

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



A nice winter walk



Frozen euphorbia characias

This is why visiting gardens in winter is so good for your health

TOMORROW, 4th February, Seedy Sunday is back in Brighton from 9am to 4.30pm.

This year, they are back at the Brighton Open Market, Marshalls Row, BN1 4JU for the UK's oldest & biggest seed swap. You will be able to swap your own seeds for a range of seeds or make a 50p donation. There will be talks, advice and stalls from specialist seed growers and nurseries. The entrance is free and the venue is dog friendly too. Full details can be found at www.seedysunday.org.uk

We've had some really cold days recently and many of us have probably not felt like venturing outside the door, trying our very best to keep warm. That said, new research, recently published by the National Garden Scheme, confirms the important health benefits that visiting a garden in the darkest days of winter can provide. Their chief executive says, "visits to our snowdrop and spring flower gardens are always a popular start to the garden visiting season and this latest research gives us more of an insight into why that is. Existing research generally links the health benefits of garden visiting to the summer months when most gardens are at their abundant best. But our new research highlights the benefits of visiting in winter and, as well as comparing those to visiting in summer, shows how a winter visit helps combat the particular seasonal challenges that we all face at that time of year."

The report also examines the effect of nature on wellbeing for visitors during the winter. The report states some key findings, including, our wellbeing is significantly improved after visiting gardens in winter. Visitors felt more relaxed, happy and excited in the gardens, and less stressed, sad and bored. Also, the more time visitors spend in the winter gardens, the higher their wellbeing.

Interestingly, the report finds that the level of wellbeing was similarly high for visitors in winter and summer, suggesting that visiting gardens during either season is likely to carry benefits. But the

average level of wellbeing before entering the gardens in winter was lower than in summer, meaning that those visiting in winter showed the greatest increase in wellbeing. The more nature that visitors observe in the gardens, such as birds, insects, and water, the higher their wellbeing.

Visitors described, in their own words, a number of positive feelings while visiting the winter gardens. They felt relaxed and calm, happy and uplifted, interested and inspired, appreciative of the gardens, immersed and at one with nature, and hopeful for spring.

The research, author Dr Emma White, suggests that visiting a garden in winter can be just as beneficial as visiting in summer, as long as you wrap up warm. But winter gardens can be full of life and interest. The survey respondents felt that winter was the perfect time to observe the emergence of new growth and experience the unique joy of spring flowering bulbs. It is a great time to appreciate the structure of a well-designed garden, and respondents noticed lots of wildlife and beneficial natural features. So, whatever the season, we should all try to get out into gardens more, observe the plants and nature around us, and feel the benefits.

The National Garden Scheme has been championing the health benefits of garden visits since it first opened 609 garden gates in 1927. Now, opening over 3,500 gardens a year, they continue to advocate the improvement to wellbeing that a visit to a garden can generate. The report "The wellbeing benefits of visiting National Garden Scheme gardens in winter" by Environmental Psychologist, Dr Emma White can be found on the scheme's website, www.ngs.org.uk

I've spent a bit of time in the garden this week, moving some large containers around, with the help of a trolley. Gone are the days when I could lift and carry them around. The only problem in my plot are the small sets of steps, moving from one level to another.

I can't believe how well my poinsettia, bought at the beginning of December, is doing. It almost



Geoff moving pots

looks as good as it did when I purchased it. That said, I have been very careful of its position, out of draughts and left it in the same place all the time. I've checked it most days and only watered when the compost had dried out.

The Euphorbia characias still look pretty with no flowers and frozen leaves. It is an erect, sparsely-branched shrub with large, rounded heads of greenish-yellow flowers. It certainly makes a dramatic feature plant in the beach garden with its long stiff stems, clothed in blue-grey foliage which is handsome all the year round. Through March to April and into May, each stem carries a huge head of lime-green flowers. It prefers shelter from wind and is harmful if eaten and is skin and eye irritant.

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



Poinsettia still going strong