

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Grapes



Hydrangea groundbreaker



Loropetalum Chinense Pipa's Red

It was a joyful visit from Belgians despite it being late in the year

DESPITE closing the garden gate back at the beginning of August, I had a request recently from a Belgian couple, who were holidaying in Sussex, to ask if they could visit the garden.

At this time of the year, I always feel the garden is well past its best, but I decided to let them visit. They loved the garden and were so pleased they had been able to see the plot for themselves, despite the time of year. Having followed the garden on Facebook and seen pictures of Chester, they were keen to make his acquaintance too.

Even before I start to move my vast succulent collection from the garden into the greenhouse and porches, front and back, of the house, there are already quite a number of plants that reside there all year long. The front porch, in particular, houses over 25 pots of various houseplants, cacti and succulents. The view is south facing and the room is a real suntrap, perfect for succulents. The three pictured, enjoying the sunshine, are from left to right, aloe aristata (lace aloe), aloe vera and Euphorbia Lactea cristata. The latter is a compact, evergreen, frost-tender succulent shrub on which the stem's growing point has mutated into a line or crest, so that the plant eventually forms a dome to of ridged, undulating, reddish-green growth that resembles the appearance of brain coral.

This year, I seem to have had a lot more grapes growing on the vines than I have had in previous years! The only disappointment is that they all have pips in, which makes it difficult to put them to any good use. After trying to make grape jelly a few years ago, I decided it was not worth the effort, so now leave them all for the birds to enjoy.

I treated myself to a trio of new plants recently, along with 3 new containers for them to be planted in. The plant is Hydrangea paniculata Groundbreaker Blush. You can see both the plants and the containers pictured. The plant is the first ground covering and low growing variety, a rare and

exciting new arrival to the world of hydrangeas. It is ideal for those who love these robust and dependable shrubs, yet have smaller spaces for which the larger varieties are too overpowering.

It is rated as an astounding, dwarf shrub which reaches a more petite height and spread of around 40-50cm and is therefore perfect for containers on balconies or patios, as well as open ground. It produces pretty blooms from July to November. The flowers are both pink and white in varying degrees, depending upon the maturity of the blooms. You can even cut stems for vases, making the most of this beauty inside your home too. It should be planted in moist, well-drained, humus rich soil which benefits from either full sun or partial shade. It is a fully hardy, deciduous shrub too. The containers I've used are from a range that includes pots and planters manufactured from reclaimed ocean plastic and wood chipping waste. More importantly they are much lighter than conventional terracotta, a real bonus as you get older!

Earlier in the year I purchased a new plant that I liked the look of, Loropetalum chinense var. rubrum 'Pipa's Red'. It is an evergreen, free-flowering, shrub with star-shaped hairs. Its flowers are in clusters at the end of short branches, with thin, strap-like petals, similar to those of their witch hazel relatives, and also produced in late winter and early spring.

I've learnt that the plant is a relative newcomer to the gardening scene, it has a winning combination of showy evergreen foliage and bright coloured flowers. It's highly ornamental with its crinkled oval leaves which are borne in shades of red, pink, or purple, and its colourful flowers have a light fragrance. It originates from the woodlands of China and Japan and is sometimes referred to as Chinese fringe flower.

It is probably not too late to still see some beautiful autumn colour this weekend and maybe blow some cobwebs away into the bargain. High Beeches Woodland and Water Garden is open every



Belgian visitors

day, bar Wednesdays, through until the end of the month, from 1pm to 5pm. Autumn always guarantees some breath-taking displays of colour provided by the many spectacular Nyssas, Maples and Liquidambers growing throughout the garden. These contrast well with the conifers and the beds of cyclamen glow in the Autumn light.

It has been said that its breath-taking displays of colour are amongst the best in the country. Well worth a visit, full details can be found at www.highbeeches.com. A real bonus, if you are a dog owner, you can take your furry friend along on Monday afternoons, Bank Holidays excluded. Entrance is £10 with children paying £4.

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



Succulents in porch window