



NATIONAL COLLECTION HOLDER HANDBOOK

Revised 2026

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Front Cover: Stephen Peters (MCIHort), Head Gardener and Curator at Worth Park, West Sussex; National Collection holder of *Achillea filipendulina* & *A. millefolium* cvs.; *Camellia japonica* (Worth Park Heritage Collection); and participant in the shared, dispersed collection of *Narcissus* cvs. (bred & introduced by Noel Burr), with 2025 apprentice Laura.

Section 1 - About Plant Heritage

Organisation governance

Plant Heritage is a charity governed by a board of Trustees, supported by [committees and working groups](#), including the Plant Collection Committee which is responsible for accrediting and overseeing the National Plant Collections. Our board and committee members are volunteers, and we have hundreds of other volunteers who generously donate their time and skills to help our work.

The board of trustees are the directors of the company, their role to manage the business of the company. Every member of Plant Heritage has a vote in appointing new trustees, all supported by a small team of dedicated staff in our central office at Stone Pine, Wisley in Surrey, and working remotely.

The committees and working groups include:

Plant Collection Committee

Conservation Committee

Membership & Supporters Committee

Communications Working Group

Persephone Working Group

Governance & People Committee

Finance Audit & Risk Committee

The Plant Collections Committee (PCC)

The principal committee that assesses, supports and accredits the National Plant Collections, and has delegated authority from the board to manage the scheme.

The committee includes experts from across the industry, professional horticulturists and botanists with vast experience of their subjects. They are further supported by the Plant Heritage conservation team and regional coordinators who manage and work through all stages of the application process, and report on their areas of work, through the Conservation Team advisers.

The PCC meets four times a year where all proposals, applications and changes to collections are approved, as well as being formally notified of collections being withdrawn from the scheme.

There is a link in the [About Us](#) section on the website where you can see the present list of PCC members and current members of other committees and the board.

Conservation Committee (CC)

With three meetings a year, the Conservation Committee has a strategic remit, and includes members of the board, representatives from PCC, local groups and other horticultural organisations, collection holders and experts, who monitor the conservation activities of the charity, supported by the Plant Heritage conservation team.

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The Conservation Committee is responsible for the development of the conservation strategy, overseeing the work of the conservation team who attend this committee, and delivery of associated programmes and activities.

Local Groups and National Collections coordinators

Your regional collections coordinator is an important contact for support and advice. Their role is voluntary and their interest in plants and conservation is why they give their time to this important role.

Coordinators receive training when they take on the role and they report to the conservation team. They visit accredited collections every two years and send a report to conservation team at central office.

Most Collections coordinators' contact details are listed [here](#). Not all areas have a collections coordinator, if you are in one of these areas, please contact the Conservation Team.

Local group activities

Most counties or areas have an active local group and committee or representative who may organise talks, garden visits, publish regular newsletters, run propagation workshops, plant sales or seed swaps. You are very welcome and encouraged to be involved as a collection holder (and member).

See the [local groups page](#) of the website for details in your area.

You will find all the current contact details for local group volunteers on the website, in the annual Directory or its supplements. Group committee member contacts are listed on the back of their local newsletters.

In summary:

- Your local collections coordinator can be your main contact.
- The Conservation Team will keep you up to date with news and events, such as workshops.
- The Plant Collections Committee (PCC) agree approval of collections and change of status for National Plant Collections.
- Trustees are appointed to run the charity.
- Committee members and contacts can be found on the Plant Heritage website.

If you would like to get involved or to volunteer, see the [About Us](#) section of the website.

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Central office team and an outline of their responsibilities

Anyone below can be contacted on the office phone number 01483 447540

Conservation Team

Collections and collection coordinators

- Conservation advisers are the first point of contact for enquiries about your collection, new collections, changes to scope and collection titles, replacement signboards updating and withdrawal of collections etc.
- Liaise with your collections coordinators
- Provide support for collection holders through learning resources and targeted events, such as guidance on labelling, research, and other collection management activities

Data and record keeping

- Contact for changes to a listing on the website or directory, Plant Guardians, plant recording and records (Persephone)

Plant Guardians and Plant Exchange

- Members and collection holders' involvement with conservation projects and events run by Plant Heritage

Threatened Plants Programme (TPP) Manager

- Responsible for TPP, assessing threat status of cultivars in the UK and for reports to collection holders on specific plant groups.

If you are not sure who to contact, email collections@plantheritage.org.uk and it will be passed to the relevant person to answer your question.

Other Office contacts:

membership@plantheritage.org.uk - for enquiries and updates about your membership.

comms@plantheritage.org.uk - about shows, press, advertising and publications.

fundraising@plantheritage.org.uk - for enquiries about fundraising

accounts@plantheritage.org.uk – finance

News and communications from central office

Your contact with the office and conservation team so far will have been during the application process, in preparation for submitting your proposals and full applications to PCC.

