

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Vitage horse as garden art



Camellia William Bartlett



Sorbaria sorbifolia 'Sem'

Spring is here, time to bring out the magical dancing horse

I AM VERY pleased I've now completed all the pressure cleaning across the garden, hard surfaces, furniture and marine rope. All now look as good as new, as you can see in the image of the patio at the back of the house.

As I mentioned last week, it is a very time-consuming task but well worth the effort, as it transforms the look of the plot.

Next week sees me resume my 2022/2023 schedule of garden talks. I have three booked throughout March, the first for Haywards Heath U3A on the 10th in Lindfield, followed by Hove Gardening Club on the 20th and finally a small group in Hadlow Down on the 29th.

If you are a member of a gardening club, U3A group or WI group, do get in touch if you would be interested to book a talk between September 2023 and April 2024. I have two talks to offer: "Gardening by the sea" and "From city courtyard to seaside sanctuary", the story of my move from London and creating Driftwood.

All proceeds from the talks go to Macmillan Cancer Support. You might have read recently that I have been listed as one of the finalists in their "Thanks to You Awards 2023" in the Outstanding Supporter category.

The results will be announced at a ceremony in Birmingham, in June.

Looking good in my garden this weekend is a stunning camellia, probably my favourite, William Bartlett.

It is a large evergreen shrub with glossy, ovate dark green leaves with finely serrated edges. Flowers are formal double to 11cm across, pale pink finely streaked and spotted with dark pink, and produced in mid spring.

It is hardy through most of the UK apart from inland valleys, at altitude and central/northerly locations.

It may suffer foliage damage and stem dieback in harsh winters in very cold gardens but the plant can withstand temperatures down to -10C. Mine has done well and coped with the dreadfully cold winter this year.

Another pretty plant is Sorbaria sorbifolia "Sem", a small, compact

selection, thicket-forming shrub.

It has many upright stems and a distinctive leaf colouring. You can see mine, pictured, planted in a large pot as it can take over if planted in the ground.

The leaves are very attractive at this time of the year, yellow-green flushed with bright reddish-pink and bronze.

Leaves become greener in summer, but redden in autumn; colouring is best in good light. Flowers are borne in stiff, erect, rather narrow panicles of small white flowers in the summer.

If you fancy a garden visit tomorrow, Sunday March 12, the National Garden Scheme has a beautiful one to offer in Washington.

The Old Vicarage in The Street opens the garden gate from 10.30am to 4.30pm with entrance £7 and children free.

There is much to see in the three and a half acres of gardens, including new and mature trees from the 19th century, a Japanese garden with waterfall and ponds.

Over 2,000 tulips have been planted for spring displays along with an array of mixed bulbs throughout the garden. Home-made teas served too, with full details at www.ngs.org.uk.

From March onwards I'm always installing the various pieces of objet d'art back in the garden from their winter homes, either in the shed or the summer house.

This week it has been the turn of the magical prancing horse.

It started life in the 50s or 60s as a child's rocking horse, strung on a frame so that children could rock from side to side on it. By the time I purchased it from an antique shop in Rye eight years ago, it had long lost the frame.

I managed to get a local artist to create a metal stand for it, so that it could be placed in the garden, looking as though it was vaulting the hedge.

Several years later, a visitor said they had a freestanding version of the toy in their garden that they no longer needed and kindly donated it to Driftwood, so mine now has a pal.

Meanwhile, in the beach garden, the new plants that I put in, to replace the agave that had turned



Geoff with the new plants doing well in the beach garden

to mush in the recent cold, wet spells, are coping really well.

They are located behind the large black rowing boat and will look even better, once they become more established and develop a little bit more height.

It won't be long before I'll be positioning many more, healthy agave, planted in containers, back out into the planting scheme from their winter homes, under cover in an alley at the side of the house.

While it is a great shame that I lost the large ones that were in the ground, thankfully I have many more, smaller ones in pots to utilise.

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



Pressure cleaning is now complete