

November Report

Hannah Phillips- Ruth Borun Scholar

I had another incredibly full and rich month here at Great Dixter. It started off with a lovely visit from Amy Borun, Ruth's daughter, which meant a lot to me. I'm glad to be able to connect in person with the Borun family who've created the Ruth Borun Scholarship in memorial to Ruth. Hearing about Ruth Borun and her garden from Amy was really special. It's an honor to be here at Great Dixter, a place that meant so much to Ruth and to be studying English gardening which influenced Ruth deeply even as a gardener in the drastically different climate of Los Angeles. So many of the techniques and lessons I'm learning here could be seen as specific to this climate. But really the foundations of these techniques are of curiosity, innovation, observation and the principals of design, maintenance, propagation and plant stewardship. All of which can be used and adapted to any environment you find yourself in. I'm inspired by Ruth's work in Los Angeles and honored to be learning here at Dixter some of what she valued so much about gardening.

All in all November was a really active month, involving many transitions throughout the garden. We closed to the public and so things quieted down in terms of visitors. Though this gave us an opportunity to do more radical and much anticipated transformations. We joined in the very hands on and practical bulb planting symposium which started up the first week of November. It was our first bit of work in the garden beds changing over the bedding pockets rather than maintaining the current plantings which was really exciting for me. We started out in the hovel garden in the topiary lawn. We systematically removed weeds, as well as collected seed from annuals, *Phytolacca icosandra* and *Tagetes 'Nemagon'*. We also dug and potted up several *Salvia sagittata* and *Phytolacca* for overwintering in glass houses. The deconstruction proves to be as informative for me as the construction of things. We then turned the soil over and planted forget-me-nots and a Fringed Tulip 'Louvre Orange'. We laid them out informally, meaning with varied sizes and spacings, which will give it a slightly looser feel than had we spaced everything in an even matrix. We laid the bulbs out, literally scattering them by the handfuls through the bedding and adjusting as needed, a few less here or there, a few moved closer or further apart.

The next pocket of bedding I worked on was by the staircase down to the barn garden. We lifted *Salvias*, *Cannas*, *Dahlias* and *Aconitums* to name a few. In their places we planted *Digitalis 'Suttons Apricot'*, Tulip 'Pieter de Leur', and *myositis*. I worked my way into the bed on boards a technique used at Dixter to lessen the compression of the heavy clay soil which compacts so readily underfoot, doing a lot of harm to the soil structure. My first objective before planting was to lift a pocket of *Aconitum*, divide it and replant. We removed a bit of the *Aconitum* and adjusted it's placement pulling it back from under a stunningly beautiful variegated *Cornus* – *Cornus alternifolia 'Argentea'* as they had begun to crowd one another. The pieces we removed were split down and potted up to be grown on in cold frames. A big piece of the work changing over the bedding includes dividing, resetting and potting on perennials to bulk up the stock both

for the garden and the nursery.

We also spent a good piece of November working in the subtropical garden. The work of that garden could be mostly summed up as preparing to protect the tender and somewhat tender species from the inevitable frosts. We worked lifting and potting up a lot of trees and shrubs that will be over wintered in green houses. We also worked wrapping up the bananas in a layer of hay and burlap to insulate them. Additionally we potted up loads of ferns and begonias from the understory of this garden. Last year Matt Padbury who was in charge of the fern house decided at mid-winter to repot all the ferns into a compost with more bark and it served them really well to have that extra bark which is a spongy and moisture retentive medium. This year we potted all ferns and Begonias directly into a potting mix that included more bark to begin with. Some of these tender plants like Begonias, and Plectranthus had already been propagated via cuttings to increase the stock, and replace plants that may not overwinter well. A form of hedging bets or increasing stock depending on how your luck goes.

I really enjoyed all the hard work that came with November and this major seasonal shift. So many more seasons to anticipate ahead and I'm thrilled I'll be here to see them through. For example the sheer volume of bulbs we've planted and the new bulbs I've learned and will soon get to meet is all so exciting! Now we just have to protect our planted bulbs from any rodents or badgers that have been rooting around in the freshly opened up beds. It seems they too were eagerly anticipating our plantings! Fingers crossed they all make it through to spring to put on an absolutely over the top display. Thanks again to the Borun family for the chance to be here learning and witnessing it all.