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# 2025-26 RHS Interchange Fellow Final Report



Before I describe key moments from the last half of my time as the 2025-26 RHS Interchange Fellow, I want to thank everyone who has helped make the 10 months of my fellowship some of the most formative and impactful learning experiences of my career so far. Thank you to the Garden Club of America for giving me the unparalleled opportunity to broaden my perspective on horticulture and build an international network that I will continue to grow throughout my career. And thank you to Rowena Wilson and the Royal Horticultural Society for welcoming me and giving me such an in-depth view of everything that is British horticulture. I enjoyed learning about both the history and future visions of gardening in the United Kingdom, and I appreciate each of the gardens that hosted me for taking the time to share their world with me and making me feel like a part of it. With that being said, I am excited to tell you all about my fellowship after leaving RHS Garden Wisley in January, starting with my placement at Great Dixter this past February!

**Great Dixter**

The Great Dixter I arrived at in February was very different from the Great Dixter I visited just months earlier in October. Rather than the jungle-like maze of textures and colors I experienced at the Autumn Plant Sale, I was greeted by soft-spoken *Helleborus*, *Galanthus*, *Narcissus*, and *Crocus,* and confident, clipped yews. The towering stalks of giant fennel (*Ferulus communis*) in the Peacock Garden remained, however, as did the bright red berries of the cotoneasters and the lively yellow flowers of *Euphorbia characias* ssp. *wulfenii* that spilled onto the paths. No longer a visitor, I was now a new student in one of the world's greatest horticultural classrooms, my first class being the Pruning Symposium.

A consistent lesson was to assess (or, as my notes say, "ASSESS!"). Head Gardener Fergus Garrett gave us a strong framework for making pruning decisions and sent us off to put theory into practice. The practice included pruning sweetbriar rose (*Rosa rubiginosa)*, privet (*Ligustrum*, as pictured above*)*, a variety of hydrangeas, European cranberrybush (*Viburnum opulus* 'Compactum'), *Rosa rugosa*, *Weigela*, black bamboo (*Phyllostachys nigra* 'Punctata'), elderberry (*Sambucus*), and a *Rosa* 'Comtesse du Cayla'. After lessons and during long days of pruning, we had the chance to connect with the symposium's participants, one of whom happened to be a Delaware native like myself, proving once again how small the world of horticulture can be!



(Left: Pruning privet in the Long Border, Middle: Before pruning a *Rosa rubiginosa*, Right: After!)

To round out the symposium, the students and I pruned figs (*Ficus carica* 'Brunswick') and trained them to the sides of the Old Barn in the Barn Garden. Although I focused on the basic techniques that Fergus had taught us, I had apparently achieved a level of artistry along

the way, with Fergus describing the fig I had trained as “windswept”! Throughout the process, I gained a deep appreciation for how Fergus teaches in the garden, providing guidance to help you confidently approach projects while giving you just enough freedom to express your individual style as a horticulturist. At the end, it was such a nice, rewarding experience to finally take a step back and feel good about the work I did.



(Left: The “before” of fig pruning and training, Right: The “windswept” after!)

Following the intensive week of the Pruning Symposium, the other students and I continued our learning beyond the garden’s grounds. In fact, we left England for the weekend to attend the 18th International Perennial Plant Conference in Grünberg, Germany. I can safely say I have never been in a single room with people from so many different countries, with over 15 countries being represented across 3 continents! Each person had a unique story to tell, with Tom Coward detailing the history and evolution of William Robinson’s Gravetye Manor, Remko Beuving taking us along with him on his journey of creating a “subtropical jungle” of a back garden using unusual plant species, and Henrik Sjöman’s compelling call to action to plant resilient and carefully designed pocket woodlands in urban areas.

One speaker whose story was especially moving was Vania Slavia, a young horticulturist, landscape architect, and nurserywoman from Patagonia, Chile. Her first talk illustrated how the topography of the Patagonian steppe drives biodiversity, walking us through her exploration of Patagonia’s various microclimates and her discoveries of the flora that live within them. Her second talk struck a chord, focusing on her initiative to reshape the Patagonian identity through native plant conservation. She spoke with conviction that, through environmental education, incorporating native plants into public green spaces, and developing native plant nurseries, the Patagonian community could connect with and enjoy native flora rather than simply rely on it as a resource. As Vania said, “When people enjoy something, it encourages them to protect it.” Her

efforts in spearheading this movement are inspiring, to say the least, and I feel lucky to have gotten the chance to meet her.

