

Awards recognise the stars of production

By news staff

The great and the good of production horticulture gathered in London last week to celebrate the achievements of the UK's growers at the Grower of the Year Awards 2008.

Guests at the packed event, held at the Royal Lancaster Hotel, watched hardy nursery stock specialist Majestic Trees and berry grower AJ & CI Snell scoop the top two awards: Grower of the Year – Ornamental, sponsored by the HTA and Grower of the Year – Edible, sponsored by the NFU.

Majestic Trees' win followed its securing of the hardy nursery stock category this year. Described by judges as having made "an excellent start as a new business in the UK", a strong focus on customer service, staff motivation and quality



has helped the firm achieve above-average profitability. AJ & CI Snell, which also won Soft Fruit Grower of the Year, was praised as a business that is "continually moving forward thanks to great management".

The awards were presented by BBC sports presenter Hazel Irvine.

Other winners in the ornamentals categories included Thompson & Morgan (Young Plants) for new plant pansy 'Friolina', Springfields Fresh Produce, which picked up the Cut Flower Grower of the Year award, and Hollyoak Orchids, which won Bedding and Pot Plant Grower of the Year.

Hillier Nurseries won the Business Initiative of the Year award for its 'Streetwise' range of trees, aimed at urban developments. John Woods Nurseries picked up Trade Marketing Campaign of the Year for

its re-brand and launch.

In the edibles categories, best new variety went to Worldwide Fruit for its UK Jazz apple introduction, Watton Produce, which won Vegetable Grower of the Year, Highland Court Farm, which was named Top Fruit Grower of the Year, and The Watercress Company, which was named Salad Grower of the Year. Alfred G Pearce picked up the title Prepared Fresh Produce Grower of the Year and Loveden Estates, Organic Grower of the Year.

Also taking home trophies were Wendy Akers PR for Consumer Marketing Campaign of the Year, Richard Arnold of the Really Welsh Trading Company for Sales and Marketing Professional of the Year and Joe Cottingham of Watts Farms who was named Young Grower of the Year. The winner of the Science

into Practice award was New Farm Produce for its asparagus heating project and Technical Product of the Year went to Hortec for its Quick-Cut trimming machine.

The special award for Lifetime Achievement went to former chief executive of the Flowers & Plants Association, Veronica Richardson.

The awards were opened by *HW* editor Kate Lowe and addressed by NFU vice-president Meurig Raymond (see report, p36).

Event sponsors were Asda, Bakkavör, the HTA and NFU. Category sponsors were Container Centralen, Crop Pro Tech, CSL, Elsoms Seeds, Flamingo, Floramedia, Hortech Solutions, MorePeople, New Spitalfields Market and Rijk Zwaan.

For full details of winners, see the awards supplement, published with this edition of *HW*.



1 Guy Hickman of Hortech Solutions, Anthony Snell of AJ & CI Snell, Rob Tasker of Crop Pro Tech and presenter Hazel Irvine **2** Paul Knights of Watton Produce with Hazel Irvine **3** Nicola Spence of CSL and Tim Morris of Hollyoak Orchids **4** John Lord of John Woods Nurseries and Hazel Irvine **5** Anthony Keeling of Elsoms Seeds, Veronica Richardson, formerly of the Flowers & Plants Association, and Hazel Irvine **6** Andrew Richardson of the HTA with Steve McCurdy of Majestic Trees **7** Wendy Akers (third from right) of Wendy Akers PR and her team **8** Philip Hudson of the NFU and Watts Farms' Joe Cottingham **9** The team from Hillier Nurseries celebrate their success **10** Brian Walton of Bakkavör and Stephen McGuffie of New Farm Produce with Hazel Irvine **11** Guests celebrate in traditional fashion after the awards

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