

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Macmillan nurse



Mangave



Meadow bank

Roses are putting on a great show

THIS time of the year is always wonderful for roses.

I've got several in my garden, but two in particular, that are looking amazing this week, are Tess of the D'Urbervilles and Macmillan Nurse.

The former was a lovely gift from two ladies who used to volunteer when we opened the garden, ex Seaford Mayor, Linda Wallraven and her friend, Liz Holland. I've had it now, probably 7 years, and it never fails to put on a great show.

It is a striking climber, bearing large, deeply cupped, bright crimson-red blooms, with a pleasing Old Rose fragrance. It is a relatively compact climber clothed in large, dark green leaves.

Mine has been moved since given and now resides, growing up the wooden arch, in amongst the ivy, over the green folly door in the back garden. The latter was a generous gift from Macmillan Cancer Support's Fundraising Manager in the South East, Megan, last autumn.

It is an excellent little shrub rose, with large old-fashioned, rosette style blooms of white, occasionally flushed peach, borne in clusters. It is subtly scented and prolific throughout the summer and autumn against dark green, glossy, foliage. This is its first summer, so I am looking forward to seeing lots of blooms.

This week there are several gardens opening for the National Garden Scheme across the county. Sunday 11th sees a group of 7 gardens opening again in Seaford from midday to 5pm, with one opening for the very first time for the scheme in Downs Road. Also open on the 11th is Ringmer Park from 2pm to 5pm where visitors can see a garden developed over the last 36 years as the owner's interpretation of a classic English country house garden.

Meanwhile, later today, the 10th, you can drive over to Battle and see Kitchenham Farm which will open the garden gate at 2pm until 5pm. This is a 1-acre, country house garden, set amongst traditional farm buildings with stunning views over the Sussex countryside. On Wednesday 14th

you can check to see if there are any slots left to visit Kemp Town Enclosures in the City. This is a unique historic Grade II listed Regency private town garden in a spectacular seaside setting, but visits must be pre booked. Full details on all the gardens mentioned can be found at www.ngs.org.uk

Lilies abound in many gardens at this time of the year and I have a beautiful row of 3 large containers with a mix of colours, including some almost black blooms. The ones pictured are quite special for me. They are in a green ceramic pot that was originally planted by my aunt, prior to her death in 2004. They are a mix of mainly peach with a few dark flowers. I inherited the container and have never repotted the bulbs, just placed it centre stage each May and returned it to the back of the garden after flowering. I'm never tempted to cut the stems back until they become hollow and brown. This allows nourishment to feed the bulb for next year's flowering. I also feed mine meticulously. The net result, Aunt Margaret rises like a phoenix each spring.

Back in 2012, when the judges came to see the garden from the Daily Mail competition, one took me aside and said how impressed they were with the meadow bank at the front of the house. To be honest, I was quite taken aback, because I had done nothing to create it, just let it do its own thing each year. From that day to this though, I have nurtured it, planting some sea kale on the slope and just cutting the grass once per year, usually in January. You can see from the picture that it is looking magnificent at the moment.

I've written before about the lovely collection of mangave I have collected in recent years. If you grow mangave, they are low maintenance, very drought-tolerant, and often a perfect focal point in the landscape. Colours change and become more vibrant with the sun. Make sure to give them plenty of room to grow in all directions when you plant. Several types have emerged from



Geoff in the garden

these crosses, featuring stripes, red freckles, and different leaf edges. They have some interesting names too, like Inkblot, a wide, low-growing type with draping leaves spotted with manfreda freckles. Freckles and Speckles with serrated green leaves with a lilac overlay, also covered with red spots and freckles with rose terminal spines. Bad Hair Day which has leaves streaming outward narrow, flat, and green with a red blush extending out and expanding near the tips or Blue Dart with leaves that look more like the agave parent, with a bluish green and silvery coating, just to name but a few.

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



Tess of the D'Urbervilles