

December

On the evening of the 19, I set off for Devon, and for home. Christmas Time Is Here.

I had spent the day in the Orchard Garden, with Hannah and Mark. Cutting back ferns and old hellebore leaves, to reveal snowdrops and hellebore flowers already beginning to surface – defiantly, in the cold. Another key component of this bed, *Arum italicum*, has already staked its claim to the floor. This is a wild part of the garden, and I really love it. Korean blackberry *Rubus coreanus* – the blue-white bloom of its tall, arching stems – is one to remember. We finished as the light began to fade, stepped back and tickled out our footprints.

Work such as this is going on across the garden, as we prepare for the Christmas holidays. It is better done now than when we return – some of us, not until 6 January – when accessing these parts of the garden becomes more challenging.

This month, we all but finished planting bulbs. A small number are in plastic pots – these, mostly alliums, will be planted out in the New Year. I am excited to see them all in a few months time, and those in the Terrace and the Kitchen Drive in particular.

We have started to pot up hardy annuals. Some of the larkspur, poppies and ammi have started to root through, making this high-priority work. At the same time, I have shuffled things around, grouping the trays of antirrhinum, nicotiana and smaller/newly pricked out seedlings in the smaller, shallower frames. Ideally, we will keep these frames snug, venting them only occasionally to change the air. The larkspur, poppies and ammi that we have potted up have gone into the larger, deeper frames. It is chock-a-block in the frames, and the cornflowers are now lined out in crates on the floor of the Rhino Pen, and in the cark park field. More will follow.

A small group of us made one final trip to the Silk Route, to get the last of the bulbs in. *Tulipa linifolia* ‘Honky Tonk’ in Istanbul and Mediterranean Bursa, *Allium schubertii* in Persian Woodland, and others. Sea buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides* is a wonderful plant, and the Silk Route has several fine young specimens. I enjoy it in its winter garb – its teeth bared, it is rather mean-looking – and I am looking forward to seeing it again, and the garden as a whole, in spring.

Finally, alongside the crataegus I am attempting to grow from seed, I am trying *Escallonia bifida*. I spent a few minutes in the Long Shed looking for the (very tiny) seed in some desiccated seed heads a few of weeks ago, with limited success. But I squirreled away and sorted what material I hadn’t used, setting aside the more promising material to dry for a period of time. I opened it up yesterday 21, and I am pretty happy we now have a lot of seed. It’s golden-brown in colour – beautiful, and hopefully ripe! I will sow it on my return.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you all.



Processing and packing *Escallonia bifida* seed

Photos @joannagameflowers