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Looking at the garden in July we are trying to identify the areas that are beginning to retreat, where are the browns? Without them, is there enough space to plant into, either as a whole unit or to stitch something through a broader area of the garden? The beds and borders are really dense at this stage, so each area we open up must be clean and seamless, requiring extra finesse and agility to nimbly carry out the required steps in order for us to eventually retract and close the space up again, as if nothing had happened. Canes! They're fantastic in all their shapes and sizes, allowing us to push foliage and stems back or out the way and then driving them into the ground so they hold their position. It's a simple technique but ideal for those more scrambling, sprawling, delicate herbaceous stems that would naturally break if they were tied out the way with twine. In the spaces we clear, there may be the odd self-sower knocking about, be it *Eryngium* or *Lunaria*. These could be left, but then it takes up a potentially valuable spot for a group or other seasonal plant. Instead they can be moved to the edges of the area, where their small rosettes aren't bothersome for the remaining season, nor will they mind having a larger friend shoulder to shoulder in that time. Some of those areas beginning to retreat are in the High Garden stock bed where poppies and buttercups have gone over, either browning or causing the picture to become noisy. For Yoko (a exchange student from Heligan) and I, we were set the north east corner of the stock bed, using twine and canes to open up the area, tying up grasses, pushing plants back and creating a clean space for us to work within. From the edge, we worked through methodically, cutting back buttercups or lifting them out where they'd run too far. *Hesperus* were also taken out where they'd gone over, except where the plants were discreet and we could leave them a little longer until the seed has ripened for us to collect at a later date. Certain strains of poppies were also left where we thought the flowers were interesting and distinctly different to the others we had planted. Very quickly we were able to identify the new spaces for planting. A large group of *Anaphalis nepalensis* had to be strengthened for better impact. Stock we originally split from this group back in the winter was strong enough to plant out. These could be planted very close to each other, as that's how they would perform in the wild. From here *Canna* 'Annei' was planted to run like a river from the back of the *Anaphalis* to path edge. To the left, *Rudbeckia hirta* 'Denver Daisy', a vibrant yellow annual with wide fuzzy leaves and a broad composite flower with a large dark cone and dark inner markings. To the right of the *Canna*, Yoko planted *Amaranthus* 'Mira', a vibrant green leaved amaranth with long pendulous pale coral/pink inflorescences. Our reasoning for this placement was for the interesting floral textures and structures that visitor's would experience as they come around the corner. The flowers of this amaranth are charming and like those of *Sanguisorba* 'Lilac Squirrel', I am sure they will be the intrigue of those that pass them. Each final height of the plants were taken into consideration when placing them to give reveals and staged vistas; the *Anaphalis* being taller than the *Rudbeckias* and the *Cannas* taller still. The *Amaranthus* act as a curtain to the section. To finish the area off we ran a seam of *Malope trifida* 'Vulcan' through to the left. A very different colour and flower form to anything else already present. The flowers are deep magenta that brightens towards the edges. Each of the five petals are wide at the top and pinched towards the centre, making them appear to have a little cut window at the base between each petal. Utterly delightful flowers, perhaps easier to view than for me to explain, their whole presence is contrasting and definitely worth integrating them into a planting as there isn't really anything similar.

More and more pockets are opening up around the garden, testing us with ideas and transitions to the next step of the season. An area in the High Garden has a very strong display of *Tulipa* 'Day Dream', which is a strong yellow tulip that turns to orange as it ages. This year that was paired up with *Myosotis* and then followed by *Ferula tingitana* 'Cedric Morris', a broader leaved variety of the giant fennels with a large ornamental flower head. As this this goes to seed the self-sowers take the spotlight, predominantly *Geranium pratense* and *Sympyhtum officinale*. Eventually the geranium starts to look a little ropey as it goes to seed and the comfrey needs to be controlled before it sets seed, or it'll be a lot of digging for the next few years. So, on cutting back the geranium and digging out the comfrey, we are left with a new space to play with. Standing back at the south entrance to the High Garden we look through the space with the High Garden Stock Bed

in the distance. The desires to continue *Cosmos* and *Dahlias* are very strong but what the space actually needs is a different texture and shape. The idea changed to *Canna* 'General Eisenhower' but we would then be left with a wall of dark foliage that would inhibit to view to the display beyond. Fergus suggested we make smaller tighter groups of *Canna* in threes or fours within the space so that the view through isn't spoilt. It left Ben and I a little uncomfortable to plant like this, where we are more used to either fully filling the space of a bedding pocket or planting in high-low density through an already existing planting. But you have to trust the method. As the month has passed and the plants have filled, I am more comfortable and confident with the planting, later to add just a few *Cosmos bipinnatus* 'Double Click Cranberries' on the edges of the *Cannas* so as to extend the planting in the main stock bed beyond, to the front of the vista and tie it all together. Planting in this way reminds me that each area of the garden is gardened in a different style, taking into consideration the various views, current plantings and overall development of the space. It teaches us to be versatile.

