



**Royal Horticultural Society/
Garden Club of America
Interchange Fellowship
Grant Hughes
Final Report
2021-2022**

Echinacea pallida blooming in Piet Oudolf Borders at RHS Wisley.

2021

9.7 - 9.20 RHS Wisley, Surrey

9.21 - 9.26 RHS Chelsea Flower Show, London

9.27 - 10.31 Woodland, RHS Wisley, Surrey

11.1 - 11.30 Alpine, RHS Wisley, Surrey

12.1 - 12.22 The Eden Project, Cornwall

Bee Friend Flower, *Phacelia tanacetifolia*, used as a covercrop at RHS Bridgewater.

2022

1.1 - 1.28 Glasshouse, RHS Wisley, Surrey

1.31 - 2.20 RHS Rosemoor, Devon

2.22 - 3.12 Tresco Abbey Gardens, Isles of Scilly

3.14 - 3.31 RHS Rosemoor, Devon

4.1 - 4.30 Royal Botanic Garden of Edinburgh, Edinburgh

5.1 - 5.20 Royal Botanic Gardens of Kew, London

5.24 - 5.28 RHS Chelsea Flower Show, London

6.6 - 7.6 RHS Bridgewater, Manchester

7.7 - 7.11 RHS Wisley, Surrey

Moss filling the gaps of the Pavers on a walkway at York Gate Garden

Arriving to England

On September 6th of 2021, after an unexpected year due to COVID-19. I gave my family one final hug before I went through security at the airport. Once the wheels had lifted off I was filled to the brim with excitement and nervousness about what journeys this upcoming year would bring. I landed at Heathrow Airport in London and was welcomed by Rowena Wilson, the RHS Bursary coordinator. Since we've had countless Zoom meetings prior, we both knew who to look for at the welcoming gate! On my first day in England, Rowena took me to the Royal Horticultural Society Gardens of Wisley. The flagship garden for the 5 RHS gardens.

The grounds of Wisley cover 240 acres and contain several formal and informal gardens, a large arboretum, a trial garden, a glasshouse, and the newly opened RHS Hilltop building. I had arrived at the gardens on a very special day, as noted by the traffic jam on M25, one of the major roads near the gardens. It was the week of the RHS Wisley Flower Show, where you were greeted by over 60 exhibitors, nurseries, and it also happened to coincide with the National Dahlia Society Show.

White tents were seemingly bursting at their seams with color and excitement, and various competitors displayed their dahlias to be judged. These scenes brought back memories of when I would showcase my favorite flowers at my small town county fair each summer.

During the first few weeks at Wisley, I spent my time learning about its vision as an RHS garden and how it enriches communities through its research, outreach, and educational programs. I met various garden team leaders and visited different departments of the gardens. For example, I had the opportunity to spend the day with the Trials team with a team of Dahlia specialists while they evaluated various Dahlias in the trials garden. They were looking for AGM, Awards of Garden Merit, qualities for each dahlia. The team of specialists discussed the bloom quality, uniformity of the blooms and foliage, overall vigor of the plant, and unique qualities that could make it a good garden plant. These trials are backed and evaluated by expert horticulturists and well renowned specialists. If a plant is awarded an AGM, the public knows they are selecting a garden plant that is well suited to their English climate and has outstanding qualities.



Examining the dahlias in the Trials Garden of Wisley.



Welcomed by the Students of Wisley on my first day.



Freshly clipped topiaries along the Wisteria walk at Wisley.



Greeted by warm autumn colors at the Seven Acres near the Wisley entrance.

RHS Chelsea Flower Show: Autumn

During this time, everyone I had met thus far expressed excitement for the first Autumn RHS Chelsea Flower Show. At the Flower Show, the air of this autumnal show was buzzing with wonder; inspiration was to be found at every corner turned. I was able to spend part of the week assisting the RHS Chelsea Plant of the Year stand.

Three plants were selected as Plant of the Year for 2021. First place was given to *Cercis canadensis* Eternal Flame 'Nc2016-2'; second place was an *Allium* 'Lavender Bubbles,' while an intergeneric hybrid of *Sempervivum* and *Aeonium*, x *Semponium* 'Sienna' was awarded third place.

Attending the Chelsea Flower Show was one of the highlights of my Fellowship thus far, an event that fills every plant enthusiast's dream! During my downtime, I would join the crowds and make my way around the exhibits. It was fun to hear the chatter of awe and amazement from the crowd as I walked around the exhibits. Excitingly, one of the showcase Gold Winner gardens, Guangzhou Gardens, was designed by a fellow GCA/RHS alum in this garden at Chelsea! After years of watching the Chelsea Flower Show through social media, it quickly became one of my most memorable experiences. I loved being able to visit the exhibits in person and explore the flower show!

After a long and busy week, I was excited to see one more garden: the Chelsea Physic Gardens, which was next door to where the Flower Show was held. I heard that their garden featured a systematic garden bed, and in my mind, it became a must visit! The systematic order of beds are plants that are grouped by family, rather than by a design standpoint. I had first experienced a systematic garden at a Botanical Garden in Massachusetts that boasted an informal layout of evolutionary relations from Magnoliaceae to Asteraceae.

The Chelsea Physic Garden organized their systematic beds by representing plant families in the dicot group, plants that have two cotyledons at germination, arranged in sharp, clean rectangular beds. It was exciting to be able to notice these foundational differences between these two gardens, from the limitations of the plant families to the initial design layout.



RHS floral display using dried plumes and flowers.



A nursery display within the marquee featuring all sorts of *Clematis* in bloom.



