

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Ivy on the trellis



Osteospermum



Potted Christmas trees

Six weeks to Christmas and my potted trees are on the move

THERE are only six weeks until Christmas, it has really come around so quickly. I've moved my two potted Christmas trees down from the top of the garden, closer to the house.

The smaller of the two was bought as a very small potted tree to sit, decorated and lit, in my office three years ago. Since then, I have left it outside and it has grown quite well. The taller tree was purchased last year to sit on the railway sleeper patio, decked with baubles and lights. As Christmas approaches, I'll be moving them both to the centre of the patio and decorating them so they can be viewed from my new garden room.

Over the years I seem to struggle more and more to find winter protection for some of my plants. I recently decided to invest in a portable, temporary greenhouse that I could erect easily behind the house. There were so many different types to choose from but finally I decided on this conical one as I thought it might work better when windy. It is surprisingly roomy and very quick and easy to set up and take down. I've fleeced the plants inside too for some extra protection and placed a thermometer in there to keep a check on temperatures through the winter.

My mother bought me a lovely new acer, Japanese Jewels, back in April for my birthday and I have placed it under cover in here for safety too as I never seem to have too much success with them.

Bearing in mind it is almost mid-November it is wonderful to see some colour still in the garden, provided by pretty osteospermums, also known as the Cape or African daisy. They are brilliant choices for long-lasting, colourful blooms through the summer and right into the autumn and are often used as a front of border plant in milder parts of the country, or annual bedding and also make great container plants. There are many colours and

named cultivars to choose from and the vibrant daisy flowers are good for attracting pollinators. They grow best in a sheltered spot in well-drained soil in full sun or you can plant them in a container on a sunny patio or windowsill. It is a good idea to make sure you incorporate some grit for added drainage and water in well. I bought several in the spring and managed to have some from last year come through the winter and flower again this summer.

Some varieties of osteospermum are tender or half-hardy, particularly in cooler areas. These can be grown as annuals or moved indoors in autumn to overwinter. You can cut back hardy osteospermums in early spring or after flowering in autumn.

Starting to look pretty impressive in the back garden are two fatsia spider's web. This a relatively new fatsia and is primarily grown for its handsome foliage, it looks as though it has been dusted with icing sugar with some leaves having had a more generous dusting than others. It makes a wonderful specimen, particularly when planted near white-flowering plants that complement the leaf variegations. It can also be used to help add light and colour to areas of lightly dappled shade. My two are planted around the corten steel pond and have a degree of protection from the other shrubs around them. All the experts say you should protect plants from cold, drying winds either by moving to a sheltered spot if in a pot or cover with horticultural fleece, mine however have survived well for two years now unprotected.

My Japanese Aralia is a rare cultivar, which is also very low maintenance, a striking, evergreen shrub with a notably tropical feel with its lobed leaves. It produces pleasing white flowers and black berries in autumn.

Despite the days being much shorter, it is still quite nice to



Geoff with the new temporary greenhouse

get out in the garden on the brighter, dry days. I generally get a team in to cut my boundary hedges and ivy each year but have decided to hang fire until January to have the work completed. That said, the ivy was starting to really take hold on the trellis behind the shed so I decided that I needed to give it a trim, before it took over and made the job much harder next year. So, out came the ladder, my partner stood at the bottom to secure it for me and up I went on to the roof of the shed to cut it all back. To be honest, not a task I enjoy as I'm getting a bit too old to clamber on to shed roofs methinks! Still, I was very pleased with the end result.

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



Fatsia spider's web