

November 2024



## *So, what are we up to now?*

It is only 6 weeks since our last plant fair of the season but it seems like much longer.

Regular readers will know this is far from a slack time as there is all the maintenance and nursery husbandry work all lined up waiting for us to finish the retail side of the season. And, it's not all work as David and I escaped for a holiday too – more on that later...



## *Hard landscaping*

After a dismal winter last year, which stopped us doing anything on the land after early October, we have our fingers crossed for better conditions this year so we can get back into all the hard landscaping we still need to do.

We have made a start by taking down the cherry trees in the orchard. The photo above is the view from my loft room at home, looking out over the back of my garden to the nursery. I haven't been able to see the tunnels for years, let alone the fields beyond.

Taking down the cherries was not something we really wanted to do as they were the first trees we planted at the nursery back in the late 1970s. However, they had never really performed as they should and had become too dominant in the landscape. Removing them has opened up the orchard to allow more light into the area and give more space for the remaining trees to flourish. No doubt we will plant a few replacements in the future but for now we plan to allow the earth to recover.

The self-seeded oak in the centre of the photo now has room to breathe and looks beautiful, as does the Liquid Amber over on the far right at the end of the bungalow – glorious autumnal colours. You can just see the top of the coral bark acer I planted in my garden nearly 30 years ago in the foreground – it glows at this time of year.

Once we have finished this we will be moving our attention to the north field and reservoir so we can finish clearing the area for the fencing and more.

## *New product alert*

[Slug Stoppa](#) has been awarded product of the year at Glee 2024. Manufactured by Ecoeffective, this is a plant spray that deters slugs and snails. Therefore, my main criticism, yet again, is that it doesn't solve the problem of a pest over population. At some point we do need to intervene to control the numbers rather than allowing them to simply keep breeding. I guess, if you cut off their food supply, it might have a longer-term positive impact on numbers but I remain sceptical.

Also, I don't like spraying anything onto hosta leaves as I worry it could do more harm than good. For instance, could the application of a barrier layer affect photosynthesis and the natural transpiration of moisture? This is something I

### **Routine nursery maintenance**

Meanwhile, Roy has fixed a tear in the cover of tunnel 2, which required a lot of stitching. He has done a really neat job and at least now we have net covers, patching is possible. We would have had to buy a whole new tunnel cover had we still been using polythene. Given the very windy conditions we seem to be suffering more of, it will probably be part of the routine maintenance of the tunnels but it is worth it for the difference having the net has made to the plants.

We have all been tackling the removal of dead leaves, unplugging water trays and removing pots sitting in non-draining water trays. This has been heavy work this year due to the weight of the pots after the persistent rain we have had in recent months. However, it won't take long for them all to drain so they should be at a good moisture level for when the frosts start in earnest. Every year our composting area looks a riot of colour as we dump all the dead leaves.

### **Time off**

As I mentioned at the head of the newsletter, David and I escaped on holiday last month. We explored the Isle of Mull with friends, something we had been planning for a while in the hope of seeing sea otters, sea eagles and golden eagles. We weren't disappointed either and the added benefit of a friend with a high powered scope we could train on the sights made the experience something I won't forget in a hurry.

### **Benmore Botanic Garden**



On our way home we had decided to spend a day at the [Benmore Botanic Gardens](#) near Dunnoon, Argyll. Wow, what a place. David and I last travelled that way over 30 years ago and promised ourselves we would visit – talk about taking our time. It was worth the wait as it is now firmly fixed as one of my favourite places to visit and I cannot recommend it enough. We walked for miles along the many well marked pathways and probably only scratched the surface of everything there. The garden is divided into sections featuring a Chilean area and one focussed on Himalayan plants.

The photo overleaf is from one of the highest spots in the garden.

have tried to research and it appears little has been done in this area, probably because commercial realities force researchers to focus more on food crop protection rather than on pest damage to ornamental plants.

If any of you decide to give it a go, please do report back your experiences and I would be happy to share them through the newsletter.

Newsletter reader Angela Colbridge has also reminded me about [Strulch](#), which is a product that has been around a while. It is mineral enhanced straw used as a mulch – hence the name. Thank you Angela.

Mulching is a great way to gently introduce nutrients to your soil so might be worth a go without risking anything other than a hole in your wallet if you have a large area to treat.

### *The glory of autumn*

Scattered throughout the newsletter this month are photos from our trip to Benmore Botanic Garden. The stunning Redwood Avenue, planted at the bottom of the garden, near the entrance:



The garden has been created on steep slopes, which adds



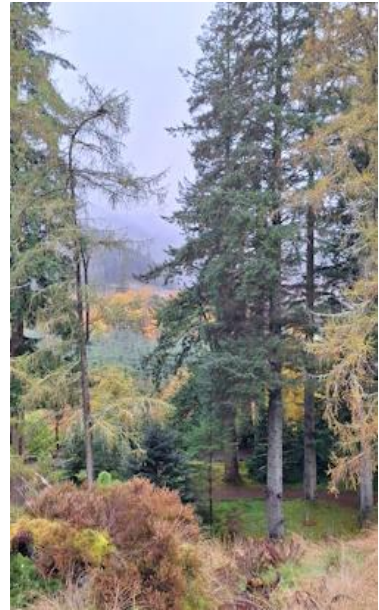
On a completely overcast day, the mossy undergrowth simply glows. I love moss for so many reasons and there is lots of it at Benmore:



The Benmore Fernery was established in 1870 but fell into disrepair as ferns went out of fashion. It was restored and opened again in 2009:



enormously to the sense of drama everywhere you look and the trees soar into the sky:



Benmore is a tree-lover's paradise, especially in the

The Japanese garden area centres around a large pond and the colours were stunning despite the hostas having gone over, the golds of the dead leaves added to the colour palette.



Yet another acer demanding attention:



I took a huge number of photos and despite the horrendous weather the rest of the country was suffering that day, the sheltered position of the garden protected us from the worse of the wind and rain. Normally you would be able to see the mountain and forest backdrops to the garden at numerous viewpoints but the mist and rain hid a lot of it making the experience feel much more about the garden itself. It takes a lot of effort to maintain such a resource and there was a lot of clearance and regeneration evident – it is a working garden and the care and attention it is receiving is a real credit to all involved. We loved it so thought we would share as many photos as possible in this newsletter. I hope you have enjoyed them.

Next month we will report on further progress of our landscaping work.  
Speak soon,

Team Mickfield Hostas

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autumn. But the spring show of rhododendrons must be spectacular as there are long avenues planted all over the garden. We will definitely need to return at the right time of year to capture this display.

A magnificent *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* had a dramatically twisted branch:



Not only was it twisted, it was completely flat on the side nearest the tree - very unusual:

