

February

Work continues in the borders, and we finally have all of the bulbs in! Tulip 'Queen of the Night' and *Allium stipitatum* 'Violet Beauty' went into the Peacock Garden early this month. Beds in the High Garden and the Orchard Garden have been marked out, cut back and mulched.

On the Long Border, we have gone one step further and started to weave through some of the hardy annuals – some of the 1400 ladybird poppies currently sat in the field. As with most of the planting here, the aim is for distribution to feel natural and to achieve a sense of movement. This is done through planting 'rivers' of poppies in high-low density, as opposed to a blanket approach and even spacing.

We have also started pruning. Figs, *Phyllostachys nigra*, the Kiftsgate rose, *Clerodendrum bungei*, *Hydrangea aspera*, pears and more. The scars left by the Kiftsgate make it the obvious choice for a few words. This is the extremely large and rampant rambler rose growing up the post and through the *Prunus* sp. on the Kitchen Drive, with very, very large thorns. Michael and I spent a day taking off the flowered wood and untangling it, and another day and a half to tie it back in, looking to achieve full coverage of the 10ft post and a kind of waterfall effect, where stems run up the post and then fall back over themselves from various heights. I'm quite happy with it, and feedback was positive. We will know for sure come June.

We have sowed the first seeds of the year: *Dystaenia takeshimana* syn. *Angelica takeshimana* and *Salvia deserta* in the Rhino Pen; cornflowers 'Blue Boy', 'Red Boy', 'Black Ball' and 'Pinkie', honeywort, woodland tobacco plant, poppies and *Psylliostachys suworowii* in the Pit; and *Berkheya cirsifolia* and *B. radula* in the Hot House. In the case of the cornflowers, honeywort, woodland tobacco plant and the poppies, all of which were sown in the autumn, this second sowing will give us a wave of young plants which will be ready for planting out later than those sown in the autumn, affording us greater flexibility and affording the plants a longer season of interest.

On the subject of annuals, the frames are in good shape again after a period this side of Christmas where other jobs took priority. A group of us spent two days potting up the last of the larkspur and the poppies and various loose ends, and making a start on the snapdragons. The *Eudianthe coeli-rosa* syn. *Silene* 'Blue Angel', poppies and *Tolpis barbata* are now lined out the field, at the mercy of both the elements and the pigeons.

At this time of year, the Long Shed is invariably full of perennials lifted from the garden and bagged, and destined for division. No different this month, and between this month and last I have split various perennials into two or three litre pots intended for the garden, one litre pots for sale in the nursery, or 3½ inch pots or smaller for growing on. *Aconitum* spp., *Eupatorium* spp., *Geranium* spp., *Hemerocallis* spp., *Polygonatum* spp., *Silphium* spp. and *Symphyotrichum* spp. When splitting for growing on, and looking to make as many plants as possible from the material we have, it is a case of the smaller the better, and splitting into single growing points and plug trays if possible.

The weekend 15-16 February, us students made the trip to the 17th International Perennial Plant Conference in Grünberg, Germany. Attended by nursery staff, professional gardeners, growers, and similar, it is an annual conference which serves as an opportunity to make friends in the perennial plant world and exchange (or in my case, absorb!) knowledge and expertise. Talks by Lucie Willan, of Sparoza, and Mike Kintgen, of Denver Botanic Gardens, were notable highlights. Inspiring, educational and great fun in equal measure – thank you to Dixter and everyone involved in making the trip possible!

Other February highlights include Jamie and Shaun's brilliant snowdrop ID, exposing my woeful lack of knowledge in this field, and new insight into Dexter's woodland and its management gained through working a day with Ritch coppicing chestnut.