

Royal Horticultural Society & Garden Club of America  
Interchange Fellowship

Midterm Report  
September 2024 - January 2025



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## **Introduction**

At the end of August 2024, I had just completed the Historic and Botanic Garden Training Programme where I had spent a year at Audley End House in Essex learning from the knowledgeable staff in their organic walled kitchen garden and historic parterre. After finishing the scheme, I had just a week to pack and get myself organised before heading across to America and to Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania, with equal portions of excitement and nerves. I will be spending the year learning from a range of horticulturalists in some familiar and some brand-new environments, encountering different plants and filling gaps in my knowledge. Over the months I will be able to spend time in different sections of the garden that appeal to my interests, attend various conferences and visit a range of gardens in the country, kindly made possible by the Garden Club of America (GCA) and the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS). My intention for this report is to record the highlights of my time, key learnings and some of the new plants I encounter.

## September

I arrived in a very warm Pennsylvania, where I spent my first days meeting the other international interns. There are 7 of us in total and between us we have travelled from South Korea, India, South Africa and the UK to work and learn at Longwood Gardens. We all live in houses on Red Lion Row, sharing the space with American interns, who specialise in one section of the garden for a year and the Professional Horticulture students who undertake a 2 year course learning and working in the gardens. In our first week we spent time learning the layout of the garden, recovering from jet lag and taking several trips to the shops to help us settle into life on the row, our new homes and Longwood Gardens. Kindly, Longwood Gardens organise weekly trips for the interns, our first trip took us to the nearby Scott Arboretum, a highlight was seeing their allee of dawn redwoods (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*)<sup>1</sup> and their outdoor amphitheatre punctuated by tulip trees (*Liriodendron tulipifera*).

### Ideas Garden, Outdoor Landscapes West

Soon it was time for our first week working in the gardens. I had opted to spend my first weeks in the Ideas Garden which includes an ornamental kitchen garden, perennial garden and container garden. The kitchen garden, supervised by the extremely knowledgeable Alex, has various beds of annual vegetables and cut flowers organised in diagonal rows. During the weeks I harvested cucamelons (*Melothria scabra*), tomatillos (*Physalis philadelphica*), ground cherries (*Physalis pubescens* 'Pierce Lester') and edible flowers for use in the restaurants. Alex demonstrated how to hand pollinate Vanilla (*Vanilla planifolia*), necessary as the bee required for pollination on this evergreen vine does not occur outside of vanilla's native range of the tropical forests of Mexico, Central and northern South America.<sup>2</sup> I learnt how the team had been using daikon radishes (*Raphanus sativus* var. *longipinnatus*) to break up compacted ground and assist with drainage – I was told these radishes have long taproots that can penetrate extremely hard soil. I spent time deadheading tagetes, cosmos and dahlias to help



Red Lion Row



Early morning in the kitchen garden

<sup>1</sup> The Scott Arboretum of Swarthmore College, 'Metasequoia Allee' (*The Scott Arboretum of Swarthmore College*) <<https://www.scottarboretum.org/gardens-tour/metasequoia-allee/>> Accessed 4th October 2024

<sup>2</sup> Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, 'Vanilla' (*Royal Botanic Gardens Kew*) <<https://www.kew.org/plants/vanilla>> Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> September 2024



keep the garden looking vibrant and propagated pelargoniums.

New plants encountered during my first week included the herbaceous perennial balloon plant (*Gomphocarpus physocarpus*), scarlet rosemallow (*Hibiscus coccineus*) and toothache plant (*Acmella oleracea*). I first learnt the name of *Ansonia hubrichtii* – a clump forming perennial which is bright green in spring and summer with small starry blue flowers before turning golden yellow in autumn. This appears to be a very popular plant in this area of the USA and I noticed it frequently on my travels. An overriding memory from my time in this garden is the scent of candy floss, being emitted from the falling leaves of the bordering Katsura tree (*Cercidiphyllum japonicum*). Although I encountered lots of new plants, I was also made aware of new diseases. Beach Leaf Disease, first discovered in 2012 is an invasive nematode that spreads quickly. Signs include dark green stripes on leaf veins in the spring and leathery, thickened, yellow leaves as the season continues.<sup>3</sup> Chrysanthemum white rust is a serious fungal disease spread by airborne spores. Infection prefers cool & wet weather conditions. Symptoms include pale yellow spots developing on the upper leaf surface, lumpy spore pustules which turn white in high humidity as airborne spores are produced.<sup>4</sup> Longwood has a huge interest in chrysanthemums, hosting a festival for them every year, so it is important to be aware of such a disease.