RHS show garden, Guangzhou Garden, with wooden sculptures framed by Dawn Redwoods.



RHS Plant of the Year awardees on display for all to see and admire.

RHS Wisley

The first placement that I joined at Wisley was the Woodland team. This team looks after Battleston Hill and the Jubilee Arboretum. These two areas are dotted with hidden botanical treasures. Battleston Hill features an exciting mix of both informal and formal areas of the garden. The most formal section of the hill, the Boardwalk, features a large sculpture that serves as a focal point. The history of this area is quite fascinating. In 1987 there was a large windstorm that had knocked down many of the naturally occurring native *Pinus sylvestris* stands.

To remedy the missing canopy, horticulturists planted durable, fast growing species like *Quercus rubra*, *Alnus glutinosa*, and *Castanea sativa*. Thirty-four years later, I joined a team of curators and horticulturists to survey the tree canopy of the area. The more ornamental trees had finally grown large enough to sustain their own canopy for Battleston hill. The team made its way around noting any large trees that were planted shortly after the storm that could be deaccessioned and removed; this was done on a case-by-case basis for each tree. This would provide more canopy space for more ornamental trees such as the *Magnolias*, *Stewartias*, *Wollemia*, and *Davidia* to grow into fabulous, mature specimens. During the evaluation, I found it rather intriguing how we considered different factors: the health of the trees, the site itself, and species abundance in an area. Instead of looking at the landscape at its present state, this allowed me to view the garden as a continuously evolving woodland of horticultural jewels. The team was looking decades, even centuries ahead.

Another star of the show this autumn was the Jubilee Arboretum, the second garden that the woodland team looks after. The Jubilee Arboretum, aptly named after the Queen's Silver Jubilee, was planted in 1977. It features many different collections, from taxa to growth habits such as fastigate and pendulous. The Arboretum collections include, but are not limited to: *Tilias*, *Quercus*, *Malus*, and *Liquidambar*. The collections are grouped together, which made it helpful when I wanted to compare different species within the same genus. The woodland team looked after the health and the management of the collections.

On rare occasions, there are trees within the collections that are deaccessioned. This was the case for a small grouping of *Ailanthus altissima* or Tree of Heaven that was growing in the most southern part of the Arboretum. Since this species is dioecious, each specimen is a distinct male or female plant, the grouping contained both male and female trees. This grouping was removed due to the reseeding, invasive qualities that these trees possessed. This also created an opportunity for a new collection to be added, or for existing collections to expand for the arboretum. One of the essential duties we had done was to scour for any damage that occurred after a storm that brought in heavy rainfall and high winds to the gardens. This ensured there was no damage, and that the arboretum was in good shape for the guests. Before I knew it, the arboretum transformed from the greens of summer to the oranges and yellows of autumn, and it was time for me to head to my next placement.



Selections of *Liriodendron* cultivars.

I joined the Alpine team in the crisp month of November. The team looked over several different areas of the gardens. The most notable areas the team manages over the Rock Garden, an alpine meadow, fern glade, and two alpine display greenhouses. One greenhouse mimics the natural habitats where alpine plants are grown. The other is a display greenhouse with sandbeds. Some of my morning duties on this team included looking after the display greenhouses. These mornings turned out to be some of my favorite memories at Wisley.

My day would start by walking around the alpine greenhouse. Finding myself searching for plants that caught my eye, were blooming or had very neat foliage. Some of these collections include true alpine cushion plants, bulbs, and South African bulbs. Once I selected a few, I would wheel them over to the display greenhouse. Here these plants would replace the tired and spent plants that are in the display greenhouse. The display greenhouse consists of two sandbeds where these potted specimens can be plunged into. The sand acts as an insulator for the plant's roots, keeping them cool, moist, as well as mimicking the root zone where these plants originate in the various mountain ranges. During my time with the Alpine team, I rotated through the different sections of the Rock Garden.

November was a quiet time in the garden. I removed fallen leaves from around the beds, allowing covered plants to thrive and helping to reduce the organic matter from clogging up the well-draining soil. It was also a perfect time to add bulbs throughout the different areas, dividing, and replanting dormant woodland plants in the fern glade. One of my small projects was to add *Iris reticulata* 'Harmony' under a Yoshino Cherry, *Prunus yedoensis* 'Moerheimii', which was planted out in a pattern that mimicked tree roots. Before I knew it my time in the Rock Garden was coming to a close, and it was time to head south.



Franklinia alatamaha blooming with its autumn colors at Wisley.



