

NOVEMBER'S MONTHLY MEETING AT THE WITHAM

REPORT BY CELIA CHAPPLE

Speaker Martin Fish - *Judging with the Royal Horticultural Society* Martin Fish has been a Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) judge for 14 years and gave Teesdale u3a members a colourfully illustrated 'behind the scenes' look at the major flower shows across the country.

Martin is a senior judge at about 12 shows each season, such as at Malvern, Tatton Park, Hampton Court and Chelsea, specialising in the floral marquee. Each of the 6 panels has 5 judges, experts in various fields such as tropical plants, begonias and streptocarpus (household plants). The panel's Chair views all 15 exhibits first, choosing one judge who would be best to lead on each exhibit. There are also 3 moderators who oversee and maintain consistency over the show and between shows. Judges are accredited, training 'on the job' and must renew their accreditation every 5 years.

The three criteria when judging are: the size, maturity, variety and nomenclature of the plants; overall impression (design); endeavour (the work demonstrated on the application form and on the exhibit). All criteria are equally important and points are accumulated to indicate which medal an exhibit has won. There is no limit on the number of medals given in each category. 11 points and over earn a gold medal, 8-10 points for a silver gilt, 5-7 points for silver, 3-5 points for bronze, and no medal below 3. The moderators come together and agree on the awards, although a discrepancy can lead to another vote and can change a medal position. The Chair then walks around the marquee giving exhibitors feedback.

The second half of Martin's talk focused on the Chelsea Flower Show held in May. He explained the intricate measures adopted to ensure that out-of-season cut flowers such as daffodils are flawless.

These flowers are nurtured indoors until they are in bud then gradually exposed to cooler temperatures to restrain growth, and finally brought into the warm show marquee at their flowering best. They are replaced by a new set of flowers half way through the show.

There used to be a waiting list to exhibit in a show but due to the postcovid rise in production costs, less sponsorship, and higher online plant and gardening sales, exhibitors attend fewer shows. The garden exhibits tend to be smaller too.