

Overflow Questions for Parallel Session 2 (Rob Brett)

Q. How do we balance the need to label and educate as opposed to some places / gardens being "works of art" ?

I think it depends on what the gardens purpose is. I always remember visiting the Yves Saint Laurent's Jardin Majorelle in Marrakech years ago, which is very much a garden about style, imagination and beauty, lifted by the vivid blue. I suppose it hopes to provide inspiration, but it is not somewhere I would visit to learn and be educated about plants, I saw it as a place for a landscape designer or architect. Thus, labels and interpretation on mass would not be appropriate, but I did feel that I wanted to learn more anyway, To get inside the thoughts associated with the layout and design and the choices of plant associated within the garden.

I therefore, also feel that where appropriate and achievable, the best way of communicating is through story telling, poetry or drama, which again in certain circumstances, does more for making a garden or a plant come alive than simply a label. Make other forms of art, part of the art of the garden.

Q. Is there an impending collections crisis? Many of those with significant collections, especially in private ownership, are maintained by those who are older or lack support or resources. Is it time there were a concerted effort as a collective to avert a crisis?

Such an interesting question. Thus the importance of organisations such as Plant Heritage, Botanic Gardens and the RHS. We do have a responsibility, to help maintain important valued collections and for example, the RHS often take on valuable collections to help maintain cultivar diversity. Nevertheless, we cannot do it all and some collections are easier than other collections, e.g Donald Piggotts collection of Tilia at Cambridge University Botanic Garden can still be maintained within the landscape of the garden, where as collections which need propagating regularly are certainly a challenge due to resource limitations and the need for regular up-keep. I do not think there is a simple answer to this, but as a curator, I have tried to engage and enthuse our teams for the importance of our own collections. At Hyde Hall we house the National Collection of Viburnum AGM's, but for years very little work in propagating, reviewing and managing the collection has been undertaken. I therefore have suggested that we create a cross team collaboration, with one senior manager to have responsibility for that collection. Similarly, we might need to partner, in a collaborative way across organisations to help maintain and save and I would take the Conifer Conservation Programme as an ideal example of helping to avoid such a crisis.

Q. Rob. Visitor feedback often says they visit gardens, particularly as a family, to escape using screens, how do we balance this?

I think, if we can, we offer all options. It's then for choice on how they experience and engage with the garden.