

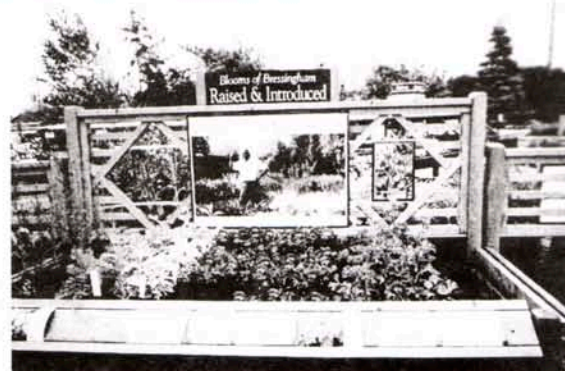
Blooms of Bressingham, a Study of Successful Sales

By Ellen Strother, *Clemson Extension*
Commercial Horticulture Agent for Colleton/Beaufort counties

Want to gather new ideas for selling plants and creating display gardens? And don't mind accumulating air miles? An educational jaunt that will improve your own South Carolina business may be just the ticket. One fine destination for horticultural stimulation and great retail ideas is Bressingham, in jolly-old England. In one location you will find twelve acres of display gardens, a premier English garden center and possible exposure to one or more world class plantsmen.

Blooms of Bressingham perennials are known throughout the world from books written and illustrated by Alan and Adrian Bloom, two of England's most prominent horticulturists and nurserymen. The Blooms are recognized as leaders in the development and release of new, distinctive plants. The expansive selection of perennials that Blooms offer has been developed over nearly 70 years.

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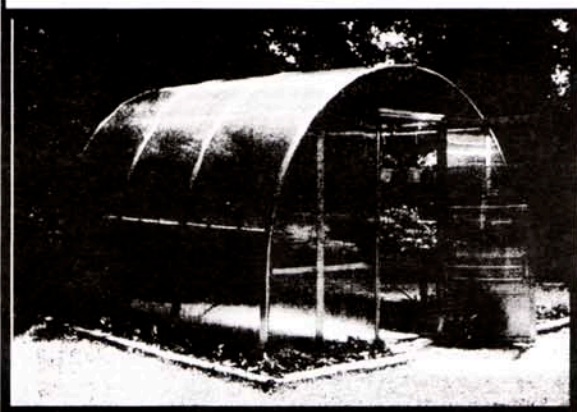


Signage identifies Bloom bred plants



Herbaceous plant display at Bressingham Garden Centre

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The Blooms are pioneers in the field of merchandising. They know plant sales increase if the plant is seen in the landscape setting, rather than merely in a pot. They capitalize on this knowledge through the use of promotional landscape photos and through the creation of display gardens. Blooms influenced the horticulture industry by including plant tags, background cards and powerful point of purchase (POP) glossy posters to promote their plants. They were the first in the UK to obtain a plant patent and the first to aggressively promote plant sales using Madison Avenue style marketing techniques.

Alan Bloom

Alan Bloom is a 90-something perennial plantsman. He succumbed to his plant passions at an early age and formed Blooms Nurseries in 1926. Twenty years later he moved the nursery to its present location in Bressingham, Norfolk. His six acre Dell Garden is testimonial to the power of the perennial.

Alan Bloom began to create The Dell Garden in 1954. He started the "island bed" craze that has swept across many nations. Island beds are free form raised beds with graceful curves which allow plants to be viewed from all sides. Alan created 47 island beds that boast three season color and foliar interest. The garden today covers six acres and holds over 5,000 different varieties/cultivars of plants. The famous "Bressingham" cultivars are on display here as are many rare and unusual plants.



Alan Bloom, Plantsman
Bressingham, England

The Dell Garden is open to the public and is located next to the retail Bressingham Garden Center. If luck is with you, you'll spy Alan Bloom wandering in the garden. With flowing white hair and a twinkle in his eye you won't confuse him with anyone else. And he's perfectly willing to shake your hand and talk plants. If hobnobbing with horticulturists is enjoyable to you, you may want to stay at his home and B&B, Bressingham Hall. This large Georgian home overlooks the entire Bloom complex, including the famous Dell Garden and is within walking distance of the garden center, the steam museum (where you can either ride on a full size steam train or an old-fashioned carousel) and Adrian Bloom's garden "Foggy Bottom."

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Alan Bloom's Dell Garden
Bressingham, England



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Adrian Bloom

Adrian Bloom is Alan's son. Adrian is as well known as his famous father, but may be best known for creating new standards of garden excellence through creation of the four-season garden. Adrian expanded the garden palette into winter through his dwarf conifer and heather introductions. His six-acre Foggy Bottom Garden boasts an impressive backdrop of richly textured mature dwarf conifers. Weave in unusual trees, shrubs, ornamental grasses, heathers and of course, perennials and the result is breathtaking.

In 1959, after graduating, Adrian of course had no interest in the family business and he struck out for America. He settled in San Francisco selling encyclopedias. One publishing giant's loss became horticulture's gain as he returned home a few short years later to add his considerable talent and skill to the company. Adrian Bloom pioneered many of the marketing practices associated with the Bloom name which have influenced the commercial horticulture industry.



