

NURSERY FOCUS

FAR FROM CLIPPING ITS PROFITS, **READYHEDGE** HAS PROSPERED OVER THE LAST YEAR AND IS LOOKING AHEAD WITH SHEER OPTIMISM

Last year was undoubtedly a challenging one, but Readyhedge thrived under the pressures.

Despite the initial wobble of the first lockdown, its sales were up 20 to 25% on the previous year, which was its best year yet. E-commerce sites which Readyhedge supplied saw a surge in demand from the public, and housing developments, a key market for the nursery, soon picked up again.

"This is going to be a record month for us," says Simon Williamson, managing director of Readyhedge, when we spoke to him towards the end of March. "Everybody is spending money on their gardens and we supply a lot to the development trade – a large percentage are looking to put in hedges as part of the planning agreements, so our hedging product is being used a lot because it's instant."

After a "fortuitous" year, Simon says Readyhedge has a really positive outlook for the future too, and is looking to expand its 17-acre site in Pershore. That's not to say that it isn't having to overcome hurdles, though, from stock shortages to higher import costs now the UK has left the EU single market. But Simon sees Brexit as an opportunity. "It will be positive for

our industry in the end. In the UK, we have the skills and the experience to be able to turn our nurseries around to produce larger quantities of quality plants and furnish our own markets – that's what the nursery trade should be doing."

“IN THE UK, WE HAVE THE SKILLS AND THE EXPERIENCE TO BE ABLE TO TURN OUR NURSERIES AROUND TO PRODUCE LARGER QUANTITIES OF QUALITY PLANTS AND FURNISH OUR OWN MARKETS”

Whilst reducing a reliance on Dutch imports, Simon says building relationships with European suppliers is really important to the nursery, and this is aided by its franchise, Readyhedge Holland. An increase in paperwork and hassle could steer Dutch nurseries away from

supplying the UK and towards supplying more locally instead, which is potentially behind current stock shortages. Readyhedge itself says mixed hedging, for instance, has completely sold out and won't be available until the end of August. But fortunately,

Readyhedge has forged strong relationships with its suppliers in Holland – they provide sensible pricing and a good service, which Readyhedge reciprocates with quick payments and loyalty. Thanks to this, and the contracts they have in place, Simon isn't concerned about supply for next year.

Readyhedge is also continually innovating, as well as growing traditional favourites. It both follows and attempts to predict trends. "Trends are very cyclical," says Simon. "Last year, it was hornbeam that was needed; this year, it's beech. They are always going backwards and forwards. You can never quite judge what the next trend is going to be, it just happens."

"The one big trend for us is the mixed hedging so housing developments can tick biodiversity boxes. So, we have expanded into that by another two kilometres for next year. General evergreens are still very popular too. But we're also trying to initiate trends with varieties like *Phillyrea*, *Nandina* and *Quercus ilex* as hedging – in small quantities to start with the hope they'll gather more interest. They're old plants, there's nothing revolutionary about them, but we're trying to get them to be used more in hedging. We're trying to alter the evergreens, so it's not just the traditional *Prunus* and *Taxus*."

"We also have these new strains of *Buxus* from a nursery in Holland which are allegedly box blight resistant. I'm not sure whether it will take over from the common *Buxus sempervirens*, but we're stocking those at the moment too."

It's all about pushing forward and remaining optimistic, as far as Readyhedge is concerned. There are certain things you cannot change, but you can adapt and evolve, and Readyhedge seems to have mastered both of these.

Tel: 01386 750 585
www.readyhedge ltd.com



AN AERIAL VIEW