

Working to avoid
blossom end rot

— ABCs of QR codes
in merchandising

GREENHOUSE

May 2012

CANADA



Flower Power

**ROSA FLORA GROWING STRONG,
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FEATURES

- 12** **Energy Edge**
Real flower power: long-term investment strategy pays dividends for Rosa Flora.
- 16** **Avoiding blossom end rot**
Maintaining the right nutrient balance, EC and pH in the rootzone on checklist.
- 20** **Knowledge is a process...**
... and not a single event; maintain the momentum by attending workshops and conferences.
- 22** **ABCs of QR codes**
Will they become a standard in horticulture merchandising?
- 26** **Fertilizers' fear factor**
Growers must understand the role of each element in growth of the plant.
- 28** **Gardens with great taste**
Visitors to Québec landmark enjoy sampling flowers in the displays *and on the menu*.



ON THE COVER

Gerbera grower Arjen Meerman of Rosa Flora. See page 12.

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DEPARTMENTS

- | | |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| 6 EDITORIAL | 20 GROWING IN THE GREEN
Grower Day preview |
| 8 UNDER COVER
New research partnership | 26 GROWING POINTS
Fertilizer basics |
| 10 NEW PRODUCTS | 34 INSIDE VIEW
Selling the 'sizzle' with the steak |

Gardens with great taste

Visitors to Quebec landmark enjoy sampling flowers in the displays *and* on the menu

BY MARTINE FRIGON

In 1918, Elsie Reford took possession of a summer camp in Grand-Métis, located in the eastern part of Québec and with a magnificent view of the St.

Lawrence River.

In 1926, she expanded Estevan Lodge, built by her uncle Lord Mount Stephen in 1887, and transformed it into a 37-room country house. Over four

decades, she created a private garden and grew many varieties of flowers that did not flourish naturally in this part of the world.

Her son, however, didn't have her horticultural passion or her green thumb. He sold the property to the provincial government in 1961, and the gardens

were opened to the public the following year.

Reford Gardens has since become an important tourist attraction in the Gaspésie. In 1995, the government transferred the site to the management of a non-profit organization. The board hired Elsie Reford's great-grandson Alexander Reford as general manager. He left his job at the University of Toronto, and career as a historian, to live a new life in the heritage settings established by his own family.

Reford Gardens (Les Jardins de Métis) is open from June through October each year. It is celebrating its 50th year as a public attraction this year. Featured will be concerts, garden parties, theatrical performances, lectures, circus events, culinary



General manager Alexander Reford; (top) each variety is grown in small quantities of 50 to 100 plants.

evenings, literary teas and musical brunches. It will also host the 13th edition of the International Garden Festival, featuring the work of artists from around the world.

STARTING PLANTS IN THE GREENHOUSE

■ From its early days, Reford Gardens has used greenhouses to start exotic seeds such as the blue poppy.

"Greenhouses have always been essential for us because of our northern climate, and also because we produce more than 23,000 different annuals and perennials every year," says horticulturalist Patricia Gallant.

She has been in charge of production for the past 24 years.

"Each year, we try new varieties. For instance in our 2012 season, we will, among many others, plant new selections never rooted here such as angelonia, antirrhinum majus, browallia americana, cosmos rubenza, dianthus 'Amazon Rose Majic,' California poppy, and 'Spanish Eye Lavender.'"

Assisted by four gardeners and an assistant gardener, this is a complex task for Gallant and her colleagues because each variety is grown in very small quantities. "Most of the time, it means 50 to 100 plants."

Reford Gardens has three greenhouses. Two are Lord and Burnham structures, built in 1972. Each measuring 30x30 feet, they are heated by a hot water



greenhouse throughout their various growth stages. And with the number and variety of plants grown, that keeps everyone hopping.

Crop start times vary because temperatures are not the same in the three main greenhouses.

"In one of the greenhouses heated by a hot water system, we set the temperature between 20 and 24 Celsius, while in the other one, we will heat only between 15 and 20 Celsius. In the third, the temperature is much lower, kept between 12 and 15 Celsius," adds Gallant.

A fourth structure is not heated. It's used for some varieties just before they are transplanted in the garden.

All irrigation is done manually.

PEST MANAGEMENT RELIES ON BIOCONTROLS

■ "We don't use any pesticides," says Gallant. Predators such as *amblyseius cucumeris*, *hypoaspis aculeifer*, *cryptolaemus montrouzieri*, *hypoaspis miles* and *amblyseius swirskii* are used, and with good success.

The 23,000 varieties grown require

close monitoring, and Gallant has created a detailed production database. "I also numbered all the flowerbeds, and detailed the type of soil and the exposure to the sun, because each part of the garden has its own characteristics."

The historic section of the gardens – the area that was maintained from 1926 until 1958 by the Refords – is still home to the same varieties grown back then. "We want to respect the original setup in the historic garden, so we maintain the same varieties over the years," Reford explains.

The newer sections of the gardens have been developed as conceptual gardens created as part of the International Garden Festival.

