancy

Industry Representative: Ian Paton, Pinetops Nursery

Location: Pinetop Nursery, Lymington and Opperman Plants, Spalding

HDC Cost: £3,818

Project Summary:

- In the last 10 years a number of German companies have developed micropropagated *Helleborus niger* which hold particular promise as a subject raised by pot and bedding growers who generally sell plants in flower.
- Advantages of the newer micro propagated varieties include higher numbers of flowers and also upright flower habit which creates greater visual impact than the conventional garden types with their more drooping flower habit. Foliage presentation can be compact or more rangy and the presentation of foliage and flowers will need to be evaluated in order to determine suitability for different markets. Furthermore the expected marketing window for Hellebores appears to offer potential for a current opportunity to extend range of product on offer for pot and bedding growers from November and particularly after Christmas through to the end of February using a product with low energy requirements. Traditional Hellebore propagation is via a seed raised product.
- Gaps currently exist in our knowledge of how these new varieties perform in low temperature protected cultivation in the UK. General information on performance during production is required and in particular the potential of these new varieties to grow to schedule needs to be assessed. In addition the price differential between the highest

specification varieties at around £1.80 per young plant and other products on offer at around £1.20 per young plant needs to be investigated.

- The work proposed here is therefore aimed at providing a preliminary investigation / demonstration of 8 micro propagated varieties in commercial UK production systems. The work will also compare lower and higher cost young plants within the same season. The primary output to levy payers will be via open days where examples of all species will be displayed and these events will cover two stages of the anticipated marketing period i.e. in November for the more advanced types and the again during the main marketing window (late January). Two conventional common seed raised varieties will be included in trials as a bench mark.
- While shelf life is a critical component for the suitability of ornamental pot plants, it will not be included in this project. Since the scheduling of the varieties in UK production is currently unknown it is not possible to predict accurately when different varieties can be expected to be ready for marketing. This has potential to lead to a protracted and therefore costly shelf life evaluation period which would be hard to justify until the product can be demonstrated to have sufficient potential.

Aims & Objectives:

Project aim:

To undertake a preliminary demonstration / evaluation of micro propagated Hellebores as a new product for pot plant producers for the winter sales period (including the Christmas market).

Project objectives:

- Evaluate new varieties of micro propagated Hellebore with potential for low temperature protected production for marketing between December and February.
- Determine if the price premium attached to some Hellebore young plants generates a market advantage.

- Consider plant performance during production in either 1 or 3 litre pots and at marketing at two UK commercial sites.
- Communicate project progress via grower meetings where growers will be able to view and discuss all varieties being assessed.

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