

Spring/summer 2013

This will be my first summer at Eastwoodhill, and my first in New Zealand, both of which I'm looking forward to. It's an exciting time to be joining the team at Eastwoodhill, having successfully celebrated the first 100 years, and now pushing forward for the next century. As the curator, you can't help but feel the responsibility of former custodians of this extraordinary collection of plants bearing down on you. Looking at the collection with a fresh set of eyes, and with the completed master plan to help guide me, it's a challenge I'm looking forward to.

When you start a new job, there's always a lot of advice offered, and particularly when the collection you're looking after is such a prominent part of the local community. Much of what I've learnt so far has been extremely useful, and is helping to shape my understanding of the arboretum. One of the projects I've started, picking up from work already undertaken, is to try and find the really rare and unusual plants in the collections. We grow a number of specimens here that are almost unique, not only to Eastwoodhill, but to New Zealand. When these have been identified, it's a matter of developing ways to ensure that we can keep the germplasm going to ensure it still remains a part of the gardens, as well as fitting into the new geographical planting schemes.

I've been fortunate enough to work in some renowned gardens, but I have a feeling that I'm going to be learning a lot more here. Every day I go out for a walk in the arboretum, and there is not one of those days that I don't see a new flower, find a different route or familiarise myself with treasures that I haven't come across for a long time. This to me is one of the great joys of being a gardener, you never stop learning, from the plants that surround you, from your fellow gardener and chance meetings in the arboretum.

One of the things that truly amazes me about this place is the rate of growth some plants can achieve in a relatively short period. As I'm originally from the UK, we have had trees growing in our gardens for several hundred years, in some cases. Few of them manage to get out of the ground as fast as they can here. In some ways, this can be a maintenance nightmare, trying to keep up with this extreme growth, but in others, it means the collection can develop rapidly. As some of the trees reach maturity, and have to be removed, their replacements are fast catching up with them. Over the next few years, the collections will change at Eastwoodhill, particularly when we start to move more rapidly on the implementation of the master plan. I'm sure there will be sharp intakes of breath, but if you think that just over 100 years ago, this site was scrub, it's easy to see what can be achieved in a relatively short time. The sapling we plant over the winter will start to provide canopy in ten years time.

I look forward to meeting you as you come to visit the arboretum, and to learn from your experiences of this fantastic resource.

Benedict Lyte

CURATOR