

# GEOFF STONEBANKS

## The Driftwood Garden Diary



# Succulents, hedges and hardy trees

**T**HIS month, I have two garden talks to deliver, the first at 2.30pm on Tuesday the 10th in East Dean Village Hall, BN20 0DR, to East Dean and Friston Gardening Club, and the second to Lindfield Horticultural Society at 7.30pm on Wednesday the 11th in the King Edward Hall, 24 High Street, Lindfield RH16 2HH.

As it happens, both clubs allow guests to attend their meetings at a cost of £4 each. The talk I shall be providing at both venues is entitled "My Succulent Obsession," recounting the story of my love of succulents, how to care for them and their use throughout my garden. Interested? Why not join us?

Taking place on February 7, is Seedy Saturday in Lewes from 10am to 3pm in Lewes Town Hall, via the Fisher Street entrance. It is a cash-only event, so take along your coins! The entrance fee is £2 for adults, with children free.

What is Seedy Saturday? It's a one-day event with a magnificent Seed Swap, seed potatoes and shallots for sale, talks and workshops, independent seed merchants, heritage seeds, children's activities, reconditioned garden tools and metal plant supports, home-baked cakes and local produce lunch.

You can learn how to make a willow plant support or restore your rusty secateurs. Over a thousand visitors went to Seedy Saturday 2025, so it is very popular. There will be a number of speakers too. All talks are free, and no booking is required; however, the lecture room has limited capacity and once full, they cannot admit more people. Donations are welcome to help cover the costs of the speaker's fees!

Full details available at [commoncause.org.uk/seedy-saturday](http://commoncause.org.uk/seedy-saturday)

I mentioned a couple of weeks ago about having someone come to the garden and cut back my tall border hedging and ivy.

The really large *Elaeagnus ebbingei*, running along the main path into the front gar-



Winter morning in beach garden. Image: Geoff Stonebanks

den, is a vigorous, evergreen shrub known for its resilience, fast growth and silvery foliage, which has become a popular choice in UK gardens for hedging and screening due to its hardiness and ability to thrive in challenging conditions, like those here on the coast. It is a fast-growing evergreen shrub that can reach a height of 3 to 5 if left untrimmed. Mine seems to have gone mad in recent years and started to fill out across the path. It is typically maintained as a dense, bushy hedge when pruned regularly as you can see mine is, especially after the harsh cut back the guys gave it when visiting. Its leaves are leathery and oval, with a dark green upper surface and dis-

tinctive silvery undersides that shimmer in the wind. Young foliage often appears with a coppery tint. The foliage provides an attractive contrast and creates a dense screen for privacy and is perfect for dissipating the salt-laden winds too. In autumn, the shrub produces small, highly fragrant, creamy-white flowers that are often hidden within the foliage but emit a powerful, sweet scent. These are followed in spring by small, edible orange berries, although fruiting is not always prolific in colder climates.

Way back in 2003, I was given a small potted olive tree for my 50th birthday. It has been planted in my garden now for about 15 of those intervening years and has

grown quite profusely and now also needs a regular trim each year. Olive trees are very hardy, and mature olive trees can survive in very cold weather, having no ill effects in temperatures as low as -15°C. They can be kept either outdoors or grown inside as houseplants. Olive trees are incredibly robust, as their root system is capable of regenerating itself even when the rest of the tree is destroyed by disease or harsh weather conditions. They are very long-lasting plants if treated with the right amount of care and attention. The oldest known olive tree is known as the Olive Tree of Vouves and is estimated to be at least 2000 years old. On average, most olive trees can reach the ripe old age of 500

years, so I guess this one is going to see me out! You can see mine getting a good trim to return it to a lollipop shape.

Creating an amazing splash of colour in my front porch at the moment is one of two hibiscus plants I have. They both came from a single plant my father bought me back in 2005, a couple of years before his death. Tropical hibiscus is native to China and is tender in Britain, so grown as a pot plant indoors where it may reach 2m.

It can be tricky to manage, and the large showy blooms only last a day or two.

Read more of Geoff's garden at [www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk](http://www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk) or follow both him and the garden on social media.



Severe cut back on elaeagnus hedge



Seedy Saturday



Trimming an olive tree



Peach coloured hibiscus