

# The Driftwood Garden Diary

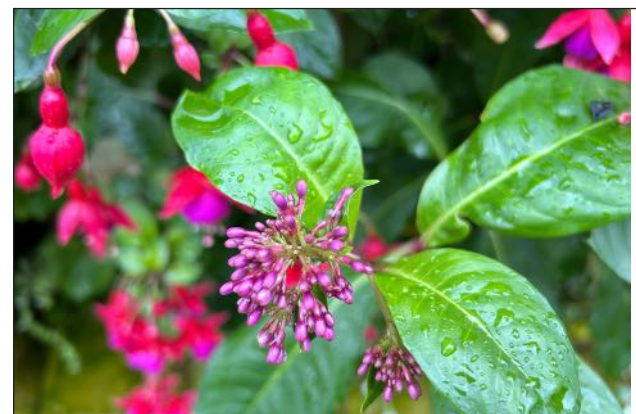
with Geoff Stonebanks



Buddleja Buzz



Dyckia Brittle Star



Fuchsia arborecens

## An amazing crop of grapes... but what do I do with them?

I HAVE had an amazing crop of grapes on the vine over the garden shed. The frustrating thing is that they are small pieces of fruit and contain pips, so it makes it difficult to do anything useful with them. In recent years I have just decided to leave them on the vine for the birds to enjoy. The many bunches hanging down do look pretty amazing though, with their colour changes from green to black.

A fuchsia in the garden that produces edible fruit too is the Arborecens. The plant is a tender, evergreen shrub or small tree that can grow up to 2m tall. It has glossy, dark green, elliptical leaves up to 20cm long, arranged in whorls. Panicles of dark pink buds open to small, single, fragrant pinkish-purple flowers in summer, followed by dark purple to blue-black fruits. Although the fuchsia berries are edible, most are not particularly tasty and are sparsely produced on plants. Fuchsia plants are generally grown as an ornamental and not for fruit crops within the UK. I have three containers of the plant but all need to be kept frost free through the winter.

A newly purchased plant for the garden through the summer months is Dyckia Brittle Star. It is a highly unusual hybrid form and a wonderfully exotic bromeliad, native to Southern America. Dyckia are highly adapted to cope with the harsh realities of their surroundings. The foliage is beautifully serrated with silvery-white edges and a deep maroon-green centre, forming a starry rosette. The plant is clump forming so you can expect offsets to eventually form at the base. As you may expect, it is not super hardy, so you will need to protect it from freezing conditions and wet winters. Mine is growing in a container and will be placed in a full-sun to semi shaded position outside next summer during the warmer months and through the winter in a bright conservatory or windowsill.

In the area surrounding the

corten steel pond I have a trio of beautiful buddleja. As you would expect, they are a great attraction for butterflies. Sadly, there have not been many to see, through the most part of the summer but September seems to have provided the perfect conditions for them to thrive and many have been in evidence posing on the plants in the last few weeks. The trio are Buddleja Buzz, in white, mauve and magenta.

Buddleja plants are really low maintenance, but they do benefit from pruning in early spring. Pruning will prevent them from becoming leggy and helps to maintain a nice compact plant. Buddleja plants flower on new growth, so pruning will also help to promote lots of new stems that will flower in the same year.

Prune Buddleja in March, once the hardest frosts are over, as the new growth begins to show. Firstly, remove any dead, diseased, damaged, or weak stems, before pruning all off the remaining stems back to form a low framework. In future years you can simply shorten the previous season's growth back to two pairs of buds from this permanent framework. A top tip for pruning buddleja is to always use clean, sharp secateurs and make your cuts squarely, just above a healthy pair of buds. Throughout the summer it is well worth deadheading the faded flowers as this will help to promote more blooms and keeps the plant looking neat and tidy. By following these simple steps your Buddleja Buzz plants will remain compact and free flowering for years to come as well as being the perfect butterfly hosts.

This weekend sees my final broadcast this year on BBC Radio Sussex's Sunday gardening programme. I'll be joining host Pat Marsh at about 11.40am for the final round-up of the year of gardens opening for the National Garden Scheme across both Sussex and Surrey. It's hard to believe that I've had a monthly slot on the radio for over ten years. All being well, I'll be back on air, for weekly slots



Geoff with Pat Marsh

again in the New Year, talking of early openers for snowdrops and hellebores.

There is just one garden open this weekend for the scheme in Sussex, Peelers Retreat at 70 Ford Road in Arundel opens today from 2pm to 5pm with entry £5, although it is open for group bookings by arrangement until the end of October. 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. Check out the inventive water feature, including a rill, raised fish pond, working Victorian fireplace and woodland sculptures. Full details at [www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk)

Read more of Geoff's garden at [www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk](http://www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk)



The grapes are looking good