



Which perennial assortment will withstand climate change in the long term?

The world is full of perennial enthusiasts, people who are passionate about perennials and who are passionate about sustainable development. In mid-October, nearly 70 nurserymen, landscape architects, implementers and perennial lovers from 14 corners of Europe came to Prague to join the Future Days, organized by the International Hardy Plant Union (ISU). The first day of the conference was focused on climate change. The first Czech transmitter, Petr Hanzelka, Botanical Garden of Prague, helped to look for plants that could stand better in the upcoming warmer climate than the current ones.



Speakers and organisers of the conference: back, from left: Jakub Hamata, Theo Villier, Frans van Wanrooij, Stan Beekmanns, Sven Straeten, Herbert Vinken, Mirjam Vogt, John Little, Frantisek Haba. front, from left: Aad Vollebregt, Tomasz Michalik, Jana Holzbecherová, Nico Rijnbeek.

He shared with an assortment of Mediterranean and North American prairie plants that he has been testing and observing for a long time both

in their natural habitat and in the exhibits of the Botanical Garden in Prague-Troja. Among the very drought-tolerant perennials he named were *Aster sericeus*, *Muhlenbergia capillaris*, *Allium 'Millenium'*, and, perhaps surprisingly, *Heuchera pulchella*.



Briton James Hitchmough made a strong plea for adapting ranges to the upcoming changes and using site conditions as a basis for plant planning.

Hanzelka's descriptions became vivid during a later tour of the Botanical Garden with beautifully flowering areas of North American prairie and annual beds planted with Mediterranean perennial species.

James Hitchmough, a professor at the University of Sheffield in Britain, shocked the participants right at the start by saying, "We are all moving towards the equator.... In 2070, Budapest will be climatically on a par with southern Greece today." And what is the answer in the range of plants on offer? James and his PhD students compared the Howard Nurseries and Beth Chatto Nurseries catalogues by the water requirements of the taxa and found that in 30 years - there has been no change in the range! And that's why he says: „Let the site drive the design! Don't push the design onto the site.

To preserve biodiversity, John Little from the United Kingdom suggested using entomologists in the implementation and design of new habitats. He also questioned whether it makes ecological sense to apply topsoil from another site to a planting area. He advised a preference for substrates, emphasizing that a greater variance of materials - from crushed construction debris to sugar industry waste - will bring more habitat and greater biodiversity.



Plants enliven every conference venue - and perennials even more so. The preparation team decorated the conference hall in pots and vases.

In a short talk of startup companies from the Czech Republic, Jakub Hamata, talked about growing leafy vegetables using waste heat from computers. František Hába from the flower farm Loukykvět showed how they have been organically gardening in Mšecke Žehrovice for 6 years and have succeeded in growing not only annuals and perennials for cutting.



The Botanical Garden in Prague was in exceptionally good condition.



Drought-tolerant plants are becoming increasingly important for urban greening throughout Europe. For years, the Botanical Garden in Prague has been testing appropriate assortments, which were visited during the excursion.

Perennial growers question sustainability of peat substitutes

Sustainable production and the preservation of perennial nurseries are pressing issues in the industry throughout Europe. This was impressively demonstrated at the Future Days of the International Hardy Plant Union, which took place in Prague in mid-October. Christoph Hokema, for example, uses a high proportion of peat substitute in his perennial nursery Fehrle Stauden. But he also pointed out the high carbon footprint of coconut fiber, which is imported from Indonesia and the Philippines and often means child labor and deforestation.

Substrates without peat often have fluctuating pH levels and increased infestations of fungal diseases, criticized Sven Straeten of the German company Greenhats Sweb Straeten. In addition, the plants must be watered more heavily when sold.

Herbert Vinken cultivates herbs and ornamental plants organically at his Herb's perennial nursery in Germany. The key to strengthening soil microbiology, he says, is alternating substrates and fertilizers.

The last two presentations addressed the issue of handing over or selling a family business. Frans van Wanrooij from the Netherlands took the audience through the process, using the Vilier company as an example. The owner Theo Vilier and the new owner Stan Beekmans pointed out the most important aspects of handing over a company from a legal, human and personal point of view. It can take up to 6 years to hand over a horticultural or agricultural business, consultant Mirijam Vogt reported from her experience in Germany.

Nico Rijnbeek explained his takeover of the Dutch family business Rijnbeek Stauden and the hand-over to his son that has now taken place. "When you pass the business on to the next generation, you must not see your offspring as a son/daughter, but as a business partner," he says. Aad Vollebregt, ISU president and Dutch perennial grower, on the other hand, told that unfortunately his older brother took over his parents' farm. He went his own way, studying and eventually buying a perennial nursery.

These sponsors promoted the conference:

- Zbyněk Slezáček - Gramoflor representative for the Czech Republic (<https://www.substraty.info/>)
- Agro-Sur from Poland (<https://agrosur.com.pl/cs>)
- ICL Poland (<http://icl-polska.com/o-nas>)
- Flora media from Poland (<https://sklep.floramedia.pl/en/>)



The city tour was another highlight for the participants.

The face of Future Days



Participants particularly appreciated the thematic group discussions where they shared their horticultural and farm experiences across national borders and age differences.

The participants agreed that the first ISU-Future Days was thematically a successful conference and led to new encounters internationally. The next event will take place in another country with new topics.



The ISU Board and the participants thank Jana Holzbecherová, who bore the brunt of the organisation in addition to her business, an open day there and her young family.

The idea for the Future Days came up at the Summer Days board meeting and was confirmed at the 2022 General Assembly. Initial plans called for a conference in Berlin. Then Jana Holzbecherova took over the organisation with Tomasz Michalik and an agency in Prague. The office assisted and some board members also got involved. Nevertheless - the joint work rested clearly on Jana's shoulders.



Jana Holzbecherová was mainly responsible for organising the Future Days together with her board colleague Tomasz Michalik. ISU President Aad Vollebregt thanked them for the successful event.