

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



The great gardens open across the county to visit this weekend

TODAY is the anniversary of beginning these full-page features!

The year has flown by and I've written 41,600 words and supplied 260 images over the year! We've seen in excess of 200 visitors so far this summer and there has been much tea and cake sold in the garden. Mostly served up by me unless we have a large group, then friends come in to help me. I'm very pleased to report that all the changes made last autumn have gone down well with all my regular visitors.

This weekend there are several gardens open across the county, with the National Garden Scheme that might be of interest to visit. In Eastbourne there are 2 brand new gardens to see, 50 Wannock Lane and 255 Kings Drive in Willingdon. Both open on Sunday 2nd July from 1pm to 5pm with a combined entry of £5. The former a west facing plot, 200ft x 55ft, with a wide selection of shrubs, herbaceous and perennials plus trees, the latter a ½ acre tropical paradise with lush jungle planting along with some unusual vibrant plants.

A regular, hot favourite, to visit is Town Place in Ketches Lane, Freshfield near Sheffield Park, also open tomorrow between 2 and 5pm, entry £8. A stunning 3-acre garden with a growing international reputation for the quality of its design, planting and gardening, set round a C17 Sussex farmhouse. The garden has over 400 roses with herbaceous borders, a herb garden, white garden and much more.

Back at Driftwood, visitors have much to see at this time of the year. Growing well, close to the shed, is a large clump of trifolium, part of the clover family. Also known as ruddy clover, it is a clump-forming, bushy perennial to 60cm tall and wide with blue-green leaves, comprising lance-shaped leaflets with tiny teeth and covered with silvery hairs. Flowers are held in pointed clusters up to 8cm long and open a dark red-purple from the bottom of the cluster. They grow best in any soil, in full sun. The pretty flower heads look

amazing as you can see.

Another favourite doing well, is Alstroemeria 'Indian Summer' or Peruvian Lily. This hardy perennial has pretty unique bronzed foliage with sunset-coloured blooms. More importantly it is very long flowering, from June right through to November or even later if no frost. It is perfect for borders, patio containers and as cut flowers too. Mine are growing well in a large border with other plants and looks good at the moment with the fused glass red hot pokers for sale at Driftwood by local artist, Annie McMullan. They are compact, with an upright habit, ensuring that stems are still a good length for cutting. Plant Peruvian Lilies in a sunny or semi shaded position in fertile, moist, well-drained soil. Alternatively, plant in patio containers in soil-based compost.

A plant I've had in the garden now since about 2008 is Erodium manescavii or Heron's bill.

This is excellent for placing at the front of a border, its pink, hardy geranium-like flowers are carried on long stems that shoot out, like fireworks, from a crown of deeply divided, mid-green leaves. Later each flower head turns into a pointed seed head. The flowers are produced continuously for many months. It is hardy to -10 degrees and more, the leaves die back in autumn and emerge again in spring. It is always best to tidy away the old foliage before the new leaves start to grow. It is very easy to grow, particularly in a poor soil. It should seed around too.

Thalictrums, or meadow rues, are prized for their airy growth habit, glaucous foliage and delicate flowers. When we moved to Seaford, back in 2004, I had not been aware of the plant and indeed, when it started appearing in the garden, initially believed it to be a weed, until I was quickly corrected by one who knew better!

They range in size from small alpine species to towering border perennials over 2m tall, but in general they can be grown in sun or shade, as long as the soil is moist. This isn't always the case,



so do check the growing requirements when buying.

Given the floaty nature of the flowers, thalictrums are well-suited to growing in herbaceous borders, bringing a relaxed, informal mood to your planting scheme. I believe mine to be Thalictrum minus, which is a perennial, clump-forming species with a wide native range including Europe, West Africa and Southeast Asia. It's well suited to being grown in a moist, well-drained soil in full sun or partial shade and looks great in the middle of a border. You can see how pretty it looks in the garden now.

Read more of Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk or book a visit this week to see it for yourself, call 01323 899296 to arrange.

