

Press release: Enormous trees reinforce climate change message at Chelsea

The Resilience Garden at RHS Chelsea Flower Show has unveiled a sensational variety of plants and trees – including a giant redwood, monkey puzzle, prickly pear cactus, red yucca and ginkgo.

The centrepiece is a 6m grain silo, repurposed as the designer's studio with an oak floor and lined with a willow weaving by sculptor Tom Hare.

The garden, created by Sarah Eberle to mark 100 years of forestry in Britain, advocates that we need to increase tree cover, diversify planting and follow strict biosecurity guidelines to help protect our landscapes from climate change, pests and diseases.

Areas of the garden include woodland, dry and damp zones, a pond and wildflower meadow. The damp area displays butter and sugar iris and globe flower. Woodland plants include Canton fairy bells and Henry's lime, while the arid zone features aloe vera and Afghan fig. The meadow presents wildflowers including Californian poppies and common columbine.

The different habitats mimic existing and probable impacts of climate change in the UK, including drier summers and wetter winters. To create healthy landscapes, we need to plant trees and plants that are resilient to the pressures of a changing environment.

The project is inspired by visionary gardener William Robinson and initiated by the William Robinson Gravetye Charity. Robinson began championing a wilder and more natural approach to landscape design on his Gravetye Estate 150 years ago. This included experimenting with a huge variety of trees and plants both for beauty and, in the case of trees, for producing timber.

The Resilience Garden forms part of a year-long celebration of 100 years of forestry in Britain.

The Forestry Commission, established in 1919, is planting more diverse woodlands and trialling how different tree species fare in diverse climatic conditions. This includes sourcing seeds from two degrees south of a planting site, and experimenting with alternative species including Montpellier maple, red oak, Chinese mahogany, western red cedar and species of eucalyptus.

Designer Sarah Eberle said:

This garden is about bringing the big issues around climate change and biosecurity to the biggest stage. We want to inspire both debate and action to ensure our landscapes are healthy and full of life for generations to come.

Sir Harry Studholme, Chair of the Forestry Commission, said:

2019 is 100 years on from the visionary Forestry Act, which not only created the Forestry Commission but set in motion a century over which the forest area of Britain has more than doubled.

Our forests are now facing new threats such as climate change and tree disease. This garden is a partnership between parties who care very deeply about how we ensure our landscapes are resilient, now and in the future.

This is exactly the right time to be looking ahead and working together to ensure our landscapes are healthy for future generations.

Lord Gardiner, Defra Biosecurity Minister, said:

I applaud Sarah Eberle's inspiring vision which has culminated in an innovative and beautiful garden for this year's Chelsea Flower Show. As the Minister responsible for biosecurity, I wholly support the theme of resilience and I thank her for drawing attention to such an important issue.

We want to be the first generation to leave our environment in a better state than we found it, which is why we have invested more than £37million between 2012 and 2019 in tree health. We have launched the Tree Health Resilience Strategy, imposed movement restrictions on high risk plant species and continue to keep a close watch for any potential new threats.

I cannot think of a more fitting garden to celebrate the Forestry Commission's centenary and pay tribute to their invaluable work in helping to safeguard our beautiful trees.

The Resilience Garden is supported by the Kingscote Estate, Gravetye Manor Hotel & Restaurant, the Forestry Commission, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Defra, Scottish Forestry and the Scottish and Welsh governments. The Animal and Plant Health Agency, Observatree and Action Oak are project partners.