

The Driftwood Garden Diary

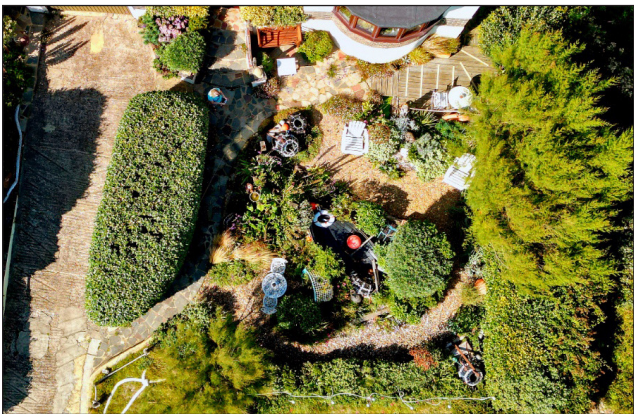
with Geoff Stonebanks



Stephanotis floribunda



Red hot pokers, Sussex Prairies



Beach garden

Make your final plans as open garden season draws to a close

Last week, I included a drone image taken recently of the back garden. Today I have include one of the beach garden at the front of the house too. It puts the layout clearly in perspective and beautifully captures the look I have created. The large black boat can be seen clearly, dominating the centre of the plot, along with the small seating areas for visitors to enjoy tea and cakes when we are open.

As the open garden season begins to draw to a close there are a few National Garden Scheme gardens opening this weekend for readers to visit. 54 Elmleigh opens in Midhurst between 11am and 5pm both days, with Knightsbridge House in Grove Hill, Hellingly, open on Saturday from 2-5pm and King Johns Lodge in Sheepstreet Lane, Etchingham, from 11am to 5pm too. On Sunday, 255 Kings Drive in Eastbourne opens the garden gate between 1-5pm. Full details on all openings are at www.ngs.org.uk

A couple of weeks ago, we visited Sussex Prairies at Morlands Farm, Wheatsheaf Road in Henfield. It too opens for the National Garden Scheme on Sunday from 1-5pm. This is an exciting prairie garden of approximately 8 acres, planted in the naturalistic style using 60,000 plants and over 1,600 different varieties. It features a huge variety of unusual ornamental grasses too. See layers of colour, texture and architectural splendour, like the red hot pokers we saw on our recent visit, pictured. The gardens are surrounded by mature oak trees with views of Chanctonbury Ring and Devil's Dyke on the South Downs. Don't miss the permanent sculpture collection and exhibited sculpture throughout the season. Spot the rare breed sheep and pigs as you walk through the tropical entrance garden. We had a wonderful afternoon there along with our beloved terrier, Chester as you can see.

A plant in the house that I have had a long time now, is Stephanotis floribunda. It is a beautiful conservatory and

house plant, grown for its glossy, dark green leaves and long-lasting white jasmine-scented flowers from spring to autumn. Also known as Madagascar jasmine, floradora or bridal wreath, it's often used in wedding bouquets. Its name comes from the Greek 'stephanos' (crown) and 'otis' (ear) – a reference to the crown of stamens within each flower. Stephanotis is a vine and is often sold trained over a wire hoop as mine was. It has a reputation for being rather tricky to grow and it can be slightly difficult to coax into re-flowering which is why I have been amazed at the number of beautiful flowers on mine in recent weeks. The flowers appear along the length of the whippy stems produced in the current year, and can be encouraged by growing them in a bright, humid and warm location in spring and summer, and feeding them with a potassium-rich liquid fertiliser.

As autumn progresses and the garden has now closed, I have embarked on a small project at the back. The spare bedroom in the house opens out on a vista across the patio bounded by old railway sleepers, so I have arranged to have some French windows installed in the room, in place of the existing windows. In recent years I have had large containers positioned across the windows, as you can see in the picture. I have had to relocate some of the plants from them to other areas in the garden and sadly, the one very large fibrecotta container was too badly damaged to reuse, so will have to go. The removal of the troughs has really opened up the area and I am looking forward to the transformation and the subsequent views we will now have from this room, which I will utilise as a garden room with a temporary bed if needed for visitors.

One of the other changes has been the need to remove a large box ball that I purchased over 30 years ago. Sadly, it had succumbed to box blight and despite several attempts to treat it, was looking a little unsightly and I decided it had to be



Geoff on a recent visit to Sussex Prairies

replaced. One of the large plants from the damaged trough fitted the bill, a large shrub of euphorbia mellifera. It is also called Honey spurge and is a handsome, semi-evergreen shrub native to Madeira and the Canary Islands. It has become a popular garden plant for its honey-scented summer flowers, which are popular with bees, attractive domed growth habit and waxy leaves.

It can be grown in full sun or partial shade, and will vary in habit depending on the sunlight it receives. In full sun it will develop a denser, more compact shape and in shadier spots a looser and taller habit. It looks brilliant growing in exotic borders or gravel gardens.

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



Preparation for French windows