After saying goodbye to all of our new friends, the students and I returned to Great Dixter. It was time to plant out the many annuals that the students had been growing since they arrived in late summer the year before. Once again, we assessed the garden beds before setting out the hundreds of ladybird poppies (*Papaver commutatum* 'Ladybird') and larkspur (*Delphinium*) we were to plant, identifying sightlines, areas of low plant density, and pockets of perennials which had not yet emerged. A key factor we learned when setting out the plants was their planting densities. In the Long Border, we arranged high-density plantings of ladybird poppies in the foreground with swaths of low-density plantings towards the background, as the eye can naturally fill in the space in the back. As for the Barn Garden, we set out high-density dollops of larkspur with low-density edges to fan out the imposing plantings. And with the ladybird poppies, we created various "hotspots" in prominent sightlines throughout the Barn Garden and connected them with low-density "links".



(Left: Planting ladybird poppies in the Long Border, Right: Mind map for plantings in Barn Garden)

One of the most memorable days of my month-long placement was in my last week, when all of the horticulturists who had been working tirelessly to prepare the garden for the fast-approaching spring took a step back to admire it. It had rained the entire first week of February, followed by random days of "mizzle" (a miserable drizzle) and a heavy storm, with ambient grey skies throughout the month. We were blessed one Tuesday, though, with a

warming, sunny winter sky, allowing the carpet of *Crocus tommasinianus* and *Crocus chrysanthus* in the Orchard Meadow to quite literally open to the heavens. It felt like a much-needed breath for all, and for a team that works as hard as Great Dixter's, a moment of rest that was entirely deserved. It was a genuine treat to learn what it takes to make the gardens what they are, and to learn from Fergus and the exceptionally talented team of horticulturists at Great Dixter. And of course, it was a treat to garden in the company of Neil, the resident cat who seemed to know all of the best spots to nap in the garden!



(Top Left: Carpet of *Crocus tommasinianus* in the Orchard Garden, Top Right: Clump of *Crocus chrysanthus* 'Cream Beauty', Bottom: A very sleepy Neil)

**University of Cambridge**

While journeying to my next placement at RHS Garden Bridgewater, I made a pit stop in Cambridge, where I had the chance to reconnect with Brian Austrin, the Head Gardener of St. John's College, University of Cambridge. After meeting him at an RHS trial forum in the fall, I took him up on his offer to tour the college and learned more about his efforts to develop the college's green spaces. Intending to reduce water use and mitigate hotter, drier summers, he began installing Mediterranean-inspired designs, adding a contemporary element to the historic campus, founded in the early 16th century. One of my favorite features was a planting near the Bridge of Sighs, where the landscape connected with the surrounding architecture, with the tan grasses complementing the beige, age-worn stone of the bridge. Another was a sneaky view of palms and *Dracaena* through an old window of an exterior corridor, offering an interesting tropical feel through a Gothic architectural lens. I also saw the works of famous garden designers like Arne Maynard and Dan Pearson being constructed across the campus. It was exciting to witness how, even as the centuries-old buildings stand unchanging, the landscapes around them are actively evolving.



(Left: A planting near the Bridge of Sighs at St. John's College, University of Cambridge, Right: View of palms from a window at St. John's College)

I was also fortunate to tour the Cambridge University Botanic Garden with Tom Lovell, a horticulturist who looks after the Winter Garden. The Winter Garden was studded with *Helleborus*, *Bergenia*, *Daphne*, *Euphorbia*, and striking red, orange, and yellow *Cornus* stems. My favorite feature was a crane-like *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Winston Churchill' that stood

tall and slender above the garden. We also toured the glasshouses, which hold seven collections based on different plant adaptations and environments. The most intriguing section, called Continents Apart, highlights the convergent evolution of plants from Southwestern Australia and the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa. With a background in genetics, I have always been fascinated by Nature vs. Nurture and how genetically unrelated species in different parts of the world can develop the same traits over time. In this case, the Cape of Good Hope and Southwestern Australia share low-nutrient soils and a Mediterranean climate, with hot, dry summers and wildfires. This has driven adaptations like downy leaves to retain moisture, woody cones that only open by fire, and large, showy flowers that attract pollinators. And, of course, it is always fun to see the eerily luminous turquoise of the endangered jade vine (*Strongylodon macrobotrys*), endemic to rainforests in the Philippines.



