

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Geoff at the top of the garden



The grapevine has been cut back



Tree surgeon in action on the conifer

Big autumn clear-up is underway now the nights are drawing in

THE clocks have now gone back, and we have much shorter days to work in our plots. At Driftwood, the big autumn clear-up is well under way now, after having to hold fire a little due to the recent TV location filming. The large conifer at the top of the garden had grown really large and needed a trim to bring it back down to size. In all the 20 years we have lived here, I have only had it professionally cut by a tree surgeon once. I contacted the same guys and they returned recently to cut out the top and thin it out. I'm very fortunate in that my neighbour allowed access on her side too, to ensure it had an all-round trim. I'm really pleased with the finished job and the tree looks much better sitting in the landscape at its new height.

With the nights closing in earlier now, it's quite nice to sit in the garden room watching the TV in the evening with the patio lights on outside. You can see how pretty it looks still, despite the time of year. More importantly, we can still enjoy it from the inside looking out now it's getting too cold to sit out and appreciate it all. It is never cheap installing outdoor lights, but I'm certainly pleased I made the decision to put them in at the time the patio was created back in 2021.

Another task in the clear-up is to cut back the large grapevine growing on the side of the shed along with a second one at the top of the garden on the side of the garden studio. There had been so many small grapes growing, as I had mentioned a few weeks ago, but the birds have obviously enjoyed them, pips and all. It looks much neater now and prevents all the falling leaves gathering on the patio.

In the front garden of the house, we have two tamarix tetrandra trees. These are beautiful small trees which produce magnificent, feathery plumes of pink flowers. In both April and May, its arching branches are smothered in masses of pink blossom,

accompanied by needle-like foliage. Swaying gently in the breeze (or occasional gales here in Seaford), this architectural low maintenance shrub makes a superb focal point in any garden. They tolerate salt and strong winds, providing a perfect addition to coastal gardens. They can look good in a mixed border or you could create a natural woodland look with swathes of crocus nesting beneath the dappled shade of the pink plumes. Both of mine are planted in the gravel garden and the largest of the two was there when we moved here back in 2004 and I planted the one pictured at the front of the beach garden in 2012. The image was taken this week by my partner and he caught it just right in the evening light.

At the top of the garden, with all the decorative features stored away for the winter, the blue metal railing stands out well amongst the lush greenery.

With Bonfire Night on the horizon, there are quite a few plants that are very reminiscent of fireworks. One in particular, *Allium Schubertii*, is the firework allium par excellence, with vast wonderful dark pink, spiky flowers. It is very eccentric and showy while flowering and great when dried too. *Schubertii* is a bulbous perennial producing bright-green, strap-shaped leaves in spring, which die back before the flowers appear. These consist of 50 or more star-shaped, pinky-purple florets on stems of differing lengths producing a starburst effect up to 30cm across. So maybe this month is a good time to plant some in your garden for great results in 2025 and beyond.

Another firework inspired planting might be *Pennisetum setaceum* 'Fireworks' (ruepplii) which makes a lively addition to bedding displays and patio containers. The fluffy seed heads can also be cut to make elegant dried flowers. The colourful foliage of this fountain grass emerges with bold stripes of red, pink and green, before maturing to a rich



Beautiful colours on the tamarisk in the beach garden

shade of burgundy. From mid-summer to autumn, the showy purple flower spikes rise above the arching foliage in a spectacular architectural "bonfire" display.

The weather is starting to turn colder at night, so now is the time to take steps to protect tender plants. If left in the ground, it's a good idea to spread a mulch around the base to protect the crown from cold temperatures. If you have alpines or sempervivum clumps out in the garden try to ensure they are not getting swamped by a topping of soggy leaves from trees above. Remove them before they smother the crowns of these delicate plants and cause them to rot.

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



Patio lights mean we can enjoy the outside whilst staying indoors