

GEOFF STONEBANKS

The Driftwood Garden Diary



A unique perennial provides colour

WE'RE into shorter days and less time in the garden. Luckily, I've completed all I really need to do before winter proper sets in.

I can't believe that the fabulous *Digitalis Panther* is still flowering away. It is a striking, hardy perennial known for its unique and dramatic appearance. Often referred to as the "Panther Foxglove," it features tall spikes of pink flowers with speckled throats that create a beautiful contrast against its dark green foliage.

These blooms appear all summer long, attracting pollinators such as bees and butterflies. The flowers' rich colour and bold stature makes it a stand-out in mixed borders, woodland gardens, or shaded areas. It grows to about 60cm tall, preferring well-drained soil in sun or partial shade. Once established, it is relatively low maintenance, though it benefits from regular watering during very dry periods. The main stems are long gone but these flowers are still doing well on the secondary growth.

This is the time of year when the pretty dogwoods come into their own. *Cornus 'Baton Rouge'*, the one pictured in my garden, grows into a compact, rounded shrub or small tree that reaches a height of 1.5-2.5 meters and a spread of 1.5-2 meters. It has a dense, bushy form, with dark green leaves in summer that transform into brilliant reds and purples in the autumn. The showy white flowers are borne in large clusters, giving the plant a delicate, airy feel in the spring. The red stems, which persist throughout the year, add architectural interest and brightens the landscape, especially in winter when the tree is bare of leaves.

Right behind the house I have a cluster of containers with some pretty camellias. This week I have pulled them all out and tidied up all the dead foliage behind them and trimmed the dead branches from the shrubs. There are quite a few



Panther. Images: Geoff Stonebanks

buds on them which will look wonderful when they flower next year. These beautiful shrubs are a popular choice for gardeners looking to add a touch of elegance and colour to their outdoor space. They are evergreen shrubs that produce stunning, large, and often fragrant flowers in shades of white, pink, and red. They are perfect for adding a splash of colour to any garden, and they are also low maintenance and easy to care for. Best especially when planted in groups. All the leaves of the three containers of *hosta* beneath them have been removed now too as they had yellowed and died.

A really pretty grass in the garden is *Miscanthus Nepalensis* or Himalayan fairy grass. It is a deciduous ornamental grass to

1m in height with arching, linear green leaves from spring to autumn, often turning bronze in winter. It bears terminal panicles of pale-yellow spikelets in summer, forming into yellow seed-heads in autumn, finally turning brown-yellow in winter. Mine are planted up in a container at the top of the garden. They are drought resistant too but appreciate some protection though a harsh winter.

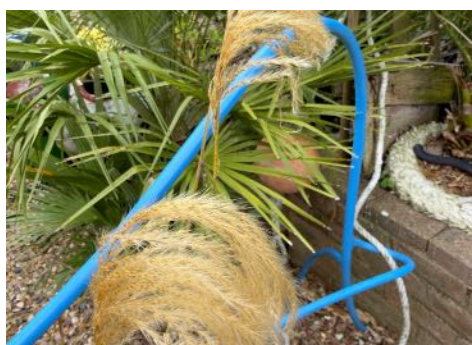
Right at the top of the garden, in a large gravel bed, I have a lovely "Torbay palm" or *Cordyline australis*. It produces fragrant, cream-colored flower heads in the summer as you can see from the image. These flower panicles emerge from the center of the plant and can lead to branching if the flower stem is removed after flower-

ing. The flowers are followed by white berries. Very tolerant of wind and coastal exposure, this palm can reach up to five metres tall in the right spot after many, many years! They are great for creating the effect of a tropical jungle garden. It is a great addition and adds its evergreen impact and architectural shape anywhere. The plant is tough and hardy too and forms an attractive plant with sword-shaped long green leaves from the top to the bottom of the stem, making for a most unusual looking specimen plant, over the years it forms a trunk.

There are only a few days now until Bonfire Night, with many readers probably celebrating the event tonight! How about planting something in the garden now that can explode like

fireworks next year? A great choice might be hydrangea "Fireworks". This is a Lacecap and is a fairly exceptional, pure white hydrangea that has double star-shaped florets, just like exploding fireworks. They are very easy to grow! Anyone and everyone can grow them and they will tolerate most soils and nearly all are very hardy. They will tolerate full sun or full shade but, as a general rule of thumb, some shade is particularly helpful especially for white hydrangeas, so why not give one a go and get ready for an explosion in 2026.

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



Nepalensis



Geoff and Flowering Palm



Camellia Corner



Dogwood