

# GEOFF STONEBANKS

## The Driftwood Garden Diary



# Some beautiful gardens to visit

**A** beautiful garden you could visit through the National Garden Scheme next weekend is the fabulous Sienna Wood in Coombe Hill Road, East Grinstead.

It will open the garden gate on Sunday, May 10 so plenty of time to plan ahead for your visit. Gates open from 1pm to 4.30pm with entry £7. Do go along and explore their beautiful four-and-a-half-acre garden and enjoy the picturesque lakeside walk and six-acre ancient woodland. Start at the herbaceous borders surrounding the croquet lawn, through the formal rose garden to the lawns and summer borders, stopping at the new Italian terrace, through the arboretum to the lake and waterfall and back past the exotic border, orchard and vegetable garden. See many unusual trees and shrubs, with possible sightings of wild deer including white deer. The garden also accepts visits by arrangement through until September too, for groups of 15 plus, so why not try and muster up a small group of friends to go along this summer?

If you are planning to go out this weekend, there are a couple of gardens open that you could also visit. Over in Hastings, there is 96 Ashford Road, a small but beautiful Japanese-themed garden, open Saturday from 1pm to 4.30pm with entry £4. The garden is full of interesting planting with many azaleas and bamboos, along with over 100 different hostas, many miniature ones. Meanwhile, on both Sunday and bank holiday Monday, 47 Denmans Lane in Lindfield will open from 11am to 4pm with entry £7. Full details on all three gardens at [ngs.org.uk](http://ngs.org.uk).

Meanwhile, I'm busy getting my own garden ready for visitors from June 1, only a few weeks to go and still much to do. Thankfully, I found time last month to bake 100 portions of cake to place in the freezer in readiness. This year's choices are lemon Victoria sponge, coffee and walnut cake and gluten-free pineapple polenta cake!



Geoff and the patio display. Pictures: Geoff Stonebanks

The beach garden at the front of the house generally looks great all year round and that is certainly true at the moment. You can see a view taken from my lounge looking down on the area. The yellows of the *coronilla glauca*, *euphorbia characias* and *helleborus argutifolius* still dominate. It is a lovely place to sit and enjoy tea and cakes when we are open, especially as it is south-facing with a full view of the ocean beyond. The brand-new decking area in the bottom left-hand corner of the image has made a real, stand-out, difference to the plot.

At the back of the house, the pretty little fireplace setting at the very top of the garden looks great too. I bought the old fire-

place a few years ago in a reclamation yard in Norfolk. With two large pots either side with the *euphorbia characias* poking through and the three agave in the grate it creates a real talking point with visitors.

Behind the house, the railway sleeper patio is also starting to come alive. You can see me standing with the wonderful view behind. There are still a few succulents to add to the mix, as they all come out of the greenhouse this month. It is always a big job getting them all out and dressing the garden with them, trying to make it look a little different each year! The square table and chairs behind me have been sanded down and given a fresh coat of teak oil to spruce it

up too and the fern fronds in the two large rectangular containers are beginning to take hold as well. I love the undulating backdrop of differing hedgerow too which provides perfect nesting spots for birds.

A stunning plant I had in the garden a few years ago is the echium. In 2024, the new growth in the gravel from self-seeding created a couple of new plants which I left in situ through the winter, protected with fleece, but they did not survive. Last autumn, I found two small plants which I carefully dug up and placed in the heated greenhouse over the winter months. They both did well and I have now planted them back out in the garden, one in the beach gar-

den and one in the gravel garden at the back of the house. I've got everything crossed that they will establish and do well.

I've now got all the seven water features reinstated for the summer. I had a problem earlier in the year with power failing on the right side of the back garden. A check by an electrician discovered that a connection box behind the summer house had become damaged and cables had become corroded. Thankfully and easily, if expensively, the problem was resolved, restoring power throughout the garden again.

■ Read more of Geoff's garden at [www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk](http://www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk) or follow both him and the garden on social media.



Sienna Wood, East Grinstead



Echium



Fireplace



Beach garden