

Dear guests

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you all to this conference on garden- and landscape plants in northern and maritime climate.

As I introduce to you the main topics of this conference I also want to tell you about how they affect us here in Iceland.

Photo 1- Old photo of Reykjavík

Iceland is an isolated island in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, far away from the European mainland, with hostile climate and conditions for traditional gardening and garden plants and small and fragile marginal market. All this makes Iceland dependent on cooperation with other countries....

Photo 2

In some sense these special conditions have made it rather unattractive for importers to establish plant retailers in Iceland. The reason is that the most common imported plant species and cultivars have not been hardy enough for the Icelandic climate.

Photo 3 – Landscape/*Populus trichocarpa*

But there has been a great demand for forest and garden plants that can grow in the barren and windswept landscape of Iceland . Gardeners, hobbyists and the forest commission have therefore through over hundred years collected and tested thousands of specimens from all over the world, many collected by Icelanders in wild nature like for an example in Alaska, the Rocky Mountains, Kamtsjatka and N-Europe.

Photo 4 – Gardens in Laugardalur

Many of those plants have proved to be well adapted to our difficult climate. Since most of them were not in cultivation anywhere else in other countries, Icelanders had to propagate and produce them themselves. Many plant nurseries were established after the Second World War, some run by the forest commission and others by municipals, but the majority of the private enterprises were run almost like a hobby. This will be discussed further tomorrow in the lecture by *Guðríður Helgadóttur*.

Photo 5 – Gardens in Fossvogur

In our cooperative countries the situation has in many ways been similar. For Icelanders it has been highly beneficial to get knowledge and plant material for improving the possibilities here in Iceland. I could mention many plant cultivars which have come from our neighbours.

And there is still more to come of interesting plant cultivars and growing methods from our partners abroad, some are already in trial in our clone archives and we will hopefully get an opportunity to look at them later on today and tomorrow.

Photo 6 - The NPNP partners on a meeting in Orkney last autumn

My colleagues and I have been fortunate to participate in the Northern periphery project “New Plants for the Northern periphery market”. Ulrika Bohman and Mona Lundberg from Sweden will tell us about The project and future opportunities for cooperation in a short while.

Photo 7 – Syringa x sp. ‘Villa Nova’

But what is the purpose of importing all these new plants and is there any need for them? You could say: the more the merrier and there is always room for new plants. OK, fair enough but we have to look closer at this because a lot of work and money can be put into trying new plants and one has to focus on what kind of plants are most needed. Some would argue that a good looking plant that sells well is enough, but in my view it is not so.

Later today *Dr. Pröstur Eysteinnsson*, from the National Forests service in Iceland will tell us about exotic trees in Icelandic forestry, their use and importance today and in the future in wide perspective.

Photo 8 – Greystone willow (*Salix x majalis* ‘Grásteinn’)

The main purpose in finding new plants for cultivation is in my view to find useful plants for particular purposes.

When finding new plants for cultivation I believe that the most important is to find useful plants for particular purposes

In Iceland there is a lack of large shrubs and small trees which are wind and salt tolerant, as well as berry and fruit plants and ground covering plants, and hardier plant material is needed for coastal areas.

Photo 9 – Nippon Spiraea (*Spiraea nipponica*) and Yellow Honeysuckle (*Lonicera deflexicalys* ‘Kristmann’)

In many cases we already have useful hardy plants that thrive well even under very difficult conditions but for some reason are not much in use like the under valued Nippon Spirea and the yellow flowered honeysuckle to name a few. Many of these have been cultivated for decades, often of uncertain cultivar that needs to be re-evaluated, given a name and marketed anew.

Photo 10 - Yndisgróður

In the research project on Icelandic garden and landscape plants, called *Yndisgróður*, which I am running, we have focused on this. We have done so by collecting Icelandic plant cultivars and information about them, value their quality and usefulness

Photo 11 – Demonstration Gardens

.....and planting them in clone archives- and demonstration gardens where scientists and others can study them.

Now we have established six of such gardens.

One of the projects that have inspired us most here in Iceland is the Finnish Keskas project. Marjatta Uosukainen will tell us about their “30 years of experience starting from searching of hardy garden plants to utilization of best material in nursery production and landscaping”.

Reflecting on our work here in Iceland we think we have come a long way but we need to look forward to find out what new tasks lie ahead. Today there is more demand worldwide on using native species and there is also a growing awareness of not using potential invasive plants.

