

## Rick Mather David Scrase Christopher Lloyd Scholar November 2023

We continue to chisel away at the dry weather work whilst we can before the impending days of dampness settle in. Primarily, hedges. If we can get the bulk of the yews complete before the New Year then we will be in good stead for other tasks, but it does depend on the rains temperament. I think overall we've done well. The only remaining parts are the internal walls of the old rose garden, a few tops of towers and the holm oak giants that sit against the oast house. Prior to this we were cutting the topiary lawn. These pieces are definitely up there in my top three to cut. They have a different stature to the rest of the hedges and are viewed from all aspects of the topiary lawn. In this, their curves need to be shaped with upmost care to keep their slick framework at best. I have come to the understanding that hedges are not only best cut in autumn/winter for the health of the plant but also because a lot of the rest of the garden retreats in these times. Sharpening up these permanent structures of the garden is ideal now, whilst other distractions keep themselves at bay.

The bulb symposium was carried out in November where we had eight keen sets of hands willing to learn and deconstruct the garden with us. It had been a good reminder for me of how to teach. Going through my internal checklist as to the structure of our work, keeping it clean and systematic. Overall it was a good nod in remembering the process to myself, working methodically through an area, taking note of what is there, marking plants, making amendments, planting out bedding/self-sowers and of course the bulbs. The actual planting of the bulbs only really takes about 15-30 minutes but all the preparation before pretty much takes the whole day. There is always a lot of stepping back, looking, imagining, assessing and questioning before acting. We may easily think that an area is complete and then when we start to throw a few *Myosotis* through the gaps to stitch it together, the spaces become more and more noticeable. "Self-sowers" have so much importance in the garden, finalising a space, accenting the planting and covering up any last spots of soil that would lie bare. Along with bulbs in borders we have been covering bulbs in pots, a task we did in great detail last year but it is always great to tweak my learning. Those on the symposium took great delight in the educational week, particularly in the smaller details, the nuances within each task. Some of them had been gardening for over 30 years, so it was a real pleasure to pass on a little helpful tip here and there. The bulb work continues from the symposium, deconstructing the beds further and methodically working through the garden to make sure that the tulip and daffodil displays, among others, are on point. It's highly productive for us to gather as a team and discuss combinations that we see fit for the garden, receiving feedback as to why they wouldn't. The Barn Garden and Long Boarder are complete, bar a few small patches for topping up. We still have the majority of the High Garden to go, and the whole of the Peacock Garden. No small feat to complete. Each area is a great lesson, as always, in how it worked in the past, learning from its errors and how we can improve it. Fergus' teachings in the way we dot plants through, moving groups and understanding the timings of plants are undoubtedly some of the best lessons of this month.

The temperature shift throughout November has been incredibly noticeable. Those cold winds making themselves all too known once the sun begins to dip. With this is the transition of tender material into relevant houses. There are five in total all with varying degrees of temperature resilience. Some are heated for those more seriously tender, others are unheated for those that are a little more tolerant. A huge percentage of the old rose garden has to be lifted; from *Pteris* and *Begonia*, to larger specimens such as *Zanthoxylum* and *Sparrmannia*. All of these are potted on, mostly into a slightly barkier mix than we do for other plants and moved to their respective houses. We pot up into the smallest possible pot we can, primarily for saving space but also as these plants aren't going to be doing too much growing in the meantime and can handle these sizes. As well as lifting is the wrapping of bananas. We create large hay structures through the sub-tropical garden to insulate for the winter. It changes the whole space; instead of it being a broad green canopy, it becomes a statuesque chessboard of these tee-pees.

Leaf cuttings of *Begonias* have also been on this month's agenda, particularly a larger leaf variety from Dan Hinkley. We prepared trays of grit layered with winter cuttings compost that has a high percentage of grit to reduce the chance of rotting off. Leaves were either left whole or cut into several smaller pieces and pinned down to the soil. Each leaf then had several cuts made across the main veins. With any luck new plantlets will form here. The trays are then covered with a plastic film or ideally glass as this makes good contact with the leaf and helps to press it down to the soil. Part of the importance of this contact is because if there are substantial air-gaps between the base of the leaf and the soil then adventitious roots can form but they will be air pruned. Contact is essential. This final layer ensures the cuttings don't dry out and remain in a humid atmosphere. These then go to a heat bench with shade and are aired on occasion to keep any fungal spores at bay. As of yet no growth has been noted but the cuttings are static and holding on.

It has been a wet month in all and this makes the work challenging, not only in the physical aspects with us trying to avoid working in the borders whilst its wet, but also the seedlings. Those longer darker wet days play havoc on the seed germination and seedlings, slowing their growth rate in them either, initially germinating or getting their roots down once we've pricked them out. It becomes a challenge in solving the atmosphere and ensuring we have enough back up if there are failures a foot. It shows me that you can be as prepared and organised as you like, but inevitably we are in the throes of the weather, so we must act accordingly to whatever it hands us. It's probably one of the biggest challenges we have as gardeners, aiming to create the best we can against an unpredictable system.