



Scottish Autumn Show & Plant Fair Livingston 27 September 2025

Visitors were treated to an engaging programme of talks throughout the day. Plantsman Neil Huntley (Hartside Nursery) kicked things off, sharing his wealth of knowledge about growing *Roscoea* and highlighting the charm of this hardy, high-altitude ginger. Frazer Henderson followed with insights into the development, distribution and habitats of *Aeonium*. Carole & Ian Bainbridge showcased stunning images from their marvellous Galloway garden, emphasizing the importance of their 'right plant, right place' philosophy. Heather McHaffie wrapped up the presentations delivering an excellent overview of fern life cycles and recommending the best varieties for gardens and homes. Finally, Alan Weepers conducted a workshop masterclass on propagating and caring for cacti and succulents, rounding out a day full of valuable gardening and botanical wisdom.

In the lecture room, several societies and clubs set up splendid displays to engage the public and showcase their interests: the Scottish Bonsai Society featured an impressive sample of plants from their vast collection, which received much admiration from visitors; the Scottish Gardeners' Forum effectively highlighted the important work they do to support and encourage all Scottish gardening clubs; the Scottish Rhododendron Society presented the extensive variety within the genus and its extensive global distribution; the Hardy Plant Society created a magnificent display, overflowing with floral treasures that many visitors

Above: *Helichrysum coralloides*

Facing: *Sempervivum ciliosum* var. *borisii*

desired, together with a comprehensive collection of informative publications; the British Pteridological Society offered an highly educational and informative display incorporating an intriguing selection of both native and exotic ferns; and the Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society's stand well illustrated the society's efforts to promote, encourage, and support a wide array of horticultural and gardening interests, including various educational projects throughout Scotland. It was clear from the overwhelmingly positive reaction that each display enhanced the visitor experience and contributed to the success of the day.



Saxifraga DANCING PIXIES TINI

The wider gardening theme was evident in the show hall too. There were four gold medal winning educational displays: cacti and succulents from the Scottish branch of the British Cacti & Succulent Society; Scottish-grown apples from the gardens of the National Trust for Scotland; growing *Meconopsis* from the Meconopsis Group – part of their Gold award at the RHS Chelsea show earlier in the year; and how to grow and care for artistic and natural displays of *Sempervivum* growing in crevices between large blocks of metamorphic rock by Graham Catlow. Also, the Logan Home trophy was awarded to Graham for his miniature garden.

With some 240 plants from 16 exhibitors the show benches were



filled with a wide range of flowering, fruiting and foliage plants, the last including both silver-grey and bright autumn colours. The conifer, crassulacea, southern hemisphere and fern classes were particularly competitive. There were also some very large cushion plants from Sam Sutherland. However, the outstanding cushion was of the extremely difficult *Raoulia eximia* that gained a certificate of merit for Cyril Lafong. Stan da Prato gained most points in Section I and the Mary Bowe trophy, along with the Wellstanlaw cup for a lovely autumnal display of cut flowers, berries

Gentiana 'Eugen's Allerbesten'

and foliage. He also took the J L Mowat trophy for best conifer with *Larix kaempferi* 'Nana' and the East Lothian trophy for 3 pans rock plants with *Gentiana* 'The Caley', *Saxifraga* DANCING PIXIES TINI and *Saxifraga* DANCING PIXIES THEA. By contrast, Section two contained just a few entries. For a second year, the East Lothian cup for best plant went to Jean Horsburgh for her *Rebutia fiebrigii*, which appeared to be in even better condition than it was at last year's show.

The non-bulbous flowering plants included heathers, campanulas, some cultivars of the far-eastern species of saxifrage, and gentians. It is a challenge to get autumn gentians to the show bench in perfect condition, because these beautiful plants don't flower well under glass and so are often spoilt by the weather. It was also unusual to see such a well flowered *Daphne jasminea* at this time of year.

As the years go by cyclamen seem to flower earlier and earlier and so *Cyclamen hederifolium* dominated the show benches, along with a few *CC. mirabile*, *cilicium*, *intaminatum* and *graecum*. Most were small specimens which, when *en masse* in the cyclamen group of classes and also scattered elsewhere, formed a lovely white, pink and red display. The best cyclamen, for the Jim Lever memorial trophy, was a small, really nice *C. mirabile* shown by Struan Harley. The abundant flowers with pronounced toothed tips and fresh leaves,

Cyclamen mirabile





Hyacinthoides lingulata
Gaultheria mucronata



suffused pink in part, made this a particularly attractive winner.

Autumn-flowering bulbs, dominated by *Crocus* and *Colchicum*, are often ignored by gardeners, but the late September date for our show is perhaps a little early for the wide range of species that are available, and indeed there were just a few pans that brought highlights to one section of the benches. Many of these species and cultivars, particularly of the larger colchicums, will grow well in our gardens though they may be trashed by the heavy autumn rains, a characteristic fate of these plants in the wild. The smaller crocus and colchicums (for example *CC. cupanii*, *boissieri*), grown under glass, make excellent show plants. To these must be added *Sternbergia* and there were a few well-flowered specimens of *SS. lutea* and *greuteriana*, the latter judged the most meritorious plant in the show, giving his fourteenth Forrest medal to Dave Millward.



Sternbergia lutea
Sternbergia greuteriana



Crocus pulchellus x *speciosus*
Fascicularia bicolor





Primula scotica

We are greatly indebted to all those members – too many to mention individually – who helped to make the Livingston 2025 event a success. Thank you to all.

Dave Millward & Frazer Henderson

(Images: *Liz Cole*)