

OCTOBER

October feels in many ways like the end of the gardening year at Dixter. We kick off the month with the autumn plant fair, which feels like a sort of closing ceremony for the season, and then we remain open till the end of the month, but visits gradually taper off, till the garden shuts on the first of November, and the digging work begins. But amidst this tapering off, October is also a month of new beginnings: of sowing and cuttings (garden stock production for next year); of cold frames that quickly fill up with hardy annuals that will go out into the garden in the spring, and of hot houses that are soon packed with tender perennials and cuttings.

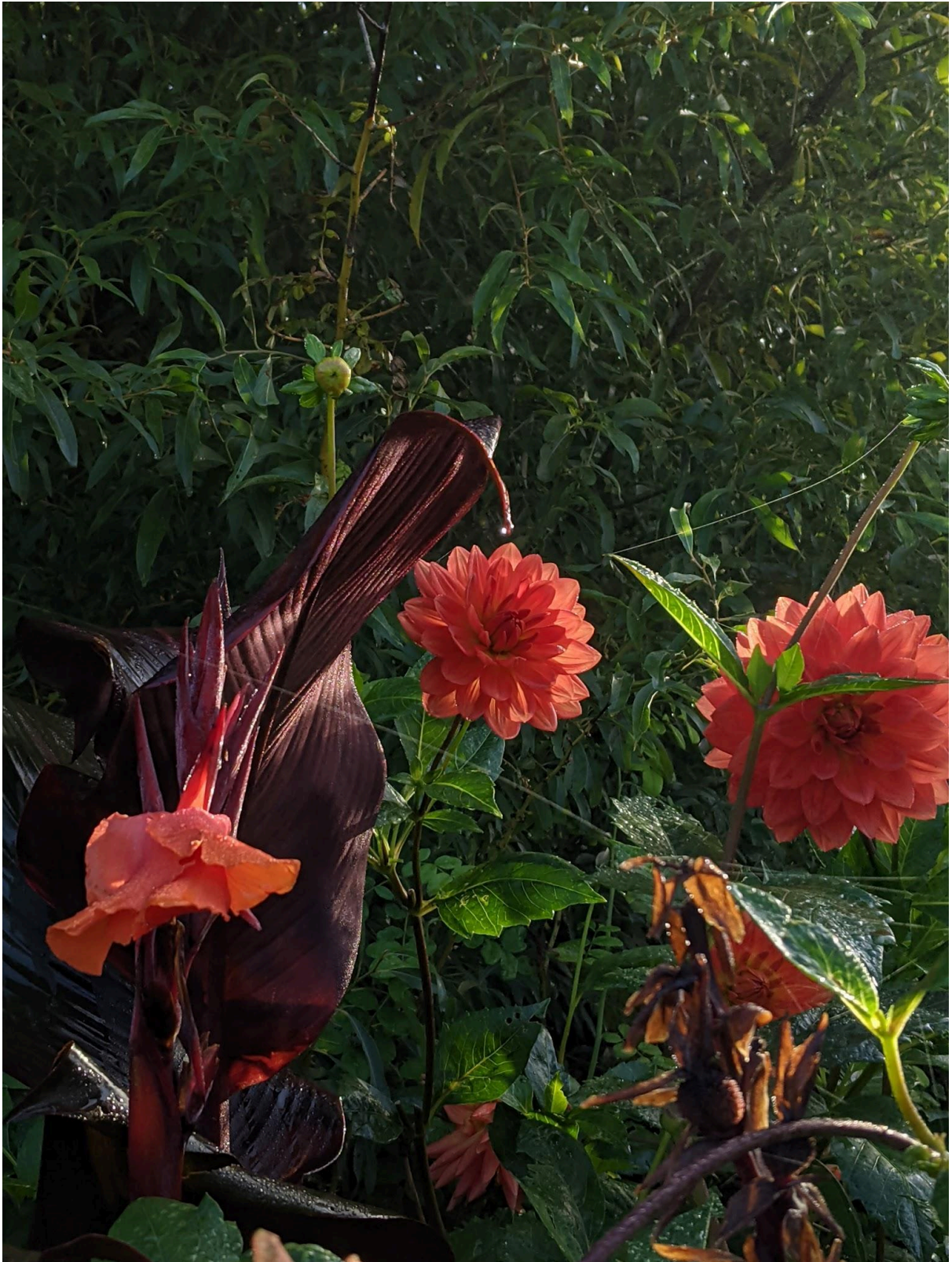
Plant fair weekend came round with better weather than we'd hoped for -- September had been quite wet, and we spent the week leading up to the fair casting suspicious glances at the car park fields, checking them for underfoot squelch, and spreading around large amounts of hay to prevent cars from getting stuck. The Saturday of the plant fair, however, was almost sunny, and fouler weather on Sunday was confined to a brief mizzle. It felt amazing to be part of the plant fair for a second year running, and I felt better prepared and more energetic than last year, when the newness of it all was still a bit overwhelming. The atmosphere was fantastic, from the breakfast cafe the Dixter staff ran for nursery folk and volunteers, to the gregarious buzz of the plant fair field, and even the mandatory stints of high-vis carparking. Saturday is also the Great Day of Fergus's cooking, in preparation for the big communal evening meal. The ovens are usually running all day with a steady rotation of meats and vegetables -- this year it featured venison, roast potatoes, roast root vegetables, mashed potatoes and celeriac, leek and carrot winter salad, and French bean winter salad. As we approached completion of the cooking process, Rob Flack prepared one of his legendary cocktails. Fergus proclaimed the flavours evoked *Amaranthus* 'Mira.' The great event of the evening, however, was the unearthing of a small parcel of venison we had buried in the compost heap the previous day, and left to cook overnight at around 80°C. It was a resounding success -- who knows, perhaps next year's plant fair meat will be compost cooked!

