

GARDEN NEWS

MARGINAL GAINS

BY ANDREA BRUNSENDORF, HEAD GARDENER
AND AMANDA DENNIS, GARDENER



Aspirations are always running high at the beginning of each gardening year due to the excitement of the new season and the desire to build on the previous years' successes. We take great pride in managing our resources as efficiently as possible to maintain and develop the Garden, and its floral displays, to create the maximum enjoyment for our garden visitors. A beautiful garden right on the door step of many offices provides a breathing space away from the desk and this change of scenery creates space for reflection, de-stressing and (as the theory goes) should help to increase your productivity and well-being at work.

Back inside the offices the Inn's staff kicked off the year with an inspiring management training course, where we were introduced to many useful ideas, one of which was David Brailsford's 'marginal gains' theory. In this theory, each team member is responsible for making small tweaks to their day-to day jobs,

which will create a 'marginal' improvement and once you add all those small improvements together they make big difference. This individual empowerment influences not just efficiency, but it also helps to create a positive environment and greater team spirit.

We have been thinking about how to integrate this into our day to day work in the Garden and so far have identified a few areas where we can apply this, as follows:

We booked the service for all our garden machinery well in advance of the upcoming mowing season and made use of the sales offer on reduced servicing costs. We were very pleased with ourselves that we were ready to go, particularly as the mowing seasons started so early this year due to the very mild weather. However that sense of achievement on this improvement was somewhat short lived, when our just serviced mower went out on its maiden voyage and we came into some

CONTINUED OVERLEAF

GARDEN NEWS

CONTINUED FROM OVERLEAF

alignment troubles with our grass collection box. As they say, every dark cloud has a silver lining, and ours was that we still had enough time to recall the mechanic for some additional fine-tuning. And now we are ready to go!

Our other venture with machinery was to take our tractor on a rough ride along the Broadwalk under the Plane Tree Avenue. Our *Liriope muscari* under-planting in this area has reached maturity in its eight years since planting and now requires cutting. This is a common practice in Japan, where they are used as a lawn alternative and mown regularly, which is where their common name turf lily originates from. Cutting our 13,500 turf lilies was not something we wanted to face doing by hand and instead decided to use the mulch deck of our tractor, which cuts and chops up the clippings, so they can then be retained as green mulch. Keeping the clippings in this way contributes to a more holistic garden approach, reducing green waste whilst also improving the soil which the plants are growing in. This method fits well with another Japanese practice established by Masanobu Fukuoka, which deals with natural farming and permaculture ideas. His books are a very interesting read and they challenge the sometimes too clinical and too

perfectly tidy image of a garden, which is quite unnatural. The more natural look can sometimes be a bit too hard for us to swallow, especially in this very traditional environment. Therefore we decided to go with the best of both worlds' leaving 'Japanese' clippings in situ and then covering them with an attractive layer of classic 'British' fine, well-rooted horse manure. We spread 37 tonnes over 910 square meters in homage to Henry Ford's assembly lines.

Continuing on the perfectly tidy theme, a little sign now adorns the door to the Gardeners' mess room which politely requests the scraping of work boots before entering. This reduces our Friday afternoon hoovering sessions of the floors by at least 5 minutes (!) and satisfies those who would otherwise desire a daily sweep during the muddy season.

As any good management trainer will tell you most of the learning does not happen on the day of the course, but occurs as you try to put into practice your day-to-day work life. Spring always does inspire new concepts, notions and philosophies and the garden team is chuffed with the results so far and motivated to find further 'marginal gains' as the seasons roll out.