Photo 12 – *Sorbus aucuparia* and *Betula pubescence*.

For Iceland, native species like *Betula pubescens*, *Sorbus aucuparia*, *Juniperus communis* and *Salix* are and will be important in the future. But too little has been done in collecting and choosing good cultivars as garden- and landscape plants of native Icelandic species. Should we perhaps focus more on perennials? In Iceland municipals and public institutions are not really using perennials at all, except maybe *Alchemilla mollis*.

Photo 13 - *Cake Berjakaka*

A big interest is now in Iceland on plants for fruit and berries. It is therefore of great interest to have ***Leif Blomquist*** from Finland to tell us about his experience in “Hunting for hardy varieties of fruit trees from Russia, Finland and the Baltic’s and their introduction into the market”. ***Jaana Laamanen*** also from Finland will talk about “Climate change in combination with opening borders in world trade – increasing threat to plant health in northern regions”

Photo 14 – Demonstration Garden in Blönduós

Having the valuable hardy and healthy plants on the market is a step forward but what about people’s interest and knowledge on using and growing these plants? **Peter Martin** from Orkney will tell us about “Gardening in harsh environments: The challenge and interest of gardeners in Scotland's Northern Isles” and **Elisabeth Öberg** and **Ulrika Bohman** from Sweden will talk about “The importance of gardening methods”

The last lecture today is held by **Vilhjálmur Lúðvíksson** Chairman of The Icelandic Horticultural Society of Iceland: “The challenges of establishing a popular gardening culture in Iceland from 1885 to present - and some new perspectives.”

Tomorrow before our work shop and site visits we will have two lectures. **Lena Ansebo** from NordGen in Sweden will talk about “Plant collecting missions in the Nordic region for conservation and utilization” and then **Guðríður Helgadóttir** from the Agricultural University of Iceland, will tell us about “Garden plants selection for Icelandic environment”.

Photo 15 – Demonstration Garden in Reykir

As you can see there are many issues concerning gardening and garden- and landscape plants that will be discussed at this conference and hopefully some questions that may rise will be answered. In the workshop tomorrow we will continue discussing these issues and there is an opportunity for all of you to contribute.

At 4 o'clock today we are invited to the 50th anniversary of the Botanical gardens here in Reykjavík. And if there is time we will also visit the new Rose garden which is close by.

I am happy to introduce Jóhann Pálsson, as our guest of honour at the conference. He is the former Director of the City Gardens of Reykjavik and former curator of the Akureyri Botanical Gardens and has made an important contribution to gardening culture in Iceland.

Photo 16 - Jóhann Pálsson in the Rose Garden

On 21st of July this year, on Jóhann's 80th (eitieth) birthday Yndisgróður, the Horticultural society of Iceland and the municipal of Reykjavik opened a new rose garden here in Laugardalur to honour him. And I hope that we can take a look at the rose garden later on today.

Photo 17 – Jóhann Pálsson and Óli Valur Hansson in the Rose Garden

I also want to mention another grand old man in our field, present here today, **Óli Valur Hanson**. In his lifelong career as a horticultural adviser he has done an enormous work for gardening in Iceland. A great number of plants have travelled through his hands to new owners and new species and cultivars have come to use because of his work and travels, with his plant hunting excursion to Alaska in 1986 being probably the best known.

And finally, as I open this conference, I would like to ask you all to give these two gentlemen a round of applause and welcome them especially to our conference!!

Thank you

From Sweden we have Ribes nigrum 'Öjebyn' and 'Storklas' Prunus padus 'Laila', Rosa x rugosa 'Örträsk'

From Norway we have got : Lonicera involucrata 'Kera' and 'Marit', Sorbaria sorbifolia 'Pia'

From the Faro Islands the local Ribes sanguineum cultivar that we call 'Færeyjar' here in Iceland, also the interesting Chilotricum diffusum.

From Finland we have got a series of hardy and valuable cultivars, first to mention the black currant cultivar among others 'Melalathi', gooseberry 'Lepän Puinainen' and 'Hinomähen keltaninen' and in recent years many cultivars of Roses. Rosa spinosissima 'Juhannus morsian', 'Tove Janson'

Yet we haven't got many cultivars from Orkney but from Scotland I could mention Rosa spinosissima 'Kakwa'