

TEN DAYS IN THE UK

Have you ever heard of a “damp squib”? Have you ever looked a royal-blue Himalayan poppy in the eye? Have you become a member of the Royal Horticultural Society just to attend the famed Chelsea Flower Show a day early? Have you ever spent 10 days with 35 perfect strangers and returned home knowing you’d made friends for life?

You can see where this is going, can’t you?

Well, have you ever been able to claim all these things? **Now, I have.** My Garden Getaway Tour, which I spent a year planning and building up for, has come and gone. My international journey, which took me from Chicago to Amsterdam to Edinburgh and London, all the way back to Chicago through Minneapolis, flew by. The hilarious, incredibly gifted group of Master Gardeners and plant enthusiasts became sources, mentors and friends I will be able to look to long into the future.

One page isn’t enough to tell you about the experience, so keep your eyes peeled for more information on the trip in the August issue of *Lawn & Garden Retailer*.



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were some of my favorite nongardening-related moments on the trip. (Never, ever walk into a department store in London asking for “khaki pants.” It will not end well for you.)



At the RHS garden Wisley, we stopped in the working vegetable garden to pose for some photos in the sun.

The Gardening Lifestyle in the UK

After spending a chilly, gray Wednesday morning cruising London’s Chelsea Flower Show (check out some photos on page 25), I headed out to the suburb of Twickenham to visit Squires Garden Centre. The clouds had burned off by the time I’d completed my trek, and the parking lot was packed. On a Wednesday morning.

The shop itself was no different than the highest-caliber garden centers I’ve visited in the States — spotless store, great product mix with great signage, beautiful plants — but I couldn’t help but feel that they were much more deeply embedded in the community than most garden centers here. The cafe inside was quite busy, not just with shoppers but with people who obviously loved the food and coffee, and events were posted for every weekend through the late spring and summer.

This place, and many garden centers in the UK, from what I hear, really knows its shoppers and provides the gardening “lifestyle” we all spend so much time talking about.

Beyond the Gardens

“Damp squib,” if you’re wondering, is an expression the British use to describe something that was supposed to be really great and ended up being kind of a letdown. Our little lessons in British slang on the coach

And for the record, my Garden Getaway Tour was just the opposite of a damp squib: It was absolutely brilliant.

Back Stateside...

By the time you receive this issue, I’ll just have returned from another big trip with more of my closest friends: the 2010 GCA Summer Tour in Orlando, Fla. Look for coverage of that tour, which included a stop at Disney’s Animal Kingdom theme park and garden centers and nurseries that know how to handle a year-round planting “season,” in the August issue as well.

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