

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Power cleaning by a contractor



Valentine's roses live another day



Succulents in a greenhouse

April is an exciting month but keep a close eye on the weather

GARDENING in April can provide us sunshine and showers, that said, Spring is in full swing, with tulips and flowering cherries in bloom. It's an exciting month as you start to sow outdoors but just watch out for frosts and keep any tender plants indoors for now. Remember to check your patio plants to ensure they aren't drying out. The warmer weather will quickly affect soil moisture levels.

I'm on a very tight schedule now to get the garden ready for visitors in June. The date of my knee replacement has been confirmed as the 30th April, so everything has to be done beforehand as I'll be out of action for between 4 and 6 weeks after the operation. To make matters worse, I have had carpal tunnel confirmed in my right wrist, so gardening jobs are getting more difficult. I've had to resort to wearing a wrist support to help the discomfort while working outside. It certainly makes things challenging trying to carry and move pots around the plot! For the first time ever, I have had to resort to getting help to do all the power washing of the patios and hard surfaces as holding the gun is not that easy and it's a long job. Being the control freak I am, needless to say, it has not been done as well as I would have done it myself but I'll have to live with it this year!

There are a couple of gardens opening for the National Garden Scheme this weekend. Firstly, there is Peelers Retreat at 70 Ford Road in Arundel which opens today, Saturday, from 2pm until 5pm with entry £5. See interlocking beds packed with year-round colour and scent, shaded by specimen trees. Check out the inventive water features and a range of quirky woodland sculptures

Near Haywards Heath, 47 Denmans Lane in Lindfield opens tomorrow, Sunday, from 1pm to 5pm with entry £7. This beautiful and tranquil 1 acre garden was described by Sussex Life as a 'garden where plants

star'. Created by the owners over the past 20 years, it is planted for interest throughout the year. Extensive choice of perennial and annual bedding plants plus home-made jams for sale too. Full details on both gardens can be found at www.ngs.org.uk

Last Sunday marked my weekly return to the BBC Radio Sussex airwaves with a weekly slot on the Sunday gardening programme with Pat Marsh, talking about the beautiful gardens opening for the National Garden Scheme every week across the county. Listen out for the slots each Sunday sometime after 1130.

Back in February, I was given a large bunch of roses for Valentine's Day. They looked fabulous for about 10 days but then started to fade. I decided to take them out of water, tie them together and hang upside down in a dark, cool space to dry out. You can see, several weeks later, they look great, living their second life as a vase of dried flowers. Whilst the vibrant colours are no longer there, they still make a great feature and will last quite a while.

As part of the process of getting ahead in the garden, all the agave I over winter, under cover to keep them dry, have now been placed out in the garden for the season. They really bring the beach garden alive and look great dotted around the garden with the smaller ones displayed against the railway sleeper wall. All the succulents in the heated greenhouse will need to come out before the 30th April too, but it will still be a little early as there might still be risk of frost. That said, I am going to have to take a chance as they must all be out and the greenhouse cleaned before I go into hospital.

I have already taken them all out individually, tidied them up and repotted where needed to try and speed the process up. Some of the lower leaves on the mangave plants had yellowed and have now been removed making them look more



Geoff with a wrist support, and agaves back out for the summer

attractive. Fresh gravel has been added around the base too. They will look magnificent once back out on the patio for the summer.

I have carefully tended all the aeoniums in there as well, removing the dead lower leaves that naturally occur through the winter and repotting some. There were a few that had broken off which have now been potted up to create some new plants too. So, come the last week in April, I can just lift them out of the greenhouse and place them in their summer homes in the garden. If the weather gets a little cold, I'll have to get someone to go out there and place some fleece over them temporarily.

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



Mangave in a greenhouse