They will have sent you feedback from the Plant Collections Committee, requested the information you want to have publicly available on the website, supplied you with forms for collection signboards, Plant Heritage logos and further relevant contacts

The team will regularly update you on news, new collections, workshops and events, and many other aspects of the charity's work through various media:

- Regular e-newsletter
- Blog : plantheritage.wordpress.com
- Website: plantheritage.org.uk
- Various Social media channels:
 - Instagram [@PlantHeritage](https://www.instagram.com/PlantHeritage)
 - Facebook [@OurPlantHeritage](https://www.facebook.com/OurPlantHeritage)
 - LinkedIn [@PlantHeritage](https://www.linkedin.com/company/PlantHeritage)

Section 2 - Practical requirements for managing your collection

There are a few things we ask of you, that help us to maintain the quality and integrity of the National Plant Collections scheme.

Membership

You must hold a membership of Plant Heritage to be eligible to be a collection holder, we recommend using direct debit if you can. There is no limit to the number of collections you can hold on one membership. See membership information on the website.

To be listed as a collection holder even if you are a spouse of someone who already is, you must also hold a membership – this could for example be a joint membership.

Where events are free for named and accredited collection holders, anyone attending with you (even if a partner who helps a lot with the collection) will have to pay to attend as any other member.

Plant lists and Persephone database

To have your collection approved (at the full application stage) you will have had to provide a fully accessioned list of plants, correctly named. You are also asked to outline what expert contacts you use and how you make sure your plants are identified correctly.

The conservation team will record all plant lists in our online database Persephone. If you already use another recognised botanical database (e.g. IrisBG, BRAHMS), we will ask for an export with the relevant data fields that we will upload into our database for reference. If you record your collection another way e.g. Excel, we can also take a data export from that to put the records into Persephone.

For more information on Record Keeping - see Section 3, Administration of the Collection

Labelling

Curation standards require clear and permanent labelling of the collection, which should be visible to visitors. Identification and correct naming are of paramount importance. We recommend a double labelling system, burying an extra label in the ground or into the side of a pot for security. People and animals love moving labels.

Labels should include the accession number (unique identifier) of the plant. We also recommend keeping a plan or map of where plants are located in beds or on a site. There are links in the appendices to label suppliers.

- There is an event recording about labelling options available upon request to collections@plantheritage.org.uk

Where plants are rare and or valuable and therefore safer not to have visible labels, we still require one to be with the plant (even if buried) as long as the planting is carefully mapped. You can use the mapping function in Persephone.

For Alternatives to using Plastic - see Section 5, Sustainability

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Propagation

Collection holders are required to have a propagation plan for their plants, for ongoing collection management or breeding - importantly, to have back up plants for your collection. Collections are required to hold 3 specimens of each plant, except for trees and larger shrubs when 1 is acceptable. In some cases, depending on the type of plants in the collection, the PCC may agree fewer than 3, if an agreed propagation programme is in place, or back up plants held in a different location are formally recorded.

We are always happy to help you to pass on specialist propagation skills, perhaps at a workshop or in a video. Please contact your local group or the conservation team to discuss options. See also Sustainability: section 5 and Plant Health: section 6

Herbarium specimens

We encourage you to contribute to herbaria. Herbarium specimens have been in use since the introduction of standardised plant identification in the 1700s. The RHS, Kew, Natural History Museum and many other botanic gardens are in possession of some of the earliest recorded specimens which are still used today.

Some collection holders have excellent Herbarium specimens and would be happy to show others.

The RHS Wisley Herbarium is actively collecting specimens to record all cultivars grown in the UK. They are happy to be in contact with and accept specimens from national collection holders. RHS Colour charts are used to ensure colours are recorded before the drying process. For help and advice on taking herbarium specimens please [see the website](#) under Conservation and Cultivation advice.

Researching your collection

Research is one of the most exciting aspects of developing a collection, with many resources available to help you in this pursuit.

There is guidance on plant nomenclature as part of the Persephone database, and many other organisations maintain large online databases that you can access via their websites (Kew, International Cultivar Registration Authorities (ICRA), Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) etc).

The RHS libraries at Wisley, Hyde Hall, Rosemoor, Harlow Carr and the Lindley Library in London are open to anyone by appointment.

JSTOR is an online digital library of academic journals, books and primary sources which collection holders can access for free. Please contact us for login details.

Links to these and more can be found in the Appendix, on the website and in the Resources session within Persephone.

Assistance for National Collection Holders

Practical

Practical help might be possible through your local group, with work parties to assist with maintenance, weeding, repotting or perhaps for an open day. Volunteers always welcome an opportunity to learn more about a plant group, and in doing so help to support a collection. Contact your local coordinator if you'd like to find out more.

