

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



The view down the garden from the greenhouse



Daffodils



Euphorbia flowering

Keep daffodil bulbs in labelled bags to avoid any confusion

WE'RE into March and I've been busy in the greenhouse pruning my overwintered fuchsias, cutting back to one or two buds on each shoot. While I'm working, there's a great view down the garden to the sea beyond. I managed to keep the temperature up to 10C throughout the recent cold snap so many are starting to grow well.

Pruning will encourage a bushy growth habit this season. Most fuchsias do not like frost and young plants will be killed if they are exposed to it. The same goes for shop-bought fuchsias because they have been grown in temperature-controlled conditions. During the cold months they need to be kept out of the cold. When warmer weather begins, they should be exposed to outside conditions in phases to avoid shocking them.

Initially place them outside during the day and gradually increase the period they are outside over a two-week period. I've got a wide range in my garden, some hardy and many not so hardy.

Fuchsias do not grow well in dry conditions, preferring their roots to be in moist but not water-logged compost. The larger the container the less often it will require watering. They are extremely easy plants to look after and so rewarding when they start to flower.

Regular readers will recall that I wrote about camellias in last week's paper and I have some magnificent blooms currently on show in my back garden, set against the north facing wall behind the house.

One is a shrub I brought with me from my garden in North London, 20 years ago now, camellia japonica Nuccio's Cameo.

There is certainly a lot of evidence that spring is really upon us throughout the garden. Pretty daffodils are starting to emerge and create many spots of sunshine across the plot.

They are one of the most popular and cheery heralds of spring. Best planted in September, they spend several months developing roots before the flowers burst forth, usually between February and May. They are ideal candidates for

containers, borders and lawns, more importantly, they'll suit almost any garden style and situation.

Daffodils have instantly recognisable flowers with a central trumpet surrounded by six petal-like tepals, usually yellow or white. The flowers stand on sturdy stems, above slender leaves, reaching from just 20cm tall up to 50cm, depending on the cultivar. Be mindful that daffodil bulbs are poisonous, causing a stomach upset if eaten. They can easily be mistaken for onions, so to avoid any confusion always keep stored daffodil bulbs in labelled bags, and don't plant them where onions might be grown.

Another spring favourite is the hyacinth. Renowned for their highly fragrant blooms, these spring bulbs are widely grown as houseplants and in bedding displays in borders and containers. They're easy and quick to grow, producing large flowerheads in shades of blue, white and pink, as well as deep red, purple and even yellow.

The flower heads are often so large that they flop over as they develop. Carefully insert a pea stick/small cane into the soil by the bulb and use garden twine to secure the bloom. Remember to cut off the flower stalk at the base when the flowers fade. Mine are just starting to flower in the garden.

On Tuesday Crosslands Flower Nursery in Barnham Lane, Walberton, near Arundel, opens for the National Garden Scheme.

This is a new visiting option for 2024, where visitors will join a two-hour, all-access tour of a fourth generation, award-winning, sustainably run flower nursery with three acres of glasshouses, filled to the brim with Sussex-grown alstroemeria. There will be an opportunity to purchase flowers at the end of the tour. It opens from 10am to midday with entry £10 but all tickets must be pre-booked at www.ngs.org.uk

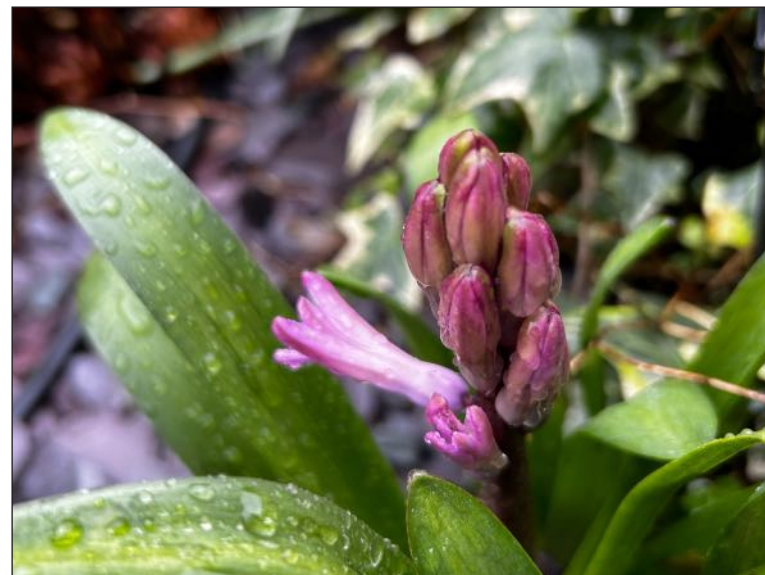
A showy plant in the garden at this time of the year is the euphorbia characias, which provides nectar and pollen for bees and the many other types of pollinating insects. It is also known



Geoff and camellia in full flower

as Mediterranean spurge and is an evergreen perennial growing up to 1.5m, with vertical or arching biennial stems, leafy throughout at first, then bare, almost woody at the base, densely leafy above, carrying flower heads in the second year. It has slender, blue-green, rather downy leaves and profuse flowers, in large, terminal, cylindrical heads in early spring which have petal-like bright yellow-green bracts surrounding the tiny flowers. The plant may be short-lived, but often self-seeds. I purchased several plants a couple of years ago now and have some beautiful flower stems on show in both the beach garden and the back garden. Sadly, those at the front have taken a bit of a beating with the winter gales.

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



A hyacinth coming into bloom