*Jason Bloom
Nursery Manager & Plant Propagator*

Jason Bloom

Jason Bloom is Adrian's son and Alan's grandson. He is also the nursery manager and chief propagator for Blooms Nurseries Limited. Like his father, Jason had no intention of joining the business and looked in other directions (such as forensic pathology) for a career. The horticultural call home was great however, and he changed majors to obtain a horticulture diploma.

He opted to start at the bottom and work his way up through the ranks in order to become a top notch supervisor. Jason has intuitive management abilities and knows how to involve his staff in decision making. Jason's bottom line is quality and as chief propagator he sets the tone created by his forefathers.

Adrian and Jason, realizing that bigger is not always better, decided to adopt a back to basics approach and return the business to its roots of new plant development and introduction. They now produce hundreds of each cultivar rather than hundreds of thousands of each. Large-scale propagation is left to the Meredith Corporation who have facilities on the Bloom complex.

Jason's team building skills and his commitment to quality ensures a third generation of managerial excellence for Bloom perennials.

Bressingham Garden Centre

The retail sales outlet on the Bloom complex is a fine example of the English garden center. Plants are massed on waist high benches with classic Bloom point of purchase aids. A color poster of Alan Bloom promoting a Bressingham perennial immediately draws the eye to a group of container plants. Back cards contain plant care information and plant tags confirm the plant name and Bloom identity. Plants for special landscape situations are grouped together. On one endcap is a sign identifying *Plants for Hot Sunny Locations*.

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Shopping is a comfortable experience due to wide outdoor isles with smooth walkways. Pots are tagged and attractively displayed on benches that are all the same height. People needing refreshment are cheered by signs clearly pointing the way to the tea room. Shopping carts are readily accessible and visible signage shows customers the way to the check out registers. Customers are encouraged to drive away feeling good about their shopping experience after passing a *Thank You for Visiting and Have a Safe Journey Home* sign located at the exit of the Bloom complex.

Blooms of Bressingham North America

Blooms of Bressingham North America was founded in 1995 by Yoder Brothers Inc. and Gary Doerr of Peppergrove Nurseries to increase awareness of the many perennial varieties available exclusively from Blooms of Bressingham. They expect to spread the use of Bloom varieties by landscapers and gardeners throughout the United States and Canada through careful trialing, skilled marketing and customer service. Blooms of Bressingham North America licensed propagators include Green Leaf Enterprises, PA, Skagit Gardens, WA, and Gulley Greenhouses, CO.

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Merchandising

Blooms of Bressingham North America promotes the Blooms 'English look' by distributing point of purchase (POP) kit materials to its North American key stockists. Key stockists are retailers who participate in a pre-introduction program that is part of the trialing efforts for Blooms perennials in North America to assess plant performance in various parts of the country. Key stockists deliver valuable feedback to Blooms of Bressingham North America concerning customer response and plant success. The POP kits help key stockists build brand identity and Bloom style merchandising.

Key stockists receive plans and photos of kiosk sales units as part of their POP package. Kiosks are light, open-fronted sales booths that stimulate sales through aesthetic plant display as well as promote the Blooms brand name. Two North American nurseries report increased sales of up to 230% as a result of using kiosks.

In preparation of a Perennial Plant Association (PPA) grower and garden center tour visit, Briggs Nursery of Attleboro, MA followed Blooms kiosk construction plans and built eight large sections displaying Blooms perennials. Display gardens were created throughout the area to show customers what plants look like in a garden setting. Briggs POP display was created a week before the PPA tour, and their regular customers went wild over the display and purchased most of the stock, thereby proving that proper displays stimulate sales.

In addition to kiosks, the Bloom brand name is promoted through plant label and glossy color posters. The long-standing Bloom association with quality and education is promoted through background cards, information sheets and glossy posters. POP information also lists ideal companion plants, thereby allowing customers to purchase a successful landscape rather than just a plant.

Bloom Plants for the Southeast

In order to thoroughly evaluate the ability of Blooms perennials to perform in the diverse North American climate, Blooms of Bressingham North America is involved with eight campus sites and four botanical gardens.

At the University of Georgia in Athens, it was *Kniphofia* 'Shining Sceptre' that set the curve in Dr. Allan Armitage's Perennial Trial Garden, earning perfect marks across the board for plant vigor, foliage quality, bloom stalk strength, bloom display, floral uniformity and disease resistance. Others earning a perfect 5-point score include *Astilbe* 'Bressingham Beauty', *Kniphofia* 'Bressingham Comet' and *Phlox subulata* 'Oakington Blue Eyes'. Other top performers in the University of Georgia trials include *Achillea* 'Anthea', *Astilbe* 'Sprite', *Erigeron* 'Prosperity', *Heuchera* 'Bressingham Bronze', *Lavandula* 'Blue Cushion', *Leucanthemum* 'Snowcap' and *Penstemon* 'Ruby'.

For more information on visiting the Bloom's display gardens and garden center in England, please telephone 01379 687 386. To make a reservation to stay at Alan's B&B Bressingham Hall, please telephone 01379 687 243. For more information concerning Blooms of Bressingham North America, please visit their web site at www.bobna.com. For more information on Allan Armitage's trials, please visit his web site at www.uga.edu/ugatrial/. Ellen Strother, Clemson Extension Commercial Horticulture Agent, may be reached by phone at (843) 549-2596 or through e-mail at ESTRTHR@Clemson.edu.