

Christopher Lloyd Scholarship report – June

There's lots of prep on the horizon for the garden. Foxgloves close to their end, we've been preparing and potting up plants to ensure that they are big enough to switch out when the time comes for the bedding change. *Cannas, Dahlias, Amaranthus, Salvias, Phytolacca* just to name a few of those that will make up the late season display. Ready for the crash, of which we hope there to be none. Before I came to Great Dixter, I had a different idea of how the summer would look. I expected our working days to be based more on keeping the displays in check, keeping them tidy and attractive. I couldn't of been more wrong and what I have learnt is that the garden doesn't actually ever stop. It isn't ever static; waiting for visitors to absorb it finished presentation. Why would it? It's Great Dixter after all... and the seasonal layered planting that we learnt so much about earlier in the year not only draws out the autumn through winter, but also draws the summer through itself. It's that careful constant edit coming into play again. Each section of the garden lives and breaths a moment of interest, inhales and exhales again, something different and more in tune with the seasonal offering. We extend each moment as much as we can through staking, hurdles, snipping, clipping and the like. You have to keep looking. It's simple really, but difficult when it comes to the practical side. From observation is decision and the actions that follow will be the temporary mark until the next shift. It's tricky to make those more complex observations, as each space you view is naturally so intriguing. It can be perplexing to see where the change may be. It'll come with time I'm sure. I see the other members of staff pulling out those smaller observations and I am always in awe of the ability to notice the subtleties that make Great Dixter stand out from the rest.

We viewed Fergus' lecture on meadows. Interesting from the get go, as usual. "The whole of Dixter is a meadow". The light goes on and the connection is made back to Michaels comment on gardens trying to replicate the woodland edge. They are complex and diverse, long seasons of pollen and nectar where wildlife can sleep, eat and breed. The act of gardening mimics the disturbance as achieved in the wild, but with that additional touch of conscious decision. I found it interesting to understand the difference between a cornfield and a meadow. The former being of much shorter season and has to be heavily disturbed to be fruitful, where as the latter will have competitive species and contain grass. They are greener for longer. The meadow can have a much longer season from December all the way through to early autumn when orchid seeds are ripening. Where as cornfields will maybe go for six weeks, still stunning and of great interest in terms of their colour and species, but a crossover between the two is unlikely to wield great results. Poppies for one can't handle the grasses competition. Their germination rates are fairly poor in these situations and even with the presence of yellow rattle they can be unsuccessful. Hence why they are so successful in wasteland. The big take away, similar to gardens, is that meadows and cornfields need management. Without them competition would become the dominant factor and eventually a meadow would turn to scrubby shrub land, followed by trees.

The Long Boarder had a really great show over June. *Hesperus matronalis* gives great rhythm and cohesion across. Multiple large groups of vibrant purple have helped to draw the eye through and add depth to the rest of the colour palate. It's

at its limit for space, and any changes would require subtraction. Although it is “wild” and “naturalised”, it is also formal, with geometric shapes, edges, hedging and repetition. The cow parsley served an important part in the Long Boarders movement to this stage, but now it has to come out. Bring back some order as the browning stems and seed heads start to muddy the picture. On doing so, definition is returned, the whimsical effect removed and in its wake, a clean, crisp aesthetic bounding with vibrancy.

The Aster bed was one of our large jobs this month; the big weed, clean and annual planting. Entering from the back, making little pathways by opening up with canes, tying back groups and clearing. The result was a bed, when viewed from the main path, which looked like nobody had been in it. It showed the great importance of entering the bed from a point that isn't viewed. Disturbance is distressing and almost guaranteed when trying to make adjustments, no matter how hard I try to avoid it. The new spaces were planted up with *Amaranthus* 'Hot Biscuits'. Thirty plants in total, different sized pots so that there is variation between the final product. Subtleties in planning will leave the space as if it has naturally happened. From here bedding pocket in the Blue Garden was maintained. Much smaller and simpler than the previous work but maybe it's simpler because we've completed this task before, we know the routine, muscle memory is in full swing and understanding that taking your time is more important than a multitude of completed tasks. *Canna indica* 'Purpurea' has been planted on the small path that runs adjacent to the house from the Walled Garden down to the Lower Terrace. When the pocket is viewed from the Blue Garden's central path, it showed us that it needed to be a show stopper; big, bold and boisterous. Other potential plants such as *Dahlias* & *Salvias* would have worked, but been too wishy-washy in relation to the surrounding foliage. The Hydrangea bed in which the pocket is situated has had a very limey, yellow, green display. As vibrant and beautiful as it is with the late evening sun glistening through it, a small dose of moody red/purple won't go a miss.