(Left: *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Winston Churchill' standing in front of two cranes in the Winter Garden, Right: Jade vine in the Tropical House)

**RHS Garden Bridgewater**

I continued my journey north and found myself just outside of Manchester at RHS Garden Bridgewater. Immediately, I got a sense of the garden's playfulness, with horticulturists using the chop-and-drop method to create beautiful designs that covered the garden beds for creative winter interest. Located in the tight-knit community of Salford in Greater Manchester, I was aware of how connected the community was to the young garden. What I didn't know was

that the community helped turn the historic site of Worlsey Old Hall into the garden it is today. After 66 years of the property sitting unused, the community wondered what would happen to the land, with the landowners proposing at one point to turn it into a racetrack. The landowners eventually collaborated with the RHS and Salford City Council to turn it into a space everyone could benefit from, and the newest RHS garden was created and opened in 2021.



(Chop-and-drop mulching designs in the garden beds at RHS Garden Bridgewater)

To fully realize the impact RHS Bridgewater has on the Salfordian community, I joined teams that work directly with community groups and schoolchildren, starting with the Community Grow Garden. I quickly became close with the proud Salfordian native, Faye Howells, who leads Community Grow. What is special about Faye is that she was originally a volunteer at RHS Bridgewater and, after earning her RHS Level 2 qualification, she became a full-time horticulturist. She also has a background in social work, making her the perfect person to lead the various community groups that participate in the garden. These groups include a refugee spoken-word group, Salford Loaves and Fishes, a social-prescribing group called Recreate U, and a community service network that provides social care called Aspire.

Each week, Faye leads the groups in lessons and hands-on horticultural experiences, teaching them how to grow edible plants from seed to harvest and expanding their knowledge of the different types of plants you can grow and eat. Having arrived in early March, I got to help the community groups sow seeds for their honeycomb-shaped garden plots, from red celery and 'Red Giant' mustard greens to 'Baby (Leaf) Come Back' lettuce and different cultivars of beetroot (*Beta vulgaris*) like 'Choggia', 'Egyptian', and 'Golden'. I also worked with volunteers in the Community Grow Garden to help make the garden beds more accessible and reduce compaction by installing gravel paths. Because people of all ages and physical abilities participate in the community groups, we had a responsibility to give each person an equal opportunity to be fully

immersed in the garden. Also, while the volunteers and I were installing the path, we noticed a very nosy robin close by watching us work. I suppose he was making sure all of the garden paths were straight and in working condition!



(Left: Said nosy robin, Right: The new garden bed paths he was so thoroughly inspecting)

Another section of RHS Garden Bridgewater that serves the community is the Wellbeing Garden, made for patients prescribed to horticultural therapy by their doctors and led by therapeutic horticulturist Ozichi Brewster. I had the chance to work closely with Ozichi, learning about her former career as a mental health advocate, her journey into public horticulture, and her particular interest in permaculture and therapy-based garden design. She explained how intentional the Wellbeing Garden's design is, pointing out a mound that lets wheelchair users lie comfortably on the grass, watch the clouds, and take part in meditations. She also showed me little alcoves hidden behind beech hedges where participants can relax and take a moment for themselves if needed.

Along with a group of volunteers, Ozichi and I helped to make the Wellbeing Garden an even more calming, relaxing space by altering and adding to some of the garden beds. One project included lifting a dense grouping of Euonymus fortunei and spacing them throughout one of the beds. We aimed to make the new planting feel balanced and draw the eye like the inhale and exhale of a breath, with some shrubs closer to the front of the bed and others further back. It was interesting because, as we took the project seriously and considered each placement thoroughly, Ozichi reminded us that the Wellbeing Garden should be therapeutic for the gardeners as well as the patients, and encouraged us to have more fun with our work. It was a

nice reminder, and one I had to tell myself while making my first-ever bog garden in one of the Wellbeing Garden's meditation nooks. Although it was difficult, I realized it served an important purpose: giving patients something to focus on while they take their minds off whatever might be troubling them. These experiences also reminded me of why I got into public horticulture in the first place: to help make spaces where people can recover and be replenished by nature, the same way I spent time in a public garden during my recovery from a health crisis four years ago.



(Left: The "Before" of a Wellbeing Garden alcove bed, Right: "After", with a newly installed bog garden!)