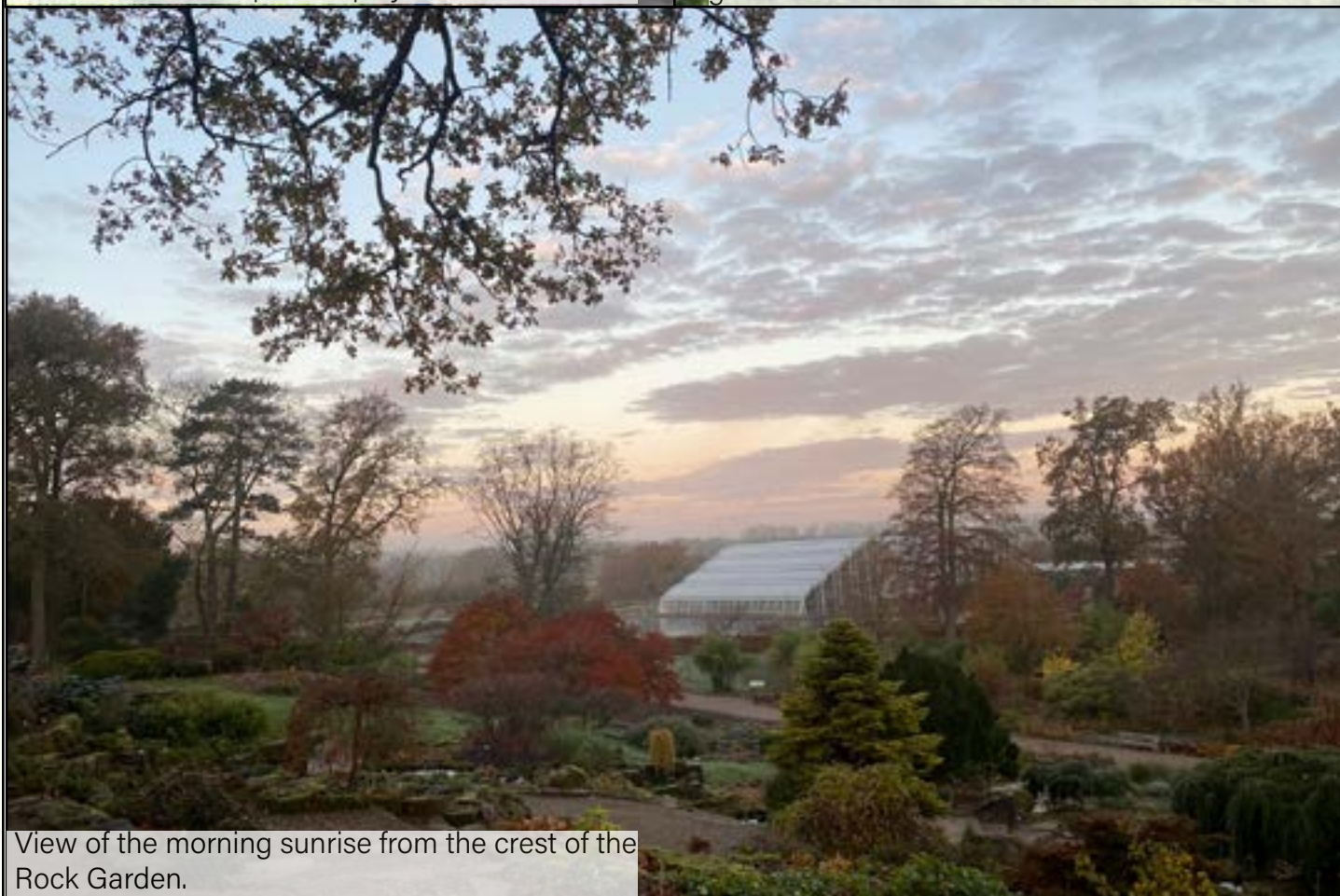
View of the Boardwalk into Battleston Hill at wisley, framed by a sculpture of a horse's head.



Plunging new alpine specimens into the sandbeds in the Alpine display house.



Strimming the meadows along the Wildlife garden



View of the morning sunrise from the crest of the Rock Garden.

The Eden Project

At the beginning of December, I left Wisley and headed southwest to Cornwall. Here I would spend the next few weeks at the Eden Project. The Eden Project's mission is to connect plants to people. The Eden Project is built into an old China clay pit, looking like a scene from the future, yet it speaks to the spirit of the place. What once was a place devoid of life, is now teeming with life. The Eden Project encourages us to become stewards of the natural world. Guests are welcomed with its ever changing exhibits as they walk down towards the biomes. A few examples of these exhibits include: crops grown all over the world, looking at the patterns of how a bee moves through the landscape, and looking at plant ecology all around the world. One of my favorite outdoor exhibits was the planting of the American Prairie. A place that took me straight back to my home state of Iowa, a diverse planting of *Andropogon gerardii*, *Silphium integrifolium*, and *Rhus typhina*. As I quickly learned, these exhibits are constantly everchanging to help spread awareness of ethnobotany, sustainability, and biodiversity. Situated at the bottom of the pit are two large biomes, the rainforest and the Mediterranean biomes. This is where I would spend most of my time.

My first week was spent with the Rainforest Biome, which still holds the title for the largest indoor rainforest in the world, and it couldn't be any more accurate. I marveled at the sheer scale of this biome, which covers 3.9 acres! When guests walk into the biome, they can walk through tropical islands, Southeast Asia, Tropical South America, and various tropical crops. Guests find themselves stepping into another world. Their journey through the biome shows how *Cacao* is grown and harvested, how coffee is roasted, and what plants are used to make spices for our everyday cooking. It's easy to imagine that they are immersed in the jungle, which I often found myself doing. During my first week there, the rainforest team was working on installing a moth trap that was designed to monitor the

banana moth. This is a pest that can target many of the plants and trees that are found in the Biome. This trap was set up to monitor the population and gathering data that could be used to help gain a better understanding of the effects of this moth on the biomes' ecosystems. During this week, I had the chance to spend a day joining the Education Team. At Eden, the curriculums allow local school districts to utilize the Eden Project's Biomes as an opportunity for students to spend an educational day in the Biomes. These students were given the honorary badge of being "Rainforest Rangers" for the day. They had a chance to learn and experience different products that can be found in the rainforest to be utilized in our everyday lives. These students spent time looking for what types of foods can be found, what plants can produce important medicines, and how they can be good "Rangers" for the rainforest.

