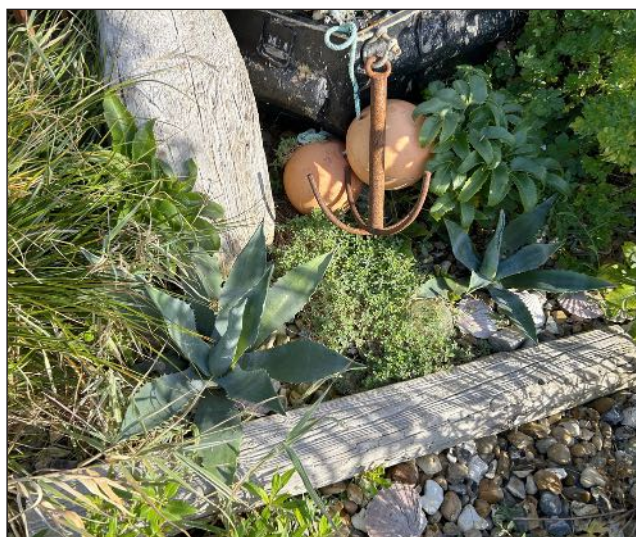
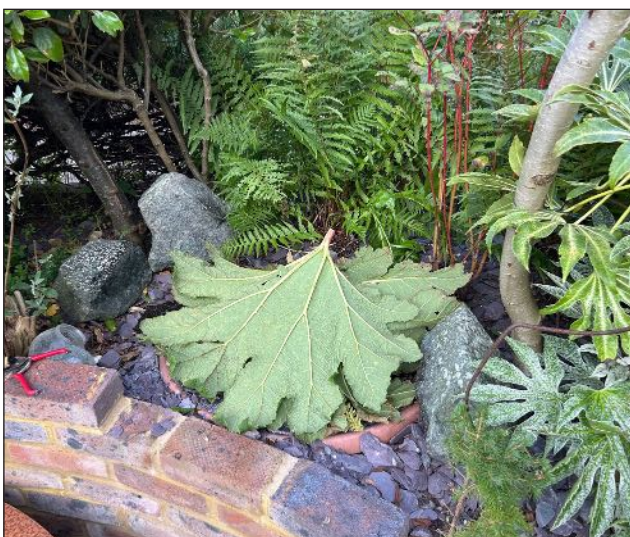


The Driftwood Garden Diary

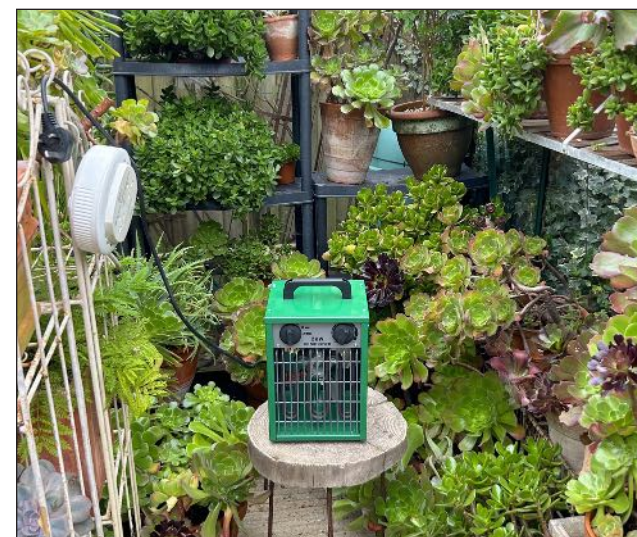
with Geoff Stonebanks



Surviving agave



Gunnera prepared for winter



Heater set up in greenhouse

Preparing for the cold weather

THE nights are drawing in, it's getting colder outside which must mean winter is on its merry way!

This time of the year also signals the resumption of gardening clubs and societies engaging speakers to present talks at their monthly meetings.

I have seven bookings between now and next March, to talk about gardening. Two of them fall next week, the first is available for anyone to come along and listen to! On Friday 10th November, I shall be presenting my talk "From City Courtyard to Seaside Sanctuary" about the move of my garden in north London to the coast and my charity fundraising for Ringmer Horticultural and Home Produce Club. The talk will take place in Ringmer Village Hall, which opens at 730pm for my talk at 8pm. Non-members are most welcome to attend too at a cost of £7. Maybe I'll meet some readers there! I am also presenting another talk to members of the Slindon, Madehurst and Earham Horticultural Society on Tuesday 7th.

Last autumn, I made the decision to plant all my larger agave Americana in the ground, as it was getting difficult to carry the containers under cover for the winter. They should have survived, as the beach garden is on chalk, so drains well. Sadly, all the larger ones were destroyed by the wet weather with the exception of 2 smaller ones which survived and seem to be doing well at the front of the garden. I have left them there and hope they make it through this winter too. All my other agaves have been carefully protected under cover to keep them dry.

Regular readers will be aware that I have a very large collection of succulents, notably aeoniums, which are all now safely tucked up for the winter. The majority are stored in the heated greenhouse at the top of the garden and my new heater is all set up in there to maintain the temperature through the colder months. The remainder

are housed in the front and back porches of the house.

In the back garden I have two medium-sized gunnera. Their common names include Brazilian giant rhubarb, giant rhubarb or devil's strawberry. The plant has the largest leaves of any hardy perennial and has the appearance of a giant rhubarb. It makes an impressive statement in a garden large enough to accommodate their huge size. However, there is a small one called Gunnera megellanica to seek out. They are great plants for wet soil on the margins of a large natural pond in gardens, but make sure they don't escape as the larger ones are invasive in the wild. Mine are both planted in large containers, one buried in the ground, the other sitting behind a corten steel wall close to the pond. I have cut the leaves back and laid over the crown of the plants and protected them with fleece for the winter months.

There is always a debate among gardeners each year, should you remove the dead hydrangea flowers in the autumn or leave them until the spring? The RHS recommends that dead blooms should only be removed from mophead hydrangeas after flowering in mild areas. Their advice is that it is better to leave the flowerheads on the plant over winter. This is because the dead flowers provide frost protection for the growth buds that will then become next year's blooms. Hydrangeas store moisture in their cork-like stems in winter, which can freeze in cold winter conditions and damage the plant. You can then remove the dead flowerheads in spring. I opt to leave mine in situ until the Spring as they look quite impressive in the garden too, as you can see.

In the back garden at Driftwood, I have two, 10-foot tall cordyline or Torbay palms which are not fully hardy. They have a high water content, which makes their crowns and trunk susceptible to frost damage. In order to play safe, I tend to fleece mine, to ensure



Hydrangea limelight flower heads

that they make it safely through the winter months. Both mine had quite large flower heads, as you can see in the picture. I decided to cut these off, in order to aid the fleecing. I find the best way is to tie the leaves with natural twine then wrap them up with horticultural fleece. It is best to do this when the leaves are totally dry to avoid rot. If you have any planted in containers these can be moved into a cold greenhouse or to a warmer part of your garden.

If your cordyline gets damaged by frost, recovery will depend on its age and size. It will very likely reshoot from the base in summer. In due course, these shoots will develop into a fully woody multi-stem specimen.

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



Torbay palm