



## **Rob interviewing Jodie Mitchell of Barnhaven Primroses**

- Jodie:** We have the National collection of primula - the French National Collection. So, we have about 80 species and about a thousand different varieties of primula in our collection.
- Rob:** And, for you, what's so special about them? Primula or primrose?
- Jodie:** Primula is the genus, so that's the main big family and the primroses are only a certain type of that genus. So, what we like about primroses is the huge diversity of them, 'cos you can get primroses in all colours. Bright yellow is obviously the most common one but then we also have, like, black, purples, oranges and all kinds of different colours. They are a Spring flower in the main so they will start flowering from January onwards, a lot of them. But we also have a lot of varieties that will flower quite late in the year - even some that don't start flowering until July or August. So there's a huge range of different types and different flowers.
- Rob:** So you're responsible for the National collection. Does that mean that you produce new hybrids?
- Jodie:** Yes. We also produce a lot of our own cultivars so what we do is we hand pollinate, which is the traditional way of producing seeds so we do our own manual crosses and we also create new varieties so we're bringing new plants into the market every year.
- Rob:** Some of these are quite spectacular aren't they?
- Jodie:** Yes. Some of the plants we have in flower now are quite unusual. We've got one which is called the primula vialii and that's also called the orchid primrose because it's looks quite like an orchid. We have some plants that grow up to a metre tall and the flowers are bright yellow and they like very damp places and they're quite unusual. We see a lot of them in English gardens but we don't often see them in France. People don't know them as well over here.
- Rob:** Primulas like damp conditions so they're ideal for Brittany?
- Jodie:** Yes - they do like semi-shade and they normally grow very well in Brittany. They also like quite acid soil as well so we also do have some that like very heavy clay soil so they do generally tend to grow well because like the climate here.
- Rob:** There is also a variety known as the 'auricular'. They are very highly esteemed, are they not?



- Jodie:** Yes. Auriculars are really collectors 'plants, and they've been going for a long time. They were actually first brought across over to England by the Huguenots in the 16th Century and they've got a very long history. And people still collect these plants. They have very beautiful, very precise flowers that look like they've been painted. They are - there's a huge range of different types. You get the very pure colours with a white centre. You get some which are quite unusual with a green outline to the flowers. They are not difficult to grow but they do like quite well drained soil which is not always easy in Brittany 'cos it can be quite wet. So people here will often grow them in pots and put them in places where they can be admired in Spring, the front door, on your table in the garden and then maybe put in the shade later on in the summer. They are wonderful plants and there's a huge variety. You often see them at Chelsea in big plant theatres where they are often displayed - like a show.
- Rob:** You have these for sale as well?
- Jodie:** Yes. We have a very big collection of auriculars. We actually inherited a couple of years ago one of the English National Collections of Alpine Auriculars and so we've integrated that into our own collection and we have now about 600 different ones, so that's a big variety.
- Rob:** That's a big collection!
- Jodie:** Yes and these, as I say, are plants that we ship all around the world. We ship them to Japan; to America. A lot go back to England, actually, which is quite funny, so yes.
- Rob:** I must admit that I was at first quite interested in coming to visit you because of the name 'Barnhaven Primroses. Barnhaven's got quite a story to it, hasn't it?
- Jodie:** Yes. Our Nursery's over 80 years old. It actually first started in the United States in the 1930's with a lady called Florence Bellit, who founded it. She was a pianist, and out of work in the 30's and she moved into an old leaky barn which her friend lent her and she called this her 'haven' so then this became the name of the business - Barnhaven and she started introducing a lot of the new coloured primroses that were actually introduced to the market over the years.
- Rob:** OK, so you inherited the name. Have you inherited some of the plants?
- Jodie:** Yes. We have kept going a lot of the old varieties from when she first started. A lot of them still have the old American names like Grand Canyon, Desert Sunset, the Harvest Yellows. We've kept those going through the hand pollinating. That's a bit part of our collection, keeping the old varieties going.



**Rob:** You're an expert. You've obviously trained in this field, let's say?

**Jodie:** No, I didn't actually, but I did grow up in the Nursery, so to speak. When I first moved to France when I was eleven, my parents started working for the old owners of Barnhaven and I started helping out in the Nursery when I was very young doing helping out with the pollinating and often working in the holidays.

**Rob:** OK. And you've been in charge here - you and your husband Rob - for how long now?

**Jodie:** Well we started working with my parents about 9 years ago and we took over about 5 years ago now so we're running it now.

**Rob:** Jodie Mitchell of Barnhaven Primroses - thank you very much for your time.

**Jodie:** Thank you