



Spring and Summer 2020 for the BCSS (Fife Branch)

Like many Societies, the lockdown caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has changed our lives for this spring and summer and probably beyond. As you can imagine, it has caused a lot of difficulties for both the local branch and the national society. The inability to hold branch meetings meant we didn't see our friends, missing the fellowship, discussions and help that are always available at our meetings and, of course, the cancellation of the Dundee Flower and Food Festival lost us our only real chance to meet with the public. Even as restrictions are gradually being relaxed there is a lot of uncertainty about resuming and deciding when it will be safe to do so.

At a national level, we had to cancel our National Show held every four years, our normal AGM and Trustees meetings necessary to guide the Society.

However, as with many problems there are upsides. Having to stay at home meant much more time than usual to look after our plants, and this was echoed across virtually all of our members in the branch and wider. Helped by some of the best spring and early summer weather in many years, the plants responded to the benefit of the extra repotting and care by having good growth and the best flowering for a long time. Greenhouses were tidier than they have ever been. Having the extra time to concentrate on the plants has meant we could keep closer to the best cultivation and growing practice.

With the lack of personal contact, communication is even more important with members. Like many societies we discovered Zoom, the video communications software, offering us the ability to stream live talks, hold meetings and chat with our members. In fact, the national society provides weekly live talks which has allowed us access to both international and national speakers usually unavailable to the majority of our branches. The more informal meetings similar to the normal branch meetings are hosted by one of the branches and are open to all Scottish members so that we can keep in contact with friends across the five Scottish branches. Zoom also made it possible for us to hold the National AGM, opening this up to many people that would normally have trouble travelling, and a number of successful Trustee meetings.

In place of the National Show we arranged a Virtual National Show with members submitting photographs of their plants to be judged. This proved very successful, encouraging entries from many members who would not normally be able to attend the Show held in the south of England. While the idea of all these electronic talks, meetings and show was to ensure that everyone was kept in touch with the Society as much as possible while face to face meetings were not possible, they have proved so successful that, while they will not in any way replace 'normal' meetings, it is almost certain that they will be integrated into programmes once normal service is resumed as they provide additional opportunities for people to interact and take part. The national meetings, for instance, have given the opportunity of chatting in real time with members from many distant countries including USA, Bolivia, India and Norway amongst others with the member from India joining us at 2am his time. With only five branches in Scotland, it also gives those more distant members the opportunity to take part.