

## Rick Mather David Scrase Christopher Lloyd Scholar December 2023

As is with December, we are racing through the garden trying to finalise the last areas for bedding out with bulbs and biennials. The weather is always a challenge, making it difficult for us to put any pressure on the beds and dig into them as this will just lead to the degradation of the soil structure. Within the bedding pockets this year we have been planting a lot of *Myosotis*, forget-me-not. These have self-sown around the garden, particularly in the vegetable garden. They need a mid-late season burst of rain to encourage the seeds to germinate. Last year the summer drought was so long that they hadn't really germinated at all. Whilst planting them, as with many of the larger groups of plants that we naturalise, they are laid out in a high low density. This helps to give the illusion of naturalisation through the presence of negative space, shape of planting and size of groupings. It may be three in a little clump, a single one a little way from there, another two and then four in a cluster a further distance away. Collectively they can form a stream of sorts that appears to have trickled through the bed. Naturally when lifting the plants from the garden, I wanted to choose the best available, which I would of said to be the largest, healthiest. But, in the situation of naturalising, a mixture of sizes is ideal. This way an undulation is created through the bed and in doing so nuances the design. To achieve this it is the age of the plant that denotes the best mixture of sizes. Smaller mature plants can be a bit scraggly; where as young juveniles remain compact. There is the option to take a small piece off of an older plant but the finish is that all the plants are the same height in the end and can look too obvious. A few of the bulbs that have been planted out this month are *T. 'Daydream'*, a Darwin hybrid with yellow through to orange. *T. turkestanica*, a dainty little species tulip that's great for naturalising under shrubs and in cracks. *Narcissus 'Thalia'*, a beauty of a daff with a good structure, great scent and clear colour. *T. 'Bleu Amable'*, a strong blue/violet tulip with a bold cup...just to name a few.

The Kitchen Drive has had a little seeing to this month with the additions of *Ornithogalum nutans* and *Eremurus x isabellinus 'Cleopatra'*. The *Ornithogalum* was dotted up the left side in small groups with a few groups bouncing over to the other side. We planted at the base of the walls where the flowers can sit dancing against the stonework. The *Eremurus* were planted in a high density at the base of the path, with the main body being as you turned up the kitchen drive. From here they danced along the path and on the beds above the walls, creating a soft gradient as they faded up. Naciim, our Ruth Borun Scholar had the idea to try and squeeze them into any gaps within the walls. Naturally these plants will grow on scree and rock faces, where there is little organic matter. So it makes sense to presume they would do well in these spaces...poking their long stems from the crevices, to create vibrant orange pillars. We pushed them in where we could and backfilled with a mix of grit and moulding the clay-rich soil into a putty to plug the gaps. All the others that were in the ground had a small hollow dug and then a mound of grit placed for them to splay over. *Eremurus* are peculiar bulbs, with long octopus-like tentacles that represent something nostalgic of sci-fi reading. They sit over the grit mound and are then back filled to leave their

emerging beak-like bud poking in the fresh air. We make a lot of changes in the garden, constantly. But for me, this one has been a real pleasure to play with. Not only working with this years students, letting them converse and come up with a plan, but also in laying out this plan, discussing further, walking the plot, laying the plants and planting in various different ways than I have before. It's a playground. As a little bonus, we threw a few up on the green roofs down at the loggia. It's a perfect place for them (I reckon) as they will have perfect, shallow drainage, minimal competition and get a decent summer baking.

The largest change that I made this month was in the Aster bed with Luke, Ernie, Will and Sarah. Coralie gave Luke and I creative control to come up with a plan, look at what worked last year and what failed, whilst also taking into consideration that this is a stock bed and as well as it being ornamental, it also has to provide material for the nursery. In doing so, Luke and I pitched amendments to increase all small insignificant groups, reshuffling where necessary and using other perennials to help create barriers between various *Asters*. Mainly due to their running ability which can cause a lot of difficulty when it comes to identifying stock for sale in the nursery. We re-mapped over 1/3 of the area, providing more clarity through the marking, identifying and re-labelling of the varieties. One element that I am becoming more aware of is spacing of plants. Taking into consideration the distance between each plants final growth. It all seems good and well to place potted plants at 'x' distance from each other, but in reality, how big are they going to get, am I planting with an open enough design to allow each to have the best expression of itself and not get squeezed out. The work Luke and I put in for this re-shuffle has really paid off, in my opinion. I can see that the previous years training has had great benefit on the way we think and plan; now we are in the right place to put these concepts into play. It's also been a good lesson in teaching. Luke is a fantastic teacher and I learn a lot from seeing him teach others. I have learnt for me to be a better teacher I must listen, give space to those I teach, take my time, remember the process and be honest. It's OK to not know the answer. Onwards we go!

Rob Leonard Flack.