When I wasn't working in Community Grow or the Wellbeing Garden, I found myself in the Learning Studio, the Working Woods, and the Growing Skills Garden, helping teach children of all ages about nature and horticulture. One of my favorite moments was working in the Growing Skills Garden, when the students, who were (not so enthusiastically) learning how to plant things in the ground, began helping and teaching each other. A close second was watching young schoolchildren ever so eager to answer questions about photosynthesis and show off how clever they are. I then found myself on the other end, learning how to make hazel hurdles! Twiggy, a very fitting name for her profession, is an expert in making structures out of coppiced hazel, and we were very fortunate to learn how to make hurdles, or small fences. She walked us through each step, making it look much easier than it is, and made sure we had lots of material to practice with. By the end, I knew how to use a billhook, properly split hazel poles along the pith, and do a "pairing" weave. I also learned that, to twist a hazel pole around a corner post, I need many more years of practice and hands of steel like Twiggy's!



(Left: Using a billhook to split the top of a hazel pole, Center: Attempting to split a hazel pole along the pith, which is much more difficult than it looks, Right: Practicing a "pairing" weave)

Everyone I met at RHS Garden Bridgewater was so welcoming, and it was so fun to interact with such a vibrant local community and see how beneficial the garden is in their lives. I always say the people are one of the best parts of working in public gardens, and this garden certainly cemented that for me. Before I close this section, though, I must highlight some of my favorite trees, which are a stunning *Prunus* 'The Bride', which I caught in full flower, a *Salix babylonica* var. *pekinensis* 'Tortuosa ', a *Corylus avellana* 'Contorta' that had yet to leaf out, perfect for displaying the oddly beautiful, contorted stems, and a massive *Salix gracilistyla* 'Mount Aso' which towered above the Community Coppice Garden. These beautiful trees help make up the little bit of canopy there is in and around the Victorian walled garden.





(Top Left: *Corylus avellana* 'Contorta', Top Right: *Salix gracilistyla* 'Mount Aso', Bottom Left: *Salix babylonica* var. *pekinensis* 'Tortuosa', Bottom Right: *Prunus* 'The Bride')

**Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh**

After RHS Garden Bridgewater, I spent a couple of weeks back home in Delaware before my next placement at Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh in Scotland. It was one of the most anticipated placements of my fellowship for many reasons, but mostly because the famous *Rhododendron* collection would be in peak bloom! Immediately after arriving in Edinburgh, I dropped my bags off at my Airbnb and went straight to the gardens. I was greeted by the massive *Rhododendron rubiginosum* var. *rubiginosum* at the East Gate and continued through the garden, chasing distant views of *R. coriaceum* and *R. vernicosum*, and looking around each corner of the Rock Garden to find stunning cultivars like *R.* 'Hatsugiri'. One of my favorite days was weeding the Azalea lawn, simply because I got to gaze at (and smell) the beautiful blooms, including *Rhododendron luteum*, *R.* 'Strawberry Ice', *R.* 'Norma', and *R.* 'Orpheus'.





(Top Left: *R. coriaceum*, Top Center: *R. luteum*, Middle Right: *R. vernicosum*, Top Left: *R. rubiginosum* var. *rubiginosum*, Middle Right: *R.* 'Hatsugiri', Bottom Left: *R.* 'Strawberry Ice', Bottom Middle: *R.* 'Norma', Bottom Right: *R.* 'Orpheus')

While RBG Edinburgh may be 356 years old and home to many historic plant collections, I got to help with new projects, like installing "Instagrammable" pop-up meadows, log piles, and the garden's first dead hedge! Speaking of new projects, RBG Edinburgh has hosted the Nature Restoration Fund's Scottish Native Plant Recovery Project for the past 3 years. In this project, a group of horticulturists, led by the fearless and creative Becca Drew, selected 5 herbaceous and 5 woody at-risk native plants to cultivate and translocate back into the wild to bolster existing populations. This project stimulated the scientific and analytical side of my brain, and I became completely fascinated by the solutions Becca and her team developed after facing challenges while growing some of their native species. For some, that meant trialing different cultivation methods; for others, it meant creating new methods altogether! For *Saxifraga hirculus*, found in vast bogs on thick turf and previously impossible to cultivate, this meant creating a cascade system that lets propagations sit 8 to 12 cm above a cold, highly oxygenated water table. To make the cascade system even more effective, sphagnum moss was incorporated into the plantings to filter out metals and minerals from the irrigation water, better reflecting the natural

habitats where *Saxifraga hirculus* is found. Even cooler, when transplanting back into the wild, bryophytes like *Tomentypnum nitens* are used as indicator species when compatible translocation sites are difficult to find.




