

# GEOFF STONEBANKS

## The Driftwood Garden Diary



### Easter garden picks and the joy of getting back to work

IT'S Easter weekend, wishing all my readers a very Happy Easter and maybe some good weather for gardening or garden visiting!

There are three gardens open for the National Garden Scheme that you could visit over the next couple of days. Peelers Retreat at 70 Ford Road in Arundel today, Easter Saturday, 47 Denman's Lane in Lindfield on both today and Easter Monday or The Old Vicarage in The Street, Washington which is also open on Easter Monday.

Peelers Retreat opens 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. Interlocking beds packed with year-round colour and scent. 47 Denman's Lane will open from 11am to 4pm with entry £7. This is a beautiful and tranquil one-acre garden created by the owners over the past 20 years. It is planted for interest throughout the year. The third, The Old Vicarage, from 10am to 5pm with entry £10. Spanning three and a half acres, the garden features formal topiary, seasonal borders, a contemporary water sculpture, an Italianate gazebo, specimen mature trees and much more. Full details on all three can be found at [www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk).

If we think back a year ago, I was a couple of weeks away from having a replacement left knee. Who would have thought, a year on, that I'd be able to fully kneel again with the replacement. As you can see, with the

help of a new, deep and soft garden cushion, I am now able to get down and tend the garden. A necessary task when sorting out the beach garden. It can be a bit tricky sometimes getting up but still not a bad achievement. It would have been very awkward tending the garden without the ability to kneel. I can assure you a lot of hard work and self-inflicted physio at home achieved this.

Over the years, the decking on the corner of the house that had been installed back in 2013, to create the illusion of crossing a jetty to get into the back garden, had really started to rot and was in desperate need of replacement. It was beginning to look very grubby and unsightly as well. Last month I decided to have it all taken up and revamped. The wooden frame beneath was also rotten and had to be removed. A brand-new base topped with a rather grand composite decking was installed in its place. I am extremely pleased with the result as you can see in the image. It still has the small run of water beneath to give the illusion of crossing a bridge.

The magnificent *Bergenia* has looked really pretty over the last few weeks but has gone over now. These are evergreen herbaceous perennials with distinctive glossy, rounded leaves. Their bold foliage gives them their common name of elephant's ears. Often consigned to tricky, shady areas of the garden where not much else will grow, however they are actually versatile plants that



Geoff able to kneel after new knee. Image: Geoff Stonebanks



Baby agave out of winter storage. Image: Geoff Stonebanks

deserve a prominent spot in your garden. Many have interesting leaf colours in the winter, ranging from coral to red to burgundy. Their spring flowers, held on short stems and in shades of magenta, pale pink or white, look excellent with spring bulbs and provide early nectar for pollinating insects. The plants are very low maintenance, drought-resistant and

do well in a wide range of soils, including poor, dry soils and clay. They also grow well in sun or shade and can be grown in gravel gardens like the one pictured in my front garden.

This is generally the time of the year that I start to sort out all the succulents that have been stored away in their winter homes. The first to come out of the undercover area at the

side of the house are the agaves. I have over 80 of them in varying sizes. You can see pictured some of the smaller ones in a range of containers, including two vintage metal kitchen colanders too. Some of them were babies taken from the mother plant last autumn. They will all go out either in the beach garden or on the patio at the back of the house. All the larger agave are in the front garden and I'll talk more about them in the feature next week. After the agave, later this month or early next, comes the aeonium. I have already taken each container out of the greenhouse and tidied them up and repotted some of the plants where needed. Each has been watered and fed where necessary and put back into the greenhouse until I can be sure there will be no more cold mornings or possible frost.

Read more about Geoff's garden at [www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk](http://www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk) or follow both him and the garden on social media.



Bergenia in beach garden. Image: Geoff Stonebanks



Old decking. Image: Geoff Stonebanks



Brand new composite decking. Image: Geoff Stonebanks