

June 2024 Report
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A view of the High Garden poppy moment with Papaver 'Ladybird' and Silene 'Blue Angel'

Hardwood cuttings of *Sambucus* 'Gate in Field' grown in two different rooting media. On the left side is the Dexter cuttings mix which is a combination of grit, loam, and bark. On the right the cutting was rooted into pure sharp sand. The cuttings were taken at the same time and kept in the same conditions, in an unheated coldframe outside for the duration of the winter.



Results show the compact, hard growth and root thickening in the straight sand mix, with reddening at the leaf margins from anthocyanin, indicating a more stressed growing condition. Roots are much finer and more elongated in the loam cuttings mix, and the growth is more extended and softer than in the straight sand mix. Both are viable methods for rooting, but one method may be preferable depending on the timing and conditions of planting, and for how long the cutting needs to develop in a pot.

Meadows

In June, the meadows are in full swing, with common spotted orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*), ox-eye daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*), bird's foot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), and yellow rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) all blooming in sequence in the Topiary Lawn. It's fascinating to watch the emergence of these plants in the season, and the first fading of sweet vernal grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*) as the bents (*Agrostis* species) and fescues (*Festuca* species) take over in the fine-

textured turf. The English hay meadow has a fascinating history and management that differs in many key respects to the grasslands I am familiar with back home, particularly the sandplain grasslands and fire-adapted ecologies which are more common in southern New England. Many of the British native grasses are cool season growing and form turfs, so they continue to grow through the winter and remain more or less green for the whole year. They are also maintained with a seasonal cut for making hay, which at Dixter occurs in August and September. We cut again in November to mimic aftermath grazing, which opens up the sward texture and allows for the emergence of many fall-germinating seedlings. Our native grasslands are largely composed of grasses that are warm-season growing and form tussocks instead of turfs, and they go brown in the winter and do not fully emerge into growth until after the passing of the last frosts. These sandplain grasslands are dominated by little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) and poverty oatgrass (*Danthonia spicata*) are adapted to fire disturbance, which is often cycled with a return interval of about 7 years in managed grasslands, which may vary according to other site characteristics. These are broad generalizations of two complex systems with many different

