

GEOFF STONEBANKS

The Driftwood Garden Diary



Wild plums among late summer joys

WE recently had a long weekend away, staying in a lovely hotel in Hampshire, near Romsey.

While there, we visited three National Trust properties and gardens. Sadly, it was during the incessant heat, so the gardens were not looking their very best.

That said, we spent a few hours at Hinton Ampner and had a very enjoyable visit wandering around, despite the heat. The garden still looked good but the lawns were very brown indeed.

Back home again, I was able to pick quite a nice crop of wild plums from my small tree in the back garden. I've had it for about five years now and this was by far the best harvest. They have all been cooked and placed in the freezer to enjoy through the winter months. The tree will thrive in any garden as it is a native deciduous tree. It blossoms in spring producing edible plums in autumn. The tree is great for wildlife too and super easy to grow. It was bought as a boxed Christmas gift by my mum and is now treasured for its abundance of pale pink flowers which blossom in early spring. Along with its sweet plum harvest!

A brand-new garden, opening for the National Garden Scheme is Black Shed Studio Gardens at Sunnyview, in Nursery Lane, Fairwarp, near Uckfield. They open from 10am to 6pm for pre-booked visitors only and entry is £5. There are two-hour slots at 10am, midday, 2pm, and 4pm, with 50 tickets per slot. Set in the Ashdown Forest, this unique three acre garden blends formal structure with naturalistic planting. Designed by an artist, it features sculpture, painting, ceramics, and glass art throughout. Explore a wildlife pond, meadow, and a small wetland, all offering tranquillity and inspiration in a relaxed, welcoming setting.

Open on Sunday are the gardens of the Ashdown Park Hotel in Wych Cross, East Grinstead. They are open from 1pm to 4pm with entry £7. Ashdown Park spans 186 acres of woodland, with grazing land, parkland and



Geoff at Hinton Ampner. Image: Geoff Stonebanks

ornamental gardens. The Walled Garden features perennials, shrubs, fruit trees and seasonal blooms. To the east lies the tranquil Secret Garden with flowing water amongst the trees. Mature specimen trees grace the rolling lawns that lead to the main lake, perfect for peaceful exploration. Full details of both gardens at www.ngs.org.uk.

A fairly new shrub looking good in the garden, on its second flowering this season is *escallonia pink Elle*. Its larger than average heads of pink flowers form in abundance at the ends of the branches of this compact evergreen shrub in early summer. Usually in early autumn there is a second, less prolific flush that will add another shot of colour to

the shrub border. The foliage is a rich glossy green, and looks great all through the year, even when not providing a backdrop for the flowers. I have two shrubs, both in the ground, the one pictured near the house and a larger one in the centre of the garden. Attracting pollinators such as butterflies and bees while providing your garden with life and vitality. Additionally, its compact size makes it perfect for container gardening, allowing you to bring a touch of elegance to patios, balconies, and small gardens. Ideal for both novice and seasoned gardeners alike, *escallonia laevis 'pink Elle'* is a hardy evergreen shrub which requires minimal maintenance while providing maximum visual impact. Wheth-

er planted as a standalone specimen or used to create a stunning hedge, reaching a height and spread of up to 1.2m, its graceful form and profusion of blooms are sure to captivate.

A great favourite in my garden is the fabulous coastal plant, sea kale or *crambe maritima*. On top of being a robust and lovely plant for the garden, it is edible, too. Glaucous mounds of this herbaceous perennial can often be spotted growing on shingle beaches, like the area called Tide Mills across from our garden. In early summer clusters of white honey-scented flowers appear that attract a range of pollinating insects. The very young leaves and stems can be eaten raw or steamed, but the best flavour is

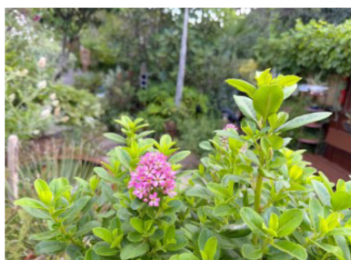
thought to come from plants that have been forced, as you would with rhubarb. It's a great addition to gravel and coastal gardens, where it'll combine beautifully with plants like sea thrift and kniphofia. For best results, grow in full sun or partial shade in deep, fertile, well-drained soil and cut back in the autumn.

I was selling ceramics through the summer by various artists and couldn't resist another two small pots to plant succulents in by Brighton ceramicist, Chris Murphy. You can see they look great, both planted up with a baby agave.

Read more of Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk or follow both him and the garden on social media.



Wild plums



Escallonia pink elleStonebanks



New planters



Sea kale