

## GARDEN NEWS

# GIFTS OF NATURE

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HEAD GARDENER

**T**he Michaelmas daisies seem incredibly early this year, while I and some of our dahlias are still waiting for summer, and by now I guess it isn't going to come, because the first signs of autumn are already here. Many of our plants have started to complete their life-cycle by setting seeds, and a lot of these seed heads can be attractive architectural features; sturdy enough to last the winter in a border or as decorative items for the home, a substitute for cut flowers, which the garden is rather short of during this dormant season.

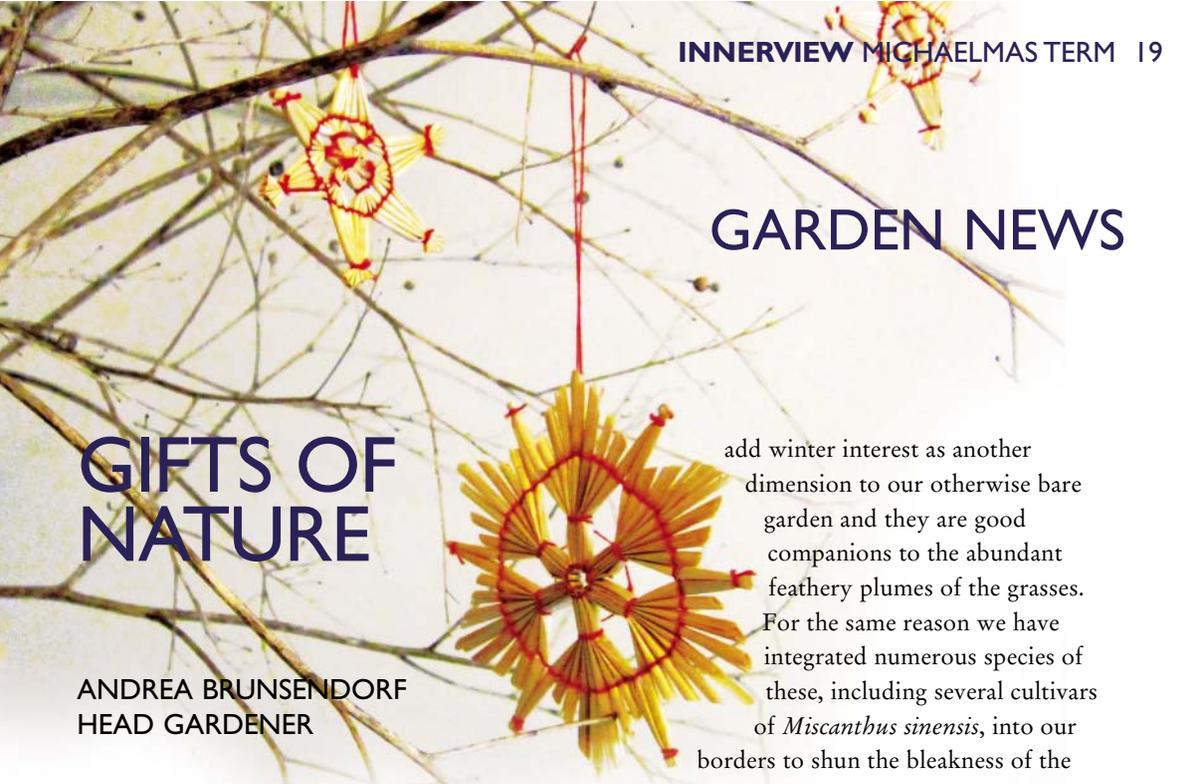
In the autumn, one of our maintenance tasks is to cut down the perennials, but over the years we have become more selective and have started to leave many plants alone, like *Aster umbellatus*, *Vernonia crinata* 'Mammoth' (Ironweed) or clumps of cardoons until their floral structures have finally weathered away at the end of winter. There are other flowers that develop striking seed heads, like the round papery seed pods of the annual honesty that shimmer like silver coins in the evening sun, which might explain how it came by its common name 'Judas coin', or the spiky stems and cones of teasels that turn gold in the low light. I bring dozens of the latter inside, as I love the beautiful shadows and shapes they throw on the wall of my living room on a clear winter's day. All these seed heads don't just provide a food source for our overwintering birds, they also

add winter interest as another dimension to our otherwise bare garden and they are good companions to the abundant feathery plumes of the grasses. For the same reason we have integrated numerous species of these, including several cultivars of *Miscanthus sinensis*, into our borders to shun the bleakness of the wintry weather. Another grass that is worth a mention is *Chasmanthium latifolium*, or wood oats, whose pendant panicles and bronze spikelets form an intricate feature outside or inside during the winter months. I still have its dried flower stems from last year arching over my mantel-piece.

