

The RHS Hyde Hall Winter Garden: a winter garden with a difference...

At RHS Garden Hyde Hall, we have strived for originality with our new Winter Garden by challenging what people have come to typically expect from such a garden. By focusing on form, texture and celebrating the beauty of plants after they have died back, we hope to set ourselves apart from other known winter gardens around the world.

Yes, we have included some of your classic winter garden favourites and there is a definite focus on scent, stem colour, interesting barks and berries with plants like *Salix*, *Cornus*, *Betula*, *Daphne* and *Malus* but what we really wanted to do was include a huge amount of herbaceous plants which would showcase to our visitors just how good plants can still look when they have died back for the winter.

We achieved this by pooling our collective knowledge as a team and researching plants that can hold their own right the way through winter by staying rigid and providing us with varying textures, heights and interesting seed heads.

Planting started in 2015 with the backbone of trees and shrubs which now total approximately 1500 (including over 150 different taxa). The herbaceous planting was completed in 2017 with over 5,200 perennials and nearly 50,000 bulbs (both of which total some 130 different taxa) planted. This was a substantial horticultural project and has now become an important part of Hyde Hall's visitor experience.



The journey starts at the Hyde Hall entrance with a newly created path that cuts right through our Birch Grove which in itself provides a lot of winter interest through the birches, viburnums and woodland planting. This path leads you right into the beginning

of the Winter Garden where we have used the usual winter garden suspect of *Cornus alba* 'Sibirica' planted in large groups to grab your attention straight away and entice visitors into this new experience.

As part of the RHS Plant Trials, Hyde Hall is currently 2 years into a 4 year trial of *Cornus*. Most of this collection is located at the start of the Winter Garden but is also threaded through the garden itself. The trial includes 59 different cultivars which will be assessed over the next few winters to determine which cultivars are worthy of the RHS Award of Garden Merit (AGM).

The pathway through the garden meanders in-between undulating mounds which were created manually by moving over 9000 tonnes of soil from elsewhere on site. These were vital for providing much needed shelter from biting winds but it also allowed us to be much more creative with our design by elevating the planting, allowing more of the planting to be seen and as you walk through, hidden views eventually become revealed.

Herbaceous planting runs through the whole garden but there are two large scale herbaceous sections, one in each half of the garden, where each combination is planted in large drifts with a strong textural presence caused by the lignified stems, grasses and seed heads (see below). We have purposefully created low areas in this planting to provide visual links to Clover Hill where some of the same plants are used.



In this first half of the garden, you will also see two of our three steel sculptures which were created by David Watkinson. The brief we gave David was 'The slow decay of a leaf' as we wanted to again, celebrate the beauty of decay. These sculptures reveal the skeletal structure of the leaf as you walk towards the end of the garden and is also repeated in our new interpretation boards all the way through. These boards have been

designed to provide our visitors with insightful information on some of the scientific processes that are happening to our plants and our soil during winter.



As the first half of the garden ends and is bisected by our Millennium Avenue, each half is linked by a small grove of *Prunus mackii* 'Amber Beauty' with their golden orange peeling bark. These are contrasted by under plantings of *Acorus gramineus* 'Ogon' and *Nandina domestica* 'Gulfstream' which provide great colour and texture all year round.

Scent is another big part of our Winter Garden so as you walk through you will be enticed by wintersweet, *Chimonanthus praecox*, as well as *Daphne bholua*, *Viburnum × bodnantense* 'Charles Lamont' and *Sarcococca hookeriana* 'Winter Gem' among others.

Another attribute that we wanted to celebrate at this time of year is the berry as many plants have amazing fruit that persist well into winter. *Malus* grow really well for us here and as luck would have it, many of them have persistent fruit. Each of our cultivars of *Malus* have been chosen for this exact reason, they include *Malus* 'Adirondack', *M.* 'Comtesse de Paris' and *M.* 'Indian Magic'.

Weaving amongst the planting are groups of pollarded *Salix* cultivars which provide structure and a blast of colourful stems. From these, the gardeners bring to life our 'living sculptures' by bunching and tying groups of stems together to create something truly unique, as shown in the picture below of *Salix alba* var. *vitellina* 'Yelverton'. The living sculptures, together with training the colourful stems of *Rubus biflorus* and *Rubus phoenicolasius* into interesting shapes using frames, add yet another layer of creativity to our Winter Garden as a whole.



As you approach the end of your journey, you will again be drawn in by one last hit of colour in the form of what we like to call 'Project Stem'. This is a huge bed of solid stem colour provided by a simple planting palette of *Salix daphnoides* 'Continental Purple', *Cornus sanguinea* 'Anny's Winter Orange', *Cornus alba* 'Kesselringii', *Rubus cockburnianus* and the amazing *Tilia cordata* 'Winter Orange'.



I hope this has given you a little insight into what we have tried to create here at Hyde Hall in our take on a Winter Garden. What we aim to do is inspire you to look at a winter

garden in a scientific, philosophical and artistic way as we believe gardens in winter are not just about bright colours. Plants have a lot of attributes that come to centre stage in winter and there is a lot of beauty to be had in a dead plant!

We believe in our vision and concept of what a winter garden can be and we want all of our visitors to enjoy its subtle beauty and tranquillity.

Prepared by:

Tom Freeman – Team Leader of The Winter Garden, Clover Hill, Courtyard gardens, Birch Grove & Entrance and Sky Meadow at RHS Garden Hyde Hall.

December 2018