

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



A wild plum tree



Pigeons live in the garden

Image: Mark Glassman



Chiastophyllum oppositifolium

Spoilt for choice with six brand new gardens to visit

A GOOD few Christmases ago now, my mum bought me a wild plum tree as a present in a gift box. It has been planted in a large container on the patio ever since and seems to have flourished well. It looks stunning in the garden and is so pretty with its abundance of pale pink flowers, which blossom in early spring. In autumn the deep-red, sweet plums can be eaten straight from the tree! This deciduous tree naturally sheds its leaves every autumn and will remain in its dormant phase all winter. Fresh, new leaves will grow in spring and it's well worth the wait. This year I have been surprised to find some small fruit growing on it too for the very first time.

Across Sussex this weekend, there are actually six brand new gardens opening for the National Garden Scheme. Kotamaki in Broad Oak, The Old Manor and Shorts Farm in Nutbourne, 8 Rushy Mead in West Broyle, Swallow Lodge and Talma in Horsham. Spoilt for choice! Look out the full details on the scheme's website at www.ngs.org.uk

A couple of others you could visit are Alpines in High Street, Maresfield, near Uckfield, opening today (Saturday) from 11am to 5pm with entry £6. It is a largely level, one-acre garden, incorporating the ornamental and the edible. It offers a riot of colour and scent over many months, especially early summer with large and rampant mixed borders containing many scented roses. The other is Farleys Sculpture Garden in Muddles Green, Chiddingfold, near Lewes opening especially for the scheme today from 10am to 4.30pm with entry £5. Designed as different themed rooms for sculpture, Farleys garden presents their permanent collection of works chosen by photographer Lee Miller and surrealist artist Roland Penrose alongside works by contemporary guest sculptors. Over the years, giants, goddesses, mythical creatures and Roland's own work has populated the garden in the company of work by their artist friends. You may recognise part of the garden as having been featured

as the view through the window in the movie 'Lee' starring Kate Winslet.

A really pretty plant in the garden is *Chiastophyllum oppositifolium*, it is an alpine succulent, closely related to sedum but more suited to shady gardens. It is a clump-forming perennial, and is ideal for using in pots too, as you can see from the one growing at Driftwood. Its unusual dangling yellow flowers contrast beautifully with the fleshy leaves, which change colour from mid-green to red. Also known as Lamb's Tail, *Chiastophyllum oppositifolium* is easy to grow and is also suitable for growing in rockeries and rock walls. A great statement plant.

A couple of months ago, I mentioned a new plant that I'd recently added to the garden is *Loropetalum chinense* 'Fire Dance', which I've read is rarely seen in gardens. This handsome spreading shrub deserves to be much better known in my book. Its evergreen purple-bronze foliage provides fabulous year-round colour, and contrasts beautifully with the spidery, raspberry-red spring blooms, which are delicately scented and only adds to its charms. This magnificent hardy shrub is ideal for sheltered borders and woodland gardens where it makes an eye-catching specimen in spring and provides a beautiful backdrop for colourful summer perennials. Mine have both been planted in containers and are now looking radiant in the June sunshine.

We have certainly had a tremendous number of birds visit the garden this year, with many nesting in the border hedging, two in particular are a pair of pigeons and many blackbirds, both of which are quite tame. The pigeons are often seen washing and drinking in the bird baths and corten steel pond. The love to perch on the rusty metal sculpture and one of the three arches across the central path as you can see.

This year, the beach garden is a little wilder than it would be normally. I kept it neat and tidy up to the end of April when my surgery took place, but throughout May, I was really unable to get out there, while recovering from the



Geoff in the Wild Beach Garden

knee replacement. To be honest, I'm not sure visitors will really notice but I certainly do and I like to keep all the plants in check. You can see the ballota, growing beneath the metal sphere, is about to take over. Also called false dittany, it is a small, bushy shrub that thrives in hot, sunny and dry conditions. It's aided by a covering of felty, silver hairs that reduce water loss. In late summer it produces flowering spears that bear whorls of small pink flowers and is perfect for growing in sunny gravel gardens, like mine, where it'll inhibit weed growth and combine well with plants like bearded irises and phlomis.

Read more of Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk of book a visit before 3rd August by emailing visitdriftwood@gmail.com



loropetalum Fire Dance