

GEOFF STONEBANKS

The Driftwood Garden Diary



What's flourishing this summer

We closed the garden gate for 2026 last weekend, after a quieter summer than usual, due to the intense heat over several weeks.

We had more than 350 visitors across the nine weeks, and two of them were a real surprise. A classmate from my secondary school – we last saw each other when we went our separate ways back in 1970 – booked to visit with his wife. Julian and Mary Humphrey travelled from their home in Bedfordshire, by car, train and bus, to visit the garden for the day and then returned home after the visit. How's that for commitment! It was really lovely to catch up on the intervening 56 years! Needless to say, they both loved the garden and enjoyed the tea and cake served.

This weekend, there is a new garden open for the National Garden Scheme in the city, 1 Belton Close, BN2 3RY. It opens for pre-booked visitors only tomorrow, (August 9) and again on August 23. It is a compact city garden and packs texture and colour into a small space. It was designed five years ago around a bold extension, and the garden includes both sitting and dining areas, an outdoor kitchen, a rill and ponds, a kitchen garden and both sun-baked and shaded beds. It comes into its own in late summer, with planting that includes grasses, dahlias, perennials, annuals, aconiums and climbers. It may well be sold out for the 9th, but you should be able to find tickets for the 23rd. Full details at www.ngs.org.uk.

I have three different oleanders in the back garden, a pretty red one in the ground and a lemon (pictured) and pink one in containers. They have been pretty stunning this summer with the intense heat we have enjoyed. Oleanders are a mainstay of Mediterranean gardens, widely used for screen planting, on hill-sides and alongside roads. Flowering in summer, the large open flower clusters can be single or double, and come in many colours including white, pink, red and peach. Upright stems are clothed with evergreen leaves



Geoff and school friends. Images: Geoff Stonebanks

which are long, slender and an attractive shade of silvery-green. That said, every part of the oleander plant is extremely poisonous if ingested and consuming even a small amount can be fatal. While the strongly bitter taste of oleander makes it unpalatable, it's wise not to grow oleanders where there are young children. They are not good for pets either but mine are kept away from where our dog can get to. It's sensible to wear gloves when handling oleander, along with thoroughly washing hands and exposed skin after handling or pruning.

A pretty plant growing in a raised bed at the back of the house is nepeta or catmint. It bears large blue blooms on square stems, above aromatic,

toothed foliage. It's extremely attractive to bees and other insects, and makes an excellent cut flower. Catmints are appealing to cats, though if they eat an excessive amount of the foliage it can give them an upset stomach. Best grown at the front of a mixed border, in pots or as part of an informal, low-growing hedge. You can prune back after flowering to promote bushy growth, and divide congested clumps in spring.

Over the years I have accumulated quite a number of hydrangeas in the garden. One of my favourites is *Hydrangea paniculata* 'Limelight'. It has dense clusters of long-lasting flowers that emerge in mid-summer lime green, fade to cream and finally turn shades of deep pink

in autumn. The flowers are held upright on sturdy stems and the flower heads are quite large, and range between 15-30cm long. They are ideal for using in cut flower displays, both fresh and dried. They prefer partial shade to full sun, though at hotter, sunnier times of the year, like the recent heat waves they can need protection to prevent plant wilt. That said, mine seem to have coped well with the heat! Regular watering is important, especially during dry spells, to ensure the plant establishes well and produces abundant blooms, remember hydrangea do not like to dry out. Once established, to enhance flowering prune hard in late winter/early spring cutting back the previous season's shoots to with-

in a few buds of the permanent, woody framework of the plant.

One of my many fuchsia plants that has flowered well this summer, is one that my Dad bought for my Mum for their ruby wedding anniversary, many moons ago. It is Fuchsia 'Empress of Prussia' which is a classic, hardy, deciduous shrub, famous for its large, two-toned blooms. Bred in Germany in 1868, it features glowing scarlet sepals and vibrant, reddish-magenta petals. This upright plant reaches about 90cm in height and thrives in moist, well-drained soil with partial shade.

■ Read more about Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk or follow both him and the garden on social media.



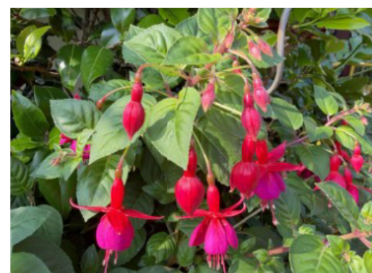
Limelight



Nepeta cat mint



Lemon oleander



Empress of Prussia