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Educational

We run free workshops for collection holders on subjects such as taxonomy, preparing herbarium specimens, photography, research and plant records. These are always advertised through email newsletters and on the website.

Registering for workshops and events is usually done online.

Financial

Plant Heritage offers a collection holder Bursary for awards of up to £500. You will be notified in autumn through newsletters, direct emails and on the website of the application deadline which is annually by the 28th February. Information is available under 'Resources for collection holders' on the website or contact collections@plantheritage.org.uk for more information.

Some local groups may be able to give small grants to help with certain developments with your collection, such as relabelling or testing for disease. You will be asked to give feedback and progress reports to the group. The local committee make decisions on grants under agreed guidelines. Funding for general running costs are not included.

Contact your local group directly to find out more about what is available in your area.

You are encouraged to apply for grants and bursaries from a wide range of charitable trusts and institutions. The conservation team will support you through the process if you need help and can write letters of support.

Details for all the above can be found on the [Bursaries and Awards](#) page of the website.

Section 2 - In summary

- Collection holders must hold membership of Plant Heritage (individually, or as joint, Club or Organisational members).
- A double labelling system is recommended as standard for your plants.
- Records and plant lists should be regularly updated and held on a plant records database, ideally in Persephone, or another botanical database. A spreadsheet for example in Excel will also be fine.
- Ongoing propagation of your collection should be part of a management plan.
- Be aware of the collection category and requirements relating to your collection scope or title.
- Ask to be put in contact with the Herbarium at RHS Wisley.
- Practical or financial assistance might be available.



Herbarium workshop RHS Garden Hyde Hall 2025

Section 3 - Administration of the Collection

Record Keeping

Our online plant records database, Persephone, is the main point of reference for National Collection record keeping, unless you already use another recognised botanical database (e.g. IrisBG).

As well as storing key data about the plants (unique identifying code, correct plant name, date acquired and source), the system enables you to store additional information, such as images, cultural information, research relating to the plants, map locations and any relevant legal paperwork e.g. plant passports, or CITES documentation.

It is also a great way to keep track of propagation and breeding work. Photos stored in Persephone may be used on our website, with your permission.

Contact the Plant Records Officer for help to get started and support along the way. Or the team: Persephone@plantheritage.org.uk

Collection holders not using Persephone will be asked to provide a new plant list every two years.

All collection holders are requested to include additions and losses on the Annual Report, or to direct to their plant records in Persephone, if no plant list is submitted in that year.

The Wish List

The Wish List highlights hard-to-find plants that National Collection Holders are seeking to help complete and strengthen their collections. The list is maintained within the Persephone plant records database, where it is accessible to all users, and is also published on our website.

Collection Holders who use Persephone can add plants directly to the Wish List within the system. Those who do not use Persephone can submit Wish List items through their annual report or by contacting the conservation team at any time during the year.

Annual reports

You are required to provide the conservation team with an annual report, by completing the [Annual Report](#) form which you can download from the website and email to collections@plantheritage.org.uk

You can also use the form as a guide for what needs to be included and send it by post.

The Collections Directory

The National Plant Collections Directory is published and sent out to all members. In some years this may be a supplement to the previous year. The same details are available on the website, which is updated throughout the year.

The Conservation team will contact you annually in October, to request confirmation of your details for the Directory entry that applies to your collections and details of any open days in the year ahead. This is the Directory Return.

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Coordinator visits

Your local coordinator will visit you and the collection formally, every two years. They may ask to see plant records if they can't see or access them in Persephone. The coordinator is there to act as support and liaison between you the collection holder, and the conservation team, so the visit is a valuable opportunity for you to raise any questions you may have. The form used by the coordinator to feedback to the conservation team is in the [Collection Coordinator resources](#) section of the website.

If you need or want to make any changes to your collection such as adding to the scope, request a change from e.g. Provisional to Full status, a coordinator visit is necessary so they can write a short report for confirmation and giving their support before it goes to the Plant Collections Committee for approval. For more details see Section 4 - Changes to National Plant Collections.

Open days

One of the requirements of holding a national collection is to make it available for others to see. Some collections are in gardens open to the public, so that's simple, but with a private collection you can state a preference for visits which can be by appointment or set an annual open day. Some collection holders combine this with opening their garden through the National Gardens Scheme or holding a fundraising event with plant sales or a talk on their specialist collection.

You can publicise your open day(s) in the Directory, published annually in March, and on the Plant Heritage website. We will also share on our social media sites. If you post on social media, please use the hashtags #PlantHeritage #NationalPlantCollections #PlantDiversity or #PlantConservation.

If your home or place the collection is held is not suitable for visitors, there are several different ways to fulfil this aspect of the scheme, including displaying at a show or in a neutral location. The conservation team will help and advice.

