

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Crasula ovata money plant in centre



Aeoniums



Driftwood greenhouse

This mild weather has made for a surreal year for gardeners

WORK has been moving on at a pace at Driftwood, creating the new patio and pond area adjoining the shed.

It won't be long before it is complete and ready to be dressed with plants and containers. This is always the bit I love, creating the finished product. I'll be writing and posting images of the area once it's all completed.

Meanwhile, I've been busy monitoring the plants stored in my greenhouse.

Before moving my large collection to safety for the upcoming colder months, I gave the area a thorough clean, ideally a task completed in dry, calm weather so you can move any delicate plants inside to a sheltered area while the job is in hand.

I removed all the debris and cleaned the structural parts with detergent, washing the glazing material inside and out too.

If you used shade paint through the summer then that would need to be scrubbed off as well.

It can be difficult to ease out dirt trapped between the panes, so try using a flexible scraper, such as plastic plant label, to get into the grooves.

Check the space too for broken parts, such as vent controllers and draught excluders.

If you propagate your own plants, then pay special attention to those areas and the equipment you use, as young plants are especially vulnerable to diseases.

Once complete, you can restock the greenhouse for the oncoming colder months.

I generally only have space for a few new plants, I'm holding one of six new lilies recently purchased, with the others on the shelf, ready to plant out next spring.

This year, I have taken cuttings from a large Buddleja Buzz magenta that had to be dug up while preparing for the new patio to go down.

My heated greenhouse is primarily used for storage of plants that don't like the cold.

That said, this year has been quite surreal, as the weather has been so mild in recent weeks, most unlike October and early November.

You can see from the images that I have quite a collection to fit in.

There is a large selection of

succulents, especially aeoniums, which need to be protected from the winter cold. Aeonium is a genus including about 35 succulent plant species with unusually glossy, waxy leaves arranged in rosettes.

The species range from the low-growing plants that grow just a few inches across, to larger species that grow several feet across.

The rounded leaves of the rosette structures are so perfect that these species are sometimes mistaken for artificial plants.

These signature rosettes can be a solid colour or variegated in white, yellow, red, and green. Small, star-like flowers grow in clusters from the centre of the rosettes, many cut them off but I generally leave them for show.

Aeoniums can be planted in the garden through the summer months, they are rather slow-growing plants, and it may take as much as five years before they produce the little bunches of flowers from the centre of the rosettes.

I usually plant some of mine in raised beds, leaving them in the plastic pots to ease lifting to put back in the greenhouse for the winter.

Most aeoniums are monocarpic, meaning that the mother plant dies after flowering, but the pups (shoots) will continue to produce more shoots, as well.

I have a number of aloe vera too which I plant outside for the summer: aloe vera is a succulent plant species of the genus aloe.

The plant is stemless or very short-stemmed with thick, greenish, fleshy leaves that fan out from the plant's central stem. The margin of the leaf is serrated with small teeth. They need a location that offers bright, indirect sunlight (or artificial sunlight).

Direct sunlight can dry out the plant too much and turn its fleshy leaves yellow, so you may need to water more often if your aloe lives in an especially sunny spot.

They do best in temperatures between 13 and 27C.

From May to September, you can place your plant outdoors without any problems, providing it does not get too cold.

Another useful succulent that can survive in the garden through the



Geoff checking on plants

summer is Crassula ovata, commonly known as the Money Plant.

It is a succulent evergreen, originating in Eastern South Africa and is both easy to care for and is long-lived.

The plant bears shiny, chunky leaves and inflorescences of pretty white or pinkish flowers and is an attractive ornamental, low-maintenance plant that is so popular the world over.

This evergreen plant can tolerate varying sun-shade balance, dry weather, and even drought conditions, and is super-easy to propagate.

It is equally easy to grow and care for both outdoors and indoors. I have five large ones that I place in the garden each summer.

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



Aloe vera