Whilst with the Ideas Garden I helped with the installation of the train display. Over autumn and winter a temporary garden is constructed of mulch, and filled with plants, model buildings and model railways for children to enjoy. There was a large range of plants including woody shrubs, meatball chrysanthemums and huge specimens of *Salvia* 'Phyllis Fancy' which instantly attracted the hummingbirds. Our intern trip took us to Delaware Botanic Garden to see Piet Oudolf's meadow as autumn was taking hold presenting a display of colour, foliage and seed heads. The purple aster (*Eurybia spectabilis*) was in full strength providing large swathes of purple flowers.



*Monarda punctata* at Delaware Botanic Garden



*Eurybia spectabilis*



The entrance to Oudolf's meadow

<sup>3</sup> Invasive Species Centre 'Beech Leaf Disease' (*Invasive Species Centre*, June 2024) <[https://www.invasivespeciescentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/BLD\\_Factsheet\\_FINAL\\_June2024\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.invasivespeciescentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/BLD_Factsheet_FINAL_June2024_WEB.pdf)> Accessed 4<sup>th</sup> October 2024

<sup>4</sup> RHS, Chrysanthemum White Rust' (*RHS*) <<https://www.rhs.org.uk/disease/chrysanthemum-white-rust>> Accessed 17th October 2024



A grey and rainy day provided the backdrop to our first visit to the nearby Chanticleer Garden. I was taken in by their vegetable and cutting garden. The vegetable garden entrance was framed by a weeping blue atlas cedar (*Cedrus atlantica* 'Pendula') whilst gourds grew along the fence, encircling every shade of green.



*Cedrus atlantica* 'Pendula' over the gate to the vegetable garden



Vegetable garden at Chanticleer

## October

Already we were in October and beginning to think about the Halloween display in the Ideas Garden. Within one morning the external borders were removed to make room for the autumnal displays. The borders combined: cannas, cardamom (*Elettaria cardamomum*), colocasia, galangal (*Alpinia galanga*), ethiopian black bananas (*Ensete ventricosum* 'Maurelii'), tagetes and dahlias. The removal was a huge team effort, starting first thing by the lights of the machines. I had the opportunity to propagate some plants from the border including sugar cane (*Saccharum officinarum*), this was done by cutting the stalks into lengths approx. 6 inches long and potting up in compost, laying some vertically and some horizontally. Faith, a member of the Idea Garden, also took me to meet her lovely family in Lancaster county to collect a giant pumpkin grown by her grandparents which was to be featured in the Halloween display (pictured below).





External borders of the Kitchen Garden prior to removal



Cut flowers gathered from the garden

We continued the week creating the autumnal display using pumpkins, gourds, chrysanthemums, brassicas and ornamental peppers. We harvested cut flowers for sales at the shop, the cockscomb (*Celosia argentea* var. *cristata*) was full of bright autumnal colour. I met with Mary Frediani from the GCA for the first time, my key point of contact, and was kindly invited to the house of GCA member Betsy McCoy for dinner later that evening. We were joined by Mary as well as Adam & Grant – previous RHS/GCA fellows who now work at Chanticleer.

## Outdoors East

Just like that it was time to move on as I headed over to the Outdoors East Team. Their area includes numerous ornamental compartment gardens and a 600ft long brick path, lined with a formal border. However, we quickly found ourselves back in the Ideas Garden helping to plant bulbs in a new area of their garden. The hope was the bulbs are to naturalise in an area of fine fescue (*Festuca*). The bulbs included *Tulipa sylvestris*, *T. turkistanica* and



*T. praestans shogun*, *Narcissus* 'moonlight sensation', *N.* 'Thalia' and *N. poetica recurvus*. The bulbs were scattered throughout the fescue in a naturalistic fashion.