For help publicising the day locally contact your local group or coordinator. Another great place to advertise is on local notice boards, parish magazines and radio stations.

Insurance

As a collection holder you have insurance with us (UK only) relating to opening your collection to the public. [The insurance document](#) is available on the website.

Collection Holder Bursary

Collections holders who have had their collection accredited, are welcome to apply for the annual Bursary. An invitation is sent out in the autumn, details of the [criteria and application form](#) are available on the website.

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Marsh Awards

Newly established in 2026, there are 4 Awards, including one to recognise work in plant conservation and 3 for volunteers across the organisation, not necessarily collection holders, but they may also be nominated. It is not possible to nominate yourself.

Read more about the awards here: [Marsh Awards](#)

The Brickell Award

The Award was established in 2003 to celebrate the jubilee year of Plant Heritage. It was named after Chris Brickell, one of the founding members of the organisation.

The Award recognises the extensive and vital conservation work carried out by many collection holders and is given to those demonstrating excellence in cultivated plant conservation.

The Award is judged by an independent panel - [Full details and the criteria](#) can be found on the website

You can nominate another collection holder, but not yourself. The nominee should not know they have been nominated.

Section 3 - In summary

- Send your Annual Report to central office
- Confirm details for the Directory.
- Keep plant records and lists up to date.
- Your local collections coordinator will visit you to see the collection every two years.
- The collection needs to be made available for members or public visits. Open days are a good way of making this a controlled annual event.
- Collection holders have some insurance through Plant Heritage for open days.
- The Collection Holder Bursary is open for applications in the autumn prior to the 28 February deadline.
- Collection holders demonstrating excellence in cultivated plant conservation, can be nominated for the prestigious Brickell Award.



Linda Eggins being awarded the Brickell Award 2025 by Matthew Pottage.

Section 4 - Changes to National Plant Collections

The following are the most common scenarios, but your local coordinator and the conservation team will help you with making decisions, and each case is always looked at individually.

Provisional and Full collection status

With collection accreditation, some new collections may be given a Provisional (P) status by the Plant Collections Committee (PCC). This will usually be when the collection has reached the level required to be recognised as a National Collection but, for example, a proportion of plants in the collection have been recently added and need further time to establish, or some additional naming verification is needed. The PCC will recommend the period the collection is advised to remain in Provisional status, depending on the collection, after which a request can be made to change to Full status.

An existing collection can also go from Full to Provisional for an agreed time. In such situations, the Provisional status is used where for example a collection must be closed to visitors for a while, for replanting, bring back to health after e.g. flooding, disease or similar, or if the collection holder is unwell.

A coordinator visit and plant list is needed for PCC with requests to return to Full collection status – as above.

Change of site

A change of site leading to all or a large part of the collection being lifted and replanted elsewhere will mean that the collection needs to be designated as Transitional (T) – effectively in transit, until the plants are re-established. The collection holder can discuss with their local coordinator, or the conservation team.

A collection grown in pots or one that is annually propagated may not need a change in status for long, however the coordinator should be able to advise on the suitability of the new site so that a decision can be made. The conservation team will advise on each case individually.

Change of collection holder or custodian

A change of collection holder where, for example, a collection has been passed on to a new owner, will require approval of the PCC. This is very likely to require a new Application (but not necessarily the first stage, Proposal), especially if both site and the collection holder change are new to the scheme.

However, if either owner or custodian changes but the site remains the same (or vice versa) a change of status may not be required. The new owner or custodian would be asked to agree to the requirements of holding a National Collection through the PCC as usual for any changes.

Change of collection scope (collection title)

Additions or losses of plants to your collection may make it appropriate to change the scope or name of the collection. If for example you started with deciduous examples of *Agapanthus* but have since collected evergreens, you may wish to change the scope to include the entire breadth of your collection.

Contact your local coordinator or the plant conservation team for advice.

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Retirement and succession of a collection

If you have reached the point when you feel it is time to retire as a collection holder and withdraw the collection from the scheme, please let your coordinator and the conservation team know as soon as possible. This allows time to perhaps find a new location and home, or to create a duplicate collection as back up, or to disperse sections of a collection to an additional site, with a view to that becoming a National Collection in the future.

It is of such importance to our conservation aims that we ask you to think about a plan for the succession of the collection on your application form. It can be difficult to discuss and think how you might do it, but it is important not to lose both the collection (plants), the records and expertise you will have built up over the years.

Duplicate and dispersed (shared) collections are a very safe and helpful way to back up collections and getting some establishment before a collection is withdrawn from the scheme.