In my second week, I joined along with the team that took care of the Mediterranean biome. In this biome, guests can visit several different areas: South Africa, Western Australia, the vineyards, and Californian plants. I joined the team while they were doing a complete renovation to one of the South African beds. I was able to utilize my skills at laying down drip irrigation, helping to layout where the plants should go, and watering the beds. This week I learned about so many new plants that are endemic to South Africa. I had the pleasure to hear stories of the lead horticulturist's trip to South Africa to visit and botanize various habitats, and where one got to encounter a Cheetah (safely, of course)! One of the plants that I had fallen in love with while I was laying out plants was the *Polygala myrtifolia*, a woody shrub that produces clusters of beautiful purple flowers, reminiscent of a bird in flight.

During my time in Cornwall, I joined one of the Eden Project students on a trip to the Lost Gardens of Heligan. Heligan was discovered under ruins and restored in honor of the gardeners that had left and lost their lives in WWI.

This garden gives a glimpse into the past with its Victorian fruit houses, and productive vegetable gardens grown with heritage crops. One of the most exciting discoveries was the pineapple pit, heated by the warmth of compost piles, which allowed gardeners to grow this tropical fruit in this British climate. My time in Cornwall was so enthralling! I had my first Cornish pasties, walked down the south coasts, and made many new friends at Eden. I cannot wait to go back and walk more of the coastal paths and discover more seaside villages and ports. It was time to pack up my suitcase and make my way to Wisley to spend more time under glass.

Leaving Cornwall on a very scenic train ride I arrived back at Wisley, just shortly before Christmas. Coming from a big family, Christmas for me is an important holiday. It was strange to spend Christmas across the pond, but thanks to Facetime and Zoom I was able to spend time with my family and open presents with them. I was introduced to a proper British Christmas hosted by Rowena and her family. We opened Christmas crackers which contained paper crowns and little gifts and enjoyed a delicious roast! I am constantly amazed and extremely grateful for all the gracious hospitality I've experienced here so far. I spent the rest of the holiday up in London visiting Museums and joining forces with another horticultural, American fellow, at the Gardeners Museum and exploring the city.



The Eden Project Biomes delicately sitting in the pit.



Vignette of the plantings of the Mediterranean Biome punctuated by the Tree Aloe.



Laying out the irrigation lines before they get buried in the Mediterranean Biome.



View from the top platform looking down at the Tropical Biome, towering higher than all the Palms.

RHS Wisley

Once January had rolled around, I found myself joining the Glasshouse Team. They look after three different climatic zones; dry temperate, moist temperate, and tropical. This Glasshouse is accompanied by a large sweeping landscape designed by Tom Stuart-Smith, an English landscape architect. This area features a large reflective pond, with large bold plantings of *Eupatorium*, *Helenium*, all contained within a Beech hedge boundary. You are greeted by two beds flanked by large beech columns, *Sarcococca confusa*, and *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Starlight' as you walk into the glasshouse. This planting is massed with these plants, and yet it is done so successfully. The trio all have something to offer during all seasons of the year.

Currently, the *Sarcococca confusa* has center stage with its sweet aroma in the air. You can find the scent wafting into the Glasshouse, where you are welcomed by the moist temperate area. In this area, you will find a planting mix with bananas, tree ferns, and various epiphytic plants. Following the pathway, you'll notice a transition from the moist temperate to the dry temperate zone. This is where you will find plants that are more suited to drier, and more arid conditions. This area highlights many different species found in South Africa, Chile, and the Southern United States. Once you've made your way through the temperate zones, you are welcomed into the Tropical Zones, the section I worked on.

We had a busy week ahead of us, as there was a bed that was in critical need of being redone. The original plantings had become overgrown and it was time for a refresh. One of the issues noted with this bed was a steep slope that caused runoff onto the pathways, which was resolved by adding a stonewall. It was exciting to have a fresh start, the lead horticulturist and I took charge of selecting plants to be laid out in the new beds. We had established a color palette and started looking for interesting plant combinations. It was important to look not only at the color of the plants but rather the forms of the plants.

This helped us create a bed that highlighted plant textures and carried existing themes from planting areas into the new bed. We were able to get the bed installed and completed within the week. It was no easy feat for us, as we had to take out the existing plantings, raise up the soil level behind the stonewall, select the plants, lay them out, and mulch the bed. Once it was completed we discussed how the bed would look in a year's time, given that the plants would mature and fill in the gaps.

As my time here at Wisley is coming to a bittersweet end, I am looking forward to my new journey to Devon, where I will spend these next few months at RHS Rosemoor. Spring seems to be knocking on our door in full force at Wisley, with various *Hamamelis*, *Chimonanthus*, and *Galanthus* all in full bloom. I am spending my last week here, joining some of the Wisley Diploma Students on a weekend trip to visit Sir Harold Hillier Gardens to see their national collections of witch hazels. Living alongside the students here at Wisley has made my time here nothing short of amazing. I am forever grateful for their graciousness to introduce me to all the different gardens around England, countless dinners by the bonfires, and emergency runs to the grocery stores. I was constantly thankful for how willing they are to help me out no matter how big or small my concerns were. I cannot wait to see what the new year has in store.

Cheers for now!



Clipped beech columns towering over the *Miscanthus* near the Wisley Glasshouse entrance.



Friendly snail on the fronds of Bird's nest fern.



Plantings of a new copse of Tree Ferns at the near the entrance of the Wisley Glasshouse.



Admiring the final plantings of the new bed in the tropical arid zone.