Seed sowing kicked off again this month in preparation for spring next year -- Ladybird poppies, Beth's poppy, larkspur, and antirrhinum. This year, however, the hardy annuals and the cold frames in the rhino pen will be looked after by Matthew Padbury and this year's Christopher Lloyd scholar George Game. We had a little hand-over session, and while I will miss my seed domain, I'm looking forward to helping Ruth Borun scholar Hannah Phillips with the perennial frames in the car park this year. One momentous cold frame event this month was the shockingly quick progress of some giant fennel seedlings that one of our Tuesday volunteers, Jodie Jones, had potted on from a plug tray last month, and which had been growing on in the rhino pen cold frames since. By the end of October, they were already starting to root through their 9cm pots. These fennels would in the past have been potted on in spring, and have taken a full 9 months to reach the size and vigour they were now exhibiting. Observing that the fennel seedlings were coming up and actively growing in the autumn, we took action and potted them on, and at their current rate, they will be saleable plants by springtime -- a testament, as Fergus summarised it, to the value of using common sense and close observation rather than relying on force of habit and conventional wisdom.

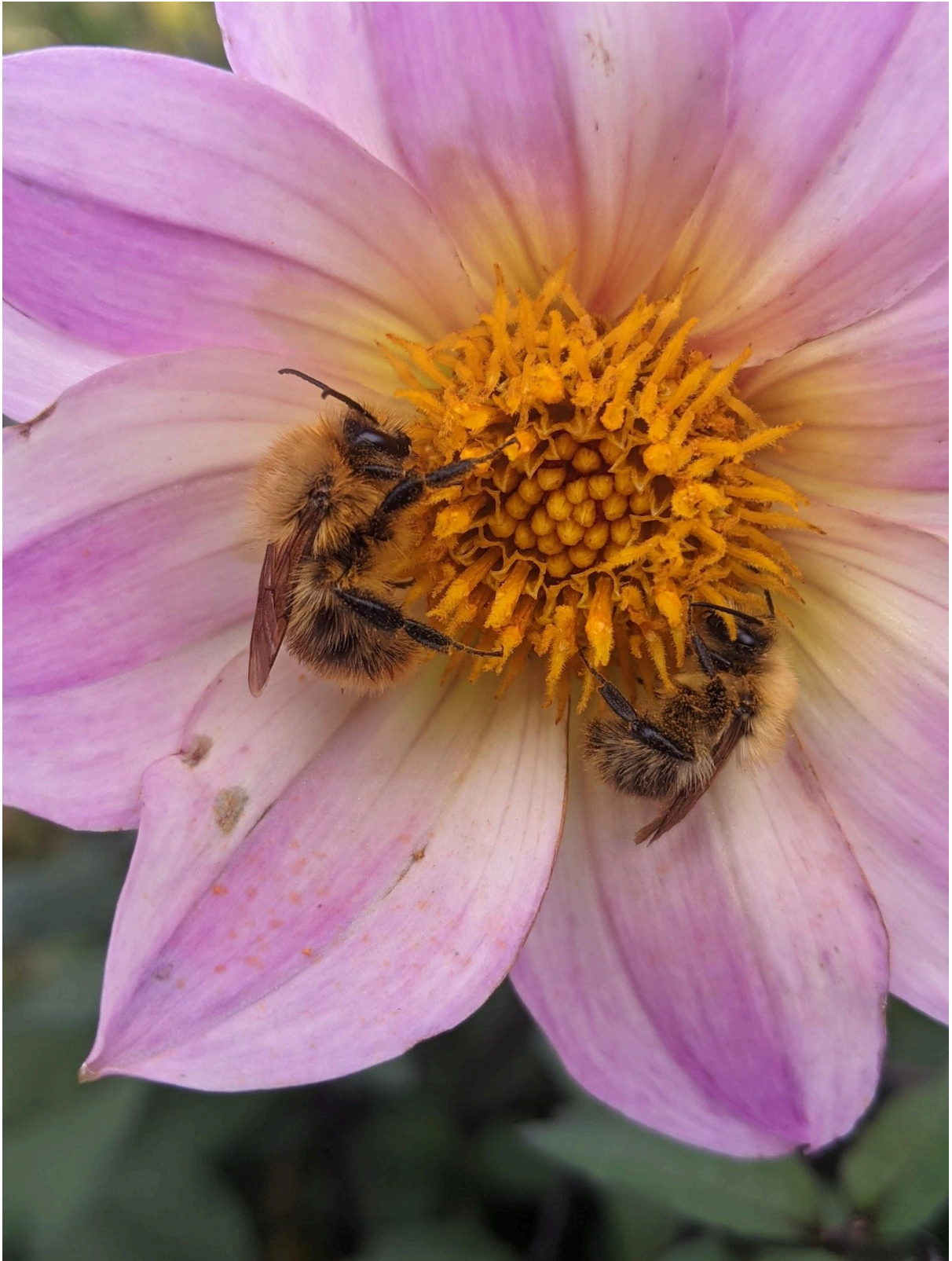