There are many ways to ensure the future of your collections, which can include:

- Being added to the list of 'Collections looking for a new home'
- Duplicating a collection: work with others to create a 'copy' of the collection or establish a parallel collection which could be as a back-up initially, but which later could become the main collection at the appropriate time.
- Dispersing a collection by
 - 1) sharing a collection with one or more other holders while retaining the full collection and established satellites
 - 2) create a dispersed collection from the outset with multiple collection holders.
 - 3) safeguard individual plants by donating to the Plant Exchange or giving to members who are friends and registration with Plant Guardians
- Legacy: establish an executor for your collection, a few larger (trees, shrubs or whole gardens) collections have been set up as Trusts.

Talk to your coordinator and the conservation team. We have very good examples of many different options and are happy to advise on a case-by-case basis.

Scientific Collection status

For fully accredited National Collections - if you are actively carrying out research on your collection, publishing academic and reference papers, writing articles and sharing your findings you could be eligible to apply for scientific status.

Should you wish to consider it, we encourage you to visit the [Apply for Scientific Status](#) page on the website and contact the conservation team who will be happy to take your request to the PCC. They will usually appoint a mentor to guide you through the process, however if your academic work is already recognised and acknowledged, we can also ask for a peer review to support the application.

Summary

- Any change to the scope or title of a collection must be agreed by the PCC including requesting change from or to Provisional, Transitional and Full status.
- From the application stage onwards, we ask collections holders to plan for the succession of their collection as far as that is possible, but which can change over the years.
- Contact your collection coordinator or the conservation team if you have any questions about all the above

Section 5 – Encouraging best practice in sustainability.

There are many ways we can all make a positive impact when it comes to sustainability. By using resources efficiently, reducing waste, and promoting biodiversity, we can minimise environmental impact while still producing high-quality plants.

Horticulture as an industry, faces increasing pressures that affect us all as growers. Our goal is to ensure that collection holders feel supported in making the changes that work best for them. Don't forget to explore the links at the end of this section for further industry information. If you have ideas or examples of best practice, please get in touch — we'd love to share your experiences and add links to our resources. We achieve the most when we collaborate and share knowledge.

Areas Where We Can Make an Impact

Many of us are already taking steps towards greater sustainability, but it's helpful to revisit what we can achieve — often through small, meaningful changes.

Travel & Transport

Maintaining good networks and social connections is vital for sharing ideas, learning new approaches, and discovering case studies that can help improve our sustainability footprint. Where possible, consider using public transport or car sharing when attending Plant Heritage and other grower events.

Support local suppliers to reduce transport mileage — the more we buy locally, the more resilient these businesses become. Build relationships with local producers and take advantage of their purchasing networks to source what you need more sustainably.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) – Prevention, Monitoring, Intervention & Control

IPM offers a sustainable approach to managing pests, weeds, and diseases. It supports healthy growing practices through a mix of protection methods, reducing reliance on chemical controls while encouraging natural processes.

This approach helps manage pesticide resistance and enhances wildlife and biodiversity. Consider companion planting to support your collection — for example, using groundcover to suppress weeds or selecting plants that attract beneficial insects and pollinators.

Water Management – Improving Efficiency and Building Resilience

Water is one of our most valuable resources. Improve efficiency through rainwater harvesting, drip and trickle irrigation, and mulching to reduce waste. Assess whether establishing a borehole could provide a reliable long-term water supply.

Develop systems to collect and recycle water, supported by regular water quality testing. Explore which irrigation method best suits your growing style — from precision drip and sub-irrigation systems (such as capillary beds, sand beds, or ebb-and-flow setups) to overhead systems with effective recapture and reuse of drainage and runoff.

For more advice go to the [RHS Water Management](#) webpage

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Growing Media and Soil Health

Prioritise sustainable growing media and test their performance before making significant changes to your growing regime.

The RHS **Peat-Free Fellowship** provides excellent research and resources:

- [Transition to peat-free growing](#)
- [Peat-free case studies](#)
- [Guide to trialling growing media](#)
- [RHS Peat Free Workshops](#)

Mulching also supports soil health, reduces chemical inputs, and aids in weed control — a simple yet powerful sustainable practice.

Reduction in Plastics, Packaging, and Waste

Plastic waste in horticulture — from pots and packaging to labels — is a significant challenge. Look for ways to reduce, reuse, and recycle materials wherever possible.

Alternative materials are available for everyday use items such as labels and pots; selling and sharing plants bare-root, avoids the use of plastic pots entirely, good examples of sustainable growing methods.

Incorporate green waste into composting systems to minimise disposal. Explore recycling schemes for horticultural plastics and consider recyclable and reusable alternatives for pots and packaging. For more advice go to the [RHS Plastic-Free Gardening](#) webpage.

Energy Usage

Evaluate your energy consumption and consider greener alternatives. Is there support from your local council to help transition to renewable sources? Small changes can collectively have a large impact on the industry's carbon footprint.