We took a trip to New York to see the High Line & Little Island. On the High Line my eye was caught by *Euphorbia corollata* – I had never seen this before and the white flowers stood out against the fading autumn shades. I learnt about the Harlequin Glorybower (*Clerodendrum trichotomum*), the blue berries against the bright pink calyxes were particularly eye catching, but perhaps even more enchanting were the leaves as once crushed they smell like peanut butter. A short walk from our tour on the High Line was Little Island, a relatively new park that is built on the site of an old pier with meandering and undulating paths giving the impression of a much larger space to enjoy. *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Malepartus' was glowing in the autumn sun, filtering New York's skyline behind.



*Miscanthus sinensis* on Little Island



Little Island



*Clerodendrum trichotomum* on the High Line

On Friday 18th October I was given the opportunity to attend the Perennial Plant Conference hosted at the Scott Arboretum where I heard a variety of speakers including Nate Bremer on 21st Century Peonies and an emotional talk from Kenneth Darsney regarding the Nemours Estate, a nearby garden with historical links to the neighbouring Children's Hospitals. His talk reminded us of the value of public spaces and gardens for their communities. The conference heavily emphasised the use of native plants and growing for ecological endurance.

## Bulbs

Working with the East Team in the autumn means you will be helping to prepare for the spring bulb displays. Over 100,000 bulbs are planted in huge swathes. The schemes are meticulously planned by extremely experienced horticulturalists. Each large bed presents one dominant colour progressing along the brick walk through blue, purple, pink, red, orange, yellow and white. There was a huge variety of bulbs used including muscari, narcissus, fritillaria, tulips, hyacinths, camassia and alliums. Various species and cultivars are picked to extend the length of the display and early bulbs were planted in clusters so they could be removed and replaced with spring annuals. The removal of the summer borders felt early as the sun was still shining bright, taking out plants in full bloom was unfamiliar but with so many bulbs to plant the project had to start on schedule. As work progressed the East Team combined with the West to start laying out bulbs. Shapes were marked out on the beds and numbered, then densely and uniformly filled with combinations of bulbs, the numbers would then repeat throughout the bed. We made sure to walk across the beds on boards, to avoid compacting the freshly tilled soil. The bulbs themselves made for mesmerising patterns so I eagerly await the display they will provide in the spring.

Towards the end of the month, as the bulbs were planted and securely netted to protect them from both squirrels and deer, our attention turned to ‘Longwood Reimagined.’ A new conservatory was about to be opened after a 5-year building project. We were seconded to assist with the final touches to ensure the new West Conservatory was ready for guests.



Sunrise in the East section



Bulbs laid out, ready for planting



Swathes of bulbs laid out

## November Conservatories

As November approached I moved on to my next rotation in the conservatories, coinciding with the launching of ‘Longwood Reimagined’ and the opening of the West Conservatory, housing an array of Mediterranean plants. I have never worked in large conservatoires with permanent displays so I was looking forward to finding out how they operated. It turns out hoses come out of the floor and orchids hang from the sky in Longwood’s conservatories.

This placement brought with it a brand-new palette of plants for me. When entering the East Conservatory the view is dominated by the dramatic form of Wood’s Cycad (*Encephalartos woodii*). I learnt that cycads are evergreen dioecious perennials<sup>5</sup> with short woody trunks and a rosette of pinnate leathery leaves, present since before the age of the dinosaur.<sup>6</sup> Wood’s cycad is of particular note as it is no longer found in the wild and a female plant has never been found.<sup>7</sup> Assisting in the cascade garden brought me into contact with members of the bromeliad family including *Tillandsia funckiana*. Commonly known as air plants tillandsia are monocarpic epiphytes. They are able to trap moisture and dust in trichomes on their leaves, allowing them to survive on branches, rocks or even electricity lines.<sup>8</sup> Helping the Aquatics Team led me to *Aponogeton distachyos*, this aquatic perennial flowers from the autumn to spring in the cooler temperatures. In the summer it remains as

<sup>5</sup> RHS, ‘Cycads’ (*RHS*) <<https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/158256/cycas/details>> Accessed 15th January 2025

<sup>6</sup> Ganna Walska Lotusland, ‘Cycad Garden’ (*Ganna Walska Lotusland*) <<https://www.lotusland.org/gardens/cycad-garden/#:~:text=Cycads%20are%20ancient%20seed%2Dbearing,major%20groups%20still%20remain%20today>> Accessed 4th January 2025

<sup>7</sup> Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, ‘Wood like to meet: The loneliest plant in the world’ (*Anthea Gordon* 18<sup>th</sup> May 2018) <<https://www.kew.org/read-and-watch/wood-like-to-meet-the-loneliest-plant>> Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> December 2024

