November at Great Dixter Nurseries

Samuel Walker, Nursery Scholar

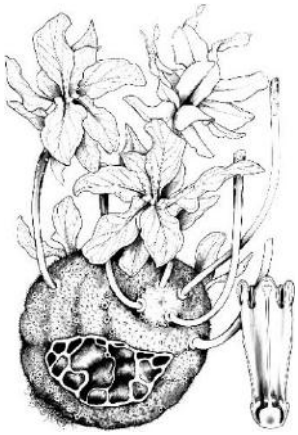
Key events this month:

-Trip to RHS Wisley and RBG Kew

-Fern and begonia leaf cuttings

This month I got the exciting opportunity to visit RBG Kew and RHS Wisley thanks to sponsorship from the Christopher Lloyd Bursary.

Whilst at Kew, I got a behind the scenes tour of their wonderful nursery and I learned a lot of interesting facts from the nursery manager. One of my favourites was about how epiphytic plants, namely the genus ***Squamellaria***, have a unique symbiotic relationship with ants. These epiphytic plants have a large woody base which are cellulose with airy chambers inside. The ants (mainly ***Philidris nagasau***) will use these structures and build nests within them. Researchers found that the ants don't dispose of anything outside of these nests, instead, they dedicate certain chambers for waste, filling it up with nitrogen-rich droppings. The plant will respond to this, sending feeder roots into the chambers to get the nutrients.



Credit: New Phytologist Foundation

The aim of my trip to RHS Wisley was to attend a Youth Engagement Panel (Y.E.P) meeting. Our aim is to get more 18–25-year-olds visiting Wisley.

RHS Wisley has never had a Youth Engagement panel before so it's very exciting to be a part of. This was our first in-person meeting, so it was great to see everyone. The panel is made up of young people with a range of backgrounds and knowledge of horticulture which ensures we get a wide range of opinions and experiences from different people. It'll be great to see how the panel grows and what difference we can make over the next year.

This month I also got the chance to do some fern and begonia propagation.

For the fern, we cut the fronds down slightly to fit the seed box and laid them onto the cuttings mix. A sheet of glass helps to weigh the leaf down, giving good soil contact and providing a humid environment. Pictured here is ***Polystichum setiferum Acutilobum.*** The cuttings are put In the double frame for a small amount of extra heat which will promote growth without drying out the delicate fronds.

For the begonias, we took mature undamaged leaves from plants. Then we made small cuts through the thicker veins on the underside of the leaf. This will promote new growth of plantlets from these points. The leaves are laid on cuttings mix and covered over with glass, again the glass weighs down the cutting, giving good soil contact and providing humidity. They are then placed on the heat bench to promote growth.

This month we also had an eryngium Ident with Christopher Lloyd Scholar Talitha Slabbert. They did a fantastic job showing us the various eryngiums around the garden, including some small seedlings!

This included: ***Eryngium giganteum***, ***Eryngium paniculatum***, ***Eryngium planum***, ***Eryngium pandanifolium 'Physic Purple'***, ***Eryngium guatamalense***, ***Eryngium bourgatii***, ***Eryngium X Zabelli 'Big Blue'*** and ***Eryngium agavifolium***

Toward the end of the month, myself and Ruth Borun scholar Naciim Benkreira got the opportunity to make some small floral posies for an event in the house. It was great to wander the garden carefully collecting flowers and foliage we found interesting. Pairing together different pieces to make several small arrangements we liked. We also decorated the table with ginkgo leaves as an extra touch.