Consider adopting solar energy, heat pump technology, or equipment that operates without fossil fuels. Transitioning to electric tools and machinery can enhance efficiency, reduce worker fatigue and noise pollution, and lower fossil fuel consumption.

Biodiversity and Ecosystem Enrichment

Think about how your collection can contribute to habitat creation and ecosystem enrichment. Even small changes — such as planting for pollinators or creating microhabitats — can make a big difference.

For more advice go to the [RHS Planting for the Environment](#) webpage

Education and Interpretation

National Plant Collections play a vital role in conserving plant genetics and supporting biodiversity. Use interpretation, such as signage, a leaflet or guided tour, and education to share information and benefits with the public and inspire sustainable action, especially on public open days or when displaying your collection at a flower show.

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Working Towards a Sustainable Future

By implementing these practices, you can help build a more sustainable and environmentally friendly horticultural operation — one that supports a healthier planet, thriving ecosystems, and a stronger horticultural community.



Jonathan Sheppard's National Collection of *Cosmos*, grown sustainably, at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2025.

Section 6 – Legislation

Legislation affecting national collection holders

There are many legal issues associated with a plant collection, (for example; plant importing, water management and plant health) that you may need to be aware of at some point as your collection builds. You will find more detailed and up-to-date information on the [Plant Heritage website](#).

Many of these subjects are discussed and updated via the collection holder's newsletter and at the regular conferences organised by the conservation team for collection holders.

Protected species - CITES: Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

An international agreement that came into force in 1975. The import, export and use for commercial gain of certain species requires a CITES permit. For plants, the list includes mainly but not exclusively; orchid, cacti, succulents, medicinal plants and cycads.

Follow these links for more information:

[Guidance on CITES import & exports \(UK government\)](#)

[List of species covered by CITES](#)

Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) the Nagoya Protocol

The Nagoya Protocol is an agreement part of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) which deals globally with the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilisation of genetic resources.

From 12th October 2014, this legally binding international agreement covers wild collecting of plants and associated traditional knowledge from 100s of signatory countries. It is the responsibility of the collection holder to ensure that they have undertaken the necessary steps to **legally** obtain and use plant material collected under the terms of this agreement. This includes plants sourced from online sellers.

Users of genetic material will be required to obtain prior informed consent from the owner of those resources, on mutually agreed terms. For example, should a plant hunting trip be organised to an overseas country to collect seed of a specified species, it will be necessary to find out what the legal requirements are about plant collecting and the ABS arrangement in that country.

See links for more details:

[The Nagoya Protocol guidance for National Collection Holders](#)

[Convention on Biological Diversity CBD \(1992\)](#)

Collectors' References

Plants from licenced plant collections will have a formal collection reference.

Where plants are listed in the [RHS Plant Finder](#), the Collectors' References can be found under the information in the supplementary keys.

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Water management

National Collection Holders have an exemption from water use restrictions, such as hosepipe bans, for watering the plants in their collections. To find out more about temporary bans on water use please refer to the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 [linked here](#) (page 25)

The exemption for National Plant Collections is explained in the [Water Use Order 2010](#) (page 3) The most recent guidance to water companies on water use restrictions is [Managing Through Drought 2023](#)

Plant health

As a collection holder, you will be aware of plant health issues affecting the plants in your collection, but there are resources available to help you with this.

The main resource for plant health is the [UK Plant Health Information Portal](#), maintained by DEFRA. The [UK Plant Health Risk Register](#) records and rates the risk from pests to UK crops, trees, gardens and ecosystems. A search function is available by plant name or pest name.

The [RHS advice pages](#) of their website has numerous searchable advice sheets covering a wide range of plant pests and diseases.

For resources and advice on tree pests and diseases, see the [Forestry Commission](#) government website. If you would like to be more involved, in monitoring and reporting tree health concerns, see the [Observatree](#) website

Biosecurity Plan for Collection Holders

The Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) have set this up to assess risk(s) from pest and disease to your collection genus (or group of plants), to try to mitigate the risk and losses. It isn't compulsory but is recommended - Contact the conservation team for more information.

As National Collections Holders we maintain a genetic library of plants from the everyday to the rarest. It is therefore important that they are protected to the best of our ability.

The increase in invasive pests and diseases is placing more pressure on to Collection Holders. Nothing will provide 100 per cent protection but a good biosecurity system will dramatically reduce the risk of spread.

It is essential therefore that all National Collection Holders have an effective biosecurity plan centred on a risk-based process, it can be used to instil practices that will help protect your collections by reducing the risk of pests, diseases and invasives to the collections.

