

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Clivias are houseplants that can spend the summer outdoors



Winter garden is looking good



The coral red stems of dogwood behind my conifer

My plans for 2025 are a bit of an unknown at the moment

CAN you really believe we are into a new year, 2025. To me, it only seems yesterday that we were all thinking about ringing in a new century, back in 1999, how time flies and how old I now feel. Here's hoping all my readers had a lovely Christmas and are looking forward to a prosperous 2025.

2025 is all a bit of unknown as far as I am concerned. With the confirmation that I need a new left knee provided late last year and the knowledge that there is between a 6-9 month waiting list, planning gardening activities is not going to be so easy this year. That said, should it be the whole nine months, that would extend beyond when I normally close Driftwood, any sooner and it will impact on planned openings but I'll just have to wait and see.

A plant thriving in the back porch of the house is one gifted to my mum by a friend, Edna, who passed away a couple of years ago now. It is a stunning clivia. Clivias are easy-to-grow houseplants with showy clusters of colourful flowers through spring and summer. They originate in the woodlands of South Africa and these tender plants like indirect light, warmth and regular watering, with a cool, dry spell in winter to initiate flowering. These are the first flowers to be seen on mine for several years and they are quite early. The plant is sometimes known as a Natal lily and is popular as a houseplant that will tolerate low light. The fragrant, trumpet-shaped or tubular blooms come in various colours, from cream and pale yellow to the vibrant orange shown, also red. They're held in a cluster on top of a sturdy stem, up to 45cm (18in) tall, above a fountain on long, leathery, evergreen leaves. The plant can also be moved outdoors for the summer in the UK, to add a tropical look to a warm, sheltered spot, in light shade.

I'll be 72 in April and back in

2003, for my 50th birthday, a friend gave me a small potted olive tree. It remained in a large container for several years before it was finally planted in the ground, probably back in 2008. You can see from the billowing branches behind me in the picture, that it was in dire need of some taming. So, just before Christmas I had a professional come in and give it a good trim and create a lollipop effect as you can see. It looks so much better standing independently of the hedge behind it now, it had begun to become as one with it.

The olive tree, or *Olea europaea*, is a classic Mediterranean tree that we might associate more with holidays than our own back garden. However, being slow-growing and usually only reaching a modest size, it makes a good garden tree in the UK. They can be grown in borders but make good trees for pots, too. There are now many cultivars that tolerate cooler temperatures to choose from, although a sunny, sheltered location will get the best results. You might even be lucky enough to get your own crop of olives, perhaps not enough for a bottle of olive oil, but certainly enough to cure and serve up as an appetiser. Mine has produced some very small fruit in previous years.

Despite the time of year, the area outside the garden room has remained quite good. The two large rectangular pots of ferns have died back and are in need of a good trim before this year's growth starts to appear but the remainder looks quite neat and tidy. It has been a case of lifting down the bonsai trees from the shelves at the back, every time heavy winds are forecast, but so far, so good. You can see all the boundary growth is quite extensive and any time now, I am due to get help to cut back the ivy on all sides and neaten all around the garden.

In the centre of the garden, there is a small bed which looks good at the moment with the



The olive before a trim

small conifer growing, the piece of driftwood resting in a metal frame and the red dogwood stems behind. The latter is a deciduous shrub which has oval, dark green leaves and produces small, creamy-white flowers in May and June. But it's really grown for the bright, coral-red stems that are revealed when the leaves fall. This lovely dogwood looks stunning planted in groups, beside water, or in a winter border. They work best in full sun, and can be planted with orange or purple-stemmed varieties of dogwood too. That said, I'm rather pleased with mine, sitting in total isolation looking fabulous.

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



The same tree now stands out in its new lollipop shape