(Left: Watering the *Saxifraga hirculus* cascade system, Right: Using a sod cutter to make beds for a pop-up meadow in one of the lawns near the Willow Pond)

Outside of working with the Herbaceous and Nursery teams, I also joined the Alpine and Rock Garden team! Most of my work with them included lifting, dividing, and replanting some of RBG Edinburgh's extensive *Galanthus* collection throughout the Rock Garden, including *G. woronowii*, *G.* 'Neill Fraser', *G.* 'Limetree', and *G.* 'Lady Beatrix Stanley'. The flowers had long since gone, making it nearly impossible to tell the different cultivars apart. Still, I was able to admire the flowers and forms of the Rock Garden's wide range of plants from Siberia, New Zealand, and Japan while planting the *Galanthus* bulbs instead. Some personal favorites were the Siberian *Pulsatilla ambigua* and *Rhodiola kirilowii*, *Acrothamnus colensoi* and *Veronica hectorii* in the New Zealand beds, and Japanese natives *Chamaecyparis pisifera* 'Plumosa Compressa' and *Rhododendron keiskei* 'Cordifolium'.






(Top Left: *Pulsatilla ambigua*, Top Right: *Rhododendron keiskei* 'Cordifolium', Bottom Left: Planting *Galanthus*, Bottom Center: *Rhodiola kirilowii*, Bottom Right: *Acrothamnus colensoi*)

While in Scotland, I also had the absolute pleasure of visiting Benmore Botanic Garden, a mountainside garden at the bottom of Beinn Mhòr (translated as "big mountain" in Scottish Gaelic) on the Cowal Peninsula. To get there, we took a ferry in typical Scottish style, with rain and fog surrounding us on all fronts. The coastline along the loch was so beautiful, and luckily, it distracted me from the anticipation of seeing the gardens. I was told that if I liked rhododendrons, I would really love Benmore as it holds over 300 species in its collection, and I really (really) did. In contrast to the neatly edged beds and meticulously placed rocks of the Rock Garden at RBG Edinburgh, these rhododendrons dotted mossy hillsides, breaking up the lush green against the grey skies above with soft pinks, bright corals, and magentas. I was most excited when the horticulturists giving us a tour said I could venture off the path to get the perfect angles for taking photos. I made sure to stay on the paths for some of them, though!






(Hillside rhododendrons at Benmore Botanic Garden)

Because Benmore is practically surrounded by mountains and cliffsides, the garden's horticulturists do their best with the spaces they have, planting atop steep ledges that most of us would never dream of climbing. Interesting beauties like *Arisaema nepenthoides* were tucked into crevices just along the side of precariously placed stairs, a less daring option especially for the viewer. The garden's most gravity-defying feat, though, is a Victorian fernery built into the mountainside in the early 1870s. After climbing several flights of rugged, rocky steps, we entered to see a collection of temperate ferns, including *Woodwardia*, the royal fern (*Osmunda regalis*), the Tunbridge filmy fern (*Hymenophyllum tunbrigense*), the king fern (*Angiopteris evecta*), and the rare Killarney fern (*Trichomanes speciosum*). Walking through the fernery, you would never know it had fallen to ruin and was only restored within the past twenty years. A favorite feature of mine, added during the restoration, is the forest-green cast-iron benches with ferns designed into them. I just love a good bench!







(Top Left: The path leading up to the fernery, Top Middle: *Arisaema nepenthoides*, Top Right: Tunbridge filmy fern, Bottom Left: *Woodwardia*, Bottom Right: The cast iron fern bench)

**The RHS Chelsea Flower Show**

I found myself on a train yet again, the journey from Edinburgh to London being the longest of my fellowship. It was one of the most exciting, though, as I had been anticipating this part of my fellowship since before I had even arrived in the United Kingdom. While I was prepared for the glitz and glamour of the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, I didn't realize how much goes into preparing the venue and the show gardens, and how quickly everything becomes show-ready for Press Day on Monday after still looking like a construction site the day before. I was lucky to see both sides of the transformation, as I helped RHS Staff prepare the RHS Plant of the Year stand on Sunday and assisted with the judging process the next morning. With all the care and consideration that went into deciding how to orient the Plant of the Year candidates and ensuring each entry looked perfect for judging, I couldn't imagine the pressure of preparing a show garden!

