

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Self-seeded geranium



Phlox



Oleander

This tough yet dazzling plant is great for bees and butterflies

A MUCH-TALKED about plant by visitors to the garden is a pretty flower, part of the clover family, called trifolium rubens. I have two largish clumps in the back garden. Also known as the ruddy clover, it is a clump forming perennial with large ruby, red flowers lasting throughout the summer, contrasting against its trifoliate, clover-like foliage. A real magnet for bees and other pollinators, it is best grown in full sun or partial shade in a moist but well drained soil and cut back the first spent blooms to encourage a second flush. I've had the plant several years now but so many visitors have never seen it before

This weekend you could go out and visit Penns in the Rocks, opening for the National Garden Scheme in Groombridge, near Tunbridge Wells tomorrow, Sunday, from 2pm to 6pm with entrance £7. This is a large garden with a spectacular outcrop of rocks, 140 million years old. Take a stroll around the lake, see the 18th century temple and wander through the woods. Enjoy the old walled garden with herbaceous borders, roses and shrubs and there are stone sculptures by Richard Strachey too.

Opening by next weekend, Saturday, July 10, is Bourne Botanicals at The Bourne, Chesterfield Close, Furnace Wood, in Felbridge, near East Grinstead. All visits have to be pre-booked by emailing bournebotanic@outlook.com or calling 07785 562558. The garden is a lush setting of huge bananas, jostling alongside gunnera and arid beds of agave, yucca and cacti. It is a diverse tropical look garden with a wildlife pond and stream including bog beds of carnivorous plants. There are palms, tree ferns and many unusual plants plus quirky touches, all set in an acre of woodland.

This week has seen me dragging out and moving some of the large containers located around the garden and sweeping up the debris that accumulated behind them in recent weeks from the strong winds we have experienced this summer. It always surprises me how much can build up over a few

weeks. The stunning fuchsia magellanica produces never ending pretty ballerina blooms, but they will drop regularly as new blooms form, it's a constant task removing them from the patio as well.

The pretty oleander is a widely used landscape plant in warmer climates, grown for its carefree habit and attractive star-shaped flowers. Because of its beauty and tough nature, this evergreen shrub is commonly found in Mediterranean countries, where it is a native. They are very heat and drought-tolerant once established, and will grow especially well in seaside gardens, tolerating salt spray and wind. While oleanders generally grow best in coastal areas most will be damaged or killed by winter cold. I have one in a large container and three planted in the ground. In recent winters they have struggled, especially the three in the ground, despite all being well fleeced, but they have eventually come back to life and flowered in late summer.

Their colours range from pure white through pale-yellow, peach, salmon and pink to deep burgundy red. The leaves are smooth, dark green, thick and leathery. They are long and narrow, usually between four and six inches long and an inch or less wide.

Growing, quite randomly, in both the front and back gardens is a pretty mauve, hardy geranium, which has established itself over time, it was certainly not one I have purchased and planted although it may have been planted by the previous owner of the house at the back, over 20 years ago. It works well with my tightly packed planting arrangements, as it just bursts forth through the other foliage to dazzle. Hardy geraniums are reputedly the most popular perennials in Britain and it's easy to see why. They're tough and easy to grow, many flowering for months at a stretch. With a range of colours, including deep purples, pinks, and whites, these blooms will surely add elegance to your flower beds or containers. Also known as cranesbill geraniums, one of their most attractive features is their versatility. These hardy plants thrive in both sun and

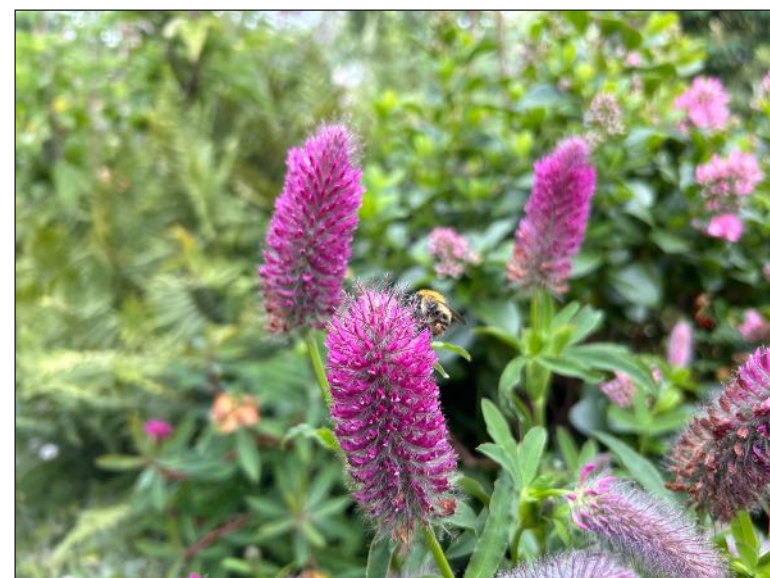


Geoff clearing up the debris

partial shade, making them ideal for any garden location, whether you have a sunny patio or a shady corner. They require minimal maintenance and are drought-tolerant, making them perfect for the unpredictable British weather. They also attract pollinators like bees and butterflies.

Several years ago, I planted a pretty phlox in the beach garden too. These perennials sport copious star-shaped, colourful flowers from spring through summer, depending on the variety. Because there are so many types you can find a phlox for almost any garden. Phlox plants are easy to grow from seed too, and are especially weather tolerant, hence mine surviving in an exposed location.

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



Trifolium