

# The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



The tidied-up Eleagnus



A boundary tidy up



Chamaerops humilis

## I have relented and called in a landscaper to do the tough jobs

**T**HE older I have become, the harder it is to complete some of the jobs required around the garden. At this time of the year, I like to get all the boundary hedges and shrubs tidied up. On all sides at the back, the hedges are over 6ft tall and it is not possible to tend to them properly without getting ladders out and climbing up to do the deed.

I decided a few years ago that I would relent and get a local landscaper to do the job for me. So, the 2024 trim has just been completed, with several large bags of debris removed. Fortunately, it was a sunny but very windy day, so I'd rather them up the ladders than me.

It has made a huge difference though, especially with a third being taken off the top of the olive tree which was getting so tall. In the front garden, the two large tamarisk trees have been well trimmed as they grow back so quickly.

Many years ago, alongside the path to the front door, I planted several *Elaeagnus × ebbingei*, also known by their common name of Oleaster, which make for a delightful evergreen hedge. It has become very dominant and last year I had about 2ft taken off the top. It took a while to recover, but looks great again.

This time, I have had the sides cut well back and am very pleased now with the overall shape.

More importantly, it is at a height that I can manage to trim back through the summer months.

The green foliage bears small silver spots and silvery white undersides, creating a silver-green shimmering effect and the shrub produces highly scented flowers in the autumn and orange berries in the spring, giving unusual seasonal interest, as the flowers and berries normally appear in the reverse order.

The large hedge has become a bird hotel as well, judging by the mass of sparrows and robins that gather in the beach garden and pop in and out of the hedge.

The main reason for planting it in the first place was to act as a windbreak for the many strong winds that blow across the garden too, it has certainly served its

purpose in that respect in recent weeks through the various storms.

We have quite a lot of birds across the garden and in the back garden a large number of robins.

It helps that there is a great deal of rusty metal sculpture positioned around the plot, providing the perfect spot for them to perch upon and survey their food chain.

It's always a good idea to put food out for them in the winter months to attract them to the garden as well.

I posted recently that one of the National Garden Scheme's Sussex snowdrop gardens had cancelled all its openings due to the owner having surgery. I am very pleased to say that they have fully recovered and have now confirmed some pop-up openings for visitors to see snowdrops, the last of which is on the February 14, Valentine's Day, from 10.30am to 3.30pm. Go to [www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk) to see if there are any tickets still available.

A few years ago, I purchased two dwarf palms. One is a *Chamaerops humilis* var. "Cerifera".

It is a beautiful dwarf growing, blue-leaved fan palm, originating from the high Atlas Mountains in Morocco where it endures both heat and extreme cold.

It is a great little palm that can be grown quite easily, unprotected, in all weathers yet remaining healthy and undamaged by the weather. I reckon it is among one of the best hardy palms suitable for growing in a UK climate.

It is very compact and demands little more than a sunny position and relatively free draining soil. Mine have looked great throughout the seasons and their blue colour is enhanced by the intensity of the summer sun.

Due to its dense habit and growth, it is a great candidate for long-term container growing, like mine.

Another favourite palm at Driftwood is the *Chamaerops humilis*, or Mediterranean Fan Palm.

I have four large plants in the gravel gardens at the back of the house.

It is, in my opinion, a beautiful and extremely tough palm, and deservedly one of the most popular to be used in the UK.

It is a small clustering palm, with



Geoff with one of the dwarf palms

distinctive, huge green leaves which spread out in a very attractive fan form. *Chamaerops humilis* is tolerant of drought, once established, suited to sun or part shade, a cold garden or hot conservatory, exposed gardens or balcony planters, so perfect in many different situations and remarkably easy to look after and grow.

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



A robin in the garden