With all the changes that July brings, it is important for us to observe the stock, not only for area such as above but for the larger bedding changeovers that lay on the horizon. Stock has to be analysed for how far along it is as well as its success or failures. From here we need to assess which stock is to be used where and ensure we reserve those numbers for the changeovers. This then informs us of the remaining material to be used elsewhere. The key bedding areas are The Solar, to which *Helichrysum petiolare*, *Dahlia* 'Karma Choc', *D.* 'Ken's Rarity', *Monarda citriodora*, *Plectranthus argentatus*, *Ageratum* 'Tall Blue' and *Canna* 'General Eisenhower' are to be reserved. For the Rose Garden Hovel we are keeping back *Tagetes* 'Giant Yellow', *Phytolacca icosandra* and *Ageratum* 'Red Bouquet'. For the High Garden Double Boarders we are going full *Rudbeckia* fest with 'Cappuccino', 'Indian Summer' and 'Sahara'. Of course these are the initial ideas to which we aim to hold enough stock back to cover ourselves/the foundations of the planting. During all these plantings later in the month, further additions were used to bolster, complement and contrast the design. The planting on the late season Rose Garden Hovel was an idea I was keen to try. I envisioned the *Tagetes* and the *Phytolacca* contrasting and playing well together with opposing pinks and yellows along with their foliage and structures echoing their differences. The *Ageratum* would act as a small accent plant but its colour can be a little dull. With the aid of the team we decided to add *Tagetes* 'Nemegon', a very strong plant with punchy orange flowers, along with *Salvia sagittata*, a interesting wavy form with cornflower blue flowers and glaucous arrow shaped leaves. Fergus said this combination is a gamble as there are reliable elements but there are those that are dependant on the remainder of the season being favourable to produce good strong plants. On the basis of annuals, there are the plants you know are reliable. These would fall into the category of "safe play" where they can be used regularly, knowing that they will perform again and again. BUT...there are also the ones you like but may be more of a gamble. They are still valid, providing they do not succumb to the same errors again and again, making them ideal test subjects. Lastly there are "the unknowns"; new varieties that have never been grown before on your soil. They could go either way towards success or failure in these situations, making them slightly edgy choices. It can be risky and difficult to plan the planting on a variety you are not familiar with, but this is why we trial new plants in pots the majority of the time. This is how we move forwards, trial and error, we may get it wrong or we may get it right. It's what makes the work interesting and the designs intriguing to the visitors. We always get asked what certain plants are in the garden, particularly those that are in the bedding areas as they are normally all in their transition together, making a strong impression...Rarely do they ask of the plants that don't sing.

The next wave of stock from the 'car park frames' is ready to move on. The majority of these were early season splits that have been potted on and now outgrown that space. Now, making them ideal, well rooted specimens to pot up again to their final size and move them into the nursery for the remainder of the season. In some cases we will keep some stock back to stagger the amount we give to the nursery and ensure that we can increase numbers of our own stock if needs be. The stock we are moving into the nursery is predominantly those that are coming into flower in the garden or are looking well, e.g. *Crococsmia*, *Miscanthus*, *Helianthus*. As the visitors move round the garden, the real keen ones will make note of certain choice plants and finish the visit in the nursery to collect those that raised their interest. As the spaces open up in the frames, soon they will be filled with new stock, some of which we have brought in as we didn't have the material in the first place and are looking to increase ours, or want to grow on varieties for the nursery. The

buying in of material from certain larger scale nurseries is becoming less and less as we take more cuttings and sow more seed in an aim to close the circuit a little more and be as sustainable as possible. We will still support UK based, local and small-scale nurseries.

An observation of the *Antirrhinums* in the Solar bed. They are self cleaning. They don't hold onto their flowers once pollinated. There is no browning instead they drop with colour. Therefore there is no deadheading required or tidying to carry out. Of course they do go over and there is a timeframe for their display. But, they give a lot and don't ask for much. In our books, that makes it a very good garden plant. It is very clean and consistent.

We've had our spring plant fair this month as well. Always a treat really as it brings people together and is a reminder of what Great Dixter is all about...community and plants. Nurseries come from all over the UK along with visitors to follow from inland and beyond, all with bags and boxes at the ready for the treats that they may find. We had many volunteers come and join us to park the cars, ring the bell for talks, grilling goods for the barbeque and raising money for the raffle. Everyone of them was keen and over the moon to be part of the weekend. Within this is a big meal where all the nurseries, staff and volunteers gather to talk plants, techniques and gardens. It's really quite special and I don't know of anywhere else that brings people together in the same way.

Rob Leonard Flack.