Download and create your [Biosecurity Plan](#)

See the website for links to up-to-date information on all plant health and biosecurity issues [Plant Health Advice](#)

Regular updates to the risks likely to affect specific plants / plant groups can be found on DEFRA's website (see above)

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Plant Breeders' Rights

Plant Breeders' Rights (PBR), sometimes referred to as Plant Variety Rights (PVR), are granted on new cultivars to give the breeder exclusive control over the propagating material from that plant and rights to royalties. If you have cultivars with PBRs in your collection you should be aware of restrictions on the propagation and sale of these plants.

For more information and applying for your own PBR see this [DEFRA guidance](#) webpage.

Cross border plant movements

From 1st January 2021 new requirements for importing and exporting plants between Great Britain, Northern Ireland and the EU were put in place. Any plants, seeds or bulbs intended for planting, imported into the UK will require certain checks and certification.

Full guidance on this process can be found on this [DEFRA](#) webpage
Guidance for the non-professional can be confusing, though the best advice can be found on this [RHS Importing and Exporting Plants](#) webpage. This includes the replacement of EU Plant Passports to [UK Plant passports](#) from 1st January 2021.

Please note that with the ever-changing legislative situation it is best to get up-to-date advice by [contacting your local Animal and Plant Health Agency inspector \(APHA\)](#).

Plant Passports

There are two steps to Plant Passporting dependent upon individual circumstances and whether you are considered a professional operator and plant sales are your main income stream.

Registration

1. If you are propagating or raising plants at a commercial or large scale, you should register as a Plant Health Professional Operator (free, online). APHA recommend that all Collection Holders register with us to ensure your details are recorded correctly. If you are not registering as a business, please enter “**National Collection of ...**” as the name. Do not begin the name with “**The**”, as this affects search results in the system.

If you have any chargeable work carried out by us, you must provide the business name to which the invoice should be issued. You may add “**National Collection of ...**” on the second line if needed.

Register or Plant Passport Authorisation

2. **Authorisation for Plant Passports** is required for professional operators meeting the legal criteria. Applications and legislation details are online. Note: If you sell to anyone other than the end user, including online or by mail order, you must apply for both stages of registration. APHA are pragmatic and your sales business must be of reasonable size, i.e. main income.

Section 7 - Plant Heritage conservation initiatives

The Plant Exchange

The annual [Plant Exchange](#) is designed to increase the diversity of garden plants available in cultivation and to help conserve plants in danger of being lost. It enables members and collection holders to offer rare, threatened and unusual plants freely to other members, and/or request plants which may be difficult to obtain, or which have disappeared from sale in nurseries or plant centres.

Members who wish to participate in the scheme can request from or offer plants to the Exchange by contacting the regional Plant Exchange coordinator, local contact or the office if your area does not have a local organiser.

National Collection holders are given priority for receiving plants if requesting them for a registered collection.

The Exchange usually takes place at the annual Members Day. Members are asked to offer and request plants by their local group coordinator; the lists of 'offers' and 'wants' are sent back out to group members and published on the website.

We recommend that plants from the Plant Exchange, as with all new plants for your collection are put into a 'quarantine' area for approx. 6 weeks to monitor plant health or possible pest or disease. See Biosecurity p.18

Plants in the Plant Exchange will be eligible to register as Plant Guardians (see below).



Plant Exchange 2024 Dumfries and Galloway, and 2025 at Thenford Arboretum and Garden.

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The Threatened Plants Programme (TPP)

A huge resource of information, this now covers 135,000 named garden cultivars and is always improving, using trade sales data since 1987, partner organisations' plant lists across thousands of locations, plant breeding and registration details, and records of current, previous and proposed National Collections to calculate conservation status in cultivation, research which is unique to Plant Heritage.

Using this, the conservation team can find out how rare your plants are nationally, advise of additional plants on your Wish List or within your collection scope which may still be able to be found, and ask you for help gathering information on useful and interesting plants that we wouldn't want to lose.

See the [Threatened Plants Programme](#) webpage for more details.

The Plant Guardian scheme

Our [Plant Guardian scheme](#) enables members to take an active role in conserving rare, cultivated plants — whether from their own garden, greenhouse, allotment, or even a windowsill.

Plants are submitted [through the online registration form](#), and the conservation team assess whether a plant is suitable to be recorded within the scheme. We publish a full list online, along with an evolving list of images and information about the origins of these plants. Registering plants in the scheme supports our wider research and the Threatened Plants Programme data. Contact the team if you'd like to find out which plants in your collection could qualify for members to become Plant Guardians for, and which could become a backup of collection plants.

The **Plant Exchange** offers an ideal way to both share and receive plants eligible for the Plant Guardian scheme.