The pot displays are showing their age, still youthful, but a few changes wouldn't harm them. Mainly the Ladybird Poppies, whose browning leaves sit like bruises on an apple. The plants have also become a little crowded with age, gorging themselves on solar rays and chlorophyll. Poppies out, plants spaced, *Matricaria parthenium* 'Golden Ball' & *Tolpis barbata* swapped in. The *Tolpis* really shines next to the *Silene armeria*. Of which, the bright yellows and vibrant pinks, very much a Christo colour combo. Those shades which way back when would have caused the general public to revere in horror to such a “grotesque” combination. But then, that's why Christo was so good at what he did, didn't care what people thought, pushed the boundaries and tried something out of the ordinary. I found myself reminded of photos Fergus would show us of Christo in either a bright pink shirt stood next to a vibrant yellow flower or the other way round. The team and myself stood around the combo and saw something in it that may make a good show for next year; a success to the process of the pot display. Trust the process. On review of the display changes: Does it read as natural? Still a bit tight in places, pots could be turned slightly to look like they haven't just been plonked there. Find their natural side and remove the idea that they enjoy being squashed up against

their neighbours. These are the little notes that take those displays to the next level. A naturalised pot display.

Just to say *Philadelphus mexicanus*, up in the High Garden on the East arm. Wow! The scent off this chap!!! For June flowering shrubs, this is it! Elegant, charming and alluring. Words I may have used if I'd taken a career in making tasting notes on swanky wines. The plants incredible! Foliage, structure and flowers. It has it all. If you read this, look it up, find one, write where it is, visit it in June and head straight for it with nostrils widened to the beauty. Apparently it's difficult to do from cuttings, so forget trying to take a snipping from the one here. Both parties will only be disappointed in the end.

Rain! It came, it finally came, and boy oh boy did it hammer it down. Thunder, lightning and goblet sized drops that unfortunately caused the *Miscanthus x giganteus* to keel over. A cross between *M. sinensis* x *M. sacchariflorus*. A real beast of a grass, but in the heavy rain and wind the lower nodes take a bit of a beating and gave way like dominos. The cure...? Olympic ring styled staking. Creating a solid stake structure at the back and then tying in groups of plants with overlapping twine to create a locked ring form. Still today as I write this in the early side of July, it's held up strong. I can't say I've ever staked a garden at all before I came here and since being here I have realised what an important part of the horticultural maintenance it is in the UK. Maybe it's different for these plants in the wild, but with out rich soil, accessible water and fairly decent sun they can get pretty big. *Ferrula communis* for example. They get big here, its part of the early summer charm to have the structural juggernauts towering over the displays. Do their seeds get as heavy and tend to cause the plant to topple over in the wild or do they gorge themselves on the UK's resources and find their pods a little more cumbersome than they set out for. I do wonder what they are like in the wild. Maybe one day I will visit Mt Olympus and put the two together.

The Solar Display this year. Dark on Dark!!! *Arundo versicolor*, *Canna* 'General Eisenhower', *Amaranthus* 'Velvet Curtains', *Phytolacca isocondra*, *Dahlia* 'Dove Grove', *Saccharum officinarum*, *Salvia* 'Embers Wish'. Key to us in this design is how the *Cannas* sit in the combo. They are large, but shouldn't just sit at the back as they'll create a wall...but if they run in rivers towards the front of the bed then as the viewer moves around the space it changes. The *Phytolacca* will add some wow & weirdness to this display, but will it be enough to knock it out the park, is it a bit "pedestrian" as Fergus would say. We'll know when we know. So far it looks pretty fantastic, although the *Dahlias* are flowering a little shorter than intended. They don't like our hyper heat summers, it stunts them and they go into reproduction. An observation for the future, are they a plant that will give the same results we used to have or is their time as dominant summer plants beginning to change.