

# The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Lamium orvala



Bee watering stations



Angelica flower

## Hundreds have already signed up to visit... why not swing by?

**O**NE of my favourite plants in the garden has to be a beautiful fern. I've got a large planting of six big specimens outside the kitchen door, which you can see me with in the picture. They are perfect in containers too and are so reliable at creating a wonderful eye-catching feature. The two in large containers sit against the dark wood of the old railway sleepers and look quite elegant. The ones pictured were planted in my garden in North London and have now been at Driftwood for 20 years and are still going strong. They are so impressive, one minute there is nothing there, next these stunning fronds suddenly unfurl and emerge from the ground, all very dramatic.

Today, June 1, my garden gate is open for pre-booked visitors until July 31. I have already received more than 250 bookings and am sure many more will confirm as the weeks go by. You can find the garden in the National Garden Scheme's booklet and the BBC Gardeners' World 2 for 1 booklet too. If you have not visited before why not give it a go this summer, perhaps check out the 200 5-star reviews on Trip Advisor to sway your decision.

There are other gardens open for the National Garden Scheme this weekend too, notably Skyscape at 46 Ainsworth Avenue in Ovingdean. It is a 250ft south facing rear garden with great views of both the South Downs and the ocean. It is a great place to sit and have tea and cakes and dogs on leads are allowed too.

Tomorrow, June 2, there is a trail of four gardens in central Eastbourne, all within walking distance of each other, or via the Number 3 bus. Tickets and trail maps are available at each garden. They open from 1pm to 5pm with a combined entry of £7.

Also, tomorrow there are ten gardens opening as part of the Seaford gardens, however, this is not a walking trail. Combined entry is £9 and they all open from 11am to 5pm. Maps available at each garden, check the web site, [www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk) for all the details of each of the gardens opening in

both Eastbourne and Seaford.

I've finally found the perfect spot for the trio of bee drinking cups I was given for my birthday. They are in a small pot, containing a succulent, close to the shed, looking rather pretty as a sculptural set too. A plant I was given by a visitor several years ago now is angelica. Most ornamental angelicas are tall biennials with huge, domed umbelliferous flowerheads followed by delicate seed pods.

The ribbed, hollow stems are flushed pink and are traditionally candied for use in baking. As a plant, angelica makes a strong architectural statement, and works at the back of a border or in a wild part of the garden, alongside grasses and flowering perennials. All parts of angelica are highly aromatic and it has traditionally been used for medicinal as well as culinary purposes. What's more, it's good for wildlife planting as the flowers are attractive to pollinators and the seeds are eaten by birds. You can see the flower heads are starting to form on mine, which is actually growing in a container.

Yet another gift from a visitor is a lamium, commonly known as dead nettles which are an interesting group of plants that superficially resemble stinging nettles. In fact, they don't have any stinging ability and their resemblance to stinging nettles is to deter herbivores from eating them. Species can be annuals or perennials, with many valued for their ground cover abilities, pollinator-friendly flowers and preference of shady areas. Lamium orvala, the balm-leaved red deadnettle, is a handsome perennial species, with large, green, heart-shaped leaves. From mid-spring and into summer it produces pretty sage-like flowers that are a warm purple-pink colour. It has a clump-forming growth habit and is best grown in moist, well-drained soil in partial shade.

Growing in my beach garden, red valerian is a drought-tolerant herbaceous perennial that blooms all summer long and makes a good cut flower. Its sprays of small crimson, pink or white nectar-



Geoff with the ferns which are doing well

rich flowers are scented and attract bees, butterflies and other pollinators, in particular the fascinating humming-bird hawk moth. Red valerian is not the same as the herb known as common valerian. While red valerian has no toxic effects it also has no medicinal value, whereas the root of common valerian is used in herbal medicine.

It is best grown in full sun in an informal, dry or wildlife garden, on walls and banks. It will flower from early summer through until early autumn, and even later in milder areas. Fading flowers should be cut back to avoid self-seeding.

Read more of Geoff's garden at [www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk](http://www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk) or email [visitdriftwood@gmail.com](mailto:visitdriftwood@gmail.com) to arrange a visit before July 31



Valerian