

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Euphorbia mellifera



Hostas



Sea kale

It's World Naked Gardening Day ... just watch out for the cacti

IT'S a once in a lifetime celebration weekend with the coronation of King Charles III.

I'm 70 and the last coronation took place just as I was born, back in 1953. Depending on Charles's longevity, I may not see another one. You may like to mark the occasion in your garden with a King Charles III rose bush. This fully hardy, red rose is the perfect plant with which to mark the coronation. It flowers in summer and autumn and likes a sunny spot. Another commemorative planting might be Achillea Coronation Gold, a fitting tribute to grow in the garden to honour King Charles.

Apparently, it was introduced to honour the coronation of the late Queen Elizabeth and features tall stems with clusters of bright yellow flowers that are very popular with bees. It works especially well planted with grasses and in prairie-style planting schemes.

I am extremely lucky to be able to join the newly crowned King and Queen on May 9 at a Royal Garden Party in the grounds of Buckingham Palace by virtue of my recent crowning as one of the 500 Coronation Champions. Pray for fine weather.

Did you know that it has been National Gardening Week this past week. The theme this year has been to "create your coronation container" to celebrate His Majesty King Charles III and his love of gardening. I hope you've all had a go.

I wonder if you plan to mark World Naked Gardening Day today? Every year, on the first Saturday in May, gardeners are encouraged to shed their clothes and tend their gardens naked, just as nature intended.

It's not just other nudists that are encouraged to garden in the buff. It's anyone who desires to experience a stronger bond with nature.

If you are thinking of trying naked gardening today it is probably not a good day to plant roses or do anything with cacti.

A couple of years ago I decided to give it a go, with a strategically positioned pot of tulips and managed to raise £800 into the

bargain for Macmillan Cancer Support by asking for donations on social media. This year I'm posing with a pot of succulents.

Starting to look good in my garden are the three large pots of hostas on the north facing back wall.

These shade-loving plants are primarily grown for their beautiful foliage and there's a vast range to choose from, with leaves in all shades of green as well as dusky blues and acid yellows, sometimes variegated or flashed with cream or gold, ruffled, smooth or distinctively ribbed. Many also produce small trumpet-shaped mauve or white flowers in summer. However, hostas are notoriously irresistible to slugs and snails but are also much loved by gardeners. I stand my containers on an upturned saucer, set in a larger dish, then fill with water, so they sit in a moat and the slugs tend not to cross the water.

A beautiful plant in my garden at this time of the year is crambe maritima or sea kale.

It is a robust herbaceous perennial growing up to 75cm which forms a clump of large, lobed, wavy-edged blue-green leaves, with dense racemes of small white flowers in early summer. Mine are actually flowering now.

Ideally, grow in a deep, fertile, well-drained soil in full sun although it will tolerate poor soil and partial shade.

Mine are growing well on chalk here at Driftwood. Provide shelter from strong winds if possible.

Another of my stalwart plants is Euphorbia mellifera. Often referred to as a honey spurge, it is a handsome, semi-evergreen shrub, native to Madeira and the Canary Islands.

It has become a popular garden plant for its honey-scented summer flowers, which are popular with bees, attractive domed growth habit and waxy leaves.

The plant can be grown in full sun or partial shade, and will vary in habit depending on the sunlight it receives.

In full sun it will develop a denser, more compact shape and in shadier spots a looser and taller habit. It looks brilliant growing in exotic borders or gravel gardens.

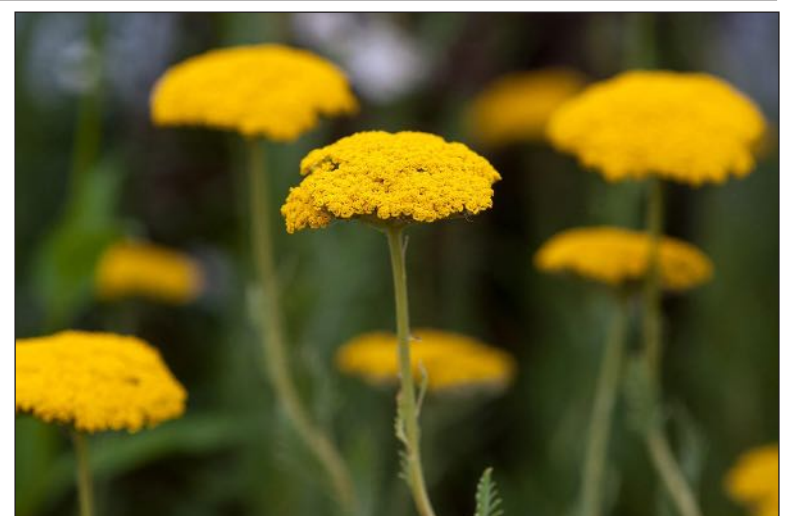


Geoff marks naked gardening day

I have several clumps around the back garden. It can be pruned back hard in spring if it starts to get too leggy, but remember to wear gloves when pruning, as the milky white sap can irritate the skin and eyes.

If you want to get out and about, there are a few National Garden Scheme venues open over the Coronation weekend, Mountfield Court in Robertsbridge opens between 2pm and 5pm and Hollymount in High Hurstwood opens between 2pm and 6pm, both on Sunday 7th and Stone Cross House in Crowborough will open on Monday between 2pm and 5pm. Full details available at www.ngs.org.uk

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



Achillea Coronation Gold