<sup>8</sup> Cornell Cooperative Extension, ‘Air Plants (Tillandsia)’ (*Sandy Vanno*) <<https://warren.cce.cornell.edu/gardening-landscape/warren-county-master-gardener-articles/air-plants-tillandsia>> Accessed 15th December 2024



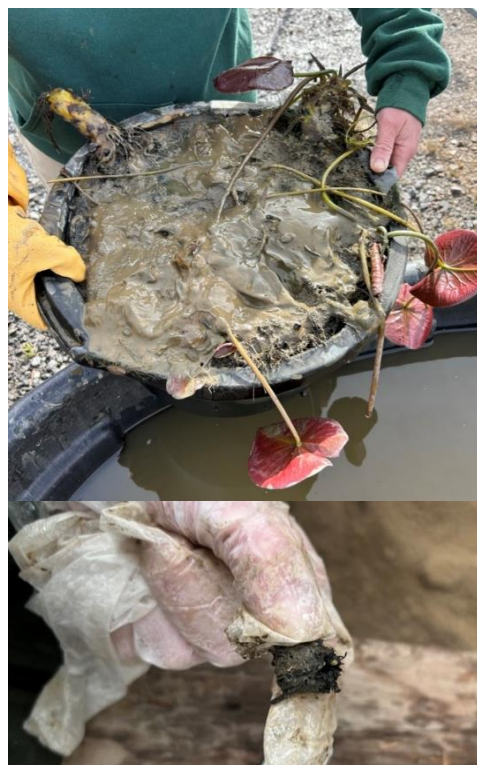
dormant tubers, as they would often be in dried up ponds in their native South Africa. I helped over winter water lilies (*Nymphaea spp.*), transferring them to heated ponds and searched for tubers of water lilies that had been purposefully been placed under stress. Working in the conservatories could often mean swapping whole beds of plants in one morning to ensure everything was in perfect condition for the guests- frequently swathes of anthurium are planted, providing broad ribbons of bold colours in the main conservatory. I was also given the opportunity to attend identification classes of tropical plants at this time too - helping me to build my knowledge and understanding of the plants I was working with.



Sunrise from the Main Conservatory



Views of the new West Conservatory



Over wintering nymphaea and the tuber of *Nymphaea castilliflora*

Half way through November and attention in the conservatory shifted to Christmas. For one week of the year Longwood closes, to allow for the conservatory and other areas of the garden to be transformed into extravagant Christmas displays. Starting on a Sunday evening, when the last guests have left, students and staff combine to remove the current displays to leave a blank slate for work to start on Monday morning. For the majority of the week I was working in the East Conservatory. We spent time planting hundreds of white cyclamen, turf was removed to make way for a blanket of snow and white orchids were planted as part of the frosty snow scene. Whilst we were focusing on the East, other gardeners were planting hundreds of poinsettias in the main conservatory, putting up Christmas trees and installing thousands of decorations. By Friday the conservatories were transformed into rich, grand displays, ready to receive thousands of guests daily to see the spectacle that is Longwood at Christmas.

This month also brought a trip to the Tyler Arboretum, I especially appreciated the Fragrant garden, originally designed for those with visual impairment, this area of the garden is home to large variety of highly scented herbs including lavender, mint and sage, my favourite being the huge specimens of lemon verbena (*Aloysia citrodora*). Thanksgiving



A sea of poinsettias and spinning Christmas trees



arrived with the end of the month and all those remaining on the row made a dish, contributing to a huge spread for us all to enjoy together.

## December

### Southern California

December meant my first GCA facilitated trip. Mary Frediani from the GCA had kindly reached out to her numerous contacts on the West coast to help me organise my trips, tours and accommodation. I left behind the fast plummeting temperatures of the East coast and headed to Southern California for a week. Having only being in full time horticulture a relatively short time I wanted to expose myself to new gardens, environments and plants outside my frame of reference. I was looking forward to seeing how gardens operated in a Mediterranean climate and what I could learn for when I return to the UK.

