

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Pretty fading hosta leaves



lone buddleja Buzz magenta flowering



Hakonechloa macra

There are still some pretty sights to be seen out in the garden

IT has been so much colder outside and to be honest I've been finding things to do in the warm rather than go out in the garden.

That said, there are still some pretty sights to be seen out there, like the lone flower dazzling on the Buddleja Buzz. During the summer months, this is one of the best plants to attract butterflies to your garden. This particular, dwarf patio buddleja won't take over your garden, the flowers are the usual size of buddlejas, but the plants are half the size. They are long-flowering, easy to grow and mostly problem-free. These attractive shrubs are loved by bees too and are perfectly proportioned for the smaller garden. Mine is actually planted in the ground and I just cut back to the height I want each spring.

Another set of plants that is looking good are my containers of hostas. Whilst they are long gone, the leaves have been changing through some amazing autumnal colours as they slowly die. I can't honestly say I have seen this amazing show in previous years! Of all the shady characters you can acquire for your garden, the lovely, leafy hostas (more commonly known as plantain lilies) surely are at the top of any list. Originally, they come from China, Korea and Japan. In their natural homes they flourish in dappled shade and rich, moist soil. They were first introduced to Europe about 260 years ago, and became an instant hit thanks to the luxuriant nature of their leaves, and the delicacy and fragrance of their lily-like flowers in the summer, that all said, mine, as you can see, are still looking good as they die for the winter.

It's December so time for some Christmas cheer in the garden. I purchased a small potted tree a couple of years ago, which I lit and decorated to place in my office, thereafter, keeping it in the garden in a large pot. Last year, I purchased a larger, pot grown, tree and lit and decorated it on the patio. So,

this week I have placed the 2 together and decked them with a set of outdoor fairy lights and some coloured baubles. They are positioned just outside my new garden room and the French windows, so they can be fully appreciated from the house now too.

The one area of my garden that always seems to shine is the beach garden at the front of the house. I've managed to capture the selfie on a recent sunny day. The tree behind me and in front of the telegraph pole, is a tamarisk, also known as salt cedar. It is a beautiful flowering shrub that thrives in gardens and coastal regions throughout the UK, although it's native to the Mediterranean and parts of Asia. It can be easily identified by its delicate, feathery foliage and small pink or white flowers that bloom from spring to early autumn, depending on the species. It's also known to have a number of benefits for wildlife, attracting bees, butterflies and other pollinators.

It is an evergreen plant in warmer climates, but here in the UK it's deciduous and loses its leaves in the winter. It's a relatively fast-growing plant and can reach its full size in just a few years.

Hakonechloa macra, or Japanese forest grass, is a perennial, producing mounds of bright green leaves, topped by airy sprays of green flowers in mid- to late summer. I've found it to be an unfussy plant that can adapt to lots of different growing situations. It can cope with spots in sun, part shade or full shade, in any soil type. It prefers a moist but well-draining soil, so if it is planted in a dry or sandy spot, then take care to water through the warmer months. Mine is in a part shaded spot in the back garden and has been thriving for over 6 years now. It is a small, ornamental grass native to the wet, rocky cliffs of Japan's Honshu Island, including the area around Mount Hakone, after which the species is named. It is a slow



Geoff and his garden

spreading, deciduous grass which builds into gently cascading hummocks of bright green that are useful as a simple understorey to light shrubs and as a soft edging to paths or steps. Fine, light sprays of lime green flowers appear during June and July, giving a billowing lightness to planted drifts. The clean, minimalist style of this grass makes it a good choice for formal courtyards or in minimalist urban planters and the fresh green foliage gradually acquires rich russet tones as autumn advances, as you can see from the image. Remember to cut back old, flowered stems and dead foliage at the base in late winter.

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



Garden Christmas trees