September 2024

Dixter holds onto summer for longer than other gardens, and while there is still plenty of interest in the Long Border, and elsewhere, as asters, heleniums and Dixter stalwarts such as dahlias and cannas guarantee colour well into autumn, I am drawn to the Orchard Garden. Wiry stems of brown-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia triloba*), an old magnolia and seedheads combine; light seems to slow down, or speed up; *Helianthus angustifolius* and *Erigeron annuus* provide depth; and, quietly, yew and box hedges give structure and offer up the canvas for others to shine on. It is yellows and browns, texture and scattered light; dream-like, and very beautiful.

I was working in this area last week. Initially, clawing bindweed out from underneath the hedge. Then, more glamorously, and with guidance from Ben and Coralie, selecting seedheads to keep and removing others. This is done on gut-feeling, and on a case-by-case basis, to inject some clarity into the picture. Here, angelica, hollyhock, isatis, yukka and some of the lythrum were removed, taking

Rudbeckia triloba in the Orchard Garden

care that the seed of the self-sowers was spilt before removal.

In terms of practical work, it is meadow cutting season and we are making good progress. For me, it is the second time I have been involved cutting the meadows here at Dixter (after a placement last year) and, while it is hard work, I enjoy it. Each meadow is managed a little differently but in essence it is a case of cutting the meadow, collecting the strewings and composting them. The compost heap eats them up greedily, and is a spectacle in itself. We cut now after the seed of common spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*) has ripened and spilt (in this part of the UK), and collect to drive down fertility and allow light in for autumn-germinating species. I find meadow gardening fascinating – it is far more nuanced than many would think – and May/June when the meadows look their best is my favourite time of year at Great Dixter. A few weeks hard work is a small price to pay, and instant gratification comes in the form of autumn germination of myriad species.

R. triloba and Abelia x *grandiflora* in the High Garden

Each of us has been given an area to sweep in the morning, both with a broom and with a critical eye. Fergus has lent me the Long Border, which requires regular deadheading and a little staking after blustery weather at this time of year. Dixter's approach to both of these, demonstrated by Coralie, is a little different to what I am used to, and generally more sympathetic. I am getting to grips with both.

The High Garden

Other September highlights include Andrew and Isabelle's respective plant IDs, Rob's demonstration of semi-hardwood cuttings and the opportunity to practise alongside him, Fergus's mind maps and the walks he leads around the garden and the discovery that, unbeknownst to us all, deep in one of the cold frames, seed of *Crataegus pentagyna* I had sown 12 months ago has germinated.

Alongside practical, hands-on training, we have had the opportunity to visit gardens – notably, Prospect Cottage and Sissinghurst – and nurseries – Pelham Plants and Marchants Hardy Plants – and attend talks – *All Together Now* at the Garden Museum. On each occasion, we have been met by gardeners/nurserymen full of knowledge of and enthusiasm for the work we love.

Kew tomorrow, and the Plant Fair this weekend (let it be dry – please!) I am looking forward it, and all of what is to come these next twelve months.

I am enormously grateful for the opportunity to spend a year in such a special place, and to those at Dixter and beyond who have given me this opportunity – thank you. I will do my absolute best to

The Orchard Garden

make the most of every minute.

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