

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Geoff chatting with the TV team



The Coastguard cottages



Hibiscus

An exciting day preparing for my Gardeners' World close-ups

I'M SURE many readers will have seen the garden and I on BBC Gardeners' World a couple of weeks ago. I was extremely pleased with the seven-minute film that was edited down from the 11 hours of filming, back on a beautifully sunny day, last August.

It had been an interesting journey from me writing to the series producer in Bristol a few months earlier in April 2023.

I first appeared on the programme back in 2016 and seven years on there have been a lot of changes in the garden. I told how I had been forced to completely rethink the garden and create a plot at the back that is now much easier to maintain and, more importantly, one that has become more drought tolerant, to cope with our recent summer weather. On the morning of filming, I was up at 5.30am making sure everything was perfect, carrying out some final dead-heading, putting cushions and furniture out and having a last-minute walk around to make sure everything was picture perfect.

We were blessed with a lovely sunny, if perhaps a little warm, day and the crew arrived just after 8am.

The best area for filming the interview was agreed and the session got under way.

Once the Q&A session wrapped, I was asked to identify two of my favourite plants in the garden. After much debate and considering ease of access for filming, we settled on *Eucomis* and *Buddleia* Buzz. I was asked to talk about the plants, with close ups of me touching them and distant shots too. After lunch, the team and I identified two tasks they could film me undertaking. The final list was decided and we set about the task.

First up was a demonstration of taking cuttings from a fuchsia, pictured. I opted to take them from a plant that my father had bought his mother as a ruby wedding gift many years ago, *Empress of Prussia*. There were many shots taken of close ups, then cutting the stems, preparing, dipping in rooting powder and watering. Next was some deadheading, the flower stems on phormiums in the gravel beds at the top of the garden,

followed by flower deadheading of sweet peas and geraniums around the garden. By 5pm everyone was a little jaded, me included, but what a wonderful day to remember.

The crew had made the whole thing so easy to film and it was a complete joy from start to finish.

The task ahead for them was to edit what was probably five hours of film into the seven-minute broadcast on the programme.

I think they did an excellent job.

I had a double whammy effect that day as well because BBC South East Today wanted to interview me and show a piece on the evening news, prior to *Gardeners' World*.

Juliette Parkin and a cameraman spent a drizzly wet morning filming the interview and other shots of the garden. All in all, a momentous day.

If you missed the show, you can always catch up and see episode two of *Gardeners' World* on iPlayer

A new opening for the National Garden Scheme next weekend is a garden at 5 Coastguard Cottages overlooking the world renowned Seven Sisters and Cuckmere Haven. This garden is rarely seen and is nestled on the cliff top in the South Downs National Park with amazing sea views. It is planted with native plants and spring bulbs and is a perfect setting for the owner's sculpture and pottery. An embryonic vegetable plot and beehives contribute to attracting wildlife to the garden. Dogs on leads allowed too.

It will be open from 10am to 5pm on both Saturday 13 and Sunday 14 with full details at www.ngs.org.uk

Looking pretty amazing in the front porch of the house is a beautiful hibiscus that my father bought for me many moons ago, probably about 18 years ago.

It never fails to impress. Hibiscus requires bright, humid conditions with good ventilation, protected from direct sunlight and a with a minimum night temperature of 7C.

You can place your plant outdoors in summer if you want but it will need to be brought indoors before temperatures drop below 12C. I've always kept mine indoors as I'd hate something to happen to it bearing in mind its provenance.

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



Geoff being filmed during a busy day with the Gardeners' World crew