

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Succulents removed



A maple bonsai



Hardy plumbago

Getting ready for winter and some lovely new purchases

IT'S not long now until the clocks go back and we really are into the winter months. There has been much to do in the garden, making sure all the succulents and tender plants are safe and warm for the winter. The bulk of them are displayed on the railway sleeper patio area behind the house, and up near the summer house!

Pictured, you can see the patio now devoid of the aeoniums and agave. It is quite a time consuming and hard job to get them all safe and sound and fitting them in the greenhouse is a real challenge year on year, as I accumulate a few more from purchases or taking babies from existing plants. The remaining containers of plants, including ferns and a couple of lovely conifer trees, still make the patio look pretty from our garden room too. My collection of eight bonsai trees, all kept in this area through the winter, look good as well.

While we were away in Derbyshire last month, we visited Bolsover Castle which was pretty stunning. You can see me standing on the battlements above the Fountain Garden. It was designed around the statue of Venus, the goddess of love and pleasure, emerging from her bath. It included a secluded chamber for intimate banquets set into the garden wall. With re-glazed original windows and new hand-carved doors, this has now been opened to the public. You can wander the gardens and enjoy the 5,000 plants and flowers they have planted to capture the spirit of the garden in its heyday. Fan-trained fruit trees and colourful planting around the walls are all lovingly tended by English heritage's volunteer gardeners. Garden fashion in the 17th-century included 'outlandish' foreign bulbs such as tulips, and fanciful designs cut into turf and filled with colourful gravels. Well worth a visit if you get up north.

I made a couple of new purchases while we were away too. While visiting the beautiful gardens of the Thornbridge Estate in Ashford in the Water near Bakewell, I purchased an interesting garden sculpture, a

duck formed from a boulder and two metal pieces, one shaped for its head and one for its tail! I love it, you can see it pictured.

The other purchase was a new bonsai tree to add to my collection. It is a Japanese Deshojo Maple. As you can see, it is a breath-taking miniature tree that captures the essence of natural elegance and seasonal beauty. The tree is renowned for its vibrant red foliage in spring and fiery hues in autumn. I've read that it is a variety prized by bonsai enthusiasts for its delicate leaves and graceful structure. This cultivated and shaped bonsai showcases a refined trunk and an elegant canopy, reflecting both patience and craftsmanship. Its stunning transformation through the seasons makes it a living piece of art, calm and green in summer, vivid and dramatic in the cooler months. Its delicate, palmate leaves and graceful branching make it a true standout among bonsai varieties.

With Christmas on the horizon, maybe this is a perfect gift for those who appreciate beauty, tradition, and the meditative art of bonsai.

Looking good in the garden this week are the pretty blue flowers of the hardy plumbago, *Ceratostigma plumbaginoides*. The plant provides amazing autumnal colour and azure blooms and is an incredibly versatile beauty, creeping and rambling through your garden. Clusters of vivid gentian blue blooms are produced on red stems from July to October over attractive mats of wiry stems which hold shiny, oval, deer-resistant leaves. Also referred to as Hardy Plumbago, it will reach a height of up to 45cm and spreads to 60cm, the pretty foliage is present from March to October. The plant also works well as weed-suppressing ground cover and will happily grow in containers too should you wish. It is attractive to bees, butterflies and other pollinators and can be propagated by semi-hardwood cuttings. A hardy perennial to -10 C, the autumnal foliage flushes with fiery red tones before falling



Bolsover Castle and the Fountain Garden

when the plant becomes dormant, ready to sprout again in the spring. It is not fussy on soil type, as long as it does not get too wet but prefers a sunny or partially shaded position. Mine is actually growing in a large container, close to the house in shade, and has done really well over the last two years!

I've been spending quite a bit of time cutting back right across the garden, these last few weeks, everything seems to have grown so much! Many of the boundary hedges have just gone wild. I normally get them professionally trimmed every January, as it is quite a hard job for me to do now as I get older, but I've had to do some myself now as they are getting out of hand!

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



A new garden duck ornament