I travelled from Philadelphia to Phoenix and then on to Santa Barbara. Here I was hosted by a generous GCA member. I spent the weekend exploring the local area, already I was amazed by the flowering fox tail agaves (*Agave attenuata*) lining the coast, their flowers standing proud guarding the route. My first garden visit was to the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden. This garden focuses exclusively on native plants from the California Floristic Province. They were the first botanic garden in the country to do this. At the heart of the garden is their mission to ‘conserve native plants and habitats for the health and well-being of people and the planet.’<sup>9</sup> I was kindly shown round by Keith Nevison, the Director of Horticulture & Operations, giving me an insight into the garden and informing me of the ‘perfect climate’ they have in the area. The garden acts as a microcosm of Californian habitats, demonstrating a coastal redwood forest, meadow and the plants unique to the Channel Islands (8 islands lying off the coast of Southern California) amongst others. The botanic garden has an incredible borrowed landscape, as the meadow sits in front of Arlington Peak. There is a wide display of manzanitas (*Arctostaphylos spp.*), a genus I was previously unfamiliar with. I was struck by their smooth, red bark. I was able to walk amongst their giant coastal redwoods (*Sequoia sempervirens*), the earth’s tallest tree which can grow up to 350ft and feel the shade cast by the coast live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*). In their demonstration garden they exhibit a rain garden, an area designed to collect runoff from hard surfaces such as roofs. The garden is constructed just below ground level and filled with plants that can tolerate waterlogging.<sup>10</sup> Once it has collected rainwater it then steadily drains whilst simultaneously filtering the water and reducing pollution re-entering the water course. I made a note of this for the future, as all gardeners become increasingly conscious of their water usage. The Garden was a great place for



Santa Barbara Botanic Garden - a view of Arlington Peak across the meadow with the red bark of a manzanita in the foreground



*Optunia galapageia* in Lotusland’s cactus garden

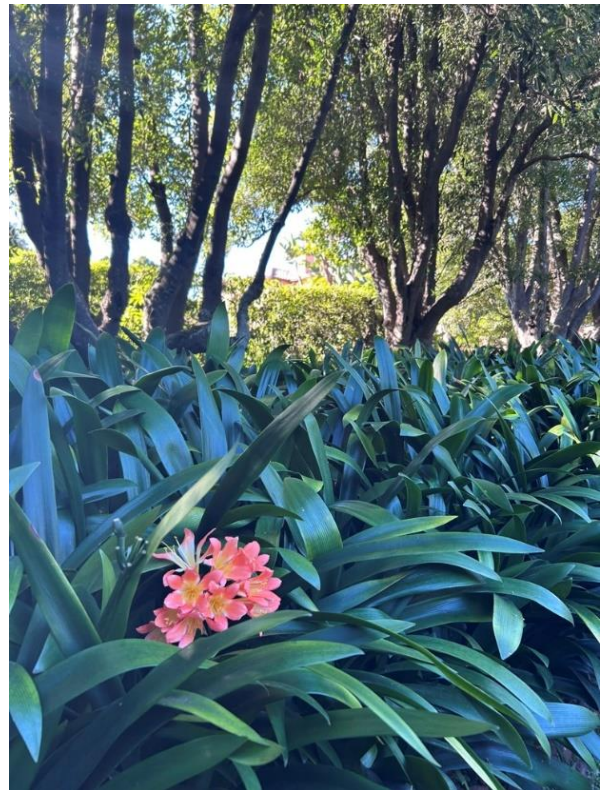
<sup>9</sup> Santa Barbara Botanic Garden, ‘Mission Vision’ (Santa Barbara Botanic Garden) <<https://sbbotanicgarden.org/about/mission-vision/>> Accessed 4<sup>th</sup> January 2025

<sup>10</sup> RHS, ‘Rain Gardens’ (RHS) <<https://www.rhs.org.uk/garden-features/rain-gardens>> Accessed 20th January 2025



me to start my trip, putting into perspective the different conditions that can be found in California and highlighting the native plants and their importance.

