



Nature and nurture working in harmony

Mires Beck Nursery offers trainees experience of working in horticulture



HAPPY PLACE: Above, Lewis and Charlotte working at the nursery. Below, a busy day for visitors.



The oasis of calm that greets you when you first arrive at Mires Beck Nursery is slightly misleading. Once through the gate, it's a hive of activity at every turn.

As busy as the bumblebees gathering nectar from the pretty lavender borders, people were potting, lopping, weeding and trundling wheelbarrows or trolleys of plants about.

There was a team clearing a new pathway through the woodland walk. Another little group was taking advantage of some welcome shade while doing a spot of weeding outside a glasshouse.

Preparation for a display at Driffeld Show was also under way (the nursery later came away with a gold award).

All the while, there was the gentle murmur of voices, plenty of laughter and lots of smiles. This is a happy place to work.

With the tagline "Nurturing people, nurturing plants", Mires Beck is a registered charity that enables those with a learning difficulty or disability to be involved in a working horticultural nursery.

"I feel I get more out of it all than the trainees do," said Shelley Morris, co-ordinator in the site's Anniversary Garden, who works with trainees who have the most complex needs.

"We have such an amazing day. We do some planting work in the morning – today we are potting up plug plants – and in the afternoon we might be doing some arts and crafts or enjoying a games session.

"We might join in with the herb team for a game of skittles, for example. We like to go to the different groups on the site, so there is interaction with different people.

"It is great to see how much the trainees grow, in every aspect."

Shelley previously worked at St Anne's Community Special School, in Welton.

She said: "I didn't know what it would be like moving away from working with children to adults, but I am so glad I made the change.

"I can't see me ever wanting to leave here."

Mires Beck was founded in 1985 by Richard and Irene Tinklin, who acquired a ten-acre site just to the south of the village of North Cave, aiming to establish a nursery producing wildflowers for conservation projects.

They also shared the vision of Mires Beck being a place where people could come to enjoy the therapeutic benefits of gardening and horticulture.



By **Debbie Hall**

In 1994, Mires Beck became a registered charity and has grown steadily ever since. The site now stretches over 14 acres and has a range of glasshouses and buildings for the trainees to use.

Mires Beck employs about 40 staff on a full and part-time basis, supported by volunteers.

Every week, almost 100 trainees aged from 18 to 71, who are referred from the Hull and East Riding area, visit for between one and four days to engage in a range of tasks, including sowing seeds, potting on, taking cuttings, planting trees, establishing hedges and developing flower borders.

Their endeavours result in plants for a thriving wholesale business – Mires Beck supplies to about 25 different garden centres – and for sale to the visiting public. There are 200 varieties stocked, including the Mires Beck specialisms of hardy perennials, herbs and wildflowers.

The nursery is also an important producer of Phragmites australis, or the Common Reed, commonly found growing on the margins of ponds, lakes and rivers, and cut for thatching material.

One area is dedicated to the production of thousands of Phragmites plug plants for nature reserves and other situations where they are useful, such as creating new reed beds around lakes formed after quarrying activity, or with their ability to remove pollutants from water; around small-scale sewerage treatment schemes.

Mires Beck also recently received an order for more than 7,000 Luzula plants.

"It's a type of grass and the North York Moors National Park Authority uses Luzulas along the River Ure to stabilise the banks and stop the cows wearing them away," said Steve Meays, who is the wildflower team supervisor.

"They wanted their own generated stock and picked the seed from about a mile away from where they want to use the plants.

"We sow them, prick out the seedlings and grow them on for them."

Under Steve's guidance, trainees are involved in the nursery's production of native wildflowers, all of which are of Yorkshire provenance.

Available either at the nursery or by mail order, the wildflowers have been supplied to organisations including the RSPB, the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, local authorities and the Environment Agency.

The herb team grows about 50 varieties of herbs for the kitchen and the garden. Shrubs for all sizes and styles of garden are also produced at Mires Beck.

One of its major ongoing projects is the growing of native tree saplings for William Jackson Food Group (WJFG).



The Hull company has embarked on a project to plant 200,000 trees to mark its long-term commitment to the city and to celebrate its 200th anniversary in 2051.

It will be busy "greening" Hull, up to its milestone year, working to create its Bicentennial Woodland with the help of about 8,000 trees supplied annually by Mires Beck.

WJFG's charity committee provided Mires Beck with a new poly-tunnel to assist with the project.

Steve Tuck, who is the estate team

supervisor at the nursery, said: "We have provided about 40,000 saplings so far. There are about 28 different native varieties, including small-leaved lime, hazel, guelder rose, blackthorn, beech and English walnut."

The conservation value of the Mires Beck site has been significantly improved since its launch, by the planting of thousands of trees, hedges and wildflowers.

Ornamental gardens on the site further enhance the surroundings for users and visitors.

Geraldine Butler, garden team leader, who



TEAMWORK: From far left, the plant prep team at Mires Beck, the plant sales area, Steve Tuck and the estate team and an aerial view of the site.

looks after the ornamental gardens, said: "It's an amazing place, and its potential is huge.

"We're trying to grow a lot of flowers for cutting – a very big wedding was held just down the road recently and we provided some sweetpeas for the bride's bouquet," said Geraldine.

"We have also just been involved with the funeral of a local person – we did some little jam-jars of flowers for the tables at the wake. "They are small amounts, but it is nice for the trainees to know they have played a part in the special moments in people's lives."

An area of the nursery grows vegetables and fruit that the trainees can take home, or that is used in the kitchen, where Janet Wride is team leader.

She said: "We provide up to about 30 meals a day, birthday cakes when it's someone's birthday, and sometimes cakes for visitors.

"The trainees bring recipes in from home,

Opening hours

MIRES Beck Nursery welcomes visitors March to September, daily, 10am to 4pm, and October to February, Monday to Friday, 10am to 4pm.

The charity is always interested in hearing from volunteers, with many opportunities available, from helping service users carry out their work to assisting with general nursery tasks.

The nursery runs a Friends of Mires Beck initiative, which raises funds for, and awareness of, the charity. Subscriptions and events help towards the development of the nursery and member benefits include newsletters and a 15 per cent discount on plant purchases.

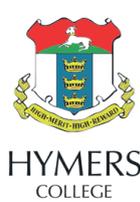
and some of these have become regular fixtures on the menu."

Graham Elliott, marketing officer at Mires Beck, said that the nursery had just been confirmed as the M&S Kingswood charity of the year.

"It's great news for us," He said. "I'm just planning to go there with some big collection buckets. We are also very pleased to have been supported by the Tesco in Market Weighton. Its Bags of Help initiative raised £2,000, which paid for a new dishwasher.

"The Friends of Mires Beck paid for a number of cameras, so trainees could take a diary of their activities they could take home to their parents and carers."

■ Mires Beck Nursery is at Low Mill Lane, North Cave, HU15 2NR. Call 01430 421543 or visit www.miresbeck.co.uk for further information. Find Mires Beck Nursery on Facebook.




Open Morning

Saturday 6th October 9:30am - 12:30pm

The perfect opportunity to take a look at the school, meet the team, meet present students and to find out everything you would like to know about Hymers.

Register your interest:

[hymerscollege.co.uk/
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