The garden is still looking fantastic now in October, and the Cannas and Dahlias especially seem now to be at their best. 'Gwyneth' remains resplendent in the High Garden, and 'Chimborazo', which initially seemed a little underwhelming, has really come into its own on the Long Border. Other stellar Dahlias like 'Grenadier' and 'Taratahi Ruby' are starting to fizzle out, but they've held their own for a good stretch. 'Emory Paul' is looking possibly at its best in the late autumn light, while 'Spartacus', which had been quite poor all summer, is finally flowering as it should be. We went about labelling some of the interesting variations among the Dixter seedling dahlias, including a pale pink one and a particularly bright, clean, yellow.

Now that most of the meadow work is done, it's hedging time again at Dixter, which is always a joy. It was remarkable, however, how rusty and cautious one becomes in the space of a year. My first day or so of cutting was far too gentle, and my cut became much tighter and neater as I got back into the swing of things. The hedges at Dixter are always interesting to cut though, as some patches do require a much lighter hand, especially if the long-term view is to even out divots or allow a particularly mean step on an archway to flesh out. Conversely, particularly vigorous sections need much closer cutting. It's an engaging task, and one that requires sensitivity and responsiveness as one reads the hedge being cut. As with much of the work at Dixter, observant and thoughtful gardening is the order of the day.







