

# The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Miscanthus



Geoff and Camellia



New growth sea kale

## Think carefully about the flowers you chose for Valentine's Day

**S**O, NEXT week is Valentine's Day, will you be celebrating and buying flowers for your loved one? If so, what flower do you choose? I suppose the Valentine's icon is the red rose pictured, a true classic through the ages, but did you know different colour roses can mean slightly different things? Red roses are for your true love, yellow roses are for friendship, and pink roses can mean gratitude or appreciation. Maybe you need to think carefully about which one you choose.

Another staple is the pretty carnation, they come in all sorts of magical colours and last a long time, making them a Valentine's bunch that keeps on bringing joy. I've read that in the Victorian era couples would signal each other with carnations, so they have a long history of romance too.

One of my favourites is the beautiful lily, their sculptural beauty might fit the bill. We're told that hot pink lilies symbolise admiration, while red lilies signify passion, but if you look hard enough you can find all sorts of magical varieties.

A classic spring bloom though is the ever-popular tulip which symbolises deep or perfect love. Maybe then this makes them the perfect pick for Valentine's Day. They come in all sorts of lovely colours too, so you can choose the shade your loved one most prefers.

A final choice on my list might be the gorgeous alstroemeria. Supposedly one of the best kept floral secrets, they come in pretty jewel like colours and last for a really long time. The flower reportedly symbolises wealth and prosperity but also devotion and friendship.

Some of my beautiful camellias are flowering well in the back garden. The one pictured is a camellia Japonica Giulio nuccio. Camellia plants are wonderful shrubs for the winter and spring garden, with strong shiny foliage and fantastic blooms in an array of colours. Their showy flowers appear early in the season at a time when not much else is flowering. They too are often associated with love, affection and admiration and there is even one called

Valentine's Day! It is a cross between the Camellia japonica and Camellia reticulata and is therefore also a popular gift for Valentine's Day

Valentine's Day also sees me deliver my first garden talk of 2025 to the Seaford Museum and Heritage Society in the Little Theatre in Seaford.

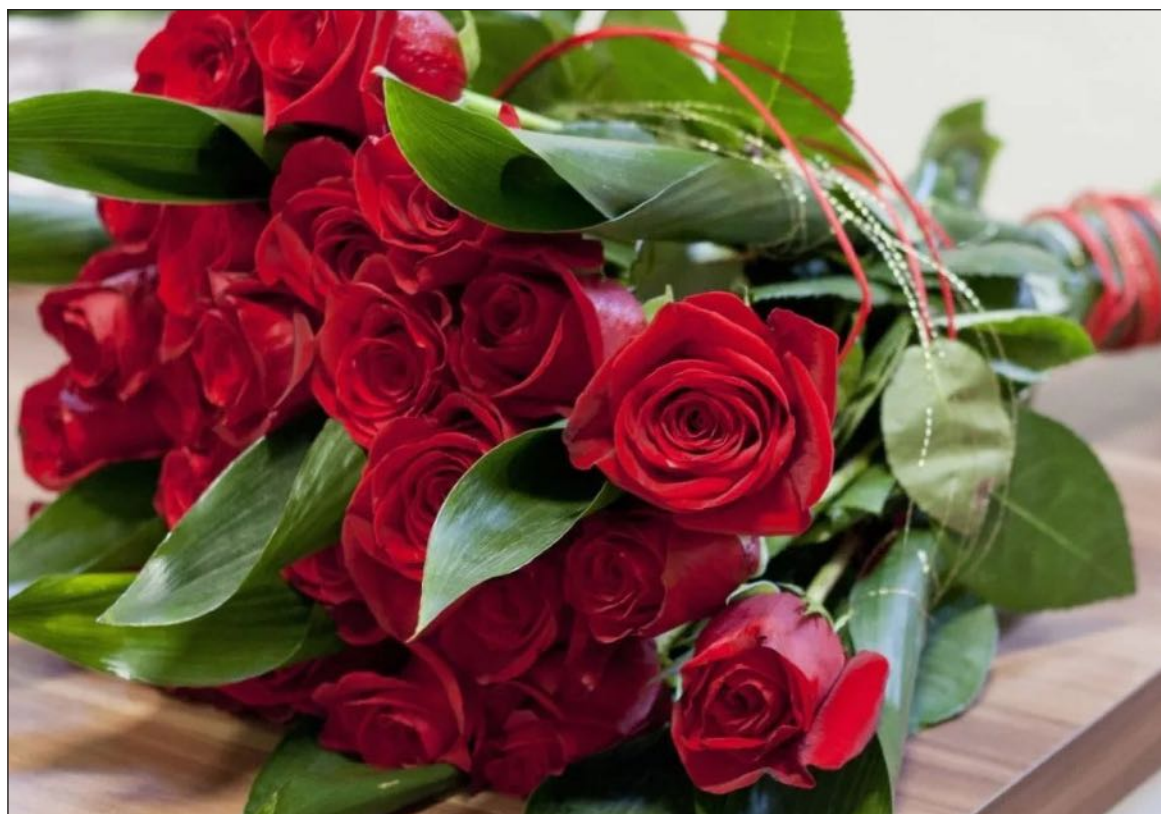
Don't forget there are a couple of snowdrop gardens open for the National Garden Scheme over the next few weeks so do check the scheme's website, [www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk) to see if there are still pre-booked tickets available. The two gardens are 5 Whitemans Close in Cuckfield and Pembury House in Clayton.

Looking good in my garden is the gorgeous miscanthus at the top of the garden. Its common name is Eulalia or elephant grass. They are reliable grasses that provide interest over a long period.

Fountains of foliage grow up in early summer and bear plumes of white or pink flowers in late summer. As winter approaches these then bleach into shades of biscuity brown as you can see from the image. They tend to thrive in most soil types, coping better than many other ornamental grasses on heavy soils. For the best flowering results, plant in full sun but light shade can be tolerated but may inhibit a good flower display.

A great architectural plant for year-round drama and is the phormium or New Zealand Flax. I have three large clumps at the top of the garden. Also called Phormiums, these are handsome long-lived evergreen shrubs that form bold clumps of elongated sword-shaped leaves. The attractive, often colourful foliage looks good all year, and makes the perfect foil for other plants in borders, raised beds, gravel gardens and pots.

It has a wide range of leaf colours, including olive-green, purple, yellow, cream, red and apricot variegations, in wide or fine stripes. Mine have regularly produced flower stems in summer, which are tall and branching with yellow-green, reddish or brown flowers. The plant originates from New Zealand, where their tough, fibrous leaves were traditionally



Roses for Valentine's Day

used in weaving and basket making and they are moderately hardy once established, although not suitable for cold, exposed sites. That said, mine are quite exposed and have done well over the last 15 year

A staple of my seaside garden is Crambe maritima or sea kale. They are a perfect foil for a gravel bed. You can just see the new growth starting to appear in the image. Glaucous mounds of this herbaceous perennial can often be spotted growing on shingle beaches, like the area beyond our house, Tide Mills. In early summer clusters of white honey-scented flowers appear which are known for attracting bees, beneficial insects and other pollinators. It has nectar/pollen rich flowers.

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



Phormium