

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



I am particularly fond of aeonium sunburst



Euphorbia griffithii fireglow has a dramatic look



Fatsia spider's web is another plant with a striking appearance

Pop out to visit stunning gardens in the National Garden Scheme

AS you pick up your paper this weekend and read this column, I should be back at home, recovering from my knee replacement surgery. Well, that's the plan. Let's hope I'm back, fully on my feet and into the garden again soon!

This weekend, there are four gardens open for the National Garden Scheme you could pop out and visit. A fairly frequent opener, 47 Denmans Lane in Lindfield opens tomorrow, May 4, from 1pm to 5pm with entry £7. Created by the owners over the past 20 years, it is planted for interest throughout the year with spring bulbs followed by azaleas, rhododendrons, roses and herbaceous perennials. Another regular, Peelers Retreat at 70 Ford Road in Arundel, opens today, May 3, from 2pm to 5pm with entry £5. This inspirational space is a delight with permanent gazebos and comfortable seating to sit and relax, enjoying delicious teas.

Stanley Farm in Highfield Lane, Liphook opens tomorrow from midday to 5pm with entry £5. The one-acre garden has been created over the last 15 years around an old West Sussex farmhouse, sitting in the midst of its own fields and woods. The final garden is Terwick House in Rogate, near Petersfield which opens tomorrow and Monday from 2pm to 5pm with entry £6. This is a wild woodland garden planted for spring interest some 40 years ago by plant collectors of rhododendron, azalea, camellia and acer. Full details on all four gardens can be found at www.ngs.org.uk.

The Cox's Orange Pippin tree in the garden has been brimming with blossom over the last couple of weeks and fortunately we have not had too much wind blowing it all away. We had a really good crop of apples from it last year and it looks like we will have the same again this year too. We have only just finished eating the poached crop from last year, which was frozen.

Not that I have planted them, but we have now got quite a few Spanish bluebells popping up on small areas of the garden. These are vigorous, bulbous perennials

that bear sturdy stems topped with clusters of bell-shaped flowers in spring above large clumps of strap-shaped leaves. The flowers are usually pale blue in colour but can occasionally be pink or white. Spanish bluebell is hardy, robust and easy to grow, but it can be invasive, spreading both by seed and by bulb, and is difficult to get rid of. They originate from Spain, Portugal and North Africa and were introduced to the UK as a garden plant in the 17th century, though it soon "escaped" and was first recorded growing in the wild in 1909.

All my aeoniums are now back out in the garden, carefully arranged before I went into hospital. One of my favourites is sunburst. I've read that this is the most popular aeonium many growers sell and for good reason. As you can see, it has beautiful variegation in the leaves and pink tinges to the leaf margins in high light levels. It grows to a large size after just a few years. Mine was gifted by two friends locally a few years ago and always stands out in my garden display.

Another "looker" plant in the garden at the moment is the pretty euphorbia griffithii "fireglow". It is a dramatic plant, bearing attractive dark green foliage, each leaf with a reddish midrib, which contrasts beautifully with its bright fiery brick red flowers. Tall and bushy, it's well suited to growing in hot planting schemes and dry sunny borders, and combines well with yellow flowers and gold variegated foliage. When working with euphorbias always wear gloves as the milky sap is a skin irritant. Euphorbia "fireglow" is known for attracting other pollinators and has nectar/pollen rich flowers. I bought mine about 12 years ago and have two clumps now growing in the back garden.

A great stand-alone plant with a striking appearance is the fatsia spider's web. Also known as Japanese aralia, it is prized for its glossy palmate foliage that brings a lush, tropical feel to any planting scheme. It is a particularly intriguing variety with speckled markings that



Hoping for another bumper crop of apples this year

spread inwards from the outermost edges. The overall effect is an unusual, frosted appearance. Clusters of globular white flowers in autumn are followed by black berries. Despite its exotic looks, this evergreen shrub is perfectly hardy and is a great choice for challenging, shaded positions. The one pictured is growing on a north facing wall and spends most of its time in the shade. I cut it back last autumn and you can see it has produced lots of new growth in recent weeks.

■ Read more of Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk or you can book a visit this summer, to enjoy tea and homemade cakes in the garden, between June 1 and August 3 by emailing visitdriftwood@gmail.com.



Spanish bluebells are popping up