

# GARDEN NEWS HOPES FOR HIGH BORDER

ANDREA BRUNSENDORF, HEAD GARDENER

**S**ince I arrived at the Inner Temple Gardens 15 months ago we have been working hard on creating one of the most interesting and colourful gardens in central London. The main showpiece is the High Border. We have re-designed it to create a lengthy season of colour, beginning in March with the first snowdrops and tulips, through the fertile summer months, until late November with the last of the herbaceous plants and annuals. To achieve this we have used a mixture of perennials, shrubs, annuals, climbers and bulbs. All have been carefully placed in combinations, so that each plant complements the other. We have deliberately picked bright, strong colours, as pastel shades are lost against the backdrop of the surrounding brick buildings. This has been a challenge because there is a fine line between breathtakingly striking colour combinations,

and a shocking garish mess. One of my favourite combinations is *Dahlia* 'Bishop of Landalff' (red with dark bronze foliage), *Calamagrostis* 'Overdam' (golden brown inflorescences), *Helenium* 'Wesergold' (clear yellow flower with a brown centre) and *Aster x frikartii* 'Moench' (sky blue with a yellow centre).

To enhance the extended season in the High Border we have planted annuals among the hybrid tea roses in the beds on the other side of the path to fill them with colour once the roses are past their best. One of the star performers here has been the wonderfully named 'Kiss me over the gate' (*Persicaria orientalis*). This tall arching plant, with its deep pink flowers in long tassels, makes a striking show against the pale yellow of the sunflowers 'Vanilla Ice' and 'Valentine'.

It has been hard work to revive the High Border. Many of the existing plants were tired and over-grown, and the soil needed much improvement. We were able to split and move some plants to more appropriate sites in the garden, and once the border was relatively clear we dug in about twenty tonnes of composted horse manure before any replanting was done, and as we put in new plants we added even more organic matter in the form of mulch. Although we are pleased with the results we have achieved in a short time, there is plenty of room for improvement: we have many notes on what hasn't worked and many ideas to embellish what has succeeded. As well as putting those into practice now, and during the coming autumn and spring, the work in the High Border never finishes: we are still staking plants to protect them from collapsing in the high winds, dead-heading regularly to give longevity to the flowering season and weeding, always weeding...

I hope the beauty of the High Border has gone a little way to cheer you on the many dull days we've experienced this summer.



# GARDEN NEWS

## THE MYTH OF THE MAGNOLIA

HILARY HALE, GARDEN VOLUNTEER



**F**or the past several years in the Inner Temple, Masters and gardeners alike, have proudly shown off this tree. ‘It is a *Magnolia salicifolia*,’ they proclaimed, ‘Over two hundred years old – the largest specimen in the British Isles.’ Listeners nodded in awed appreciation, noting these details, repeating them in newspaper features and learned journals.

Then in July this year, Jim Gardiner, Curator of RHS Wisley (and a renowned Magnolia expert), came to visit the garden and in an innocent manner – reminiscent of the small boy identifying the Emperor’s new clothes as nakedness – correctly identified it as a *Magnolia x kewensis*, in all likelihood no more than fifty years old.

The Inner Temple blushed in uniformed embarrassment.

He also confirmed an obvious fact, that the tree is not well. ‘Killed kindly,’ he said,

blaming dry, hot summers without the right sort of nourishment. He approved of its new layer of mulch – a mixture of composted manure and seasoned woodchips which is replenished every six months. There are now signs of new root growth, and it is possible that severely reducing its crown to conserve its energy output would also help. This would be a drastic action, rendering it unsightly and one which would in no way guarantee its survival. It has been decided to wait for a season or two in the hope that nature will nurse it to full health before risking such action.

Meanwhile, the RHS has most generously given the Inner Temple Garden a *Magnolia x kewensis* ‘Wada’s Memory’ to mark both the quatercentenary of the Inn’s Charter and the RHS’s 2008 Floral Celebration. It is hoped that the glory of this original tree can be restored, but whatever happens it is fervently wished that in 2208 the new ‘Wada’s Memory’ will be in robust bloom – and correctly identified.