

Christopher Lloyd Scholarship report – July

July! What a month this has been. It began with Madelaine, Andrew and myself taking a trip to North-eastern Turkey to view wild plant populations. Needless to say it was one of the most exhilarating horticultural experiences of my life. Highly enriching, gratifying and educational. The knowledge and experience gained over that week were of great benefit and highly enjoyable. The main purpose of the trip was to see collections of plants, new and familiar, those that we grow at Great Dixter and those we don't. We saw some of the most fantastic meadows I have ever set my eyes on, filled with varieties that I am familiar with in a garden setting but just hanging out in the wild. I have written a separate report of my accounts there, which I will make available to Linda and Catherine in the education team should you like some further reading. The accounts are a little large to fill this space, but just as valid none the less. I will say that Turkey is one of the most diverse spaces I have ever witnessed and I couldn't have predicted how many different plants and their communities I would have witnessed. It was highly fascinating to see how these communities socialised with each other, filling all the various habitats and eco-tones that we viewed. Highlights of the trip were seeing *Geranium psilostemon*, one of Christo's favourite Geraniums, and to see how it danced through the meadows was such a humbling experience. I can see why he liked it so. Along with this was viewing meadows with *Inula orientalis*, *Persicaria bistorta*, *Aster amellus*, *Lilium carniolium subsp. ponticum* & *Centaurea pulcherrima*. Stimulation overload!!!

Back in the land of Great Dixter we have been carrying out the clearance of the Kitchen Drive, with lots of new compost added and *Zinnia* seeds broadcast throughout for a late season display. In reality they should germinate within a few days, weather depending, but they have had the tendency to be on the slightly more miserable side of growth. Those pesky summer showers and cooler temperatures, although beneficial to the garden, seem to have come at a time when we'd rather they didn't. You can't win! We've also been doing a lot of big tidy ups through the garden, that constant careful edit, moving through beds, making space, staking, weeding and planting. Peeling away the layers to add a little more clarity to the picture. Its important for us to look at the big picture, viewing from the intended/expected viewpoint and noting which changes you can make. Additions have been made to plant *Aster lateriflorus* 'Chloe' opposite the Aster-Bed, along with a few other asters in there as this will help to stretch out the season a bit more and add a few more layers to the whole picture. This, backed up with a few *Cosmos* dotted around the place will really bring a new lease of life into the picture.

I had spent a little time in the Old Rose Garden/Exotic Garden with Fergus, aiming to get a crate of hardy plants I have been propagating since my time here into the beds. They are *Eomecon chionantha*, one of my favourite herbaceous plants for its interesting cookie-cut cordate leaves, reddish fleshy stems and simple poppy-like flowers. Its also hardy down to -20°C, a big win in my book. It's known as the Himalayan snow poppy, hence its hardiness. Fergus agreed that they could go in and I should place them out and see how it goes. After my initial placement he mentioned that it was a no-go in that spot for the sheer fact that "it

must be significant!" This has since been one of the most beneficial lessons to date. A plant must stand out from other foliage, stand out on its own and not be lost in or create any surrounding froth. It should not encourage a muddy image. We moved the *Eomecon* around a few times until we found the right spot and when you know...you know. There is clarity in differentiation. As always, Fergus taught me a few little quips here and there whilst working in the Exotic Garden and got me to appreciate that this a foliage canvas, highly different from other spaces we work in. It is a play in light and shadow most of all. The plants must be planted in the right direction and planted in naturalised rivers so as to look like it is untainted by a cultivated hand.

We have also carried out "The Big Stake", as I was calling it. Taking care to tie up all those who may potentially flop in the severely heavy incoming winds. Staking is an investment in time and resources, when time is limited what do you want to invest in. When those who you haven't invested in fall, will it make a big impact, detract from the picture or be ok? Its been a real lesson in staking, learning the correct angle to stake, who to stake, who not to stake and how, as always, to move through the bed without causing any destruction. Ballet in the boarder. For example, the large *Verbascums* on the long boarder are key to the display this year. They add height and rhythm to the compartmentalised design. Without them the boarder would be slightly deflated and that's not a word you want to be using in reference to the visual aesthetic of boarder design. It needs to be pow, wow, plump and vibrant. Within the Long Boarder we have been discussing how we avoided the crash through careful editing of browns, dead heading, bedding pockets and the crucial use of summer perennials to take over from the poppies. This accompanied with the strong year round structure, repetition and layered bulbs all form to make an incredibly long season. Stretching it like an elastic band.

