

# The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Acanthus



Ferns and succulents



Annabelle

## The vibrant colour pairings and greenery of summer gardens

**Y**OU can see me pictured with an interesting fuchsia growing in the garden, *arborescens*, originating from Central America, it is an erect, evergreen shrub or small tree with shiny dark green leaves and panicles of small purple/pink flowers, rather like lilac flowers, followed by purple spherical fruits.

It is easy to train into a small, single-stemmed tree and is lovely as a conservatory specimen where it will bloom throughout the year. Mine are kept fleeced in a covered alley at the side of the house in the winter. They are best grown in moist but well-drained compost in part shade. Although Fuchsia berries are edible, most are not particularly tasty and are sparsely produced on plants. Fuchsia plants are generally grown as an ornamental and not for fruit crops within the UK.

There are 2 lovely gardens opening together for the National Garden Scheme in Eastbourne tomorrow, Sunday from 1pm to 5pm with a combined entry of £5. Sadly, no refreshments at either but plenty of local cafés on Eastbourne seafront and in the harbour area. The first is 16 Hardy Drive which is a small, coastal, town garden, made private by strategic planting and plenty of work. It has been filled with perennials, shrubs and climbers to give privacy and colour. Central to the garden is a magnificent 35 year old Canary palm. The plot is well designed with lots of interest and provides an excellent example of what can be accomplished in a small garden, resulting in an oasis of peacefulness and calm!

The second, 36 Jellicoe Close, has a new front and rear garden that has been created over the last 5 years on reclaimed land. It is a Mediterranean, cottage style garden with wildlife, ecology and sustainability at its heart and is packed with trees, shrubs, perennial plants and a few exotics. There are winding paths, a gazebo and a potter's studio at the rear. Described by The Sunday Times last year as a 'sub-tropical paradise'.

A bit nearer to the city you could visit Seaford Gardens South, a trail of 8 gardens in the town, one of

which is new for 2025. They open between midday and 5pm tomorrow, 13th, with a combined entry of £8. See web site for full details of each garden, all of which are signed off the A259. See a garden surrounded by mature trees, a mature garden with naturalistic planting, a well-planted front garden that leads to a back garden with beautifully planted deep beds, a flint walled garden with cottage, coastal and kitchen beds where you can climb steps and enjoy views of Seaford Head. Seaford Allotments has 189 plots with a wide range of planting and 100 years of cultivation. Full details on all gardens at [www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk)

A reliable show off in my front garden is the *Acanthus Mollis*, or Bear's Breeches. They are bold plants, with evergreen architectural foliage and tall flower spikes in summer. They have enormous, glossy, deeply lobed leaves and tall flower spikes that are clothed in white flowers, each with a hood-like purple bract, in midsummer. It's perfect for growing at the back of a herbaceous border and makes a striking architectural presence, like those in my beach garden pictured. The flowers are much loved by bees and can be used in fresh and dried arrangements. It's an herbaceous perennial, so its foliage dies down in autumn, reappearing the following spring. Whilst most of my lilies have long gone over now, there is currently a really pretty yellow one that is quite striking as you can see. There are 5 stems of them in a tall border. Contained in the same border is a very large hydrangea shrub, *Annabelle*, also pictured. The enormous, rounded heads of white florets stand proud on the strong stems of this deciduous shrub, even in exposed positions. A superb specimen for a shaded border or woodland garden. The enormous, densely packed heads of creamy-white flowers appear above pointed, dark green leaves from July to September. It blooms reliably every year, even after severe pruning or intensely cold winters. The huge, white "drumstick" blooms will appear in profusion without fail. Some people

Geoff and *arborescens*

plant 'Annabelle' as a hedge since it can be cut back severely in the winter for a tidy effect. Deciduous and with an upright growth habit it makes a gorgeous feature for a partly shaded border with moist, well-drained soil and its large flower heads can also be cut for use in a vase and are particularly suitable for dried flower arrangements.

I love the colour combinations and the sheer variety of greens, set against the rustic look of the old railway sleepers on the back patio. I have several ferns which look good too, along with the *grisolina littoralis* hedge, aided and abetted by a sprinkling of rusty ornaments like the mice.

Read more of Geoff's garden at [www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk](http://www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk) or book a visit before 3rd August by emailing [visitdriftwood@gmail.com](mailto:visitdriftwood@gmail.com)



Yellow lily