

GEOFF STONEBANKS

The Driftwood Garden Diary



Looking like snowballs in a heatwave!

This coming week in the city, we have a pop-up garden opening for the National Garden Scheme that is not in the Sussex booklet.

The wonderfully creative 33 Wivelsfield Road in Saltdean, BN2 7BX, will open its garden gate to the Downs on Friday, August 7 from 11am to 5pm. Created in 2016, this three-level coastal garden was landscaped in 2017 and planted with colourful perennials, annuals, grasses and succulents in beds and containers. A formal garden leads into a one-acre wildflower meadow with spectacular ocean and South Downs views. It was updated in 2023, with the re-landscaped front gravel garden, and 2026, with the expansion of the central beds, new greenhouse and planting troughs. Visitors can relax in the meadow with tea and home-made cake and take home one of the many plants for sale, including many aconitums.

Additionally, there will be hand-craft sales by "From Brighton with Love". Owners Chris and Steve tell me one of the stand-out plants on show will be cosmos 'Polidor' which has been home-grown and looks fabulous in both their containers and the flower beds at the moment.

Also open this weekend is a trail of three gardens in Mayfield.

Full details on them and the Saltdean garden at www.ngs.org.uk

This is the final weekend for my own garden. We will close the garden gate on Sunday until 2027. Sadly, we have not been as busy as usual, mainly due to the hot weather, with quite a few visitors cancelling due to the excessive heat! If you want to squeeze in a visit on August 1 or 2, email vis@driftwood.co.uk. More on our overall results in a couple of weeks.

Looking good in my garden, despite the heat, are two hydrangeas including the stunning blooms of Annabelle. One of the loveliest hydrangeas, it has huge globes of tightly packed, creamy white bracts that look like giant snowballs in late summer. As autumn progresses, the flowerheads fade to pale lime and the dark green, pointed leaves turn soft yellow. The plant has an upright habit and makes a breathtaking feature in a wide, partly shady border, particularly when planted in groups or with other hydrangeas. The flowerheads are a popular choice for dried flower arrangements too. These beautiful flowers are heavy which means the stems on young plants can struggle to support the weight. The stems will strengthen as the plant matures but in the early years it is best to use plant supports. Mine are planted against the old railway sleeper wall.

The other is a relatively new plant, *Hydrangea paniculata* 'groundbreaker blush'. It is ideal for those hydrangea lovers who have smaller spaces for which the larger varieties are too overpowering. This dwarf shrub reaches a more petite height and a spread of around 40-50cm and is perfect for containers on balconies or patios as well as open ground. I have two, both in medium-sized containers at the back of the house. A wonderfully exuberant abundance of blooms emerges from July through to November, spreading floriferous joy wherever it grows. Its flowers are both pink and white in varying degrees, depending upon the maturity of the blooms. You can even cut stems for vases, making the most of this beauty inside your home too. It will benefit from either full sun or partial shade and is a fully hardy, deciduous shrub which will not



Geoff and Annabelle. Images: Geoff Stonebanks



Cosmos polidor at 33 Wivelsfield Rd

need any additional winter protection throughout the majority of the UK.

An old favourite in my beach garden is the *acanthus mollis* which has enormous, deeply lobed leaves that can grow up to 1m long, forming impressive clumps, from which tall flower

spikes emerge in late summer. These are clothed in white flowers, each with a hood-like purple bract, creating a two-tone effect. It is a vigorous perennial that has a striking architectural presence and the flowers can be used in both fresh and dried arrangements. This perennial dies

back to below ground level each year in autumn, then fresh new growth appears again in spring. It thrives best in dappled shade and although it will take full sun, the leaves may scorch.

One of the prettiest fuchsias in my garden is a hanging one that I've had for several years now, 'pink temptation'. It is a specific, popular variety of fuchsia plant known for its vibrant, bushy, trailing growth with unique single flowers featuring creamy white sepals, pink flush and reddish-orange blossoms, making it perfect for baskets and containers. It's a half-hardy, floriferous trailer that provides long-lasting summer colour, often used in hanging displays, as shown. Mine are all growing in large wall pots on a north-facing wall that I take down and protect undercover for the winter months.

■ Read more of Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk or follow both him and the garden on social media.



Acanthus mollis



Hydrangea 'groundbreaker blush'



Pink temptation