

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Purple storm



New corten steel wall delivered



Ferns chopped back ready for steel wall

Pond is going but new area will make garden easier to manage

TODAY sees the start of a substantial project here at Driftwood. Over the last few weeks, I have been preparing for the landscapers to arrive to begin the work of filling in the old pond and creating a new area that will be much easier for me to maintain over the coming years.

I've designed the look of the area myself and have sketched out my plan for the guys to work from. Fortunately, we will not need to use a skip as all waste rubble can be used to fill the pond in.

I have never had fish in the pond, so that made the task of emptying it that bit easier. I love the sound of water in the garden, so I wanted to ensure that was retained in the new design.

To that end, I have purchased a large, corten steel, circular water feature in which I will place a fountain. To complement the feature, I have bought a large, curved corten steel wall which you can see in the image above. It has been specially made and delivered from the Netherlands recently. Let's hope it is not too difficult to relocate from the beach garden into the back garden.

The new area is just inside the back garden gate, so is the first impression visitors will have as they walk up the side of the house. I recently had someone come in and repair the large garden shed and give it a couple of new coats of red stain varnish. I had to remove the grape vine, which has now been replaced, from the structure while this was completed.

In order to open up the area to the rest of the garden, I am having a small set of steps put in to cut through the planting, meaning there will now be two routes to get to the top of the garden, not just the existing central path. The resulting new patio, incorporating a small Indian sandstone circle, will be dressed with containers and two new steel gabions, filled with rocks and stones, one either side.

I've just purchased four new shrubs to go in two large containers, which will be located in front of the shed, *Lonicera nitida* Garden Clouds 'Purple Storm'. These shrubs naturally grow in a round shape, making them very suitable for pruning as, for example, a sphere, making them an extremely interesting substitute for box. The glossy, fine foliage of Garden Clouds 'Purple Storm' is green with dark purple new shoots. They are supposedly very easy to grow, hardy down to -18 degrees and will look wonderful once established.

Many readers will, I'm sure, be celebrating Bonfire Night tonight. There are quite a few plants that are very reminiscent of fireworks too. Why not consider planting something in the garden now that can explode like fireworks for you next year? A great choice might be hydrangea "Fireworks". It is a Lacecap and a new, fairly exceptional, pure white hydrangea that has double star-shaped florets, just like exploding fireworks. They are very easy to grow. Anyone and everyone can grow them and they will tolerate most soils and nearly all are very hardy. They can cope with either full sun or full shade but, as a general rule of thumb, some shade is particularly helpful, especially for white hydrangeas, so why not give one a go.

Another great plant resembling a firework is *Allium Schubertii* with vast wonderful dark pink, spiky flowers. It is very eccentric and showy while flowering and great when dried too. You can't do better than this. They can be sprayed silver or crimson and become the crowning top of your Christmas tree as well. What's more, the bulbs flower for literally decades. *Schubertii* is a bulbous perennial producing bright-green, strap-shaped leaves in spring, which die back before the flowers appear. These consist of 50 or more star-shaped, pinky-purple florets on stems of differing lengths, producing a starburst effect up to 30 cm across.

So maybe this weekend is a good time to plant some in your garden for great results in 2023 and



Selfie in the mirror

beyond. These are perennial, so plant them somewhere permanent but add grit on heavy soils.

Another firework-inspired planting might be *Pennisetum setaceum* "Fireworks" (ruepplii), which makes a lively addition to bedding displays and patio containers. It is a half hardy perennial, so will need protection from frost. The fluffy seedheads can be also cut to make elegant dried flowers. The colourful foliage of this fountain grass emerges with bold stripes of red, pink and green before maturing to a rich shade of burgundy. From mid-summer to autumn, the showy purple flower spikes rise above the arching foliage in a spectacular architectural "bonfire" display.

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



Route of new path through planting