

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Vintage mini pots



Chrysanthemums



Agave babies

Vibrant late-season blooms and the nation’s most-loved flowers

If you ever get up to Derbyshire, be sure to visit the gardens at Hardwick Hall. We recently visited for the first time and were very impressed, as was Chester our terrier. The house is an Elizabethan masterpiece and the gardens are very impressive too. It is laid out around the hall and has a herb garden, orchards, mixed borders which provide lots of seasonal colour. Across the estate there are impressive views of rolling hills and Grade I listed parkland. Follow walks which wind through ancient trees and countryside. Well worth a visit.

While we were away, I bought some vintage, mini, clay pots and this week have been filling them with some small succulents ready for next year. The plants have been created with cuttings from existing stock and broken off aeonium stems. I have a couple of nice stands just right for displaying smaller containers. Also, this week, there were a couple of my agave plants that had some pups growing alongside the main plant. I carefully teased them away and you can see I have created eight new plants which I will probably sell next year.

This is the final week of 2025 that I shall be updating you on gardens opening for the National Garden Scheme as their season comes to a close. This weekend, Saturday, you could visit Kotamaki in Tottingworth Park, Broad Oak which has opened several times through the season in its first year of opening for the scheme, with today being its final offering. It is open for pre-booked visitors only from 10am to midday with entry £12 and children £6. The owners will provide a talk about the garden at 10:30am and refreshments are included. It is a large creatively planted garden featuring a long double border within yew hedging, rockery, shade garden, exotic garden, pot garden, wildflower meadows, and kitchen garden. There is an emphasis on continuity of interest via imaginative mixed plantings of shrubs, climbers, perennials, bulbs, annuals and self-sowers.

Opening tomorrow, Sunday, is the lovely Bates Green Garden in Tye Hill Road, Arlington, from 1030am to 330pm with entry £7 and children

£3.50. There will be home-made soup, cakes & scones plus light lunches available in the large insulated Bluebell Barn. This plantswoman’s tranquil garden provides interest through the seasons. A woodland garden has been created around a majestic oak tree with a colour themed middle garden. The courtyard garden has seasonal container displays. Gardened for nature and wildlife and autumn guests can enjoy spotting the abundant fungi in the woods. Full details on both gardens at www.ngs.org.uk

A great plant for the garden at this time of the year is the ever-popular chrysanthemum. I have a large container with some pretty lemon-coloured flowers. The chrysanthemum is a versatile, popular plant, also known as a “mum” or “chrysanth,” and is renowned for its vibrant late-season blooms in various colours and shapes, including daisy-like, pompom, and spider forms. These hardy perennials are excellent for garden borders, pots, and cut flower arrangements, flowering from late summer into winter. To grow them, provide fertile, well-drained soil in a sunny, sheltered location, and protect them from frost. It is important to bear in mind that garden chrysanthemums are not the same plants as indoor chrysanthemums, which are sold as house plants. Indoor chrysanthemums are tender and must not be taken outside in autumn and winter. They are best treated as cut flowers as you’re unlikely to encourage them to flower again after they have finished blooming.

Chrysanthemums are generally sold as rooted cuttings or small plants, in spring. You can pot these on at home and then plant out after all risk of frost has passed, from late May, alternatively, buy garden-ready chrysanthemums in summer and autumn for immediate planting.

The sunflower is one of the nation’s best-loved flowers. Although most varieties have yellow blooms, like those pictured in my garden, you can grow them with rusty-red, green and even white flowers. Sunflowers are easy to grow from seed and fun for all the family. Mine were grown from a seed packet



Geoff at Hardwick Hall

that came free with a delivery.

Annual sunflowers are fast growers and can reach a height of 2m or more in just three months. Bear in mind that their growth rate and eventual height depend on factors like variety, availability of food and water, and weather conditions, so you’re not always guaranteed the heights predicted on your seed packet. For best results, grow your sunflowers in rich soil in open ground, in a sunny, sheltered spot, and water and feed frequently. That said, mine are growing in a large container.

Sunflowers bloom from summer through to the autumn and depending on the variety, can take 11-18 weeks to flower from seed. They are real eye catchers in any garden.

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



Sunflowers