We have a new temporary student volunteer called Kaan from Istanbul. He studies landscape architecture and has a couple of years left. After seeing one of Fergus' lectures he decided that he wanted to come and work over here. It's been a real pleasure to teach him the ways of Great Dixter and of horticulture in the UK, as back over in Turkey the scene is very different. It seems that horticulture in Istanbul consists of large vacant lawns, with a few trees. We've been planting, bedding out, pruning, propagating and discussing the general processes at Dixter. It's interesting what you see and what someone else see's and has reminded me how complex Great Dixter is, it takes time and understanding to get your eye in, to see how the system works, how we get the most out of it and again how we stretch it fully. It's a joy to teach in this way. We recently planted out two *Tagates*, 'Sahara' and 'Coco Gold' in a flamed fashion; bright orange and golden lemon yellow in alternating swathes. Very fun, very much of its time but also a window into something that has a lot of play and can be tailored into something wacky and flamboyant. I did realise whilst teaching Kaan that I need to remind myself how to teach sometimes, that I need to remember the processes and the structure to each job. It's easy to just jump in to a job but we have a method at Great Dixter and it's my job to inform of this. Whilst staking the *Tagates* I was reminded of the importance of using a stake that isn't too thin, although it may seem stable at the time, as the plant grows, the flowering head

will get incredibly large and with its weight cause the cane to bend, not necessarily snap, but the canes purpose of holding the flowering head up is obsolete if it is too flimsy.

We had a long walk around the garden with Fergus and the Arts and Craft group, to show them how we make notes and assess each area of the garden. Filling holes as we go. One in particular, can you have enough visual distractions to deter from the browns, balancing the view of the observer. It's all a big show, a big play on the structures within the garden. Also noteworthy is; not to shoehorn failure spots. It's ok to take the time to stop and think about them. A negative space isn't a failure, as much as an empty canvas isn't a failure. It just isn't at its finest expression yet. We have also noted that we need to increase the "static vegetation" in the Switzerland bed within the blue garden. Ideally more conifers, the valley of conifers, to give it some more character and definition, take out the fluff. Which we have since completed and I have to say it looks the finest I have seen it since being here. It has a purpose and it has stature. Fergus and Ed Flint also informed us that the best time to visit a garden is when you have problems, so as to see what other gardens are doing. Assess and solve.

We've carried a good bit of late season nursery work out. This has consisted of all the biennials for next years bedding pockets, plenty of *Hesperus*, *Digitalis*, *Verbascum* and *Lupinus*.

We have had the pleasure of Lewis from Fulham Palace joining us for a few weeks; a keen young fellow with a great eye for detail. Together we battled the walled garden pot display. After many attempts at doing pot displays I finally feel confident to be able to run through the process in great detail. Informing Lewis of all the intricacies of the process and how to get the most out of the space. Key to this is big bold groups, balance, healthy plants, no itty-biddy plants, negative space and the act of being quick. Don't overthink it or you'll lose your rhythm. Plants should be impactful from the get go, no waiting around for something to develop. Any additional development is merely a bonus... how long will it last? I have to say that it was a pleasure teaching Lewis and I think we have created something quite exceptional. Big bold groups, contrasting and harmonising colours, structure, and negative space so as to give the display some breathing room and future development. I have since this day added a few bits here and there. You can't help yourself when you see it on a regular basis. Smaller *Agaves* and *Aloes* to give a different structure and soften the front edge.

It's been a great month. Always so much to learn and yet there are still a couple of months left of the scholarship. Soon we will be back at cutting the meadows and a full circle will be complete.