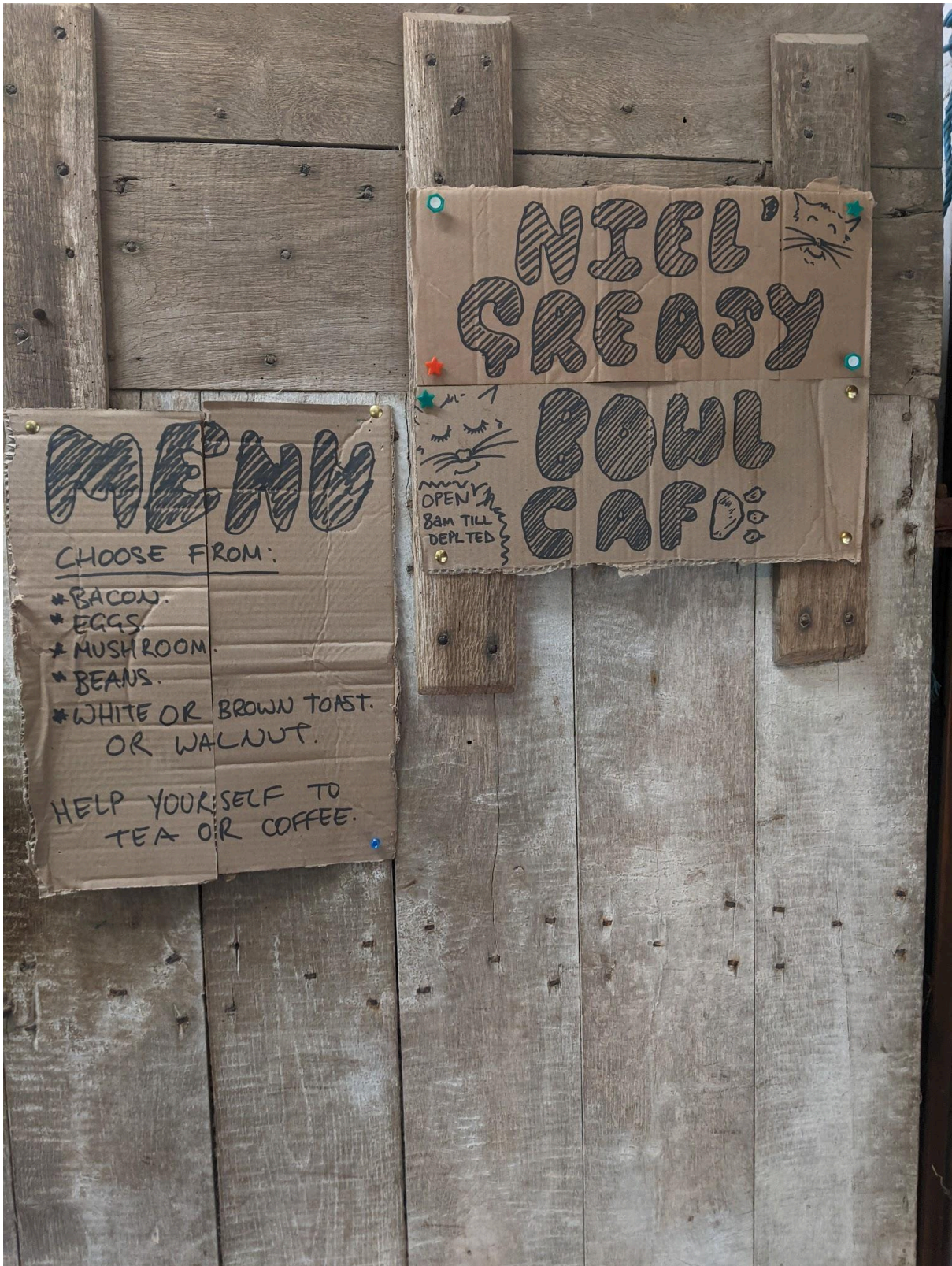




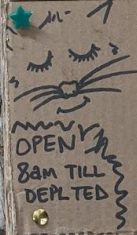








NIEL'S
GREASY



OPEN
8am TILL
DEPLETED

BOWL
CAFE

MENU

CHOOSE FROM:

- *BACON.
- *EGGS.
- *MUSHROOM.
- *BEANS.
- *WHITE OR BROWN TOAST.
OR WALNUT.

HELP YOURSELF TO
TEA OR COFFEE.

MENU

PLANT FAIR 2024

Venison

Locally shot. In red wine
& juniper berries slow
roasted for 8 hours

French Bean
Winter Salad
*VEGAN

Cobra beans slow
cooked in olive oil
with tomatoes, garlic,
dill, parsley, & onions
+ Lemon juice

Leek & Carrot
Winter Salad
*VEGAN

Leeks & Carrot slow
cooked in Olive oil. Dill,
parsley & Lemon juice

Mashed Potatoes
& Celeriac *VEGAN

In Olive oil with chives

Roast
Potatoes *VEGAN

In Olive oil

Mixed greens
Chard, kale, parsley, spinach
*VEGAN

In Olive oil

Roast root
vegetables *VEGAN

Beetroot, pumpkin,
turnip, Root fennel