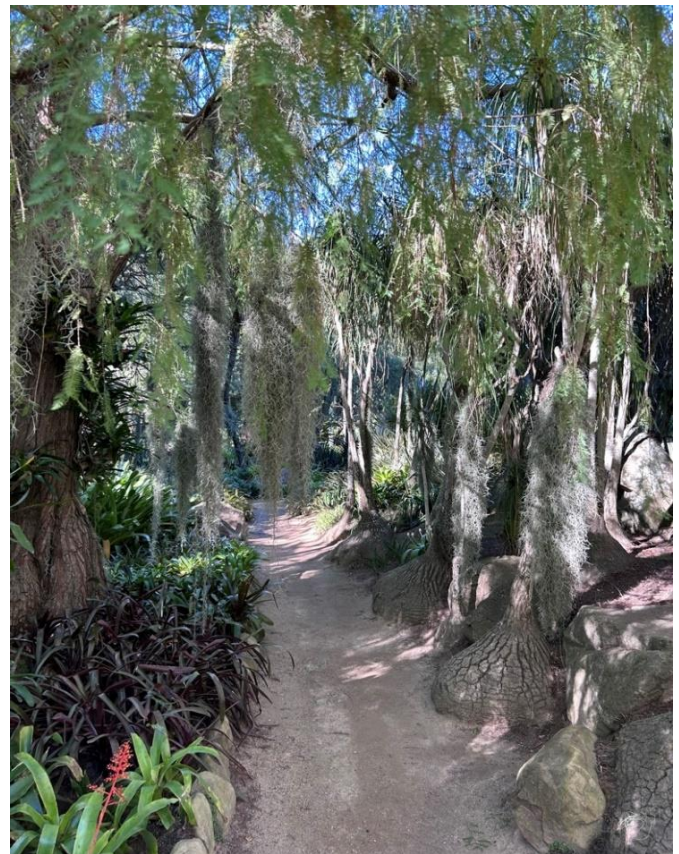
Lotusland in Montecito was my next stop, accompanied by Sally Fairbanks from the GCA. Although the garden was closed to visitors for the season Sally was able to facilitate my visit where I met with a pair of extremely knowledgeable docents. The garden is organic and emphasis is placed on sustainability and biodiversity. The different gardens of Lotusland are dramatic, rich and diverse. From the moment of arrival, I was fascinated by the garden. Immediately I noticed the en masse style of planting, starting with the clivia. I walked through a pomegranate hedge into the cactus garden. My pictures do not provide any sense of justice for the scale and variety of forms which towered above our heads. The garden has more than 300 species of cacti which arrived in the garden just prior to the millennium as part of a donation. In the Bromeliad garden, I was able to see plants that have been housed in the glasshouses at Longwood thriving outdoors. Spanish moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*) trailed from the limbs of Montezuma cypress (*Taxodium distichum* var. *mexicanum*) and over the walk way. In the succulent garden swathes of aeoniums lined the paths and hen & chicks (*Echeveria elegans*) acted as ground cover. Glaucous tones filled the blue garden, even the paths were lined by aqua coloured glass. The cycad garden provided me with another specimen of Wood's Cycad, allowing me to draw on my learnings from the conservatories at Longwood. Around every corner there was a dramatic sight, hard to comprehend with the time we had. The garden combines important botanical collections with individuality, a rich history and eccentricity.



Waves of clivia



Water Garden



Walkway of the Bromeliad Garden



Across the street from Lotusland is Tom Cole's nursery - Cold Spring Aloes. Tom greeted us, an incredible character wearing many hats, primarily a humanitarian aid worker routinely working in Uganda and sub-Saharan Africa. His work allows him to explore areas of Uganda, resulting in the publication of 'Aloes of Uganda, A Field Guide'<sup>11</sup> discovering 3 new species and 1 new sub species. The nursery is brimming with unusual aloes, grown from seed. We were able to meander past them all in his informal nursery where jade plants (*Crassula ovata*) grow like weeds.

Wednesday took me to the Taft Garden and Nature Reserve in Ojai. The creator, John Taft, has cultivated a display garden of plants he loved from arid areas of the world, namely Australia and South Africa, on a small portion of the site whilst preserving the bulk for native habitat. It has been described as having a 'rugged dryness, [with] emphasis on texture and form, and many shades of green.'<sup>12</sup> My journey to get there took me from Montecito up winding mountain roads and to a private gateway, where I continued for what felt like miles on a small track, over creeks and down steep hills to arrive at the garden. The isolation and location of the garden is spectacular as you are surrounded by canyons and hills. There are strict limits on the number of visitors per day, contributing to the feeling of remoteness and as though you have discovered a hidden gem. The garden lives up to its description of containing many shades of green; I saw hedges of jade plant, walls of grass tree (*Xanthorrhoea spp.*) and spikes of cape aloe (*Aloe ferox*). However, there were inserts of bright, vivid colours too, hidden away I found a blooming firewheel tree (*Stenocarpus sinuatus*). The seclusion, quiet and setting makes this a very special garden.



