

Notes on the Garden: Raised Terrace

The borders at Packwood were once described to me as being like a piece of music. Starting with the East Court, the borders are soft and calm, easing you in. On entering the Carolean Garden, the intensity of colour starts to build, gently at first, gradually more powerful until the final glorious crescendo, at which point we find ourselves on the Raised Terrace.

Leaving the double borders behind, the terrace is reached by a steep flight of brick steps. This raised walkway offers spectacular views back towards the house and into the parkland beyond, allowing all elements of the unique garden below to be on show, whilst still creating a sense of intimacy with its rich density of planting.

The terrace was built in stages, as an early plan from 1723 shows only a single wall, and was believed to be constructed in order to offer the views mentioned above. Photographs from the 19th century show narrow borders either side of the path, planted with standard roses and bedding. In Graham Baron Ash's time, the raised walkway was used as a stage for outdoor theatre performances, the audience sitting on the lawn below in a section of the Carolean Garden.

Bedding plants definitely have their uses, but are very labour intensive, and use a significant amount of resources in their production which has an impact on sustainability. By using a higher number of herbaceous perennial plants, we can create a more sustainable display year on year that can be adapted and tweaked as necessary. We use a lot of tender perennial plants in this border, which gives it a particularly unique character. One of the most popular of these is the evergreen succulent *Aeonium 'Zwartkop'*.

With its deep purple black foliage, this stunning architectural plant is used in keeping with the 'mingled style,' repeated at intervals down the length of the entire terrace. We plant these out individually each year in early summer, as these beauties are not frost hardy. They stay out for the duration of the warmer months before retreating back to our nursery for winter. They are then potted up and kept reasonably dry, with cuttings taken to replenish our stock as necessary.

The structure is also emphasised with other key plants, including *Ricinus communis 'Impala'*, *Euphorbia mellifera* and *Solanum laciniatum*. These structural elements are underplanted with a range of perennials in rich, hot colours, again in singles or small groups. Fuchsias, *Linum grandiflorum* and calendulas create a lower tier of colour, which rises to meet the rich glowing blues of *Salvia patens 'Guanajuato.'* The purple petals from *Tibouchina urvilleana*, (a native of Brazil) seem to shimmer when the sunlight catches them, before the eye is drawn ever upwards to the towering splendour of *Salvia confertiflora* and its flame coloured flower spikes.

Using these tender plants is a nod to the historic use of bedding in Baron Ash's time, whilst allowing for a more sustainable, longer term approach that extends the season of interest into early autumn. The hot colours echo the richness of the copper beeches that can be seen in the parkland just over the garden wall, tying in the wider landscape with the more intimate space of the terrace.

From this sumptuous conclusion to the symphony, our eye is drawn to another beautiful wrought iron gate. Beyond this is an oasis of green, a collection of mysterious shapes that soothe the eye, but intrigue the mind...