

Monthly Report September 2023 – Ernie

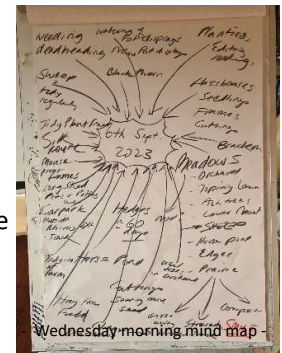
I can't really believe I am already a month into this scholarship at Great Dixter, - how time flies when you're having fun! - it has been a crazy amazing whirlwind start to this year ahead, from meadow work, to potting up biennials for next year, being assigned our own 'sweeping locations' and long term projects, a last minute trip to Le Jardin Plume, study days, selective weeding work on the Terrace, learning various methods of propagation, clearing out the Horse Pond, hedge cutting and so much more.

Before I get into this month's events in more detail I would like to start by thanking everyone involved in making this Christopher Lloyd Scholarship possible. Having been at Dixter a year and a half now (volunteering once a week) I feel have a good understanding of the importance of this opportunity for not only myself but for all the future students, Great Dixter is truly incredible place to be and learn, the experience I have gained so far has been invaluable and now being here full time I can't wait to explore further how to garden in a complex, diverse, innovative and ecological way.

06/09/23 Onwards:

Our first week started with an 8:15 mind map giving an overview of the work ahead of us, with Meadow work, weeding and deadheading being three main focuses. This time of year it is especially important to keep on top of deadheading plants such as dahlias (mostly the single flowered cultivars which go over much more regularly), cosmos and Tagetes as they could quickly reduce their flowering if allowed to produce seed. It also maintains elements of strong colour as we go further into a time of year where the gardens overall vibrancy is starting to fade. The High garden has a large number of plants in need of constant attention in this way, and I am pleased to have been assigned this garden as my area to 'sweep' in the mornings.

During the morning sweep we look for any editing jobs that may need doing such as staking an Amaranthus that has fallen after a heavy rain, or 'de-browning' which involves removing unwanted plant material but maintaining a careful balance, not to remove too much whilst keeping the current picture clean.



- Ground nest in a patch of compacted bare soil -



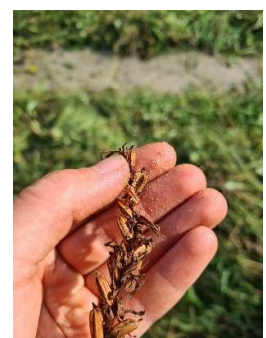
- Spider web in the Prairie Meadow -



- Morning Light shining through the Topiary Lawn Meadow -



- Horse Pond Meadow: high numbers of Yellow Rattle, Autumn Hawkbit and Plantain -



- Dactylorhiza fuchsii (Common Spotted Orchid) seed -

Meadows: During the meadow work we all stopped by a patch next to the Horse Pond to look in more detail at the plants before cutting, as this area has a high density of *Scorzoneroides autumnalis* (Autumn Hawkbit). The strewing's from this area were saved and spread across other areas of meadow that are cut later each year such as the Topiary Lawn, to hopefully allow it to naturalise. This was an important lesson for me to look closer at what's going on in the meadows, the changing diversity of plants from area to area and what this means for both visual impact and ecological benefit. During this next year at Dixter I am keen to push myself further and take things to the next step, which for me includes gaining an in depth understanding of the ecological side of gardening and how we interact with other living organisms, to be able to maximise the beneficial aspects both for us and all other life.

Another important lesson was to look and assess what stage an area may be at, as some of the smaller areas of meadow are not cut each year to allow woody growth to form, and a different tapestry of plants to establish for different periods of time. We could tell that a triangle of meadow at the top of the farm track was ready to be cut this year by looking at the age of woody growth. I find this area particularly interesting as even with this different cutting regime each year a huge orchid appears in late spring - being under a tree the grass is naturally less dominant, allowing the orchid seed in without regular cutting.

Personal Project: This year me and Rob Flack have been assigned a joint project: The Car Park. This is an area where plants of all shapes and sizes are held for varying reasons - stock for the nursery and garden, plants waiting to be planted, pot display plants, newly purchased plants and so on.. It's a big project and at first seemed a little daunting but at the same time very exciting as it will involve many different skills from organisation to the regular care of potted plants, as well as propagation techniques and further involvement/understanding of plants chosen for new plantings in the garden. Our main aim for now is to make this a more efficient and streamlined area, growing healthy happy plants that can be used throughout the year to be fed into both the garden, and the nursery.

France: On the 23rd I set off for a weekend trip to France (My first time outside of the UK) with Matt Padbury, Naciim Benkreira and Will Larson to visit Le Jardin Plume. It was incredible, with areas of different gardens, meadow, orchard and topiary. A main area of interest was the autumn garden which was an eruption of flower mostly all at eye level, completely enclosed by a large hedge - the idea being to re-create the feeling of being a child, surrounded by huge plants and colour. The whole weekend was a beautiful, inspirational trip, one I will never forget and will continue to inspire me in the way I garden for years to come.

After returning from France it was full steam ahead, with Fergus's Preparing for spring and the year ahead Study Day, which gave a great understanding of what to expect in the next few months, then onto hedge cutting and clearing out the Horse Pond. I ended the month with my first weekend nursery duty. On Saturday I was tasked with propagating Begonia (*B. mazaе* f. *nigricans*, *B. 'Silver Gem'*, *B. heracleifolia* var *nigricans*, *B. 'Little Brother Montgomery'* and *B. 'Mishmi Silver'*) from leaf cuttings into an experimental media of 50:50 Bark and Perlite, with the cuttings spaced more closely together. I really enjoyed this task and will be keeping check on them regularly to see how well they do.

As I write this report, we have just finished the amazing weekend that is Great Dixter Plant Fair, a weekend full of inspirational talks, lots of incredible plants and people coming together to share a passion and support individual nurseries from across the country. More info on this in October's report! - Ernie Weller.