

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Eye eye sculpture



Seahorse



Dragonfly

It's a seedy weekend ahead...

THIS weekend is a right seedy couple of days. Seedy Saturday is taking place in Lewes Town Hall between 10am and 3pm today, Saturday. This regular and popular event has the seed swap at its heart and there will be stalls selling plants and seeds and other garden related things as well as providing talks and workshops.

If you plan to take seeds to the event, remember to pop them in an envelope and label it with the name of the seed along with the variety, if known. Check out all the details by finding Seedy Saturday on facebook.

Then, tomorrow, Sunday, the 21st Seedy Sunday event takes place in Brighton between 10am and 4pm at Brighton Girls school in Montpelier Road. Find full details at www.seedysunday.org.

Next week sees the main thrust of the National Garden Scheme's Snowdrop Festival kick off across the county. There are two regulars beginning their series of openings, the first is The Old Vicarage in Washington from February 9 and Pembury House in Clayton, near Ditchling from February 10.

The former, The Old Vicarage, The Street, Washington, has three February dates, 9, 16, and 23, 10.30am to 4.30pm, £7. Pre booked visitors only. See 3.5 acres of garden set around the 1832 Regency house on show. The front is formally laid out with topiary, a wide lawn, mixed border and contemporary water sculpture adding to the interest. Each year 2,000 tulips are planted for spring as well as another 2,000 snowdrops and mixed bulbs throughout the garden. The garden has many pockets of interest, like the Japanese garden with its waterfall, pond, bamboo and grasses, a further large water garden and numerous creatively planted herbaceous borders. Whatever the weather, there is a haven in the conservatory where refreshments are available.

The latter, Pembury House in Ditchling Road, Clayton, opens the following dates in February, 10, 16, 17, 24 February, 10am to midday and 2pm to 3.30pm, £10,

refreshments included. Pre-booked visitors only. Depending on the vagaries of the season, hellebores and snowdrops are at their best in February and March. This is a country garden, tidy but not manicured with work always in progress on new areas. Winding paths give a choice of walks through three acres of garden, which is in and enjoys views of the South Downs National Park. Wellies, macs and winter woollies advised. Since Nick and Jane moved to Clayton, some 40 years ago, they have been able to establish the garden so that it gives pleasure throughout the seasons. An area of woodland was planted early on and the trees that were planted in 1984 are now mature trees, giving shelter to a wide variety of birds. The hellebores and snowdrops thrive under the woodland shade and then the ferns and shade loving plants take over.

In my garden, my love of rusty metal really makes a difference in the winter garden. Pictured are three of my current favourite pieces – a seahorse created out of bicycle parts, a dragonfly, seated atop an old wheel and plant support, conceived from old metal tools and an old twin telephone bell perched on top of an old groyne. It's amazing what you can find and make use of.

We've recently managed to have a week away in Suffolk and were able to visit the garden maintained by one of my long-term Facebook friends, Kate Elliot. We'd never met before and it was great to be able to put a face to the name so to speak. She began work at Columbine Hall at the tender age of 16 and has now become its head gardener. Both she and the hall's owner, Hew Stevenson, made us extremely welcome taking much time to show us around and explain the next stages of work around the garden.

Let's be honest, January is not really the best month to view a garden but all the details provided by Hew and Kate allowed us to visualise how it would look at its height for summer garden visitors. Hew, and his late wife, the journalist



Geoff, centre, with Hew Stevenson and Kate Elliot

and writer Leslie Geddes-Brown, had viewed the property back in late 1992 and described it as a depressing experience but were soon of the opinion they could stamp their mark on the house and garden.

Leslie's contacts enabled them to come up with a plan for the garden and the rest they say is history. Hew, at the age of 83, is still brimming with ideas and projects to take the garden to the next level. He talked us through the creation of an Italianate walled garden which he is hoping to create, already having invested in some lovely statues, currently being stored in one of the great barns.

If you are in the area, go and visit this summer.

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



Columbine Hall, Suffolk