

NEWS FROM THE GARDEN

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The Copenhagen Summit has filled the newspapers with relentless doom laden prophecies of the effect of climate change. At the same time the celebrations marking the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* reminds us that we are where we are in the 21st century as a result of evolution, some of it 'natural', much man-made.

However, let's be more optimistic about the future than the media and a good place to start is in the Garden. After the mild autumn, the soil temperature is well above 7°C, which means we can still plant bulbs and spring bedding until the middle of January, and we can leave the tender plants in the ground for much longer. The majority of our tender species are in the Mediterranean border, which is far enough away from the buildings to avoid the wind tunnel effect and the slope enables the loamy soil to drain freely. I hope you have enjoyed the fabulous display of colour this autumn; the striking *Salvia confertiflora* from Brazil with red flower spikes, the Mexican *Salvia leucantha*, awash with extraordinarily fuzzy white-purple flowers, and the South African *Leonotis leonurus*, vibrant with orange whirls, which with luck will still be in flower in the New Year. We could gamble that the winter will be mild, but as an insurance policy against the

risk of a hard February frost, we will lift them before the end of January.

Last winter, I purposely did not take out *Salvia uliginosa*, *Salvia guaranitica*, *Salvia 'Indigo Spire'*, they all proved hardy, so this year I shall test the robustness of various species from Brazil, Mexico, the Canary Islands and South Africa. I suspect they will survive the cold, but the English wet may prove their downfall. Three hundred years ago, when the pubescent media warned of a new ice age, the Salvias would have withered long before the Thames froze at the edge of the Garden and London's citizens took to the ice at the Frost Fairs.

All of this means that the effect of climate change on the Inner Temple Garden enables us to grow a wider variety of plants over a longer period, but the most spectacular outcome is the flowering of our *Dahlia imperialis* in the High Border. It originates from Central America, is a 4.5m tree-dahlia with thick bamboo-like stems, and we are probably the only garden in the country to have it flowering out of doors. As they say in football – 'result'!