FINE CUISINE PAIRED WITH FINE FLOWERS

■ There are two cafés and a restaurant in Estevan Lodge, the historic fishing lodge and former summer house of Elsie Reford. Pierre-Olivier Ferry, the chef since 2005, has created original dishes made

Continued on page 32

system. The third structure, a Harnois Nordique, was purchased when the province closed the Quebec City zoo in 2006; it is a double greenhouse that measures 40x75 feet and has a propane heating system.

CONSIDERING SWITCH TO BIOMASS HEATING

■ "We are looking at a biomass heating system since there are many suppliers in our region with many sawmills nearby," says Reford. "This is a project that could be feasible in 2013 or 2014."

And while talking about suppliers, Premier Tech has been an important sponsor over the years. "They give us all the compost, peat moss and substrates that we need," Reford adds. "It amounts to a substantial contribution to our growing operations."

Heating and lighting are major challenges each February when the growing season begins.

"This is very complicated," says Gallant. "I have to find the right place for each variety, taking into account the sun and the lighting. We have to count on natural light, since we only have fluorescents."

Plants are moved around the

JULY 12 ISSUE



GREENHOUSE

CANADA

Growing with you

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will contain our first

of two articles on new

varieties, as well as

features on

containers and pots.



<p>Space Reservation</p> <p>Deadline: May 25, 2012</p>	<p>Material</p> <p>Deadline: June 12, 2012</p>
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PHOTO COURTESY REFORM GARDENS

Pierre-Olivier Ferry has been chef of the restaurant and the two cafés at the Reford Gardens since 2005. He extensively utilizes flowers and herbs grown onsite.

with flowers and herbs grown onsite. He can choose from among 120 varieties to use in his recipes.

One appetizer, for example, includes petals from about 15 varieties of flowers. Several main courses are also garnished with flowers and herbs grown in the gardens. Marinades and spreads made with flowers, fruits and herbs from the garden and surrounding area are also available on the site, but also sold through a network of specialty stores and restaurants around the province.

And finally the big question: how does Alexander Reford feel about managing a garden created by his great-grandmother almost a century ago? "This is a choice I have never regretted!" ■

Martine Frigon is a freelance writer and photographer in Quebec.



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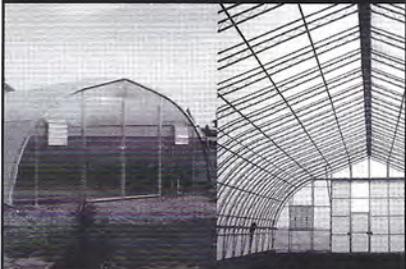


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By Dave Harrison

FROM THE EDITOR

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Low food prices a wake-up call

Food in Canada remains a bargain. That's the good news. The bad news is that such affordability also means farmgate prices are not rising; we've had Food Freedom Day on Feb. 12 since 2009.

The Canadian Federation of Agriculture says that Canadians earned enough income by Feb. 12 to pay their grocery bill for the entire year. They will have spent about 11.8 per cent of this year's disposable income on food. Compare that with France (13.5 per cent) and Japan (14.2 per cent).

Of the 11.8 per cent Canadians pay for food overall, farmers continue to take only a very small percentage of the food dollar. This is the wake-up call. Within the first three weeks of the year, notes CFA president Ron Bonnett, an average consumer has earned enough income to pay the farmers' share of the food dollar. "This is a common story for many players along the value chain - the share they get does not adequately compensate their costs," Bonnett explains. "The CFA strongly believes all stakeholders would benefit from a National Food Strategy. A plan to optimize our food system would strengthen agricultural businesses, create long-term value and make significant contributions to society."

In a recent Bank of Montreal poll, some 86 per cent of Canadians said it was important or very important that they purchase Canadian-produced food.

A sustainable agri-food industry is essential in Canada. For one thing, it makes economic sense. About nine per cent of Canada's GDP is generated within the food system. Some 2.4 million jobs are tied to the sector.

The National Food Strategy says farming and food processing in Canada needs more attention. "In spite of the food sector's contribution to a healthy economy, the bottom line of many producers and processors of food remains low. Farm incomes have suffered a roller-coaster ride that includes nominal or negative farm income. Food processing capacity has witnessed an exodus from Canada. More of our food is imported in spite of our abundance of land and water, our entrepreneurial spirit, access to technology and human capacity - all of which should facilitate expansion of our food production and processing capacity."

A key plank in the National Food Strategy notes that participants in the food chain should have a reasonable and equal opportunity to prosper.

Greenhouse vegetables would be major winners under such a plan, as they can be grown domestically year-round. Having governments and their agencies facilitate more trigren projects - electricity onto the grid, waste heat and CO₂ into the greenhouse - would be an example of improved economic sustainability.

If farmgate prices don't rise sufficiently, growers must rely on improved efficiencies and productivity to counter low prices. That requires breakthroughs in breeding and more research in cutting costs and increasing yields. Investing in research has always been important, but the slim margins of horticulture and its flat-lining prices will require even more attention over the next few years.

Let's ensure Food Freedom Day is truly something to be celebrated mutually by consumers and by those producing the food. ■

“Farmers continue to take only a very small percentage of the food dollar.”

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