

Lavant Horticultural Society

New Plants – the Future for your Garden *Graham Spencer* 10th March 2021

Just a few incomplete notes from Graham's insight into everything behind the arrival of a new plant on the market

Where do new plants come from?

Specialist breeders – some other countries, such as the USA, the Netherlands, Germany, Japan, have large specialist breeding companies. In the UK, the norm is smaller breeders including individual enthusiasts, part-time, retired.

Nurseries, large & small National collection holders Botanic gardens Universities

Collection from the wild – This is no longer significant – are such varieties legally protectable? Would probably also be constrained by CDB (*Convention on Biological Diversity*) regulations protecting wild flora.

How do new plants occur?

Controlled breeding: two parent varieties, each having desired characteristics, are crossed in the hope that the result will combine the desired characteristics of both; Pollen other than from the chosen male variety is excluded. There are some breeders doing this on a large scale and some on a small scale.

Open pollination, planned or unplanned.

Mutation – either naturally occurring (“sports”) or induced (example - by exposing to X-rays)

All of the above require knowledge, technical skill, physical resources and a tremendous investment in time and dedication, which give no guarantee of success; good fortune is also essential.

Plant Variety Rights protection - to start with, a good new plant must meet the compulsory criteria:

Distinctiveness – demonstrably different from existing varieties;

Uniformity – all plants of the variety should display the same characteristics;

Stability – must maintain these characteristics;

Novelty;

Name – so that it can be properly identified, although sometimes different names can be used in different markets, e.g. the translation of the name into the local language.

But this is just the beginning – it also needs

Good garden performance, otherwise has no commercial future.

Good nursery performance – plants must be able to be grown commercially to a cost that will provide sufficient margins and still achieve a competitive retail price. Reliability/risk and time taken to propagate and grow on also significant.

Is it easy enough to propagate vegetatively (cuttings, division etc.)

If not, is it tissue culture friendly?

It may have met the DUS criteria, but is it sufficiently different from existing varieties in the eyes of customers? (Unless it bred as a “me too” variety, to target a share of a market that others have already opened).

Will the punters pay for it? Even though a good new variety may command a premium, the customer will still expect it to fall within a price bracket for that type of plant.

A good name is important to open up a market position, but will not compensate for poor performance.

The importance of Plant Variety Rights

Similar to patents or copyrights, this protects the breeder from being undercut by straight copies that have not had to incur the very significant time, effort and cost of the initial breeding. This allows the opportunity to recover costs, to create revenue/profit and to develop and to protect market position.

It allows strategies to be developed to control and maximise distribution – growing and sales network.

The profit is used for further investment in marketing and in refining the commercial growing techniques.