

# The Driftwood Garden Diary

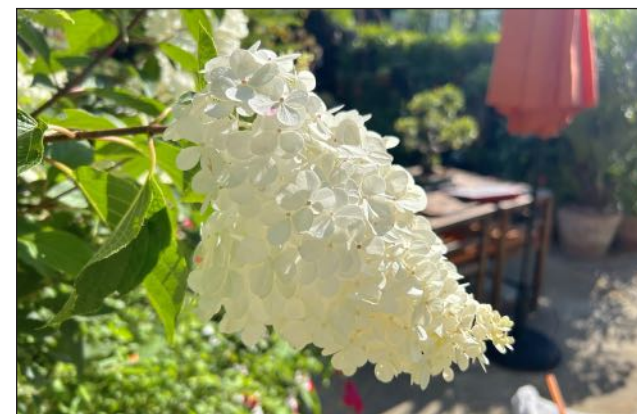
with Geoff Stonebanks



My clivia is producing some stunning orange flowers



Sea lavender is part of the leadwort family



Stunning flowers on hydrangea vanille fraise

## Some stunning summer blooms and a special shout-out to Pam!

**S**O, this weekend sees the final day visitors can book to see the garden in 2025. We've had a varied season, what with me coping with a new knee, which limited some of the things I could do around the garden, to extremes of weather, making life very difficult to keep it looking its very best for visitors. Thankfully, I think I just about managed it. We are so lucky to have a core of people returning every summer. Pictured are Pam, Pete, Pauline and Bob, who have been regular visitors to Driftwood for many years now, always bringing joy to the garden with their visits. What's more, Pam is a regular reader of this column every weekend too. Morning Pam!

In the back porch, a clivia that had been given to my mother by a friend who passed away a few years ago now, has been producing some stunning orange flowers, as you can see. Clivias are easy-care houseplants that bring bright exotic blooms to our homes through spring and summer. Their small, trumpet-shaped flowers, in various shades of yellow, orange and red, are held in large eye-catching clusters and stand on tall stems, above the long, arching, glossy leaves. They are tender plants and like filtered or indirect light, in a warm room or heated conservatory. Water regularly from spring to autumn and in winter, move to a cooler position and reduce watering, to prepare them for flowering.

Opening for the National Garden Scheme both days this weekend is the Mayfield Garden trail, comprising five plots. A detailed map will be available at each garden, all of which open at 11am until 5pm with a combined entry of £7. The gardens to visit are all within walking distance of the village centre and they vary in size and style with a wide range of shrubs, herbaceous and annual planting and including wildflower meadows, wildlife ponds, fruit and vegetable plots and a children's play area. There are far-reaching, panoramic views over the beautiful High Weald too. Penns In the Rocks in Groombridge, near Tunbridge Wells, has its final 2025 opening tomorrow, Sunday, from

2pm to 6pm with entry £7.50. This is a large garden with a spectacular outcrop of rocks, 140 million years old. See the lake, C18 temple and woods. The old walled garden has herbaceous borders, roses and shrubs and don't miss the stone sculptures by Richard Strachey. Full details on all the gardens at [www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk)

Looking wonderful in my garden this weekend is the pretty hydrangea, vanille fraise. Its stunning flowers start life as fluffy, loose, pyramid-shaped flower panicles which are creamy-white (as pictured), turning shades of pink as they age, before finally taking on a rich pink tone. They perform well from mid-summer to mid-autumn too and are perfect for adding late summer colour to the shrub border, or for creating an informal, flowering hedge. These are the most sun, heat, and drought tolerant of all hydrangeas, and benefit from at least some sun each day for the strongest stems and the most abundant flower set. Once established, to enhance flowering prune hard in late winter/early spring cutting back the previous season's shoots to within a few buds of the permanent, woody framework of the plant.

Another stand-out plant is the pretty, delicate sea lavender. I have two large mounds of it along a central path in the garden. It is a lovely perennial for the herbaceous border, with immense masses of elegant panicles of dainty, lavender-blue flowers in mid-summer. Mine are both planted in the gravel gardens and seem to work really well there, producing masses of flower heads each summer, bringing a touch of Mediterranean charm. Sea lavender is known by a few names including statice, caspia and marsh-rosemary. Despite these names, it is not actually related to the lavenders or rosemary, but belongs instead to the leadwort family. In terms of texture, sea lavender leaves are often leathery, and the leaf edges are either smooth, toothed or wavy. The flowers range in colour from white to pink to lavender. Butterflies and other pollinators often visit the flowers too.



Argus readers are among the last to visit my garden this year

A real favourite area in the garden for me is the relatively new patio, bounded by old railway sleepers. You can see me pictured, standing in the area with the stand out orange metal mirror behind me. The sleepers are the perfect foil against which to display many of my succulent collection. You can see some of the pretty aeoniums and agave arranged on the bench, shelving and on the ground. Throughout the summer months the area is a real sun trap but, because it is north facing, is in constant shade throughout the winter months. Even through the winter months the area still looks interesting, once devoid of the succulents which are housed in the heated greenhouse.

■ Read more of Geoff's garden at [www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk](http://www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk)



The sleeper area is a perfect foil for my succulents