



Single, early tulips, Purissima and 'Exotic Emperor' along King's Bench Walk

GARDEN NEWS TIP-TOE THROUGH THE TULIPS

BY ANDREA BRUNSENDORF HEAD GARDENER

In very timely fashion with the busiest garden season of the year approaching, the Inn was hosting another staff training course on 'Prioritising and Managing your Time', a topic that always challenges the Garden Team as soon as the tulip displays are flowering in mid-spring. Not that the tulip display itself is the challenge, but the symbolism of it in garden maintenance terms is somewhat alarming for the gardener.

With the first tulips out we should have mulched all the flower borders, supported all perennials with woven pea-stick cages and thinned-out the self-seeders, such as poppy 'Lauren's Grape' and *Smyrniun perfoliatum* (Great Alexander), because the borders are quite difficult to access, i.e. to tip-toe through, when the tulips are in full swing. Simple jobs such as this become unnecessarily tough, particularly on the tulips as they might accidentally lose their heads when kicked with a pea-stick, long-handled fork or a foot. You might have noticed on your recent walk through the Garden, admiring our tulips, that some of these jobs have not yet been completed. Now knowing about our access issues during the tulip season, you might think that we mis-prioritised our jobs this spring and, if I am honest, lately I have caught myself thinking this once or twice when working amongst the tulips on the High Border.

However, reflecting on our achievements in the late winter and early spring, we decided to prioritise a number of jobs on our list. At the top was the re-edging and mulching of our tree circles, a job that has to be done whilst the tree root zones are still moist from all the winter rains, the temperatures are low hindering the germination of unwanted weeds and of course before the daffodils are in full bloom, since it is much harder to work around them than tulips. This demonstrates a key element of good time management; doing a job at the right time and in the right way which is the most efficient and effective way of working; a simple concept which is so often hard to put into practice.

Sometimes the job list can be so overwhelmingly long that it can be difficult to distinguish between urgent and important jobs. I have discovered an obvious tool; I just ask myself and the team what are the consequences if we don't do this job right now. This simple reflective exercise means our weekly and monthly job list falls into place much better and is more achievable. For example, back in February, I chose to focus on the recruitment of our new trainee gardener, Emily Blackmore, and our new part-time position of Garden Administrator/Seasonal Gardener, Pamela Gent, instead of pea-staking perennials in the High Border. We figured that it was more urgent to have two new team members in place

for April, the beginning of our busiest season, than staking asters and geranium in February, just because that is the traditional time to do it. The asters and geraniums are very understanding, since they are still at ground level and with little need of support yet. Besides, now with two new team members we can easily share and delegate our workload much better, even if it means we have got to tip-toe through the tulips.

Of course, one should always aim to be proactive with the planning of garden tasks so that you don't end up in the 'fire-fighting' position where jobs are both urgent and very important. It is such an unsatisfying way of working, especially when there is so much to appreciate about being a Gardener at this time of year. A useful method to minimise this slightly panicked state is to schedule, schedule and schedule! Garden jobs such as spot weeding the long grass areas, watering the containerised laurels outside the Pegasus Bar or applying bi-weekly pond water treatments, are now reoccurring activities in our diary. These jobs that do not completely preoccupy my mind also give me some creative thinking time where I can mentally map out a vision for the Garden or plan the Garden's 5-year budget plan, which also gets its own allocated time slot from now on to avoid late nights over Excel spreadsheets!

So, in being more aware of working efficiently and effectively, we hope to deliver ever improving garden displays. Doing tasks the right way, at the right time mean that our high horticultural aspirations can be attained. As our daily objectives are continuously shuffled and re-ordered we hope not to decapitate too many tulips and that the calmness of the garden is reflected in the Team. Over the coming months, I hope that you enjoy the fruits of our labour, whether they have been realised through planned, prioritised, scheduled, delegated, or fire-fought actions.

*Footnote for the gardening enthusiast: This year has been a very poor year for tulips, because the winter was too mild and wet, therefore the more fancy tulips have succumbed to fungal disease and stunted growth. If you stuck to simple, single, early or late flowering tulips, like Purissima, Exotic Emperor or Dordogne, you would have been in for a treat. Those tulips really thrived in the cool early spring weather, particularly along King's Bench Walk and the High Border.

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