Plant Guardian plants: Top L to R: *Paeonia* 'Orion', *Narcissus* 'Penril', *Rosa* 'Autumn' (HT)
Bottom L to R: *Pelargonium* 'Brockbury Scarlet', *Helleborus* 'Mrs Betty Ranicar', *Phlox* 'Cool of the Evening'

Appendix

Helpful information – Sustainability:

Responsible Sourcing Scheme for Growing Media <https://www.responsiblesourcing.org.uk/>

The James Hutton Institute <https://ipm.hutton.ac.uk/>

Horticultural Trades Association (HTA)

<https://hta.org.uk/sustainability/hta-sustainability-roadmap>

Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Peat free gardening <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/peat>

Peat free portal for industry <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/peat/for-industry>

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Reinvest: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/garden-inspiration/get-gardening/reduce-reuse-recycle>

10 ways to be more sustainable in your garden: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/gardening-for-the-environment/planet-friendly-gardening-tips>

Integrated Pest Management <https://www.rhs.org.uk/prevention-protection/controlling-pests-and-diseases-without-chemicals>

PlanetMark Case studies

<https://www.planetmark.com/case-study/hillier-nurseries-planting-the-seed-for-a-sustainable-future/>

Local Council grant schemes for enhancing productivity, biodiversity and improving green measures. Some councils offer grant funded support for some of these measures.

Glossary of Key Terms

Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS)

A legal framework under the Nagoya Protocol ensuring fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources, particularly relevant when collecting plants from the wild overseas.

Accession / Accession Number

A unique identifying code assigned to each plant in a collection, linking the physical plant to its records.

Accreditation

Formal recognition of a collection by the Plant Collections Committee as a National Plant Collection.

Annual Report

A yearly report submitted by each Collection Holder to update Plant Heritage on plant numbers, changes, activities, and developments.

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APHA (Animal and Plant Health Agency)

The UK government agency responsible for plant health regulation, biosecurity, and Plant Passport authorisation.

Biosecurity Plan

A documented risk-based plan outlining measures to prevent the introduction and spread of pests, diseases, and invasive species within a collection.

CITES

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, regulating international trade in endangered species, including certain plants.

Collection Holder

An individual, organisation, or institution responsible for maintaining an accredited National Plant Collection.

Collection Scope

The defined plant group covered by a National Collection (e.g. a genus, species group, cultivar group, or themed grouping).

Conservation Committee (CC)

A strategic committee overseeing conservation policy and programmes within Plant Heritage.

Coordinator (Collections Coordinator)

A trained volunteer who supports Collection Holders regionally, undertakes biennial visits, and liaises with the conservation team.

Directory (National Plant Collections Directory)

The annual publication listing all accredited National Plant Collections and their key details.

Dispersed Collection

A shared collection maintained across more than one site or by multiple holders for resilience and safeguarding.

Duplicate Collection

A parallel or back-up collection established to safeguard plant material and genetic diversity.

Full Status

The accreditation level granted when a collection fully meets Plant Heritage standards.

Herbarium Specimen

A preserved, pressed plant sample stored for long-term scientific reference and identification.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

A sustainable approach to pest, weed, and disease control combining prevention, monitoring, and minimal chemical intervention.

Membership Requirement

The requirement that all Collection Holders must be current members of Plant Heritage.

National Plant Collection

An accredited, documented collection of a defined plant group, maintained to high conservation and curation standards.

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PCC (Plant Collections Committee)

The committee with delegated authority from the Board of Trustees to assess, accredit, and oversee National Plant Collections.

Persephone

Plant Heritage's online plant records database used to store collection data, images, mapping, and documentation.

Plant Breeders' Rights (PBR)

Legal protection granted to breeders of new cultivars, giving exclusive rights over propagation and commercial use.

Plant Exchange

An annual scheme enabling members and Collection Holders to offer and request rare or unusual plants to support conservation.

Plant Guardian Scheme

A scheme enabling members to grow and help safeguard rare, cultivated plants registered with Plant Heritage.

Plant Health Professional Operator

A registered individual or business authorised by APHA to issue Plant Passports where legally required.

Plant Passport

An official label required for the commercial movement of certain plants within the UK, confirming compliance with plant health regulations.

Provisional Status

Temporary accreditation status given when a collection meets core standards but requires further establishment or verification.

Scientific Collection Status

Additional recognition for accredited collections engaged in active research, publication, and scholarly contribution.

Succession Planning

Advance planning to ensure the long-term future of a collection, including transfer, duplication, or dispersal.

Threatened Plants Programme (TPP)

A Plant Heritage research initiative assessing the conservation status of cultivated plants in the UK using trade and collection data.

Transitional Status

Temporary status assigned when a collection is moved to a new site and plants require time to re-establish.

Wish List

A published list of hard-to-find plants that Collection Holders are seeking to acquire to strengthen or complete their collections.



Polly Nicholson's National Collection *Tulipa* (historic tulips) Photo credit: Lucy Pitman

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