

November 2020



What an incredible first month it has been as an apprentice forest craftsman at Bedgebury Pinetum. I have learnt and experienced so much already; I still cannot quite believe I am here! Whilst Bedgebury has been getting ready for its well-known Christmas lights event, Sarah and I have been up to all sorts of new things!

Our first week consisted of meeting the Bedgebury team and, of course, a tour around the beautiful Pinetum and Forest. There was a tour of the nursery, where Sarah and I did our first tray of cuttings: *Thuja plicata* cultivars. It was so interesting to learn about what Emma's Nursery Supervisor job



entails; Emma clearly demonstrates the passion she has for her work. We then completed our first course on the use of woodchippers. We learnt how the machine works and how to correctly use and maintain them. The week ended with me planting my first trees *Rhododendron arborescens*; ('rhodo' means rose and 'dendron' means tree), right next to Marshal's lake, where the sun was shining throughout the day leaving a stunning reflection.



We were then off to Thetford Forest the following week. This consisted of an introduction to Forestry England and the apprentice scheme and we also met the five Thetford apprentices. Whilst away, we learnt all about the importance of manual handling and health and safety, leading to the completion of our first aid and forestry first aid training, at the end of the week. While there we also gained

experience of a day's planting, which is very different to planting at Bedgebury. Thetford, being the largest lowland pine forest in Britain, is focussed much more on the production of timber, whereas Bedgebury, being a Pinetum, is more about the conservation of trees. Thetford aims to plant thousands of trees each day during the planting season. They do this by slicing the soil, placing the specimen into the ground and then firming around the stem. Tubing the specimen is sometimes necessary to protect them from deer. Bedgebury's planting involves digging a rectangular hole, three times the size of the pot, adding fertilizer and placing the specimen into the ground, then filling and firming around the stem and adding mulch. We create a tree cage around the specimen with six stakes and chicken wire. The length of the stakes and chicken wire vary depending on whether we are creating a deer or rabbit cage.

Tractor training is what our next week involved - Sarah and I were very excited about that! The course involved learning not only, of course, how drive the tractor, but also how to attach, drive and tip a trailer, attach and use a variety of front loader attachments such as a bucket and grabber and how to attach machinery to the back using a three-point linkage. We also learnt all about the maintenance that is



involved. We undertake something called PUWER (Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations) checks on all our work equipment and machinery, to ensure they are safe to use. There was a lot to remember and take in, but consolidating with Julian, our supervisor, the following week really increased our confidence. We also had the opportunity to use the tractor chipper for the first time. This was great as we consolidated what we had learnt from our woodchippers course during the first week.