RHS Rosemoor

Hello and welcome back! As the new year started, I hopped on the train from Wisley to Torrington, Devon. The RHS Rosemoor is situated at the base of the Torridge valley, where two woodland ridges meet with the Torridge river running through at the base of the valley. Creating a setting that allows for ethereal rainbows to set over Rosemoor. This is a sight that I never got tired of seeing, shining over the valley. The garden itself is split in two by a major road, the A3124. This allowed the garden to be split into two distinct areas. One side is titled the formal garden and the other is Lady Anne Garden. The garden of Lady Anne is original to the site and was created as a result of meeting the famous plantsmen Collingwood "Cherry" Ingram. In 1988 Lady Anne Berry donated her personal garden to the RHS. The garden is home to the Bicentenary arboretum, the Cherry Garden, the Croquet lawn, and the Woodland Garden. As we take the underpass that allows foot traffic to go underneath the busy road, we're welcomed into the Formal Garden. This is where you are greeted by many intimate garden rooms and large swaths of woodland edge plantings punctuated by stately ornamental trees.

While I was at Rosemoor in February and March I was welcomed by the team members and student apprentices. The first week was spent getting situated and getting to know the various team members that work at Rosemoor. Starting a rotation joining both the Formal and the Lady Anne teams. Spring was starting to yawn awake as I would arrive with frosty cool mornings. During my time with the formal garden, the fog lifting was always the sign that I would enjoy every glimpse of sunrays that peaked into the valley. Since I had arrived in early February, it was time to do winter pruning of the woody plants and apply warm compost into the beds. I joined the apprentices in a masterclass on pruning roses in the formal garden. We learned different pruning strategies for each different classification of roses, from shrub roses, hybrid tea roses,

ramblers, and climbing roses. During the masterclass, each student was tasked with an area of the rose garden. With no fear of heights, I was given the task of corralling up the rambler and climbing roses that had lined the arches along the walkway of the rose garden. During a quick assessment, the team leader and I noticed that some guidewires had rusted through. Upon this discovery, we needed to untie all the rose canes and create a new wire structure to attach the canes onto. After a week of retying newly pruned rose canes, the arbor archway was all set for a season of floriferous blooms, for its visitors to enjoy and smell!

While I was at the Lady Annes' Garden, I joined their team to help maintain several of their streams that run through the woodland and the bicentenary arboretum. As we put on our mud boots and waders, we cleaned up fallen debris and tidied up the marginal plants that were found along the stream beds. This was one of my favorite tasks to do, as it reminded me of childhood pastimes of meandering through a shallow creek in the forests. The stream beds were naturalized with *Gunnera manicata*, or giant rhubarb, that had seeded themselves in. We had thinned out a few of the rouge seedlings and tidied up the crowns from fallen leaves. Since they were semi-evergreen, we would snip off the best few leaves, and flip them upside down creating little "hats" over the crowns of *Gunnera* that were to be kept. This would create just a bit of protection from the rainfall, and keep the crown drier as the water would repel off the "hats".

Being able to join the two different teams, had allowed me to work with two different styles of gardening from the formality of the rose gardens, to skinking my boots in the ponds at Lady Annes'. I had the pleasure of being able to switch from one to another as I spent my time at Rosemoor.



Tying the canes of a ramber rose into a free standing structure in one of the perennial beds.



Admiring the *Acer grisueums* during our winter walk with the apprentices of Rosemoor.



Learning how to Hedge-Lay utilizing the Devon hedge laying techniques of hazels and maples.

Tresco Abbey Gardens

After a few weeks at Rosemoor, I took a train down to Penzance in Cornwall. But this was no ordinary train ride you see. The day before I was set to fly to the Isles of Scilly, an extratropical cyclone, Eunice, had hit the southwestern United Kingdom, and parts of Wales hard, hitting London several days later. This storm had disrupted the train tracks, so like many others, we had to get creative to travel. I had taken a rail replacement bus to get to the nearest functioning train station, but even that journey took a while since many main roads were still shut down from the debris on the roads. After a very long day of getting on and off buses and trains, I finally made it to Penzance. This is where I would take off in a small airplane, to land on St. Mary one of the few islands that make up the archipelago of Isles of Scilly, from there I took a ferry to get to the island of Tresco.

Tresco is home to one of the ruins of a monastery created in the 12th century, where Augustus Smith, in the 1830s created the Tresco Abbey Gardens, now following 4 generations of the plantsmen, the family still resides and cares for the garden. The garden is composed of 4 full-time gardeners, the curator, and 3 yearly scholars, and welcomes many students, like me, at the gardens. This garden bursting with South African, New Zealand and Australian plants encompass around 17 acres for its visitors to enjoy.

During my three weeks at Tresco Abbey Gardens, I quickly realized that this is simply no ordinary island. All the members of the island traveled by bikes, or small golf carts, always welcomed by a warm smile or a simple wave. I immediately felt welcomed and was thrilled, as always, to be doing a placement at the gardens. There was only one grocery store, one pub, one restaurant, and two indoor pools on the island. Something I noticed was that it was much warmer on the island than it was on the mainland. But it was March after all, so I still needed to wear my jumper, as I biked to the gardens each morning. Welcomed with a warm mug of tea our days were

started in the horticulturist workshop, where all the machinery, gardening tools, and even their surplus of seeds were stored. Here is where we discussed the game plan for the day, while clever jokes were thrown around to help us laugh away the morning slumber. This team became one of the most enjoyable and fun to be around.

