

Phil Dunnett, Nurseryman

“We are passionate about wildlife and the environment, so everything we do revolves around that,” said Phil Dunnett, who together with his wife Angela, runs Ribblesdale Nursery at Woodplumpton.

Still a traditional plant nursery growing and producing their own plants, Ribblesdale stocks all things required to encourage and attract wildlife into the garden, so peat and chemical free products are to the fore.

“We have a bird care section with feeders and bird food but we even have our own wildlife garden with a hide where we can observe them. As well as that there is a model railway which is of great interest to children, and big kids as well,” he adds. “We have modelled it on the old railway lines that used to cross the Fylde with long-closed stations marked out so it is a link to bygone times”

Day to day work depends entirely on the seasons of the year and at present the spring bulbs are in full flower. For Phil this means looking at their stock and moving plants into key positions where they will be seen and brought to the attention of customers. At the moment primroses are an instant colour boost for tired gardens and bring a welcome flash of colour after a dormant time.

Summer time means making hanging baskets and one person is kept busy for 6 weeks doing just that during the peak flowering time.

We have 950 varieties of plants and we keep wildlife in mind when we select them so they are attractive to butterflies and bees. “It is always good to see a cloud of butterflies lift off a stand of plants when a customer approaches and is a guaranteed talking point!”

In high summer when the schools break up they are a little quieter as people go off on holidays, but the plants still want attention and this is when they have to concentrate on weeding and watering.

“Water is so important in a garden, no matter how small a space you have. Birds, and even insects have to drink, and you’d be surprised how little water a frog needs to make a home in the garden. Just a sunken washing up bowl or bird bath will do.”

Running water gives another dimension to the garden and there is great pleasure to be had in sitting out in the evening with the sound of running water and the sights and scents of plants. “It is easier to relax and de-stress outdoors and has to be a benefit to health.

“A wildlife garden doesn’t have to be a wild garden,” says Phil. “It can be just as attractive to humans as the insects and birds it attracts. It just needs a little thought and planning.” At Ribblesdale they try to set up displays so that people can see just what can be done and bring ideas to people’s attention.

Autumn is a particularly favourite time of Phil’s “I like it as much as spring, although it is a more mellow with reds, oranges and yellow. There is so much colour available in autumn and winter. It’s surprising how many plants put on a good show at this time of year like sedums and Michaelmas daisies.” Using a mixture of flower, leaf and stem colour it’s possible to keep attractive features all year round.

People seem to put their gardens to sleep for the winter and they miss so much of interest. It’s a time to plan for the year ahead to start planting and potting and look forward to the first bulbs and winter pansies which will provide colour in the months ahead. Winter hanging baskets also provide some welcome interest at this time.

Growing food is not forgotten at Ribblesdale and Phil says that even a small garden can produce a variety of fruit and vegetables in hanging baskets, buckets and small containers, and it is so good for children to see exactly where the food comes from, that it is fresh and straight out of the ground.