

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Baby agaves in the side alley



Trimmed jelly palm



Wallflower

Perfect gifts for Mother's Day

TOMORROW, Sunday, March 10, is Mother's Day and more often than not we all show our love for our mums with flowers or a plant that might suit her personality or style. It's always hard to know what to buy.

My top three choices would be stunning tulips, they come in so many beautiful colours.

A popular second choice, a gorgeous orchid, their blooms often last a long time and they can make a real statement. A third option might be some luscious lilies, their big blooms are often sold in bud, once they start to open up, they are truly a wonder to behold. They can be found in a variety of soft and bold colours to match your mum's mood. Whatever you chose, I'm sure your mother will appreciate the gift.

Despite all the rain we have been having, it is still possible for large shrubs in containers to miss out on the falling rainfall, as the canopy of the plant covers all the exposed soil in the container.

A handy gadget to keep this in check is a probe moisture meter, which will help you determine whether to water or not.

You can see me using mine to check one of my bonsai trees in the garden. They are fairly cheap gadgets to purchase and really come into their own, both in the garden and around the house for your houseplants too.

Spring is fast approaching and it is a good time of year to think about buying plug plants, either online or in your local garden centre.

If you buy online they generally get dispatched with step by step instructions. You don't even need a greenhouse to grow them on. A sunny windowsill in a spare bedroom or kitchen will also do the trick.

A great tip is to give the ends a pinch a couple of times while the plants are young as this will help make them nice and bushy, with more flowers.

A popular garden favourite is the buddleia. Now is a good time to prune to a framework of branches and encourage lots of vigorous new shoots that will have time to mature and flower this summer.

Cut back last year's flowered stems to within one or two buds of old wood, or you can prune back harder if you need to rejuvenate.

I've got three around my large steel water feature, three buddleia buzz, magenta, white and mauve.

This compact variety still needs a prune every year. Now is also the last recommended time before the summer for pruning roses, leaving it any later may mean cutting away stems with well-developed new shoots.

You can however be as ruthless as you are as you are unlikely to kill it.

More camellias are beginning to brighten my garden, including a pretty white one. Also offering some much-needed colour at the front are the pretty yellow wallflowers.

Many of these have self-seeded over the last few years. Wallflowers are commonly grown as a spring bedding plant and most are biennial, and are grown from seed in late spring and then planted out in autumn but you can also buy bare-root wallflower plants for autumn planting.

They offer a splash of colour when there's little else in bloom and combine beautifully with spring bulbs.

This week, I have begun to check the many pots of agave Americana and the like, safely stored in the dry at the side of the house. It won't be too long before I can start to transfer them to their summer homes all around the garden.

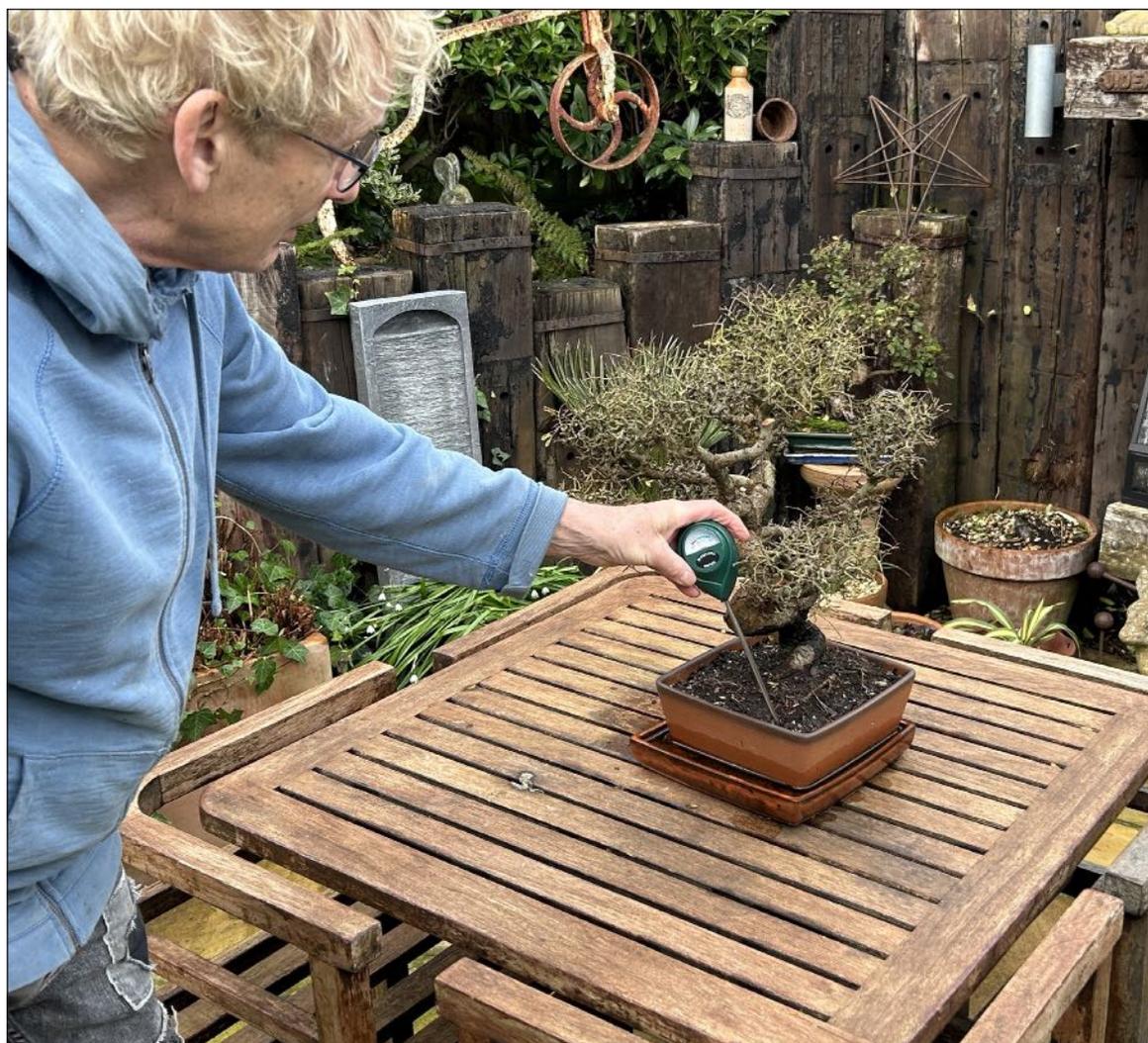
As I relocate them, I'll be looking for other small "pups" growing in the pots and cut them free to pot up and create new plants.

In the centre of my garden, I have a very tall jelly palm. Its proper name is *Butia Capitata* or Pindo Palm Tree and it is one of the hardiest feather palms, tolerating temperatures down to minus ten degrees or below.

Its curving, silvery blue pinnate leaves give it a stunning, graceful look and its stout, single trunk has prominent scars where the fronds have been cut.

The horrendous gales we have experienced on the coast this winter had badly torn the more exposed fronds.

The only way to improve its look



Geoff with a probe moisturiser meter, a useful gadget. Below right, the white camellia

in the garden is to remove those damaged fronds, with the aid of a chain saw, which I have done.

The palm prefers a sheltered position and will also be perfect for growing in a large container as its roots can adapt really well to being in a limited space. Mine however is in the ground.

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