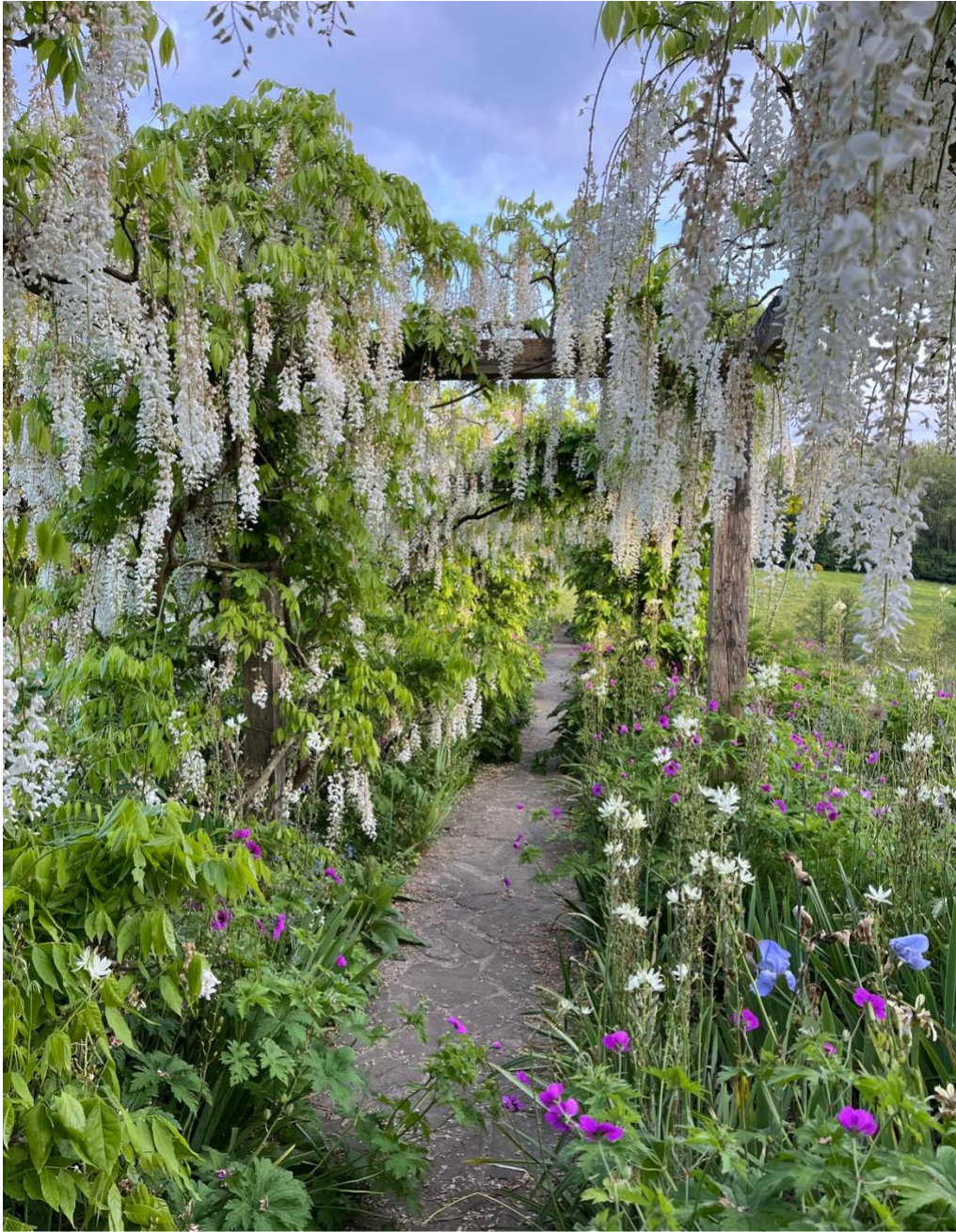


The orchard meadow below the long border with yellow rattle and ox-eye daisies in bloom.

methods to manage them, but it is interesting to see how each respective grassland develops from human interventions. In conversations with ecologists and gardeners in the UK, there is much more of a focus recreating herbivory and ground disturbance of extinct large grazing mammals by using horses, goats, pigs, ponies, cows, and sheep as modern-day analogues. In the eastern US, the eastern elk and American bison would have played the role of large herbivores in the landscape, but our grasslands are very different. Tussock-forming bunchgrasses do not owe themselves to being easily scythed like the turf-forming meadow grasses of the European hay meadows, nor do they respond well to a frequent and persistent grazing regime.



*The topiary lawn meadow with *Cotinus coggygia* (smoketree) catching the evening light.*



June is also the time for visiting gardens, as many enter their peak displays as the warmer and longer days encourage new plants to flower. We took an opportunity to see Gravetye Manor one evening after work and got to appreciate the floral power of Fabaceae, with this lovely white wisteria providing a wonderfully romantic scene.

Interestingly, the gardeners at Gravetye Manor take a different approach to growing salvias and dahlias. They dig their plants as large clumps and keep them undivided as large specimen plants, stored in glasshouses over winter and planted out earlier so they make a big effect in the June borders. This method seems to provide a great deal of flexibility to insert strong-growing plants with big impact into strategic spots in the beds. At Dixter most of our dahlias and salvias are important components of our later season display, and so we split them more aggressively in the fall and pot them up as tightly as possible to bulk up our numbers. For this reason, we don't plant them as early in the borders as they do at Gravetye, because we are still using biennials and annuals in our early summer displays. As we grow our late season display plants on through May and June, our dahlias and salvias put on more growth, and we get ready to plant them out in July. They are then used to provide a big moment of impact for the late summer through the fall.

A lovely moment with white lupins and the white wisteria in the background at Gravetye Manor.



Plugging the gap

June is an interesting time in the garden because we are also focused on softening the impact of the 'June gap,' a term used to describe the lull in the floral display as the spring flowers finish blooming and the high summer display have yet to fully turn on. In a cool summer, the flower displays last longer, and as a result many of the poppies held on to their color for a few weeks longer, which helps keep a lot of color in the borders in June. This can also prove challenging since it delays the timing of our bedding changeovers, which runs the risk of creating big holes in the borders once we changeover the annual bedding pockets in July. Its critical then to stagger our changeovers so that we slowly work in new plants, opening up a few pockets at a time to soften the crash when the annuals finish blooming. We also use many large umbellifers, such as parsnips (*Pastinaca sativa*), to provide a bridge in the June



The fading poppy display in the high garden. The yellow umbels of parsnip are visible in the center of the bed, where they provide some much needed height and clarity of color.

displays. I am challenged by having a phototoxic in a public garden where you always run the risk of causing injury to the public if we accidentally leave a plant too close to a path where

people walk. And, I will also never be particularly endeared to *Pastinaca* as it is an extremely unpleasant invasive plant in the US. Purely from an aesthetic point of view, it is a very beautiful plant, and its capacity to re-right its flowers upward after flopping makes a tiered cascading effect which is very useful for covering a large gap with flowers.



As always, we are still keeping an eye on propagation, sowing seeds of biennials for next year's display. Pricking out and potting on is a constant job at Dixter as we move plants up the production line from seed to the borders. Taking time to split perennials also mean we can make bigger plants that are ready to go in the ground in the fall. Splitting in June allows us to make the most of our annual plants that we produced to make a big colorful impact in the borders this season, and then can plant big, healthy perennial plants in the fall to make an impact next year.

A few rows of alpines which I raised from seed this spring and pricked out into small pots, ready for planting in the fall.