

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Bonsai Rhododendron Wren



Cheilanthes lanosa hairy lip fern



Loropetalum Chinense Pipa's Red

While the rest of the plants are sleeping, this one bursts alive

I'VE MADE a few new purchases recently to add to my vast collection of plants. One that really stands out is a beautiful small bonsai tree, Rhododendron Wren. This is a prostrate, dwarf evergreen shrub so it has made a good bonsai. The glossy, dark green leaves may turn bronze in winter while the young leaves have a reddish colour. Its stunning pale yellow, funnel-shaped flowers are borne freely in mid to late spring as you can see in the image. It is a fabulous addition to my small bonsai collection.

Here are two gardens you could visit for the National Garden Scheme this weekend. Peilers Retreat at 70 Ford Road in Arundel opening today, Saturday, from 2pm to 5pm and admission £5. This inspirational space is a delight with plenty of shaded areas to sit and relax, enjoying delicious teas. Interlocking beds are packed with year-round colour and scent, shaded by specimen trees, an inventive water feature, including a rill, raised fish pond, a working Victorian fireplace and several woodland sculptures.

Over in Liphook there is Stanley Farm in Highfield Lane which will open on Sunday 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 formal garden includes a kitchen garden with heated glasshouse, orchard, espaliered wall trained fruit, lawn with ha-ha and cutting garden. A motley assortment of animals including sheep, donkeys, chickens, ducks and geese look forward to welcoming you. Bluebells flourish in the woods, so feel free to bring your dog and take a walk after visiting the gardens.

Another new purchase is a fern with remarkable silvery grey foliage, Cheilanthes lanosa, or hairy lip fern, which is drought-tolerant, so able to withstand the summer heat and looks good all year long. It can be planted at the front of a border in dappled shade, or in pots and containers. I bought two plants and they are

in containers behind the house. This plant won't tolerate wet winter weather, so best grown in sharply drained, gritty, humus-rich soil in full sun, with protection from winter rain. A little tidying of the old tired fronds may be required in spring before the new growth.

Loropetalum Chinense Pipa's Red is another new addition. Its foliage is a deep purple/red in colour, which looks beautiful all year round. In winter this plant really comes alive, while the rest of the plants in the garden are sleeping, this one bursts with colour. Flowers, with thin, strap-like, pink petals appear, in winter and again in spring, loved for its deep purple/black foliage and masses of true red fringe flowers in spring. I bought mine for the amazing colour and it is in a large container on the patio at the back of the house.

Yet another new purchase is a sedum, Hylotelephium Herbsfreude, a well-known plant. First the early rosettes of fleshy slightly toothed grey-green leaves, then large heads of waxy buds exactly the same colour as the leaves, next opening to rich pink starry flowers which deepen to brick red, and finally warm brown seedheads. The crown may need dividing occasionally and the plant benefits from a "Chelsea chop" annually to produce best results but the bees will love it. The flat-topped flower heads can grow up to 20cm across, are made up of greenish white buds that open to pale pink, star-shaped flowers.

I wonder if you are planning to mark World Naked Gardening Day today? Every year, on the first Saturday in May, gardeners are encouraged to shed their clothes and tend their gardens naked, just as nature intended. It's not just other nudists that are encouraged to garden in the buff. It's anyone who desires to experience a stronger bond with nature. If you are thinking of trying naked gardening today it is probably not a good day to plant roses or do anything with cacti. Go on, give it a go.

Starting to look good in my garden are the three large pots of



Geoff in the central garden

hostas, on the north facing back wall. These shade-loving plants are primarily grown for their beautiful foliage and there's a vast range to choose from, with leaves in all shades of green, as well as dusky blues and acid yellows, sometimes variegated or flashed with cream or gold, ruffled, smooth or distinctively ribbed.

Many also produce small trumpet-shaped mauve or white flowers in summer.

However, hostas are notoriously irresistible to slugs and snails, but are also much loved by gardeners. I stand my containers on an upturned saucer, set in a larger dish, then fill with water, so they sit in a moat and the slugs tend not to cross the water.

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



Sedum Hylotelephium