Speaking of show gardens, it was amazing to see all of the unique and stunningly creative show gardens, container and balcony gardens, and nursery displays. Walking the grounds on Press Day, I saw British garden celebrities like Monty Don and Alan Titchmarsh. But I was most excited to see the students and horticulturists from RHS Garden Wisley who had joined to observe judging and lead tours. I had not seen any of them since leaving Wisley in late January, and I hadn't realized how much I missed them. I was glad to see many other familiar faces throughout the week, and I felt especially grateful to attend an event like the Chelsea Flower Show, bringing together so many people to celebrate a shared love for gardens and horticulture.

At Chelsea, I also met Amy MacDonell, Vice Chair of the Garden Club of America Scholarship Committee, whom I had been emailing updates about my fellowship in the months prior. It was so nice getting to finally meet her and tell her (in person!) about my experiences at the flower show. Amy also kindly hosted a cocktail party where I reconnected with Kristin Biddle, Trustee and Chair of the Horticultural Committee at Andalusia, and Hattie Moore, a former Garden Club of America Interchange Fellow whom I met at Longwood during a summer internship. I also had the lovely opportunity to meet another former GCA Interchange Fellow, Sam Fry, and the upcoming GCA Interchange Fellow, Indigo Wyatt. It was such a special moment because, whether we had briefly crossed paths or had never met before, I felt really connected to the other students as we shared such unique experiences that only a handful of people get to experience in their lifetimes. I am so grateful to Amy for bringing us all together and giving us the space to help prepare Indi for such an exciting and rewarding adventure during her Interchange Fellowship at Longwood this year.








(Top: The RHS Plant of the Year team with Ray Lancaster, Bottom Left: Amy and I at Chelsea, Bottom Right: Indigo, Hattie, Sam, and myself)

**Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew**

After the craziness of the week that was the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, I began my final placement at Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew in London. Kew has an extremely rich history and was famously the royal residence of King George III, Queen Charlotte, and their 15 children. But, like RBG Edinburgh, the gardens have evolved to represent modern times, with the recent installations like the Carbon Garden and the redesign of traditional order beds into what is now the Agius Evolution Garden. The Carbon Garden, which opened in July 2025, was built to educate the public about our new understanding of the relationship between plants, fungi, and the Carbon Cycle, while the Agius Evolution Garden was created to reflect Kew's "Tree of Life," a new perspective on plant evolution based on genetic relationships rather than physical appearance. In the Evolution Garden, each room focuses on a branch of the "tree," with a room for non-flowering plants (gymnosperms) like ferns and conifers and seven rooms for flowering plants (angiosperms), showcasing closely related families in clades like magnoliids, monocots, and eudicots. I found the Carbon Garden and the Evolution Garden really enjoyable to work in and great visual tools for educating visitors on our ever-growing understanding of the natural world. As someone who became interested in horticulture after spending time in a research garden, I hope these new installations inspire the next generation of garden enthusiasts and plant scientists!




(Left: Shearing geraniums in the Carbon Garden, Right: A beautiful *Calycanthus* 'Aphrodite' in the Magnoliid section of the Agius Evolution Garden)

For a couple of days at the beginning of my placement, I had the exciting opportunity to help with the summer changeout in the famous parterres in front of the Palm House with the Decorative team. I really liked the overall design theme, which celebrated the bright reds and

deep purples of the castor-oil plant (*Ricinus communis*). Planted with various dahlias, sunflowers, petunias, zinnias, *Helianthus*, *Osteospermum* 'Dalina Compact Orange Brique', *Coleus* 'Lime Delight', and more, the parterres became a bright song of colors. It was a lot of fun because as we worked, we got to see the Palm House team through the decanting process, lifting massive palms and shrubs and moving them to the Decant House, which was built just to house plants during the upcoming Palm House restoration. We also kept an eye on one very cute duck that sat nesting in one of the containers by the Palm House Pond!



(Left: The Palm House parterres, Right: The duck nesting in a container, too cute!)

