

April 2024 Report  
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*Tulip 'Apeldoorn' in the Long Border – the red is so brilliant it always seems to throw the camera off.*



April is a wonderful time in the garden, as the long-awaited tulip display bursts through the borders in all their colors. Because of the way that we front-load the work at Dixter through the autumn and winter season, we arrive at this point in spring with the bulk of the sowing and pricking out already done. Our day-to-day work is comprised of an assortment of different jobs, and its especially important at this point in time to not take our eyes off of caring for the plants we've grown on through the winter, since these will be planted to follow the tulip display.

### **Tulip review**

Many months have passed since we planted the tulips in the borders and in pots, our winter work in November and December seems a distant memory now that the seasons have changed. We now get a chance to see the fruits of our labor in the beds, and I've been able to spend more time with tulips as a feature of the garden. As I mentioned in one of my previous reports, I mostly disliked tulips for their 'overly cultivated look' before coming to Dixter. Here are a few standout performers from the display this year, as well as some more thoughts on tulips after having experienced this year's display.

'Apeldoorn', as seen in the photo above, is a striking red, with large, round, cup-shaped heads. It's a warm red, which I tend to prefer, and for my own garden I would choose it over 'Pieter de Leur', which has a narrower fluted head and a somewhat cooler red. I personally feel that the cooler reds tend to react better with the forget-me-nots and pull out the color a bit more.

'Apeldoorn', for me, tends to pull the eye (and the camera) in a way that is totally striking, especially this time of year where you tend to see less hot and intense colors.



*Tulip 'Sanne' in the top of the Long Border. Great color that fades to a creamier apricot shade, with a nice fragrance too.*



‘Sanne’ was less popular with the others than I would have thought – it was one of my favorites this year where it was in the top of the Long Border. Gorgeous, elongated shape with nice petal edges that are a lighter peach shade to the pink body of the petal. Inside, the center is a warm apricot color, and nicely scented too. It lasted weeks in the bed, and went off well too, without shriveling or crumpling too much. I’ve learned that how a tulip fades is almost as important as its main display – we are trying to squeeze as much color and interest out of each plant while making sure that its presence isn’t detracting from the overall picture. Tulips that are able to self-clean (that is, drop their petals as they wither, rather than hold on to them as they crumple up) are especially important in the borders as you can’t reach in to clean them manually as you can with most pot displays.



*Left: Tulip ‘World Friendship’ with Narcissus ‘Pipit’ at the top of the Long Border*

*Right: Tulip ‘Ballerina’ with Smyrniun perfoliatum and Hesperis matronialis in the High Garden stock beds*

‘World Friendship’ is a lovely soft yellow on tall stems that also lasted for ages where it was in the Long Border. It held itself really well through wind and wet, and its combination with Narcissus ‘Pipit’ was fantastic. The combination wasn’t fully intentional, and there were some



comments that it was quite a soft, harmonious combination for Dixter, where most bedding combinations prioritize punchy impact and color contrast. Situated next to one of the Lutyens benches at the far end of the Long Border, it was a nice moment of rest for your eyes while you took a break to sit down. It is interesting to think that perhaps in a different context, the effect of the tulip would be totally different. Because the Long Border is at its core a ‘walking experience’, having a more quiet, subtle combination might be lost if it were placed in the midsection of the border where there is no place to really stop and sit with it, and it would fade out if it were squished between two bolder, flashier moments in the border. Placing it on one end by where you can sit with it was an unintentional but lovely moment in the tulip display.

‘Ballerina’ is the most popular tulip with the Dixter team and it’s easy to see why: beautiful shape, gorgeous color, wonderfully scented, disease-resistant, and fairly perennial at Dixter. If there is one cultivated tulip that I would grow at home, this would be it. It has a natural-looking elegance to it (on balance I prefer lily-flowered tulips for this reason) that doesn’t feel stiff in the way that other tulips feel for me (see ‘Ad Rem’ in the Hovel bedding this year). The color is extra juicy when paired with *Smyrniun perfoliatum* in the High Garden stock beds, and its tangerine scent is just a wonderful thing to have in spring.

Though I admit I was skeptical of tulips before coming to Dixter, spending a very wet and grey winter here really gives you an appreciation for the impact that tulips have in a spring display. The warm flash of color makes all the difference exiting our dreary winter, and you would be challenged to find a plant that is capable of the same kind of impact with such a wide range of colors and forms. Of the cultivated tulips, I have found that single, lily-flowered varieties are my favorite for use in the garden, and some are really quite good. On balance, I still prefer the wilder,



*Tulip ‘Ad Rem’ in the Hovel bedding.*

more natural look of species tulips, and I do think there is also an important question of sustainability with using conventional tulips.