Besides all these perennials, which are widely used in natural planting schemes for their architectural stature and their benefits to wildlife during the latent time of the year, I have come to appreciate the versatility of *Crambe cordifolia* (sea kale), sometimes found in the formal settings of a rose garden, or like ours in the Peony Garden as part of a looser design. I've discovered that the 2x2 metre flowering structure, in summer covered by a frothy mass of foam-like flowers, makes an excellent and lightweight alternative to a bulky Christmas tree. I decorate the fragile branchlets of the stalks with the simple straw stars of my childhood, while the more robust branches will bear the weight of such things as the small, beautifully-painted wooden eggs from

Easter, or angels made of marzipan and chocolate coins.

A garden doesn't have to be bleak in the winter: there is plenty of scope to dress it with architecturally interesting seed structures, which can also provide a cornucopia of shape and form to bring the beauty of this season right into your own home until spring can again provide the splendour of fresh green and nascent colour.



BRIEF LIVES OF THE MASTERS WHO  
MOST INFLUENCED THE EVOLUTION  
OF THE GREAT GARDEN

## THE FIRST MASTER

BY HILARY HALE

AUTHOR OF *THE GREAT GARDEN:  
A HISTORY OF THE INNER TEMPLE GARDEN  
FROM THE 12TH TO THE 21ST CENTURY*

**A**fter the completion of the river embankment in 1771 it took a long time to turn the greatly increased area into anything resembling a garden. Not only was there detritus to be removed from the massive engineering work, but the Society's awkward neighbours who occupied Whitefriars wharf had knocked down most of the eastern wall and had to be sued for the cost of its repairs. For some years the gardener, Mr Allen, spent more time as a hard landscaper, removing rubble and rubbish than as a horticulturalist, but was eventually able to level the reclaimed land in line with the original garden, lay gravel paths and establish a lawn of Dutch clover. When he had done so, it was decided that the supervision of the Garden needed more attention than the Treasurer could give it and in 1782 two Masters of the Bench, the Hon Daines Barrington and Arthur Annesley, were selected as 'Superintendents of the Garden'. From Bench Table Orders and contemporary accounts it appears that Daines Barrington undertook this duty more assiduously than his colleague.

Barrington (1727-1800), the fourth son of the first Viscount Barrington, had the advantage of family connections in the Pelham administration and by the age of thirty was appointed justice of Merioneth, Carnarvon and Angelsey. After becoming K.C. and recorder of Bristol, he was appointed Justice of Chester. Although his friends declared that it was only lack of ambition which prevented him from rising higher in the judiciary, Bentham, while admiring his intellect, was not so generous about his legal capabilities, describing him as 'not *intentionally* a bad judge, though he was often a bad one'. Nowadays, however, he is probably best remembered as an antiquary and naturalist, both distracting interests which may better explain his early retirement from the law rather than his want of ambition.

He was an active member of the Society of Antiquaries, and his inquiring mind can be well



*Daines Barrington*

illustrated by the variety of subjects on which he wrote – Arctic exploration, musical prodigies, the language of birds, archery, the Cornish language – although his theories were sometimes mistaken (at one point stating that the Medway was in fact the Thames), attracting Horace Walpole's ridicule and considerable correspondence in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. He was a friend and correspondent with many notables of his age, from Sir Joseph Banks and Bishop Percy to Johnson and Boswell, and he is justly credited with being the driving force behind Gilbert White writing the *Natural History of Selbourne*.

He spent much of his long retirement in his rooms at 6 King's Bench Walk and bringing his knowledge and interest in the natural world to the newly-planted Great Garden. Such was his devotion to the garden that, despairing of the damage done to many of its plants by flocks of sparrows, he paid Mr Allen £1 to poison them. This uncharacteristically cruel act would have gone unrecorded had the Bench not refused his claim to recoup the cost, an episode gleefully narrated by Charles Lamb. Despite this touch of parsimony, Barrington was a generous and competent Master of the Garden, whose care of it has been a standard for all his successors.