*Euphorbia ammak* and *Aloe barberae* at Cold Spring Aloes



Views from the mountain roads on the way to Ojai



Golden barrel cactus (*Kroenleinia grusonii*) at the Taft Garden



Flowering firewheel tree

Time pressed on and I left Ojai, making my way to Pasadena on the outskirts of LA, where I was kindly hosted by several GCA members and welcomed into their homes for dinner, to stay and for breakfast. My next visit was to the Huntington Botanic Garden. I wish I could have seen everything but due to the vast scale of the gardens I

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Cole & Tom Forrest, *Aloes of Uganda* (Oakleigh Press)

<sup>12</sup> Caitlin Atkinson & Jennifer Jewell, *Under Western Skies* (Timber Press 2021)



had to choose to focus my attention on just a few areas. I was led through the Chinese garden and the Herb garden. The Herb garden contained a whole bed of *Pelargonium* 'Attar of Roses' – a favourite of mine, and which we had carefully overwintered at my previous position in the UK, but I was now able to see it thriving outside in December. I also took the time to see their roses blooming. Next, I met with John Trager, Curator of the Desert Garden and Collections who was generous with his time, giving me a tour of the section. There were spectacular specimens of succulents wherever I looked from across the world. The sky had become a muted grey, allowing the plants to stand prominent against the backdrop. I saw an incredible *Aloe arborescens*, the yellow flowering form and a whole hillside of flowering aloes. There were golden barrel cacti scattered throughout and I walked by a white silk floss tree (*Ceiba insignis*) whose huge trunk was covered with rugged short spines. There were so many plants that I had not seen before, and it was fascinating to see their well-established forms so beautifully curated in a garden that is over 100 years old. Having been warned about LA traffic I started heading towards my next destination.



Vivid yellow of the *Aloe arborescens*



Succulents glowing against the grey sky

On Friday I met with Ari Novy President of San Diego Botanic Garden, he is a great supporter of the GCA. He spent the morning with me, enquiring what led me to be in my current position as the RHS/GCA fellow and where I wanted to be heading. He also shared with me his career path and advice for the future. The garden is split up into numerous themed areas including South African, South American and native plants. It is also home



to the largest collection of bamboo in North America, the climate of San Diego keeps this notoriously fast-growing plant in check. I explored the subtropical fruits garden, looking for inspiration for what could potentially be grown under glass in the UK. Their collection included the custard apple (*Annona cherimola*), along with having such a great common name it is often regarded as one of the best tropical fruits due to its flavour. Also growing was the jabotkaba (*Plinia cauliflora*), the round, black fruits growing directly on its trunk makes it particularly striking.

My week in Southern California was coming to an end, throughout my time I was generously hosted and looked after by various GCA members, who welcomed me into their homes. I visited a range of gardens from small, appointment only specialised nurseries to large botanical gardens with hundreds of staff and thousands of visitors a year. I have been made aware of a vast array of plants I was hitherto unaware of and seen plants that we nurse through winters in the UK, thrive outside in December. I am extremely grateful to all who took time out of their days to meet with me and share their knowledge.

I returned back Longwood and to some more familiar temperatures, Christmas was still in full swing in the conservatories and for the rest of the month I assisted in maintaining the Christmas displays, replacing poinsettias and amaryllis, tidying cyclamen and keeping the new pools of the West Conservatory clean. Christmas Eve brought the first of the snow duties – an early morning start to clear all paths before the guests arrived. I definitely felt like I had earned my Christmas dinner.

