

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Pine bonsai babies



New plants from an open garden



Pyracantha

I searched in vain for pot of gold

I COULD not believe my luck a couple of weeks ago when I got the opportunity to capture an amazing double rainbow above the garden. It was pure chance seeing it there and it seemed to remain for ages. I must have spent hours trying to find the pot of gold, to no avail. The arc sat beautifully across the table and chairs in the sunken patio creating a wonderful light.

As we fast approach autumn, the clocks go back in just a couple of weeks, a reliable stalwart in the garden for some fabulous colour is pyracantha or firethorn. They are all tough, very hardy shrubs which tolerate a wide range of demanding conditions, including shaded and exposed positions, and make dense thorny evergreen growth ideal for intruder-proof hedging or for training on walls to display their profuse and brightly coloured berries.

They also make attractive free-standing shrubs, although growth is then often more compact and arching.

Mine, an "Orange Glow" is a reliable, vigorous form, with dense growth and strong branches covered in autumn with masses of long-lasting berries.

The shrub typically has plentiful orange-red berries and needle-like thorns.

The berries have not been shown to be toxic to animals or humans, although swallowing large amounts might cause some mild stomach upset. Berrying can be reduced in shady sites, including against north-facing walls.

It is a great plant species to hard prune. It's tough as boots and will respond well. The only drawback is you'll probably lose that year's flowers but other than that early spring is the best time to hard prune pyracantha.

You can even prune it back down to the ground if need be and let it regenerate.

It is a hardy plant, so won't require winter protection once established. Just take care with young plants, as they can be more susceptible to winter cold. It won't hurt to cover young specimens with a large plastic sheet or horticultural fleece if there is a heavy frost forecast.

Last month we were able to have ten days away, seven in Devon in a beautiful cottage in the middle of nowhere, followed by a few days with a friend in Dorset.

Needless to say, plants were involved along the way.

We visited quite a few gardens, including a pretty one open for the National Garden Scheme close to Ashburton where I purchased, at an extremely good price, two terracotta pots with succulents, one with sempervivum and the other with echeveria.

They already look at home among my large collection at Driftwood.

The other is an unusual plant I had not seen before which I purchased in a nursery close by. *Leonotis leonurus*, also known as lion's tail and wild dagga, is a plant species in the mint family Lamiaceae.

The plant is a broadleaf evergreen large shrub native to South Africa and southern Africa, where it is very common. Lion's Tail is perennial in areas with mild climates and works well as an annual in regions with cold winter temperatures.

It can survive temperatures as low as minus 6C and will often resprout with new growth from hardened wood if it freezes in winter.

I shall be protecting mine through the winter months. It is an excellent plant for attracting wildlife to your garden as the flowers profuse copious nectar which attracts birds, bees and butterflies.

The wild dagga is fast growing and is both drought and mild frost hardy. It should be well watered in summer and can tolerate being dried out during the dry winter months.

Last Christmas, my mum bought me a gift box with five different seed types to grow bonsai trees, larch, sweet gum, pine, redbud and juniper. I followed all the instructions meticulously, which included placing some in the fridge for a number of weeks.

They were all carefully planted in small seed pots that came with the kit but sadly only one type flourished.

The seeds from the pine packet have dutifully produced three fine



Geoff and leonotis leonurus

baby trees. I have carefully planted them up in small dishes and plan to keep a close eye on them through the winter, either kept in the house or in the heated greenhouse.

The ancient art of growing bonsai trees is well over a thousand years old. Many individuals are not aware that a simple potted plant is literally the meaning of bonsai, "potted plant".

There are, however, a large pool of types of plants, bushes and even trees that can be trained and kept as a bonsai. Though usually associated with Japan, bonsai tree cultivation actually originated in China, where the trees eventually came to be associated with the religion of Zen Buddhism.

Wish me luck in trying to keep them and create a bonsai tree.

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



The recent rainbow