

# The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Acanthus



Blue hydrangea



Santolina

## Beach garden makes a lovely view from my lounge window

**T**HIS week I'm focusing on the beach garden at the front of my house. It is looking really good at the moment. We have a lovely view from our lounge window, looking down on the gravel garden, 5ft below.

In the bottom left there is a small jetty with rope railing and duck weed on the small stretch of water between the footpath and the decking. There is a small wooden bridge linking the two sides. The whole design was set up back in 2012, around a large black rowing boat in the centre of the plot. The planting has really taken hold now, augmented by the many interesting sculptural pieces on show and I am amazed how good it looks all year round.

One of the main featured plants are two large clumps of acanthus, the common name of which is bear's breeches. It provides beautiful, leafy ground cover, not to mention a dramatic floral statement.

The plant loves sunshine and well-drained soil which suits my location on chalk. The leaves are deeply lobed, some are spiny, and they have long stalks. The hooded, spiny flowers which rise up on statuesque stems, are in muted shades of purple, pink, green or white. The one in the centre of the plot, at the bow of the boat, currently has over 20 flower heads reaching for the sky.

The clump to the left of the garage has ten stunning blooms too.

A great addition to a seaside garden is santolina. Also known as cotton lavender it is a popular and easily grown small shrub that has attractive silvery foliage and masses of bright yellow flowers in summer.

Despite its common name, this plant is no relation to lavender or cotton. It forms a compact, bushy mound of evergreen foliage and is ideal for border edges and raised beds and also makes an excellent dwarf hedge. It looks great in gravel gardens too. Its leaves are finely divided to give a feathery appearance and are aromatic when bruised.

Open this weekend, for the National Garden Scheme, is The

Beeches, Church Road in Barcombe. It opens tomorrow, July 9, from 1pm to 5pm with admission £6. This 18th century walled garden displays cut flowers, vegetables, salads and fruit. There is also a separate orchard and rose garden. A hazel walk is also being developed and don't miss the old ditch, now transformed into a flowing stream with gunnera, ferns and tree ferns.

If you love roses, then a visit to Town Place in Ketches Lane, Freshfield, is the place to go. It also opens tomorrow, from 2pm to 5pm with entry £8.

It is a stunning three-acre plot with a growing international reputation for the quality of its design, planting and gardening. There are more than 400 roses on show. Full details on both gardens can be found at [www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk)

Way back as a child, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, growing up in Lancashire in the seaside town of Cleveleys, I fondly remember my grandmother had a front garden, full of blue hydrangeas. I always loved the colour.

The only plant in my front garden that remains from the previous owners is a gorgeous blue hydrangea, to the left of the front door.

It is just beginning to change colour from its initial pale colouring, through pale lilac that will finally become blue.

Last summer I had five large echiums growing in the gravel and three of them flowered, leaving two, I had hoped, to flower this summer. Sadly, the wet and cold winter put paid to that notion, as they both died.

I am very pleased to say that there are currently scores of small, self-seeded echiums popping up across the beach garden, the largest of which you can see me pointing out. Echiums can handle temperatures down to -5C, but will not tolerate damp.

To avoid rot, which can be deadly, protect vulnerable plants from frost with a light fleece, removing when the sun shines to maintain airflow.

Alternatively, they may be transplanted to a pot (bucket-sized will do) and brought indoors for winter. I sadly forgot to protect



Geoff and baby self-seeded echium

mine until it was too late.

Echium pininana, those in my garden, is a stunning biennial plant from the Canary Islands. In its first year it forms a low rosette of silver, hairy, spear-like leaves and then in the second year it sends up a huge spike loaded with small blue flowers.

It makes a dramatic statement in a sunny garden and is extremely attractive to bees. After flowering, Echium pininana scatters its seed and dies.

Read more of Geoff's garden at [www.driftwoodbysea](http://www.driftwoodbysea) or call and book a visit before August 11 on 01323 899296.



Looking down on the beach garden