

# GEOFF STONEBANKS

## The Driftwood Garden Diary



# It is time to bring the garden indoors

**C**AN you believe, we're well into October, the nights are drawing in and the clocks go back in a couple of weeks.

It all means we are likely to be spending less time out in the garden.

That said, for me, with all the plants I have in the house too, there is much to be done with them. A rather interesting houseplant I have had for quite a few years now is the stunning *Sinningia leucotricha*. It is a beautiful plant with silver hairs covering the leaves and is often classed as a succulent. Its tubular orange flowers start appearing on the compact stems in early summer and continue into the autumn. It will lose its leaves during the winter and re-grow in spring. That said, mine lost its several stems a few weeks ago and now, a new single stem has appeared and flowered.

A new addition to my indoor collection is a *rhypsalis*. This is a variable species of epiphytic cactus, with slender, trailing, cylindrical green or pale blue-green stems. Young stems bear sparse woolly areoles with a few bristly spines which often disappear as the stems mature. Small, funnel-shaped, white or greenish-white flowers are produced along the stems, usually from winter to spring but sometimes year-round.

These are followed by small, round, translucent white or pale pink berries. You can see mine looks like the hair on the silver cachepot with a face. *Rhypsalsis* is a low-maintenance, hanging house plant that's perfect for beginners. It is known as the mistle-toe cactus.

The long stems of this tropical plant make it a good choice for adding greenery to a shelf or mantelpiece. In the wild, *rhypsalsis* is an epiphytic plant, which means it grows on trees and is found in tropical jungles in South America. Hang it up or place it on a shelf in a bright spot out of direct sunlight. Its long stems can reach several metres in length.

Another lovely garden we visited while away in Dorset recently was the stunning Mapperton, an historic estate in the rolling hills of West Dorset. First recorded



Geoff at Mapperton gardens. Images: Geoff Stonebanks

in the Domesday Book of 1086, it has been part of the Dorset landscape for nearly a thousand years. Today the house, gardens and wider estate opens for visitors from around the world. We really enjoyed our visit on a rather grey September morning and were lucky enough to be the only visitors there. You can see me pictured by one of the several water features in the garden. It is well worth a visit if you find yourself in Dorset.

It is full steam ahead getting the garden ready for the winter. I am about to undergo treatment for both my wrists by having steroid injections in them as the pain and discomfort has been getting steadily worse in recent months, making gardening very challenging

indeed, especially carrying the many containers of succulents into their winter homes. This summer many of the aeoniums have become quite leggy, meaning I have had to cut them down and re-pot. One in question is the fabulous aeonium sunburst, pictured. The stems had made the plant quite unstable in its container, with its extra-large rosettes. It is now more manageable having been cut and the resulting rosettes carefully replanted, after allowing the stems to dry out a little. The plant is a variegated, evergreen, perennial succulent growing to around 70cm tall. Its rosettes can be 15-20cm across and have spoon-shaped leaves which are borne on grey stems. The leaves are yellow with green,

central stripes and reddish-pink tints around the edges of the leaves when exposed to sunlight. Small, star-shaped, pale yellow flowers in racemes are borne on mature plants in spring.

Last month the lovely yucca in the beach garden flowered for the very first time. Its elegant, single flower stem looked very dramatic and helped fill the void, having had to cut back the large acanthus, adjacent, that had finished flowering and had started to look a little messy. Yuccas belong to a small group of genuinely tough exotic plants that hold their evergreen structure through a British winter.

Their sword-shaped leaves add year-round architectural presence when herbaceous planting

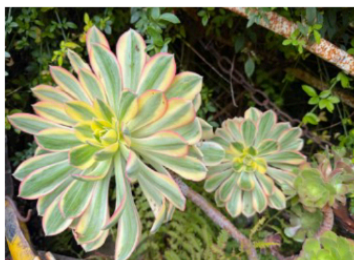
has died back, they shrug off drought, salt-laden coastal wind, and poor soil, and in maturity they will throw up their dramatic summer flower spikes. Few plants earn their place in an exotic border so completely.

Yuccas require full sun and free-draining soil above all else. They can successfully be grown in raised beds and containers too. Water newly planted specimens to establish, then water sparingly. Winter wet kills far more yuccas than winter cold, so keep containers off the ground and away from downpipes during the wettest months.

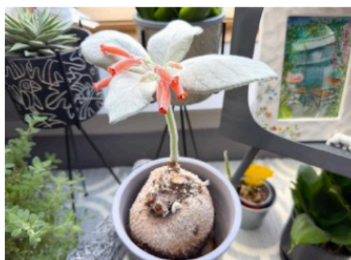
Read more of Geoff's garden at [www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk](http://www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk) or follow both him and the garden on social media.



Rhypsalsis



Aeonium sunburst



Sinningia leucotricha



Yucca