



I used my bursary award as part payment towards a study day with Fergus Garrett at Great Dixter in East Sussex, in November 2024. This innovative and unconventional garden really inspires me, so it was important for me to gain some understanding of how the planting is designed and managed. The aim of the day was to look at how using succession planting in a mixed border can provide interest in the garden through every season. Time was spent in morning and afternoon lectures interspersed with tours around the garden, particularly looking at the Long Border, to provide examples of succession planting. We were also provided with a delicious hot lunch!

The main points that I took away from the study day were:

- a LONG SEASON = right plant, right place + long season plants + shape and texture + inter and under-planting + bedding plants, in hotspots or integrated with other planting + self-sowers and climbers
- opportunities - at the beginning of each season look to see where the gaps are, then add more seasonal plants where necessary
- be flexible - scale up or down; labour intensive planting or labour saving to suit
- bulbs are good value as they invariably clump up and spread

- shrubs, trees and grasses – plants with a good shape that are interesting all year provide the structure (seed heads, winter scent, foliage, stems)
- a dynamic way of planting – combinations of plants may change with weather conditions and competition year on year
- deciduous shrubs and trees provide opportunity to plant early bulbs and other woodland plants beneath them
- weed and mulch strategically to contain self-seeders; ground cover is also useful to prevent self-seeders germinating where they are unwanted
- foliage is very important, aim for contrast in shape, colour and texture
- right spacing - be aware of competition; think carefully about eventual size and shape of plants and their vigour
- look to plants in nature - the layers of the forest – different species growing harmoniously together
- tripods or posts can be used to grow climbers within a bed

Attending the study day at Great Dixter has given me more confidence, specifically in managing a mixed border, in my day-to-day work. When I have completed my WRAGs training I now want to delve deeper, and gain the skills, confidence and theoretical and practical knowledge to run a similar large garden eventually. To this end, I have applied to study at RHS Wisley on their two year Diploma in Horticultural Practice.