I then moved from the gardens to the arboretum, where I explored some of Kew's historic woody collections. It was incredible to work surrounded by original introductions by American botanist and plant collector Ernest Wilson, who worked at Kew when he was young and eventually became the Assistant Director and Keeper of the Arnold Arboretum. Every day that I worked in the arboretum, I would spot a new tree of interest in the distance and be compelled to see it up close. Like the time I was working in the Berberis Dell and was mesmerized by the stunning *Poliothyrsis sinensis*, or when I was helping water the Camellia Walk and got distracted by the beautiful *Meliosma pinnata* ssp. *arnottiana* var. *oldhamii*.

Luckily, the section manager I was working with, Felix Cleverly, was equally as enthused by these plants and spent much time pointing out other plants that I may (and did!) find interesting. These included the uniquely purple- and red-leaved English Oak (*Quercus robur* 'Purpurascens') and Turner's Oak (*Quercus* x *turneri*). Turner's Oak had its root ball lifted in the Great Storm of 1987, revealing that compacted soil restricted air and water from reaching the roots and limited growth. After surviving and putting on a shocking amount of new growth following the storm, arborists better understand the impact of soil compaction and have even started using air spades to relieve the roots of old trees.




(Left: *Poliothyrsis sinensis*, Right: *Meliosma pinnata* ssp. *arnottiana* var. *oldhamii*)

I also spent some time in the Rhododendron Dell with horticulturist Thomas Cameron, learning about the collection originally developed by Sir Joseph Hooker around 1850. With the goal of more effectively showing visitors the relationships between certain plants in the collection, we lifted a lone-standing *Rhododendron griersonianum* and planted it near species that it's been crossed with, like *R. yakushimanum* and its hybrids like *R.* 'Dopey' and the "Seven Dwarves" hybrid series, as well as *R. forrestii* ssp. *forrestii* 'Repens' and its *R.* 'Elizabeth' hybrid. Even though the Rhododendrons weren't in flower, I was captivated by the diverse foliage in the collection, like the bronze, velvety foliage of *R. bureavii*, the purple petioles of *R. x loderi* 'Loderi Pink Diamond', and the silvery new growth of *R. floribundum*. I also could not believe the sheer size of the *R. arboreum* that towered in the Rhododendron Dell. However, it started to make more sense after I learned that the specimen, an original accession from Sir Joseph Hooker and his Himalayan expedition, is over 170 years old!







(Top Left: Digging out *Rhododendron griersonianum*, Top Right: The bronze *R. bureavii* leaves, Bottom Left: *R. x loderi* 'Loderi Pink Diamond' and its purple petioles, Bottom Right: The massive *R. arboreum*)

My time in Kew's arboretum wasn't just all about woody plants; it was also about gardens representing different parts of the world, like the Mediterranean Garden and the Japanese Landscape. I loved getting to learn about newer collections from Spain and the design emphasis on Mediterranean plants with economic value, with quadrants in the lower section of the garden showcasing the olive tree (*Olea europaea*), the cork oak (*Quercus suber*), the stone pine (*Pinus pinea*), and herbs like rosemary and lavender. The garden maintains interest at a much smaller scale, with *Echium glomeratum* displaying rare blue pollen, which can only be detected by a keen eye (and a very helpful Felix). Shifting the focus back to a larger scale, I had the special responsibility of raking the gravel in the Japanese Landscape on my last day with the arboretum teams. I really felt like I reached a zen state during this task, letting go of any perfectionism, truly going with the flow, and ending up with a satisfying scale-like pattern!






(Top Left: The Mediterranean Garden with the Olive Tree quadrant to the left and the Cork Oak quadrant to the right, Top Right: *Echium glomeratum*, Bottom Left: Raking the gravel in the Japanese Landscape, Bottom Right: The final design!)

I wish I could describe every nuance and share the thousands of pictures I took during the 10 months I spent in the United Kingdom as the RHS Interchange Fellow, but I am glad I can at least share these experiences. I am also extremely grateful for Rowena Wilson, my British "mum," the Garden Club of America, the Royal Horticultural Society, and each of the gardens that hosted me for their support and for providing me with such an incredibly immersive experience. I don't think I've been able to fully process everything since returning home to the United States, but what I do know is that this fellowship will continue to shape who I am as both a person and a horticulturist for the rest of my career. In the meantime, I am excited to see what future fellows get up to as they embark on one of the greatest adventures that a career in horticulture has to offer!