

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



An apple tree at Driftwood



Geoff's Cox's Orange Pippin



Grapes at Driftwood

Bumper apple crop means lots of pies and crumbles this winter

WHEN we moved to Driftwood, back in 2004, there were three fruit trees in the garden, an unknown large apple tree right at the top, near the studio, along with two pear trees, which I believe were Conference pears.

When creating the current garden layout, the smaller of the two pear trees had to go.

Over the years I have also planted a fig tree, a Cox's Orange Pippin tree and two grape vines.

This year seems to have been a good year for apples, both trees producing lots of fruit.

The pickings from the main tree tend to be quite tart and I always peel and poach the fruit, then freeze, to use in pies and crumbles through the winter months.

They always taste much better if some wild blackberries, picked from the many hedgerows close by on Tide Mills are added to the mix too.

I've never ever seen a squirrel in the garden in all the years we've lived here but only the other day, I was puzzled over what had been eating some of the larger apples on the tree.

It was obviously not birds from the size of the bites. Then, a lone squirrel dashed across the garden into the large conifer on the other side.

It is not possible to stop squirrels from entering a garden and it is usually necessary to accept and tolerate their presence or even appreciate their acrobatic antics, so I'm obviously going to have to get used to them if more appear.

The other problem with this tree is that it stands over our tortoise pen, so I need to try and ensure none are left to rain down on poor Hector below.

The small Cox's Orange Pippin has not produced much fruit in the past, it was planted in about 2013.

We've probably picked over 25 apples from it this year and have found them slightly tart, so I may have picked a little bit early.

Gardens opening for the National Garden Scheme are getting a little thin on the ground now as all close for the winter months.

There are just a few remaining to mention through October, then it

will be a wait until the new year, when the early openers begin with snowdrop and hellebore gardens, from late January.

This weekend, visit High Beeches Woodland and Water Garden in Handcross, near Haywards Heath. It's open, tomorrow, October 2, from 1pm through until 5pm. Entry is £9 with children free.

There are 25 acres of enchanting landscaped woodland and water gardens, full of glorious autumn colours.

Also open on October 4 is Peelers Retreat at 70 Ford Road in Arundel, from 2pm to 5pm with entry £5. This inspirational garden is a delight and has a flare for the unusual and interlocking beds packed with year-round interest.

Full details on both gardens can be found at www.ngs.org.uk

Other fruit in my garden are grapes and figs.

The former is not really suitable for eating as they are very small and contain pips.

To be honest, we were given the vine and I grew it along the side of the shed, primarily to conceal and soften its impact on the garden.

I have to confess to having a go at making grape jelly one year but the sheer frustration of having to sieve out all the pips made the whole process rather tedious and one not to be repeated.

That said, the end product was quite tasty and made perfect small, additional Christmas gifts.

Now, I tend to leave the fruit for the birds.

The latter is a fig tree I purchased at an open garden, probably ten years or so ago now.

The tree started life in a small container and has now been in the ground for five or six years.

Figs are very fast growing and I need to keep control over it, so that it does not dominate the rear garden at Driftwood too much.

They can be kept small by pruning them, allowing them to be grown in the smallest of gardens. Do be mindful though that the sap of certain figs can be a skin irritant, so be sure to wear gloves when pruning.

Last year the tree was so large I had to cut it right back which has meant I have not seen as much fruit on it this summer, just a few small



Geoff picking apples

pieces.

After pruning the fruits will begin to grow on the new shoots, as mine are now.

They will be pea-sized by late summer, and will remain on the plant throughout the autumn and winter, as long as they are protected from frost.

Hopefully, these overwintered fruitlets will, when spring comes around again begin to grow and ripen.

Read more of Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk



Fig tree at Driftwood