

Christopher Lloyd Scholarship report – August

It's a very bizarre sensation to reach the end of this year at Great Dixter. I spent many years trying to get here and it has honestly been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. I have never been on a traineeship or worked in a garden that meant so much to me, nor have I felt like I gained so much, learnt so much and was able to express this back to new students, volunteers and the public. I feel wholly enthralled and grateful for the experience so I would like to extend a huge thank you to all the people who have made this possible: The funders, my mentors, staff and volunteers. Not forgetting of course all the other fantastic people I have met on this journey, some who have become lifelong friends. I have had an absolute pleasure being surrounded by pure passion and enthusiasm. It literally radiates from all corners of this place and is accompanied with joy and alacrity. There is no place to my knowledge that extends the same hand of support within a highly creative, expressive setting. With that being said, I am over the moon to be offered another year to further develop myself and add those ever developing layers to my horticultural backpack. As of September my new position will be for me to hone those skills I have learnt over the past year, taking on new projects, teaching new students and further understanding the complex logistics of this wonderful place.

August has been an odd one in reality, completing the circle, whilst having a broad understanding as to what is going on as opposed to a year ago. We have continued with the "constant careful edit". It never really ends. There are always small little jobs that move you through the garden like stepping-stones. Each of which polishes up the space, plant or vista to give a more eloquent version of what lied before it.

I have aided in demonstrations and tours within the garden. Giving examples of different ways to take cuttings of tender plants, how we do it, why, the soil medium and the growing conditions, not to forget the complications, dos/don'ts and a bit of the science as to how these processes work. I found it pretty exciting to be honest. It's such a treat to share with a group some of our processes, why they're are important and the ways we can maximise a plants growth/abilities. I found it highly beneficial to be able to put this line of work into the context of the garden as well as tying it in with the biology of the plants and how these processes work. It helped a lot of the day's students to understand why we do certain processes certain ways and why others may not work. All in all it was a great process to cement this information with the use of examples and conversation. We discussed nodal cuttings and why taking them at this point is of importance due to the cells differentiating and dividing here, leading to the development of root cells. This is also encouraged with the flow of *Auxin*, a plant hormone that is produced in the growing point of the plant and moves down the stem, as it moves down a stem it helps to initiate that root growth and is the key component in root inducing hormones applied to cuttings. We further discussed the balance required in the growing space, to include; heat, light, shade, moisture and ventilation. All of which are to be balanced in relation to which stage the cutting is at. The light helps produce sugars for root growth, moisture helps to stop cuttings drying out, an element of shade may be required so that the

cuttings don't transpire too quickly as this can lead to the leaves drying, resulting in senescence. Heat is required (for the tender perennials we were discussing, but not all cases) to help keep the enzymes in the plant active, which are those responsible for photosynthesis and division of cells. Lastly ventilation is of benefit to circulate fresh air, flooding those cuttings with fresh oxygen and removing and stagnant humid air that may lead to rotting off. Included with this is a good, gritty medium that allows good drainage and stability of the cutting in the pot. I found it highly rewarding to explain this process as for me, learning this made it much simpler, so I wanted to be able to help these students out as much as possible. After all, that's what its all about.

We have also come full circle, arriving back to the meadows, brush cutting areas, in both directions as the first run can flatten it a little, meaning it doesn't all get cut. This is all raked into rows and then pitchforked into bags. This first batch was moved down to the lower field behind the education room. This is a meadow that is grazed throughout the year by sheep and their young. Towards the end of the year it had a fairly bad problem with thistle that the grazers were less keen on. This was all cut out prior to it setting seed to help reduce its spread. The strewing's were then distributed across an area of the meadow and left for several weeks so that they could dry further and begin to shed their seed somewhat. I shall watch this area with great anticipation. Hopefully the *Camasia*, *Genista* & *Crocus* carry over.

I have also had the luxury over the past year of keeping an eye on the Exotic Garden and attending Fergus' lectures on the subject. We recently saw one and it really helped to solidify the complexities involved, looking at ways to make the plants connect. Not only has this been valuable to the Exotic Garden, but also to better understanding the plantings throughout the garden. It is just a different paint palate. The Exotic Garden, as well as the rest of the garden is about understanding and creating a spark of contrast and significance between the plants but also understanding how to make these contrasts connect. Together, the plants add up to the sum greater than their separate parts. The key within this is to give space on planting, observe the growing conditions and what the plant will do over time, aiming to avoid a competitive mound of foliage and create a form of diverse interest that is balanced and playful.

I will sign of this year here. Being one of the most influential times in my life. I feel that I am a stronger individual, with a greater horticultural understanding and the ability to communicate this with clarity. I look forward with great interest at how this year will continue to develop the spaces I garden.