

# September At Great Dixter Nurseries

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## Key Events this Month:

- First Week
- Visit to Balmoral Cottage
- Nursery propagation study day
- Growing hardy annuals from seed course
- The Royal Parks Guild discovery day at Hampton Court Palace



My first week at Great Dixter Nurseries was all about learning how the nursery operates. This included learning about their loam-based compost and the types of compost they make, as well as their preferred methods for taking various cuttings and for sowing seed.



My first week, I was tasked with taking cuttings and pricking out seedlings. I took around 120 cuttings of various salvias and fuchsias and pricked out 330 seedlings. I also helped to re-label and stake the clematis stock with the aim to make it easier and clearer for customers.

## Balmoral Cottage Visit:

This month I got the privilege to visit Balmoral Cottage, a garden created by Charlotte and Donald Molesworth. Charlotte has a passion for topiary and an amazing collection of Buxus. As an Artist she enjoys shaping and creating living art in her own garden. I particularly enjoyed the way the wavy hedging and pillars of topiary sit in the garden. Although a big feature, they don't detract or dominate, instead they enhance the whimsical character of the garden.



## Nursery Propagation Study Day:

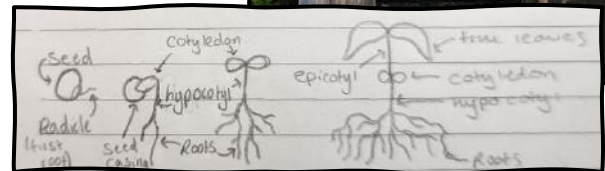
The study day was a great way to learn more about how the nursery operates. Learning in further depth about the compost mixes, hardwood cuttings, leaf cuttings, basal cuttings etc.

### Key Points:

-Loam based compost more closely resembles garden soil, and although harsher for young plants, it prepares them better for growing on in the garden. It helps them to grow harder and stronger than growing in a typical fluffy peat or peat alternative would.

-When taking hardwood cuttings, taking thicker material will give you thicker growth after rooting, making a better looking and more sellable plant quicker.

-When pricking out, knock the whole pot out and tease each plant out gently. Digging around in pots with a dibber will bruise and break roots, the plant would then have to recover these roots before making new growth.



## Growing Hardy Annuals From Seed Course:

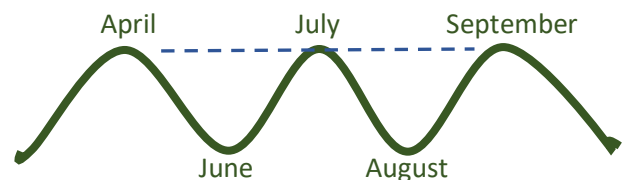
Overall, I found tagging along very helpful, it was great to hear Coralie and Michael W's perspective on the garden. It helped me see the garden in a different way and think about the succession of interest.

### Key points:

Hardy annuals are sown in Autumn or Spring, Autumn sown seed will germinate and form a tight basal rosette in the Autumn which will overwinter, springing into life when the weather warms again. Spring sown seed will typically be shorter in height and go to seed quickly whereas autumn sown have the time to build roots and energy before the spring helping them to grow stronger, taller and flower for longer.

Hardy annuals are used for threading through borders to fill gaps among perennials and also for larger block bedding schemes. The main use at Great Dixter for hardy annuals is to continue the season of interest and level out the peaks and troughs.

Pictured right, green represents the natural peaks and troughs of perennials in the garden, the blue line representing hardy annuals, levelling out the season of interest.





## The Royal Parks Guild Trainee Discovery Day:

A fantastic opportunity to meet people in horticulture, from places like the RHS, Kew, The Tree Council, Royal Parks Guild and so many more. There were talks with a focus on horticulture in historic places. The takeaway for me was that we should respect the history and work with it, be aware of prized objects and conscious of the environment you're working in.

There was also a panel which talked largely about inclusion in horticulture, getting more young people, people of colour and people from minority backgrounds into horticulture, which was brilliant to hear. They spoke about creating pathways for these people to enter horticulture as currently it is based on volunteering and knowing the right people to get anywhere.

Set in the grounds of Hampton Court Palace, a great location for the theme of horticulture within historic settings. We also had talks on the national plant collections and the previous works to revive the estate.



## Propagation this month:

As we shift into autumn, our focus has been taking softwood cuttings and sowing seed. I learnt how to take leaf cuttings of *Eucomis* 'Sparkling Burgundy'. I also started to hand pollinate *Amicia Zygomeris* and *Salvia* 'Amistad'. *Amicia* is quite popular, but we struggle to get enough material, and when we do, it can be hard to propagate successfully as it has hollow stems. *Salvia* 'Amistad' is also popular but has Plant Breeder's Rights (PBR) which makes it logistically difficult to propagate. By hand pollinating, we can hopefully get seeds and then a seedling which is very similar to *Salvia* 'Amistad' that can then be propagated and sold, under a different name avoiding the PBR.

Also, this month, was the Great Dixter Art Exhibition, featuring mixed media artwork from the staff and volunteers at Dixter. Pictured is some of the set-up, hanging a piece in the centre of the great barn with Neil the cat on health and safety. You can also see pictured the finished result during the hardy annuals from seed course demo.