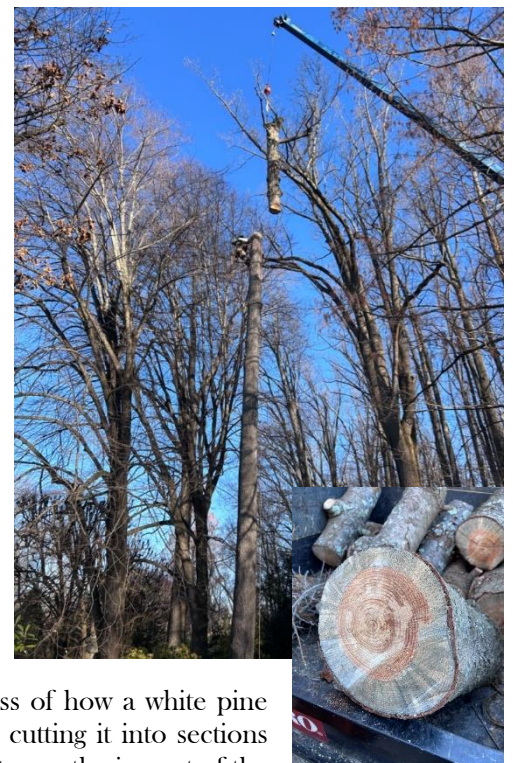
## January

### Arborists

The start of 2025 brought snow and some extremely cold conditions, just in time for me to join the arborists for the month. This is an area I had no experience in, but I wanted to gain an understanding and appreciation of how they operate, what their day to day looked like, hopefully picking up some skills along the way. My arrival coincided with the end of Christmas and the start of the mammoth task of removing thousands of Christmas lights. The team kindly welcomed me, teaching me how to use a throw line to get broken branches out of trees, what to look for when assessing trees after windy conditions and how to tie numerous knots with unending patience. They taught me what to look for when developmentally pruning ornamental trees. One afternoon we worked on a Japanese Stewartia (*Stewartia pseudocamellia*), removing a co-dominant leader on the eastern side, leaving the west leader to establish dominance. I was taught that the west should then be thinned as little as possible, ensuring plenty of leaf cover and growth, whilst the east side could be thinned, encouraging it to subordinate. I witnessed the impressive process of how a white pine (*Pinus strobus*) was removed with a crane, involving a member of the team cutting it into sections whilst tied into the tree. When the tree was on the ground we were then able to see the impact of the mountain pine beetle carrying the blue stain fungus. The team took the time to teach me as they guided me step by step and sometimes scramble by scramble as I tried to make my way up, across and down several trees. Kindly they waited as I summoned the strength to make my way to the end of a limb to remove a Christmas snowflake from a foxglove tree (*Paulownia tomentosa*). In the mix of all



Monocarpic fishtail palm in seed (*Caryota obtusa*)



White pine removal and evidence of the blue fungus

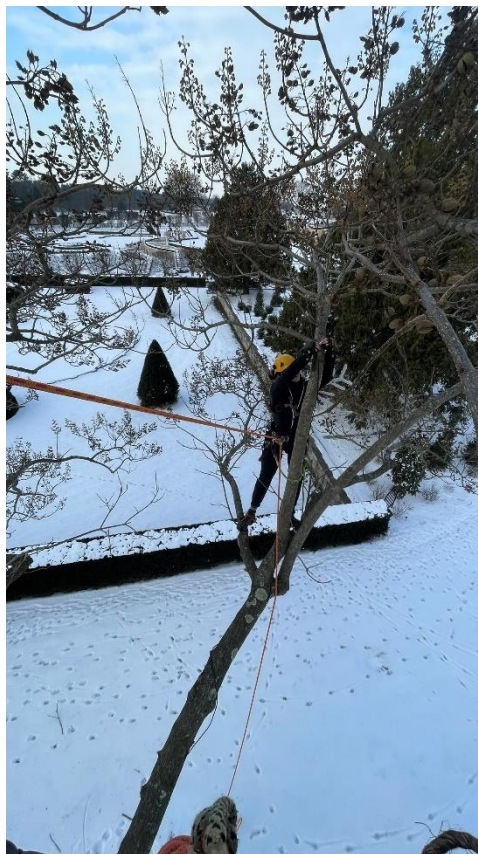


this there was also snow clearing and trying to stay warm in some of the coldest temperatures I've ever worked in as the forecast delivered feel like temperatures of -17C (1.4F).

Already January is coming to an end and I will be moving on to my next placement in production, full of admiration and respect for the arborists. I haven't spotted the first signs of spring yet, the temperatures are just creeping above freezing and snow is still covering the ground, however, the calendar is filling up with training, symposiums and shows whilst I'm giving thought to where the generous funding of the GCA will take me once spring arrives.



Practicing climbing on an ash tree



Finally making it out on the limb to remove a snow flake



Red Lion Row in the snow



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