

GEOFF STONEBANKS

The Driftwood Garden Diary



Visitors enjoy my seaside garden

THE week before I officially opened the garden gate, back on bank holiday Monday, we had a coach party of 32 enthusiastic visitors, all the way from Vilnius, the picturesque capital of Lithuania.

They were on a five-day tour of UK gardens in the South East and a visit to Chelsea Flower Show.

After several days spent tidying and deadheading, everything was prepared. I always feel like I'm dressing for a film set rather than doing the garden! Little did I, or my visitors, expect the exceedingly high temperatures on the day. The coach arrived outside the garden as the temperatures rose, almost 30 degrees on arrival. I would normally address visitors with a talk about the garden but offered to deliver it on their air-conditioned coach, instead of standing in the heat of the beach garden. Several of the group did not speak any English, so, after I had delivered a couple of sentences, the tour guide interpreted it for the remainder.

Despite the air conditioning, it was still a bit like a sauna on the bus. After disembarking, the visitors toured the garden, with those who spoke a little English, full of questions and praise for the inspiring coastal plot. Fortunately, at 10am, there is still plenty of shade at the top of the back garden, which many visitors made use of to cool off. A few small purchases were made of the artwork for sale, local Sussex artist's work on its way to Lithuania. Sadly, they had opted to pass on my homemade tea and cakes due to a heavy schedule. In hindsight, I reckon it was probably a wise decision in the excessive heat!

When asked their impressions of the garden, having seen all that Chelsea had to offer on their trip, the feedback was amazing, with all really loving and feeling inspired by the garden. Two of them, Vytautas & Audrius wrote in the visitor's book: "Loved your garden! But my wife will get too many ideas."

The organiser, Indre, back in Vilnius, wrote after feedback and a short video from me, "thank you so much for your kind message



Delivering the talk on the coach. Image: Geoff Stonebanks

and for welcoming the group so warmly today. Everyone truly enjoyed the visit, and it was lovely to hear such positive feedback from the participants as well. Many thanks again for your hospitality and for making the visit so special."

It is going to be quite a busy weekend for gardens opening for the National Garden Scheme. There are nine open across Sussex today and nine open again tomorrow! I'm just going to pick out a couple for you, but please visit their website and check out the details for all 18 openings at www.ngs.org.uk.

There are seven pretty gardens opening in the delightful Sussex village of Hellingly tomorrow (7th). Visitors can enjoy a pretty walled cottage garden with a sum-

merhouse and sunny terrace. A garden entered via a bridge over a large pond, perfect for wildlife, with countryside views. There's also a charming cottage garden overlooking the C12 Church of St Peter and St Paul. Another garden, located in the heart of the village, is extensive and still in development, with beautiful trees and roses, with ice creams for sale. On the other side of the village, a unique garden, where lunches and teas will be served, incorporates the River Cuckmere, a sluice gate and a lush mix of perennials and mature. They open 11am to 5pm with an entry £8.

Also tomorrow, Offham House in The Street, Offham, opens from 1pm to 5pm with entry £8. This is a romantic garden featuring foun-

tains, flowering trees and an established arboretum. Stroll along the double herbaceous border and the long peony bed, explore the herb and walled kitchen gardens with glasshouses and cold frames, then relax with tea and home-made cakes. Pelargoniums and other plants available to buy.

Throughout June, 19 community gardens and allotments in Brighton & Hove will open their gates for a vibrant month of Open Days. This city-wide programme invites neighbours, families and visitors to explore some of Brighton's most welcoming and inspiring urban green spaces. You can find full details here <https://www.buses.co.uk/routes-to-roots>.

Each garden has its own unique character—from hidden plots to

thriving community growing projects—and together they showcase the creativity, care and community spirit at the heart of the Brighton & Hove Community Garden Network. Discover hidden community gardens, meet local growers and volunteers, pick up practical tips on sustainable gardening, composting and wildlife-friendly planting and experience how community green spaces support well-being and bring people together. Every garden in the network will host at least one Open Day.

Read more of Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk or follow both him and the garden on social media. Book a visit to Driftwood before the 2nd August by emailing visitdriftwood@gmail.com.



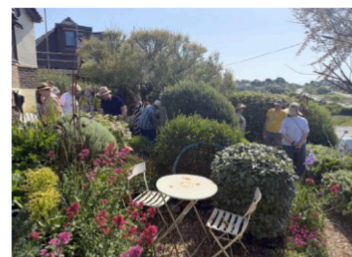
Visitors loving the detail



Crowding in the shade



On to the next garden



The scorching hot beach garden