

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Bedgebury Arboretum



Red Sea Monster



Cox's Orange Pippin.

Cox's apples, succulent stars and summer highlights from the garden

WE were lucky to spend a long weekend away recently and one of the places we visited was Bedgebury National Pinetum and Forest, located north of Flimwell. The National Pinetum is home to a world-leading collection of conifers and contains over 12,000 specimen trees. The trees and landscape create a beautiful setting for peaceful walks and picnics in the rolling hills and valleys of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The forest is awe-inspiring for tree lovers looking to learn about tree species of international conservation importance and see them up close. I just love one of the images I took that day, the light across the trees was amazing. Well worth a visit. That said, an image I took in my own garden recently looked pretty good too, best described as a cornucopia of beautiful greens. Once again, the light was pretty good too, helped by some sunshine and a blue sky. The garden still manages to look good, despite the lack of water of late. The number of gardens opening for the National Garden Scheme really reduces this month, with just a few left to open before the end of the season. This weekend there are just two gardens, King John's Nursery in Etchingham and Rymans in Apuldrum near Chichester. That said, there are still many gardens that will open the garden gate by arrangement for small groups of visitors. Check out the website, ngs.org.uk, for those open for bookings near you. As I mentioned last week, this summer has produced one of the best crops of apples in the garden. I have two trees, one I planted, a Cox's Orange Pippin, and one that was already in the garden when we arrived 22 years ago. Both have done well but the apples on the older tree are all very small and will probably be left for the wildlife. However, there are many Cox's, as you can see, and I have been busy peeling them, poaching and

freezing them for use through the winter in pies and crumbles. You can see me pictured with some of the amazing eucomis, growing in pots up the central steps in the back garden. Also known as the pineapple lily, they are a great addition to the garden. It's an easy-to-grow summer-flowering bulb, perfect for growing in sunny herbaceous borders, in pots on the patio and the greenhouse or conservatory. For best results, keep plants well-watered during summer but keep dry in winter. New plants can be propagated by removing offsets from the parent bulbs in spring. These exotic-looking plants are generally hardier than they appear and can bring a fresh burst of colour and scent to late-summer gardens. When in flower they certainly live up to their common name of pineapple lily, having a bold, unmistakably tropical appearance that would suggest to the uninitiated that they are a specialist and difficult plant to grow. But unlike pineapples, they are far more adaptable to the UK climate and much less demanding in their cultivation, making them a fun, show-stopping plant to have in the garden. While they enjoy summer rainfall, they are surprisingly drought tolerant, which makes that a great addition to our gardens in times of hosepipe bans. During the growing season, eucomis require little maintenance and are generally pest and disease free. A pretty amazing succulent to have in the garden is the standout Echeveria Red Sea Monster. It is a real gem and true to its name, it wants to grow big. The leaves are thick dark green and frilled at the edge and turn bright red with good light. The flower stems are tall (up to 50-60cm) and crowned with red/dark pink flowers on the ends. It is most certainly a real favourite of mine and a centrepiece all of its own. Most echeverias need maximum light levels for most of the year.



Geoff with Eucomis
Images: Geoff Stonebanks

The light is important for this plant group to keep the beautiful rosettes compact and true to form. As the general light levels drop in October and the clocks change, stop watering your echeverias, move them to the greenhouse or conservatory/porch and leave them cool and dry over the winter until March, when the light levels increase and the clocks change again. I keep mine in the heated greenhouse, kept at a low of about 8 degrees. It is not going to be long before the monster and the many other succulents in my garden will be moved into their winter homes, before the temperatures really drop. It is always a difficult time of the year lifting the containers and carrying them into the greenhouse and then it is like putting a jigsaw puzzle together fitting them all in but still leaving some space to move around. Read more of Geoff's garden at driftwoodbysea.co.uk



A cornucopia of green