

GEOFF STONEBANKS

The Driftwood Garden Diary



Charity visitors to the garden

In all the 16 years that I have been opening my garden for the National Garden Scheme, no one from their head office has ever been to visit.

All that changed a couple of weeks ago when the lovely duo of Vicky Flynn (media and communications manager) and Christina Plowman (social media and digital content manager) took it upon themselves to come and see the garden for themselves, after seeing and using the many images I have supplied over the years.

What's more, they came bearing gifts too. They gave me a pretty heart-shaped pebble decoration to hang in the garden. Needless to say, Chester had to get in on the act as well, charging outside after they had sampled my home-made tea and cake, hoping they may have dropped some crumbs!

Vicky emailed after: "Thank you so much for sharing your fabulous garden with us today – it was hugely inspiring and so full of joy and creativity. The cake and the company were perfect!" Christina commented: "It was so lovely to finally see your garden, I don't think photos can do it justice. Thank you for taking the time to show us around and for the delicious cake!"

It was really lovely to see them both and they too took images which you may see used through next year's celebratory year for the charity. The National Garden Scheme celebrates its 100th birthday in 2027.

One of my all-time favourite plants has to be *Erigeron karvinskianus* which has pretty white and pink flowers. Earlier this year I found a different family member!

Erigeron karvinskianus 'lavender lady' which is similar, but the flowers on this lovely plant are just soft lilac in colour.

They appear continuously for months on long stems that are coated in tiny mid-green leaves.

The former is a self-seeding, spreading perennial with pink and white, daisy-like flowers. Incredibly long-flowering and prolific, this new cultivar is just as reliable as the much-loved species, but it has slightly larger, lavender-coloured flowers. Once seen I decided it was a must-have plant, perfect for



Vicky, Geoff, Chester and Christina. Image: Geoff Stonebanks

a sunny spot with freely draining soils, providing a spreading carpet of colour that will last from May to October, if not even longer! It is hardy to -10 degrees and the leaves die back in autumn and emerge again in spring.

The tall yucca at the top of the garden has just thrown up two lovely flower stems. The only problem is that they can make the plant very unsteady and are prone to make the trunk snap, if bent over due to the weight. Sadly, this has already happened to two large trunks in recent years! Fingers crossed.

Looking good in the garden at the moment are the pretty tall stems of solidago. It produces upright stems, topped with broad clusters of rich golden-yellow flowers that resemble miniature suns, creat-

ing a spectacular display from late summer into autumn. The densely packed blooms provide valuable colour when many other plants are beginning to fade, bringing warmth and brightness to mixed borders, prairie-style planting and wildlife gardens. Rich in nectar, the flowers are highly attractive to bees, butterflies and other beneficial pollinating insects, making it an excellent choice for supporting garden wildlife. The sturdy stems add height and structure without becoming untidy, while the vibrant flower heads combine beautifully with ornamental grasses and late-flowering perennials. They also make an outstanding addition to cut flower arrangements. It will cope with most conditions and is reasonably drought tolerant once

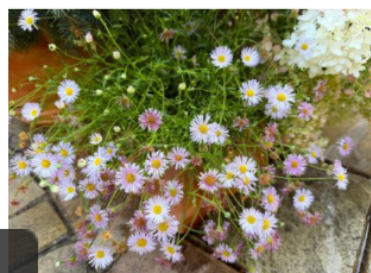
established. The best place to plant goldenrods is an open, sunny spot with well-drained soil. Most species thrive in full sun and average-to-poor soil conditions, making them ideal for back borders, native wildflower meadows and pollinator gardens.

Hydrangea paniculata 'groundbreaker blush' is a beautiful plant, ideal for those of you who love these robust and dependable shrubs yet have smaller spaces for which the larger varieties are too overpowering. It is an astounding, dwarf shrub which reaches a more petite height and spread of around 40-50cm, perfect for containers on balconies or patios as well as open ground.

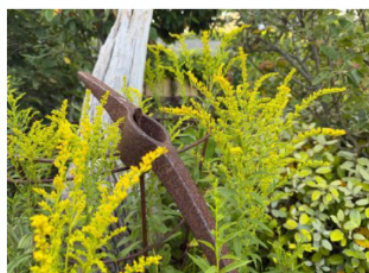
A wonderfully exuberant abundance of blooms emerges from

July to November, spreading floriferous joy wherever it grows. Flowers are both pink and white in varying degrees, depending upon the maturity of the blooms, with a stature ideal as groundcover if planted 'en masse'. You can even cut stems for vases, making the most of this beauty inside your home too. Plant in moist, well-drained, humus-rich soil which benefits from either full sun or partial shade. This is a fully hardy, deciduous shrub which will not need any additional winter protection throughout the majority of the UK. I have had two plants now for two years and this summer their displays have been amazing.

Read more of Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk or follow both him and the garden on social media.



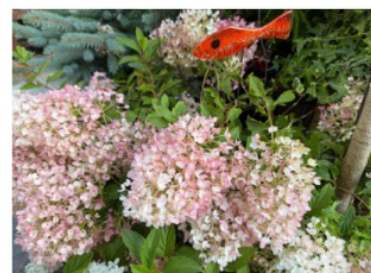
Erigeron karvinskianus



Golden rod



Yucca flowers



Hydrangea groundbreaker blush