

GEOFF STONEBANKS

The Driftwood Garden Diary



Perfect foil for coastal location

This weekend, why not venture along the coast to Seaford? Opening for the National Garden Scheme on Sunday are five gardens in the town: 5 Clementine Avenue, 101 Clementine Avenue, Cupani, Madehurst and Seaford Allotments.

All are open from mid-day to 5pm, each offering its own unique charm. Combined entry will be £8. Tickets and maps will be available from any participating garden, all of which will be signed from the A259. Full details can be found at www.ngs.org.uk.

While in Seaford, you could book a visit to my garden, Driftwood, too, see details at the end of the article. What's more, dogs on leads are welcome in all the gardens too. Sadly, if you were planning on a visit to Rose Cottage in Willingdon in Eastbourne, the opening has been cancelled.

Back in 2019, a Dutch lifestyle magazine, *Seasons*, featured an amazing eight-page spread on my beach garden at the front of the house. When the photographer came to the house, it was a first, she was only interested in the front garden, and did not want to shoot the back. In a way, I understood her decision, as the front garden is the perfect foil for a coastal location like mine. Since its creation, back in 2012, it has always held a certain magic for me. With its marine theme throughout, it has plenty to offer in its own right.

You can see me standing in front of the large black rowing boat that dominates the space. It's not the original boat from 2012; that model was wooden and rotted over the years. Back in 2022, some generous visitors donated the current fibreglass boat, which blends in well. One of my favourite plants by far, which has become quite prolific along the paths and in the gravel, is the pretty *Erigeron karvinskianus* or Mexican Fleabane. It continues flowering from June right through to October. Each new daisy-like bloom opens crisp white with a yellow centre, the petals maturing to take on pink-purple hues. The plant thrives



Geoff in his beach garden. Images: Geoff Stonebanks

even in the poorest of soils. Whether grown as an edging plant in a border, tumbling over a wall, or cascading over the edge of a container, it is sure to delight both you and the pollinators who will visit for a nectar-rich feast.

Another pretty plant at the front of the gravel beds is the *Verbena polaris*. This compact, low-growing perennial features fragrant clusters of pale lilac flowers that bloom from early summer through to the first frosts. With its wiry, square stems and dense clumps of rigid, lance-shaped dark green leaves, it adds a delicate yet resilient touch to garden borders. Ideal for full sun and well-drained soil, this easy-to-grow plant creates a striking front-of-border display

that spreads gracefully and attracts pollinators, offering long-lasting seasonal colour.

Growing pretty rampant throughout the beach garden and on the grass bank at the front of the house is red valerian. This is a tall perennial wildflower with flowers that continue to bloom late into the season in deep luxurious red. Often called a dry-stone wall or large rockery plant, it is very good on a border and attractive to bees. Dense clusters of reddish-pink flowers appear from July to October on tall, fleshy stems with glaucous leaves. Red valerian is long-flowering and easy to grow. It's ideal for a sunny wildflower or seaside garden with poor but well-drained soil, or for grow-

ing between the cracks in walls. It self-seeds freely and prefers a chalky or alkaline soil. Many think it a weed, but I love it in the garden and simply pull it out if it gets in my way.

I love agave and have more than 80 of them, strategically placed throughout the beach garden. All of them, with the exception of two, are in a variety of containers. One such container is the lovely vintage colander you can see on the bistro table, which provides a great location to sit with a drink and admire the fabulous view.

If you are in the city next Friday why not get involved with the annual Moulsecoomb Forest Garden's open day which runs from mid-day through until 6

pm. It's located at Queensdown School Road behind Moulsecoomb Station. Go and see what they get up to and meet the amazing people who keep the garden blooming. What's more, you can find out about primitive technology, make pizzas, hunt for bugs, pond dip, engage in some of the art activities and have a go on the tombola too. Find out about the incredible bees and lots more. In addition, there will be a café serving snacks and refreshments and everyone is welcome.

■ Read more about Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk or follow both him and the garden on social media.

■ Book a visit to the garden, before 2nd August, by emailing visit.driftwood@gmail.com.



Agave Americana



Marine themed path with Erigeron



Valerian



Verbena polaris