

# The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Vanille fraise



Lavender



Dahlias

## Hydrangeas are thriving in my seaside garden

I SEEM to have developed a great love for hydrangeas, they always grow well in my seaside garden.

I do wonder if this stems from my grandmother having a large collection in her seaside garden back in the 1960s and 1970s. They are easy to grow shrubs, and include a range of unusual exotic flowering plants, as well as the popular lace cap and mop heads and they offer a kaleidoscope of colour, from delicate white flowers through to warm mauves and striking blues. These stunning plants can change colour depending on the acidity of your soil.

Two looking good in my garden this week are Vanille Fraise and Annabelle. The former is an extra special hydrangea, selected for its stunning appearance with a garden performance to match! Its blooms emerge pure white then mature through the season to a delicious raspberry pink. *Hydrangea paniculata* 'Vanille Fraise' is easy to grow and perfect for those problematic north-facing areas, due to its extreme hardiness, it will take temperatures down to -20C! Mine is located on a north facing wall in the garden and has flourished there for several years now.

The latter, Annabelle has enormous, rounded heads of white florets which stand proud on the strong stems of this deciduous shrub, even in exposed positions. Unlike many *Hydrangea arborescens* varieties, this well branched plant rarely flops due to its well branched, compact growth habit and is a superb specimen for a shaded border or woodland garden. Mine is situated in a little bit more sun but still seems to do well.

This weekend, there are quite a few gardens open for the National Garden Scheme across the county, including one that makes its final appearance, both days from 11am to 5pm, after 15 years of public open days with entry £6! South Grange in Quickbourne Lane, Northiam, near Rye is the treasured garden of Mike and Linda Belton, who are Hardy Plant Society members and they have placed an emphasis on planting for insects and try to

maintain nectar and pollen supplies and varied habitats for most of the creatures that share the garden with them.

Sadly, they have reluctantly decided they can no longer manage the work needed for full blown public openings although they will open by arrangement in future years, which is so much easier to manage. Their garden is a plant collection, set out to give themselves things of interest at a variety of scales from the single small detail to the broad, all the year round and Mike says "it is a poor day if we haven't been out in the garden". Why not pop over and make their final openings go with a bang?

Other openings for the scheme across this weekend are Knightsbridge House in Hellingly on Saturday only, Mayfield group of gardens both days, Oaklands Farm near Horsham on Saturday only and a brand-new trail of gardens in Langney and Willingdon in Eastbourne on Sunday only. You can find all the garden details, directions and opening hours on the scheme's website at [www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk)

A few years ago, I purchased three plants of Lavender Munstead. It is named after Gertrude Jekyll's garden at Munstead Wood and bears dense spikes of fragrant, blue-purple flowers above aromatic, grey-green leaves. It's a popular lavender for gravel gardens, along with edging paths and borders because when you brush past it the aromas from its foliage are released. Like all English lavenders, Munstead lavender is a perennial, low-growing woody shrub. It flowers in summer and its flowers are attractive to bees and other pollinators. I planted all three in a large trough at the top of the garden.

Several years ago, I was given a bag of dahlia tubers, so I never knew the name of them. They have been planted in a large cube container in the garden and have been flowering profusely over the last 5 years or so. This summer, they seem to have gone mad, producing many pretty blooms, one after another, as you can see. I have never lifted them, just left



Two new pieces in the garden

them in the container in the garden all year and they have done really well.

Regular readers of the column will be fully aware of my love of bits and pieces to augment the planting around the plot. Three of my latest acquisitions are a couple of rusty metal mice along with a chunk of rusty metal cheese. The amphitheatre of old railway sleepers I introduced into the garden a couple of years ago is the perfect place to display many of these objets d'art. You can see they look very playful atop a couple of the sleepers and have been much commented on by visitors this summer.

Read more of Geoff's garden at [www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk](http://www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk) or email [visitdriftwood@gmail.com](mailto:visitdriftwood@gmail.com) to arrange a visit before the garden closes on July 31.



Annabelle