I had joined just about every horticulturist and scholar around the gardens in discussing the management and vision of the gardens. One of the things I noticed was their management of plant labels and documentation of plant collections were unofficially kept in the heads of the horticulturist's. It was just simply a public garden to be enjoyed and cared for, and that was true to every extent possible. Gardeners took care of each plant as if it were their own. At the end of each week, or on a stormy day, a horticulturist would note and collect 30 plants to take back to the workshop for a plant ident. This was always the highlight of my placement at Tresco, where we would walk around ID'ing what family, country of origin, and botanical name of each specimen. This was such a joy for me to use my detective skills to try and categorize each plant into a family, identify the plant if we had worked with it earlier in the week, and try to pinpoint where in the world this plant is native to. Once the plant idents were done, the scholars and visiting students would gather to discuss which plant had stumped us or facts that we had learned. Because of the numerous plant idents, I had left Tresco Abbey Gardens gaining so much more knowledge on South African, New Zealand, and Australian plants.

After a very quick three weeks at Tresco, and completing the final few weeks at RHS Rosemoor. April had quickly arrived, where I had my suitcase, a very stuffed backpack, and a train ticket heading north to Scotland. As I was looking out of the train window I could see spring was starting all over again, It was like going back in time to experience spring all over again. I arrived in Edinburgh, the capital of Scotland.



Admiring the height of these Norfolk Island pines, *Araucaria heterophylla*, at Tresco.



Tresco Abbey Garden students and scholars taking an Identification exam on a sunny day.



Pruning off fronds of this Canary island date palm, *Phoenix canariensis*, to allow more airflow.

Royal Botanic Gardens of Edinburgh

During April, I spent time at a world-renowned botanical garden, the Royal Botanic Gardens of Edinburgh. It is known for plant research, conservation, herbarium collections, and in plant sciences. The RBGE is located in the city of Edinburgh and was a short walk away from Edinburgh castle, the very well known castle that was built in the 11th century at the heart of the city. I noted that the gardens welcomed a wide range of visitors. They came to enjoy the plant collections. It is a place of refuge from the city, a place where they can enjoy spending time with their companions, to even meditating, as I noted one day on a warm morning a group doing yoga on an open lawn.

I had arrived at RBGE at a quite historic time for the gardens themselves, they were in the midst of their Biome Project. This is a project which focuses on restoring and creating new glasshouse facilities for the Gardens. The Victorian Palm House and Temperate Glasshouse are listed as Grade-A historic buildings and were in need of restoration. This will ensure that the historic glasshouse can provide the right environment for the plant collections, but also keeping the safety of the public at the forefront. In addition to the careful restoration of the historic glasshouses, they are welcoming more controlled environmental spaces for the visitors to enjoy, linking the existing Long Range glasshouse to the Library and the Science department. During my time at RBGE, I knew I wanted to spend time with their woodland teams, the alpine team, and their plant records departments. During my first few weeks, I rotated through the alpine and the woodland team. While I was with the alpine team I was in different areas of the garden, the alpine garden, and the rock garden. In the rock garden, there were different concentrations of plants from all around the world from North America to South Africa, China, Japan, and Europe. This allowed the visitor to stroll through the rock garden and experience such a wide diversity of plants during all seasons. During my stint, the rock garden was dotted with

color from *Meconopsis*, *Erythronium*, and dwarf *Rhododendrons* all in full bloom. My next rotation was due to spend some time at the Alpine house and courtyard. During my time here, I joined in with another British horticultural fellow who was studying alpine plant care and propagation. We had spent a day pricking out seedlings, making free draining alpine potting mix, and looking after the sand plunge beds where most of the alpine collections were kept.

Once my time with the alpine and rock garden had come to a close, I joined the woodland team. At RBGE, there are several outdoor teams that look after various sections of the gardens. But I was keen on joining the woodland team to learn how the RBGE looks after their woody plant collections. While I was on the team, one of the things we had done was look for and tag newly transplanted or established shrubs and trees that may have heaved up from ground frosts in the winter. We used a system of cables and guide wires to slowly correct the lean on the plants, once the system of wires was in place. It could be adjusted on a week-by-week basis so as to not disturb the rootball too drastically. Another task that we accomplished was to plant a small grove of three Water hickory, *Carya aquatica*, in the arboretum. Seeds were collected on an expedition trip to southeast North America and germinated at the nursery of RBGE in 2015. It was quite an exciting day to be planting native North American trees on the grounds of RBGE. Soon it was time to bid the woodland team farewell and join in with the plant records team.

My final placement at RBGE was with the plant records department. At the time of my arrival, the department was towards the tail end of relocating the data from BG-Base to IrisBG. Spending a day with their data migration officer allowed me to understand the undertaking of switching plant record databases. This also allowed me to get experience in understanding the interface of IrisBG and how the data was merged.

Another project that was being done was creating an app to allow data collection to be done out in the field or within the boundaries of the botanic gardens. This app was particularly useful while I had spent time locating specimens to update their conditions within IrisBG. To use the app, we took advantage of using Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping to locate where specimens of interest can be located within the gardens. Once the specimen was found we could then assess the quality of the plant. Asking ourselves questions such as, "Is the plant alive?" or "How does the specimen look, in terms of health?" and "Are there any qualities of the plant worth noting, such as analyzing any blooming periods, emerging foliage, or bud break, and perhaps any management that may need to be done such as pruning, or any diseases to be aware of?"

Being able to locate and enter details noted from the specimens by using an app and a tablet within the field can help produce much stronger data management and can be very useful for the horticulturists, and for the institution to analyze the data to help make decisions for future for plant collections.

