

# The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Verbena bonariensis



Vanilla fraise



Geranium and helichrysum silver

## Where are all the butterflies?

**A** RATHER under-rated plant for the garden is, in my opinion, helichrysum petiolare Goring Silver which is a trailing perennial with rounded, grey-white leaves. Pretty flowers are produced in summer which experts say are best removed as they appear. I like to leave them on some of mine for show.

The plant prefers full sun, or partial shade with free-draining soil or compost. It is a brilliant choice to knit a display together. The plant really helps create some stunning displays and is great for baskets, bowls and tubs, particularly at the edges to allow the plant to demonstrate its full trailing ability. It is very easy to grow with the woolly leaves intensifying in colour with more light. You can also get helichrysum gold too.

I plant them up with geraniums and osteospermums and they look perfect once the flower heads emerge from the plants through the silver great foliage. They are also planted in my wall pots along with trailing geraniums.

I don't know about you, but I have not seen anywhere near as many butterflies in my garden this year as in previous years, certainly not at the start of the summer. I have many plants to entice them to the garden but they were very late to the party with a few more in evidence in recent weeks.

One such plant in my garden is verbena bonariensis which has tall, narrow, sparsely-leaved stems on top of which flattened heads of bright lavender-purple flowers appear in late summer. It's perfect for bringing height to an ornamental border and also works well in prairie-style planting schemes with ornamental grasses. It's a superb butterfly plant, rivalling even buddleja. They grow best in moist but well-drained soil in full sun. Given the right conditions, plants will self-seed freely, but in colder regions they may need protection from frost. You can leave dead stalks to provide winter interest too. I have a lot at Driftwood especially in the beach

garden where they look dramatic as they sway with the breeze.

A lovely specimen plant at this time of the year is the beautiful hydrangea Vanille Fraise. Thompson and Morgan state on their website that from trials, totalling 10,000 plants, this extra special hydrangea was selected for its stunning appearance with a garden performance to match. Its blooms emerge pure white then mature through the season to a delicious raspberry pink. It is very easy to grow and perfect for the back of my house which is north facing. The plant is perfectly able to take temperatures down to 20C due to its extreme hardiness. The plant has large flowers that perform well from mid-summer to mid-autumn with fluffy, loose, pyramid-shaped flower panicles which are creamy-white to begin then turn shades of pink as they age, before finally taking on rich pink tones. Mine started life in a container but has now been planted up in a raised bed behind the upturned railway sleepers at the rear of the house with the dangling flower heads set off by the dark tones of the wood.

You might have seen the recent Sunday Times feature on the garden, which was published on August 18. The subject was how I age-proofed my garden. I have to say I was very pleased with the piece, especially the more detailed online feature. There was a great photoshoot with a professional photographer, the only thing was, it took place on an incredibly hot Sunday afternoon, making it quite challenging for him. You can see him shooting me under an umbrella and can read the feature on a link from the home page of my web site.

The second opening this year, for the National Garden Scheme, of the Langney and Willingdon trail in Eastbourne, takes place next Sunday between 1pm and 5pm with a reduced entry of £5, as sadly, due to illness, 23 Oldfield Road is no longer able to open, so please don't visit the garden. There will be no refreshments available, but local cafés are close by. The two gardens left to



The photoshoot

open are at 36 Jellicoe Close (also recently featured in the Sunday Times) and 16 Hardy Drive. The former has a front and rear garden created over the past five years on beach reclaimed land and is a Mediterranean, cottage-style garden with wildlife, ecology and sustainability at its heart while 16 Hardy Drive is a small urban back garden packed with plants dominated by a large palm tree and full borders.

Also open this weekend for the scheme are Knightsbridge House in Hellingly, Parsonage Farm near Billingshurst, 70 Peelers Retreat in Arundel and Sussex Prairies near Henfield. Full details on dates and location for all gardens can be found at [www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk)

Read more of Geoff's garden at [www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk](http://www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk)



A red admiral butterfly