

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Question Time expert drops in to celebrate £100k milestone

REGULAR readers will know that I have organised the Macmillan Garden Trail, between Brighton and Seaford since 2012, raising money for Macmillan Cancer Support and the Macmillan Cancer Centre in the city.

This year's recent event raised an incredible £7114.61 across the weekend. The 17 garden owners taking part were very pleased to see two days of brilliant sunshine, instead of the usual weekend of rain and sun. There were nearly 1,400 individual garden visits made throughout the weekend, almost £1,500 worth of tea and cake sold as well as £1,300 received in generous donations from visitors both in person and online.

I was extremely pleased to be able to welcome The One Show's gardening expert and Gardeners' Question Time panellist, Christine Walkden, to my garden, to help us mark the fact we had raised over £100,000 for the charity over the years. We were fortunate that many people came to chat to her and seek gardening advice for their own plots. Christine spoke of how impressed she was that the trail had sustained over the 12 years, thanks to my ongoing commitment and the willingness of others to open their plots.

Megan Watson, Macmillan's fundraising manager in the South East, said "I attended Geoff's garden and spoke to visitors. It was lovely to hear, first-hand, their previous years' experience. The feedback was brilliant and made me truly proud to be involved in the event and have the pleasure of meeting you all. Thank you so much Geoff for the commitment and passion he has for his event and it's been truly lovely to see him in action this year - £100,000 is a staggering amount of money and truly is something to be celebrated. I personally and on behalf of Macmillan Cancer Support cannot thank you all enough."

In addition to Christine, the Eastbourne-based Holocaust survivor Dorit Oliver Wolff was on hand to sell copies of her book *From Yellow Star to Pop Star*. An author, public speaker and artist, Dorit recounts her remarkable journey from Nazi persecution to

pop stardom in spectacular detail. More importantly, half of her book sales over the weekend went to the charity too.

Looking pretty amazing in my garden this week is a beautiful plant, *Sanguisorba hakusanensis* Lilac. I vividly remember catching sight of this gorgeous plant at Hampton Court Flower Show a few years ago and decided I had to add it to my garden. It is such a stand-out plant. Lilac Squirrel is an herbaceous perennial which grows to about one metre. The pretty foliage is blue-green with rounded, wavy-edged leaflets and the flowers, produced from midsummer to early autumn, are pinkish-purple, fluffy, hanging, squirrel tails. It is located on the central path in my garden and is one of about half a dozen plants that visitors always ask the name of. What's more, in my book, it is pretty easy to grow too. Mine is positioned so that you almost brush against it as you walk up the path.

A knockout plant showing its true colours this week with its vibrant red flowers, superbly contrasting with the narrow, lance-shaped bright green foliage, is *Canna Brilliant*. I bought mine a couple of years ago while visiting a garden in Kent that had a plentiful supply of them growing en masse in the borders. It can immediately provide a cheerful touch of the tropics in your garden or patio and blooms from mid-summer right through until the autumn. The plant is a medium size that makes it a perfect fit for container planting too. Mine is in a large container, set among the succulents in the new sunken patio and stands out beautifully against the old railway sleepers.

Canna tubers can be planted in April or May, at a depth of between 7cm and 10cm. They are often best started in pots and then transplanted into borders or beds towards the end of May, requiring a sunny spot protected from the wind. The plants are renowned for their love of sunny areas and should be watered regularly during warm weather. They can be given a feed once a month and can be dead-headed when necessary. The tubers should be lifted and



Top left, *Canna Brilliant* and, right, celebrating £100,000. Above, Geoff with Christine Walkden and, right, *sanguisorba*

stored indoors after the first autumn frost. Their striking flowers and ornamental foliage can be used as a centre piece in bedding schemes or like mine, can be grown in large containers. *Cannas* are an excellent perennial that will add plenty of exotic colour to all your garden borders, beds or containers.

You can read more of Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk or why not go and visit? You can book a slot by calling him on 01323 899296 or emailing visitdriftwood@gmail.com.

The garden gate will be open most days until August 31 for you to enjoy his home-made tea and cakes too.