My time at RBGE had very quickly gone by, but I was able to explore and visit a range of gardens, from visiting Benmore, one of the four gardens that fall underneath RBGE, to private gardens, and alpine shows. It was time for me to head back down to London to start my new placement at the Royal Botanic Gardens of Kew and to prepare for the spring RHS Chelsea Flower Show.



Picturesque view from the Chilean garden at Benmore Botanic Gardens.

Structural pruning of the *Carya aquatica*, Water hickory before they get planted into the collection.



Meconopsis cookei 'Old Rose' blooming at the Rock Garden at RBGE.

Pricking out alpine seedlings of *Rheum palmatum*, into larger pots to grow on.



King Arthur Seat covered with yellow blooming gorse, filling the air with a slight scent of coconut.

Royal Botanic Gardens of Kew

May had arrived, the streets were lined with blooming *Aesculus carnea*, red buckeye, picnic blankets were strewn across the parks, and the city of London was bustling back to life with the warm sunshine. Arriving at the Royal Botanic Gardens of Kew, I was joining in with the Arboretum Nursery team for a few weeks. Here I wanted to continue my knowledge of woody plant propagation, the Nursery at Kew is essentially the welcoming place for all seeds, cuttings, and plant material to arrive at Kew. May was the perfect time of the year to be in the Nursery, where all the seedlings were vigorously growing in the glasshouses, the timing of propagating softwood cuttings was well underway, and the trees were enjoying the warming temperatures of early summer.

I expressed my keen interest in plant propagation with the Nursery manager, who allowed me to spend time with the team to go out and collect plant materials within the grounds of Kew. Horticulturists of the gardens would take note of which specimens were in need of propagating and would send a list to the Nursery manager, who then created a timetable of what is the best method and time to propagate these specimens.

Once we'd gone out into the garden to collect the plant material that was in need of being propagated, we would be arriving back at the nursery and preparing the cuttings that were taken. This normally involved reducing the cuttings to three or four nodes and reducing the leaf area size in half. The cuttings were dipped into solution of rooting hormone created for the species that we are propagating, and placed into a pot of well-drained soilless media. Once all the cuttings were stuck into the pot, an identification label was created with the Genus, species, and cultivar if needed, along with the date and how many cuttings were stuck in a pot. These are all extremely important information that helps the propagator know how successful the cuttings were down the line.

All the same information is later written down in the propagators' logbook as a reference if they need to look back and refer to any propagation notes in the future. Another task for us to do was to up pot any seedlings that may have outgrown their nursery pot. This was another important task to keep an eye on to ensure a healthy, strong root system for these plants. I enjoyed spending time with the arboretum nursery team, as I got a chance to see where all the plants get their start before they are planted out into the collections of temperate woody plants.

My next placement within Kew Gardens was with the Tropical Nursery, where all the tropical, and plants that could not survive through a London winter are grown and kept. I met a wide array of horticulturists and Kew diploma students. I got a chance to look at Kew's many different tropical plant collections from their aquatic plants to their cacti and succulents. A very specialized horticulturalist looked after each collection of plants. I had a chance to spend some time with the orchid, aquatic, and succulent/cacti collections, each with a wide variety of specialty care and needs. I was very fortunate to be able to work with so many different collections within a few weeks, and wide exposure to plants that I was familiar with, to species that I had never seen or even heard about!

During these few weeks, I joined some of the Kew diploma students in some of their educational workshops. One of the classes I was able to attend was an orchid workshop, where we got a chance to learn about the general care and maintenance of orchids. Here we were able to look through Kew's extensive collection of orchids and learn about what makes each genera different that sets them apart from another. At the end of this lesson, we all got an opportunity to mount *Dendrobium chryseum* onto cork bark. It was a wonderful way to conclude my tropical nursery placement at Kew Gardens.



Seedlings of British native, *Betula pubescens*, in air pruning pots at the nursery of Kew.



A cutting is made here from *Syringa vulgaris*, the common lilac to be struck in soilless media.



Collecting cuttings from the only specimen of *Corylus jacquemontii*, to be propagated.

RHS Chelsea Flower Show: Spring



One of the RHS Show Garden featuring honeycomb like design on the pergola.

After a very quick few weeks at Kew, it was time to get ready for the 2022 RHS Spring Chelsea Flower Show. This is an event that is celebrated dearly by gardeners, landscape designers, and all plantspeople, the first spring Chelsea Flower Show since 2019. It was like a breath of relief to all those that I had met during my time there. It was delightful to be able to experience both autumn Chelsea and spring Chelsea.

While I was there I participated in the RHS Plant of the Year stand, guiding visitors and answering questions about how plants are selected and judged on a selection of criteria. Being back on the same stand for the second time around really helped me familiarize myself with the procedure of what it takes to select for the RHS Plant of the Year. This year the first prize was awarded to *x Semponium 'Destiny'* an intergeneric hybrid between *Sempervivum* and *Aeonium*, second prize was given to *Armeria pseudarmeria 'Dreamland'* with its gentle pink baubles over a short mat of strappy green foliage, and *Salvia PINK AMISTAD 'Arggr17-011'* with

its strong growth habit with its bubblegum pink flowers, and dark purple calyx was given third place. After spending some time helping the visitors of the stand. I would go out and explore the different nursery, and plant displays within the marquee, spending time visiting with nurserymen and nurserywomen about what their nursery specializes in. Some nurseries focused on producing and growing perennials and annuals to high quality plants for their customers to grow in their gardens, for some it was about preserving rare and special plants that are unknown to a common gardener. While some may only just focus on one genera or one species to grow for their customers. It was one of my favorite things to do during my free time to talk and exchange plant knowledge with fellow plant folks. During the week, It was always a delight to run into friends and colleagues that I had met while I was around the United Kingdom, we would catch up and wish each other well as we enjoyed the Flower Show! It was such an amazing week to experience and compare the two Chelsea Flower Shows with those who had attended both.

