

November 2023 Report
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*Lovely orange foliage of bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*), a deciduous conifer native to the eastern US, looking wonderful in the reflection of the Horse Pond. *Gunnera manicata* still held on in early November until it finally succumbed to a hard ground frost.*

(More) Seed sowing and pricking out

November is a particularly busy time for the garden team as we continue sowing and pricking out hardy annuals for next year's display. Seeds are sown into 4in plastic pots and kept in double-frames until they germinate, after which they are taken into a higher light area on a bench in the pit house. We prick out the seedlings when they are quite small, once the cotyledons are fully expanded but before the emergence of the first true leaves. These trays are kept in rodent-proofed cold-frames, where they grow on slowly through the winter for a spring planting.

There are a few annuals that I am particularly excited to see in the garden come springtime. *Silene coeli-rosa* 'Blue Angel' is a wonderful blue-flowering annual from the southern Mediterranean which forms low clouds of blue that can be

danced through the borders. *Silene armeria* is an upright annual with bright pink branching heads and glaucous leaves, with a habit for self-sowing in some areas. I am interested in both of these plants and how they are used at Dixter to knit together areas with color and fill in gaps while creating a natural look. The taxonomy of *Silene* is quite interesting (both of these plants have been reassigned names: *Silene coeli-rosa* is now *Eudianthe coeli-rosa*, and *Silene armeria* is *Atocion armeria*) and it's one of my favorite genera in the eastern US, where there are a number of fascinating native species. In New England, *Silene armeria* has jumped out of the garden and into human-disturbed areas as a somewhat common ruderal weed, so it will be fun to see it used more intentionally in a garden setting at Dixter.



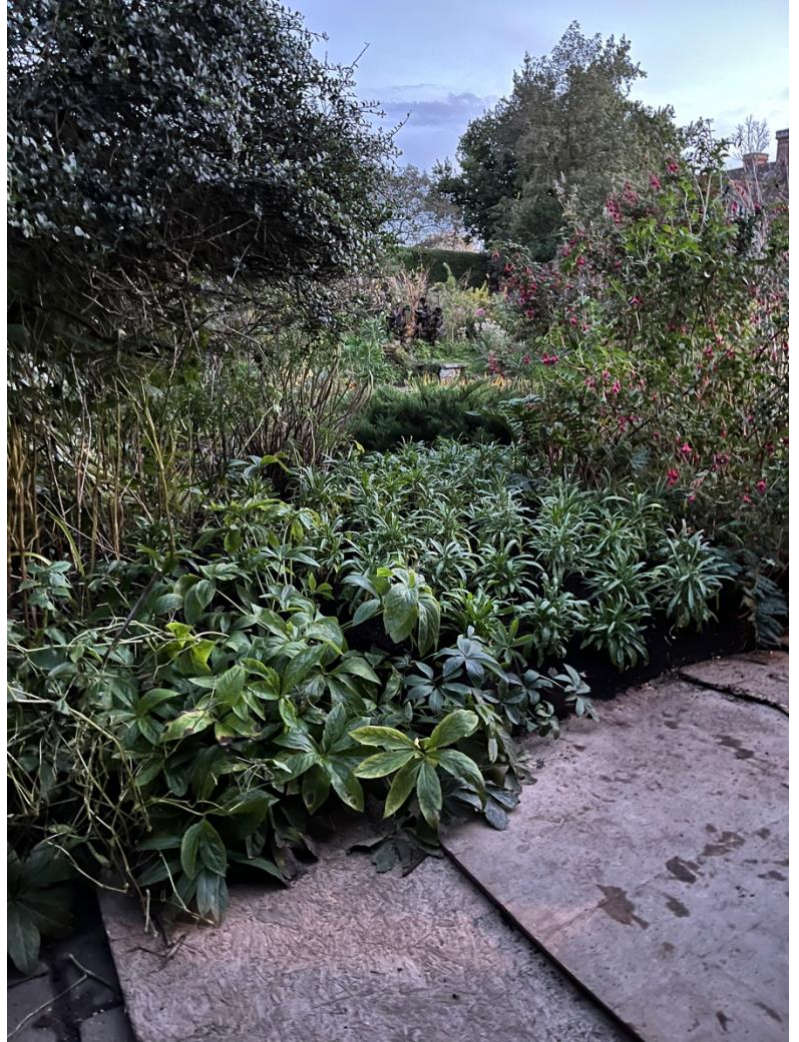


Volunteer Peter Chowney on boards in the Long Border cleaning out the beds for bulb planting.