### Spring nursery visits



Due to the unfortunate cancellation of the Dexter Spring Plant fair, we took our own little route around Sussex and visited three wonderful small nurseries: Zoophian Plants, Pelham Plants, and Marchant's Hardy Plants.



## Fun finds

Here are two interesting wild British native plants I found while out botanizing in April. *Adoxa moschatellina*, or moschatel, has a circumboreal distribution and is relatively common in UK woodlands but quite rare in the Eastern US, where it is known from a few disjunct localities in New York. It can also be found out further west, but I've never seen it in the US before, so it was quite an exciting find.

*Right: Adoxa moschatellina*

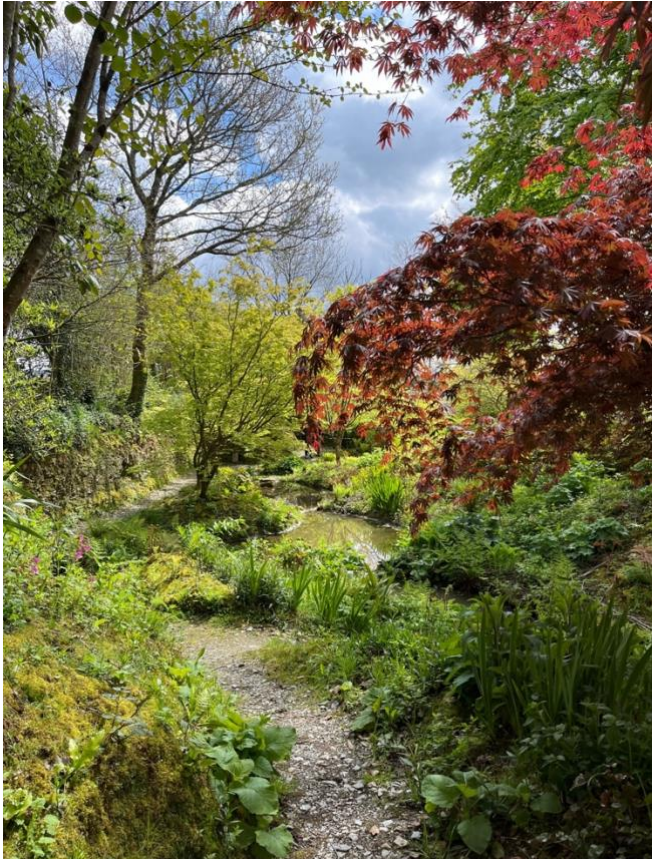


Climbing corydalis, *Ceratocarpus claviculata*, is a member of the Papaveraceae that is endemic to Northwestern Europe. Found in moist old-growth woodland in Devon, it was wonderful to stumble upon, and reminded me a bit of our weird little climbing fumitory, *Adlumia fungosa*, found in the Eastern US.

*Left: Ceratocarpus claviculata*







## Devon trip

As a weekend trip, a group of us took a drive down to Devon to visit the Garden House and Wildside, Keith Wiley's former and current gardens. Both were wonderfully layered gardens that made good use of well-pruned *Acers* to create lovely domed canopies over choice woodland plantings. The Garden House used its natural slope and extensive hardscaping to create rooms; Keith naturalistically sculpted curves and mounds at Wildside to do the same. We also hiked in Dartmoor, which was a fascinatingly barren place which felt like the surface of the moon.

*Top left:* Wildside

*Bottom left:* Garden House

*Bottom right:* Dartmoor, walking to Longaford Tor







### Daffodils galore

RHS Wisley held a fantastic Narcissus show, with hundreds of different entries across all divisions. My favorites are the miniatures, with jonquils being a particular interest. I've really fallen in love with Narcissus during my time at Dixter, and I'm interested in starting to breed dwarf cultivars from species like *N. assoanus*. Here were some highlights from the show:

*Top left:* *N. x intermedius*

*Top right:* *N. 'Crevette'*

*Bottom left:* *N. 'Ice Chimes'*





*Some of my favorite combinations this April have come from the flowering shrubs around Dexter.*

*Left: Lilacs with Tamarix tentradra and Ceanothus thyrsiflorus in the Cat Garden.*

*Right: Choisya ternata, Sambucus nigra, Wisteria floribunda and Magnolia by the steps to Christo's terrace.*