

January

A shorter entry from me this month, as I rush to keep up with all that is going on around me.

The garden is waking up. Considering the efforts of the garden's winter-flowering shrubs – its heathers, wintersweet and witch-hazels – you could argue it never slept. The flowers of the fern-leaved clematis *Clematis cirrhosa* var. *balearica* in the Walled Garden, and the scent of the viburnum *Viburnum x bodnantense* 'Dawn' in the Peacock Garden, reminders that winter is not all bad. And now we have snowdrops, and the braver of the crocus, and renewed optimism that spring is close.

We have finished cutting the yew hedges. A five month operation, starting in September, which has ebbed and flowed – rising and falling in terms of priority – and finally reached its end. The holm oak is also cut.

Work continues in the borders and in the stock beds. As detailed in November's report, it is a case of



Winter light in the High Garden

cutting down and marking out perennials, and splitting as required. We are still adding bulbs in places, now as potted plants. In the Orchard Garden – which receives more than its fair share of words, and I will mention it again here – we have added a group of blue-flowered catmint *Nepeta cyanea* syn. *Nepeta kubanica*, verbascum – a mix of Olympian mullein *V. olympicum*, lifted from the vegetable garden, and *V.* 'Christo's Yellow Lightning', potted plants grown from root cuttings taken the previous winter – brown-eyed Susan *Rudbeckia triloba*, dyer's woad *Isatis tinctoria* and *Allium stipitatum* 'White Giant'. Other areas have received similar treatment. Next steps in all of these areas will be pruning, before it is time to plant out hardy annuals, weaving them through the groups of perennials.

The autumn-sown poppies and larkspur in the Rhino Pen are, in fact, starting to show signs of restlessness, as their roots creep beyond the limits of their pots, urged on by milder weather and longer days. They will have to wait a little longer.

The dahlia and perennial orders are in, and the seed order is under way. Halls of Heddon for the dahlias, Howard Nurseries for the perennials; and Chiltern, Growild and Moles for the seeds so far. We may yet buy seed from Johnny's and Select. Growild Nursery – whose catalogue is full of species plants, hardy perennials from Japan, China and the Himalayas – is new to me, and very exciting.

Next month is full-on. I am giving a short talk at the Northiam horticultural society to kick things off, before two symposiums, a trip the ISU (International Hardy Plant Union), two open weekends and a Working Weekend. We will also start pruning, definitely maybe my favourite job in the garden.