Bulb Planting

The border work at Dixter starts in earnest now with the garden shut and we are able to begin cutting back and planting up the beds. We begin by focusing on the bedding pockets, which are areas that are dedicated to annual displays that are changed out regularly through the season, sometimes as many as four times. We plant these areas with hardy annuals: *Myosotis sylvatica*, the woodland forget-me-not, is a favorite annual that is paired with various tulips in the garden. Bulbs are laid out in a natural looking pattern of varying high and low density running in a flow through the beds. We always layout our beds before we plant them, to adjust the composition and play around with the shape and distribution of plants.

Here in the barn garden, we planted dark red wallflowers, *Erysimum cheiri* 'Vulcan', with an orange-red lily-flowered *Tulipa* 'Ballerina' running through the whole length of this bed in the Barn Garden. Here, there is a focus on creating more flow between the areas, linking the plantings together and creating a sense of rhythm through the bed.



It has been interesting for me to work with tulips, a bulb that I associated in New England with deer food and garish block plantings. Our springs are short and fast, as our transition from winter to summer happens in just a few short weeks, our seasonal bulb display is compressed. Aesthetically, I struggle with the uniform, overly bred look of many tulips in the horticulture trade, which look too artificial for my liking. I am really excited to see the spring display at Dixter and see the results of a more thoughtful and naturalistic planting approach. I expect many of my previous assumptions and opinions of tulips to be challenged here, and I look forward to adding some new favorite plants to my list and open up to the world of tulips. For now, my love is mostly confined to species tulips, and I am particularly keen to see *T. saxatilis*, *T. whittalli*, and *T. sylvestris* in the garden.



The earliest snowdrops are up! Galanthus reginae-olgae subsp. reginae-olgae in the garden.



Clockwise; Different seed pre-treatments of Crataegus orientalis seeds to try to overcome complex germination inhibitors; stem cuttings of Symphyotrichum; hardwood cuttings taken with a heel of Sambucus 'Gate in Field'; hardwood cuttings ready to be put into frames.



Planting bulbs at the Silk Route

A team of four gardeners spent a day planting species bulbs at the Silk Route, a fascinating rock garden project designed by Fergus and installed with the help of the Dixter team at Woolbeding Gardens in Midhurst. On our workday we planted about 3,000 bulbs, mostly native to Anatolia, including *Fritillaria*, *Crocus*, and *Scilla*, scrambling on top of rocks to avoid trampling any small alpine plants nestled in the crevices.

A visit to Kew Gardens

I had an opportunity to spend a day at Kew on a trip to London and be shown around the north part of the grounds by a friend and volunteer at the garden. Kew is immense, and I spent the whole day within a relatively small area of the garden concentrated near the rock garden, which was still looking fantastic in early November. The alpine house, which sits like a spaceship on one end, provides a wonderful, sheltered viewing area to get up close with many fantastic little alpine plants. The tufa wall had great little rosettes of *Petrocosmea cavaleriei* and primula species, and gravel beds with bright orange *Oxalis massoniana*. The grass garden was also in its full display, with wonderful combinations of textures planted in wide swathes and rivers of plumed seed-heads.

It was fun to be back in a garden with such wide-ranging collections, and plant labels to identify different species and their provenance. We had a quick peek around some of the propagation and stock bed areas, with row after row of long sand plunge pits for sinking specimen pots. These are arranged by genus, so you have a whole plunge dedicated just to *Crocus*, or *Muscari*, and so you get a wonderful representative snapshot of the diversity within that group. I look forward to returning to Kew and seeing more parts of the garden and connecting more with their immense staff of interesting gardeners, botanists, and plantspeople.

My favorite part of the rock garden at Kew, an area focused on the flora of east Asia, with beautiful fall coloring and skeletons of Astilbe, Rodgersia, and Lilium.





Clockwise; a tropical section of the Princess of Wales Conservatory; in the alpine house with orange Oxalis massoniana, a view of the tufa wall in the alpine house; the grass garden