The marriage of hardscaping and softscaping is done here with an exciting mix of plants.





The New Blue Peter Garden show garden that will later find itself at RHS Bridgewater.

A floral portrait of Queen Elizabeth II is displayed in the boroughs of Chelsea, London.



Bumblings of starstruck audiences at the David Austin Rose Display, featuring many exquisite roses.

RHS Bridgewater

It was time to bid farewell to London, and head back up north to Manchester, where the newest RHS Garden, Bridgewater, was opened to the public in May of 2021. It was named after a historic water canal that ran coal from Worsley to the industrial areas of Manchester. I had left most of my belongings at Wisley so that I could travel light while I was up in Manchester with only just a backpack, my secateurs, and my work boots, I was ready for my next adventure. This is where I spent the months of June and July in this newly opened garden.

Bridgewater covers a span of 154 acres, with the crown jewel of the 11 acres of the Weston Walled Garden, a historic vegetable garden that is divided into two areas, the Paradise Garden, and the Kitchen Garden. These two gardens are where I spent the majority of my time at Bridgewater. Each area had a team of horticulturalists and students that looked at the gardens. The paradise garden was designed by a well-known English landscape designer, Tom Stuart-Smith, which features North American plantings and Asian plantings, with the key feature of water running throughout the garden. Very contemporary plantings of columnar beech and pleached *Parrotia persica* dotted the Paradise garden, with a large waterlily pond separating the two regional plantings of American and Asiatic plants. While I was working in the Paradise garden, I spent some time in the only two glasshouses on site, a Mediterranean house, and a Fruit house. The only fruit house on site is lined with peach and fig espalier and fans on the brick wall, with historic grapes growing along the trusses of the glasshouse. In the Mediterranean house, I was welcomed by plants that I had run into at Tresco Abbey Gardens, from *Aeonium arboreum* 'Zwarthkop', *Echium fastuosum*, and a wide range of *Pelargoniums* were dotted in the raised beds protected from the outdoors.

Within the Weston Walled Garden the Kitchen Garden occupies the other half, here is where the garden grows much of its produce for the cafes. The kitchen garden is composed of a permaculture forest garden, a formal vegetable garden, an herbal garden, and many fruit trees trained on the wall as espaliers, fans, or step-overs.

As I worked with the team I had a chance to work in the formal vegetable garden as we harvested early in the mornings for the cafe. One of my favorite produce to harvest was the edible flowers that the cafe uses to garnish their bakeries and salads. As the summer went on we were working on removing the spring crops such as radishes, peas, and greens, to plant summer crops like squash and tomatoes. During my final week at Bridgewater, I had a chance to work with the propagator and with the outer estates' team to see how a new public garden manages the first few years of the estates and how it sets the key foundations for future plantings. While I was with the outer estates' team, we walked around the grounds discussing the removal of invasive shrubs and herbaceous plants in the woodland and along stream banks. Getting a foothold on invasive plants was key to allowing the British native understory and trees a chance to establish and create a healthy woodland for the future of the gardens.



A lively streamside bed of Foxgloves, Rushes, and Japanese primroses at Bridgewater.



Removal of the invasive Himalayan balsam, that are invading in the wetlands of Bridgewater.



A look inside of the Walled Kitchen garden fruit house, with espaliered peaches and grapes.



A harvest of broad beans that will be taken for the cafe of Bridgewater to be used.

Final Thoughts

As my time in England was very quickly coming to a wrap, I traveled back down to Hanbury Court with the diploma students of Wisley to pack up 10 months of experiences, books from antique stores, friendships, and all the trinkets I had collected along the way. It was a bittersweet feeling to be back at the same place where I had arrived for the first day in England. The students and I had a farewell pizza party and one final swim in the River Wey that ran behind Hanbury Court, with those who were brave enough to endure the cold waters.

Words could not adequately express my gratitude to The Garden Club of America and the Royal Horticultural Society for providing this opportunity for young horticultural students to have this monumental experience of pursuing our passions for gardens across the pond. My British journey will be something that I will treasure and keep very dear to my heart, as I walk through my journey in horticulture. I wanted to say a very special thank you to several people who helped me through this unprecedented multi-year journey. First I wanted to thank Rowena Wilson, who became my British mum, for being my lifeline during my time in England from picking me up at the airports, to welcoming me to a seat at your dinner table, to helping make this Fellowship run as smoothly as it could.

Next, I want to thank both current and former GCA advisors Claudia Lane, and Mary Frediani who helped me in every step from the interview in New York to the end of this Fellowship, with words of encouragement and guidance. The dedication and commitment of everyone I had met will not only continue this Interchange Fellowship provides experiences and support to young horticulturalists, but they will forever embark on a very special journey that will be cherished and remembered for a lifetime.

Lastly, I wanted to thank everyone that I had worked alongside, friends that I had made along the way, and even strangers, who had welcomed me to their gardens to talk about plants. Generously sharing their stories over tea, delicious dinners, and or a quick drink at the pub. The generosity of each of you has forever made a mark on this young lowan, and I will forever cherish my horticultural journey in the United Kingdom. I will be back soon for more exuberant plant talks, discovering new footpaths, and the most delicious British chocolates! Cheers for now!!



A final departure from Rowena Wilson, during my final days in England.

The diverse native meadows featured at Great Dixter.