

January 2024 Report

Will Larson – Chanticleer USA Christopher Lloyd Scholar



Different forms of Helleborus orientalis blooming in the garden.

January work

After a period of holiday rest, the team returned to work in the new year on a variety of different tasks. The major thrust of this month is working in the borders to systematically cut back old vegetation, mark out perennial groupings, and decide on new planting schemes. One area we focused on is in the Peacock Garden, in the phlox stock bed. Year to year there has been issues with *Helianthus angustifolius* in the bed, a North American species that can spread by seed but mostly persists by its fleshy white rhizomes, which are easily broken off when trying to weed it from the beds. The *Phlox paniculata* cultivars were dug out of the bed and had their rootballs cleaned of any bindweed (*Calystegia sepium*) or *Helianthus*, and then potted on to grow in pots in order to refresh and bulk up clean stock. This provided us with an interesting opportunity for new plantings.



A view across the High Garden stock bed to the conifer and roofline of the main house.



Rob removing congested limbs from within the High Garden conifer.

An experimental planting was devised using robust, aggressive perennials that spread by stolons and rhizomes, deemed the 'Brute Bed'. The idea behind this planting is to use spreading perennials that match the vigor and strength of the *Helianthus* already dominant in the bed, to create a strong planting that knits together and allows each 'brute' to duke it out against each other. This planting could then be managed by a single, sweeping cutback to the ground in late autumn. It is exciting to experiment with the different growth forms and habits of plants in a large garden where there is space for those species which are normally unsuitable for most residential gardens. I am curious about if there will be any issues with plants in this bed seeding throughout the Peacock garden or rooting into the other beds from underneath the paving stones, as might be the case with *Macleaya cordata*.



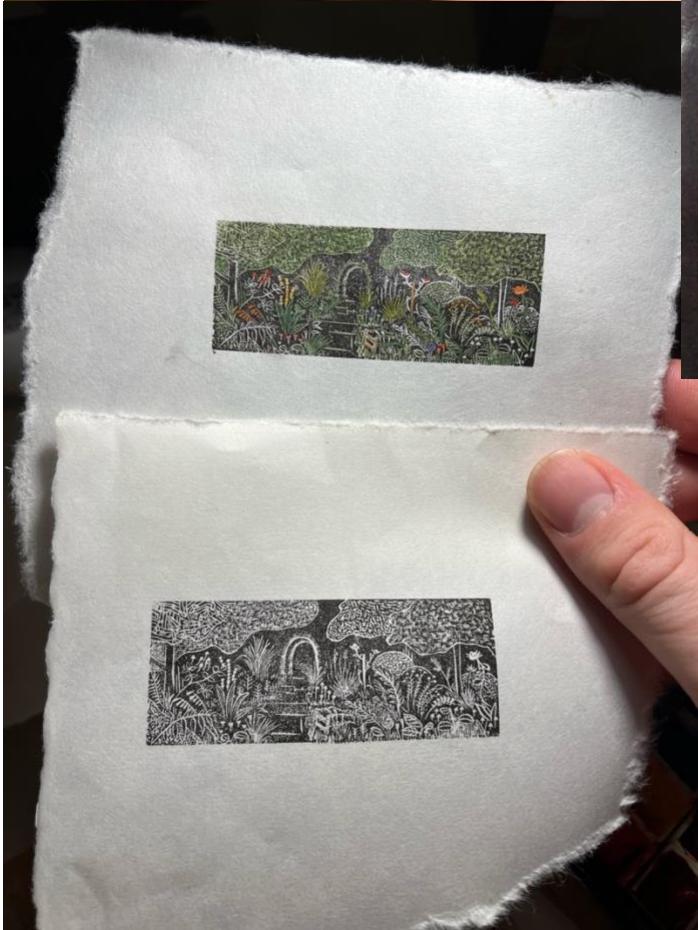
Clockwise from left: A large mixed display of dry climate plants in the cacti house; a view across to the Old Laboratory building; a tropical display of big-leaved plants in the tropical house; a wonderful mixed group of geophytes in the sand plunge in the alpine house.

A visit to RHS Wisley

A group of scholars got together for a day trip to RHS Wisley, which is about two hours by car from Great Dixter. It is always a bit of a shock to see bare ground in a garden after so much time spent at Dixter, but I enjoyed many of the unique specimen trees and having labels to identify them. It was interesting to recognize many of the same plants we use in the garden, such as *Rubus cockburnianus* and variegated red-stemmed *Cornus*, planted en masse in the winter garden areas with conifers. These more thematic plantings and the large scale of the gardens at Wisley are impressive, and I particularly enjoyed the rock garden built into the hill side, which you must climb to reach the alpine houses and crevice garden at the top. Wisley's glasshouses are fantastic, and it is always refreshing to see interesting plants thriving in the conservatories from such different habitats.



*Snowdrops and early crocuses provide a much needed injection of fresh color to the garden in January. My favorite crocuses are the yellows: I love that rich orange-y color and the way that the petals glow when the sun hits them. These are *Crocus flavus*, a wonderful and robust species that naturalizes well in meadows.*



**Great Dixter
Plant Fair**

11am - 4pm
Sat 6th & Sun 7th April 2024

Avon Bulbs; Beth Chatto Plants & Gardens
Binny Plants; Cally Gardens
CB Plants of Lower Severalls
Charleshurst Copton Ash; Daisy Roots; Edulis
Hardys Cottage Plants; Hare Spring Valley Hoylands
Johnsons Sweetpeas; Jurassic
Kent Wildflower Seed; King John's Nursery
The Laurels Nursery; Lime Cross
Madrona Moore & Moore; No Name Nursery
Pelham Plants; Phoenix Perennial Plants
Plantbase; Plantsman's Preference; Potterton
Rotherview; Wildegoose Nursery; Zophian

Talks by nurserymen at intervals

Entry: £16 includes entry to the Garden
Free for Friends and Annual ticket holders
friends@greatdixter.co.uk Tel. 01797 254048

Woodcut of Arch in Long Border by Will Larson, Chanticleer USA Christopher Lloyd Scholar 2024

Wood engraving on lemonwood of the path in the Orchard garden leading out to the Long Border. I carved this block and printed it in late January to be used on for the Spring Plant Fair flyer.