

GEOFF STONEBANKS

The Driftwood Garden Diary



What to gift on Valentine's Day?

IT'S Valentine's Day today! Have you bought that gift for your loved one yet? There's still time to pop out to the shops and buy a bunch of flowers or an appropriate plant.

The best flowers for Valentine's Day are traditionally red roses, symbolising passionate love, but modern choices include elegant tulips (perfect love), sophisticated orchids (beauty, affection), luxurious peonies (romance, prosperity) and classic lilies (devotion, admiration).

As far as houseplants go, what about a heartleaf philodendron which produces gorgeous evergreen heart-shaped leaves on long vines?

A super hardy houseplant that is great for new plant parents.

If you wanted to get something romantic for the garden, then I'd go for Lamprocapnos spectabilis, or Bleeding Heart, which is a popular romantic-looking perennial known for its distinctive pink-red (or white) heart-shaped flowers with white tips, hanging from arching stems above fern-like foliage.

It's a hardy, old-fashioned favourite, symbolising love and heart-break, and is often used in cottage gardens.

If you want something with longevity, you can even consider one of the many botanical Lego flowers, which are not only beautiful but also last forever.

You can pick from a variety of sets and maybe spend the time building it together for a wholesome night in. Happy Valentine's!

I've decided I need to get out in the garden again and start to get everywhere tidied up. There is so much debris lying around from the strong winds in the last couple of months, not helped by having all the hedges trimmed and bits dropping down. It's not so easy this year, as whilst I can still kneel OK on my right knee, it's not so easy with my new left knee. Challenging times but not impossible!

At this time of the year, the National Garden Scheme showcases beautiful snowdrops in most of the gardens opening this month. So, what is it about snowdrops that get us out into visiting gardens in the depths of winter?

The following words on snowdrops have been taken from an article on the scheme's website.



Geoff and Hoya Kerrii. Images: Geoff Stonebanks

Every year they reappear with unfailing regularity, popping up just as winter has got to the stage when we all long for it to end, to tell us that there really is something cheerful about February. And despite their apparent delicacy, small white flowers on short slender stems, they are unfailingly robust; often pushing through inches of snow and flowering for weeks on end, showing none of the weather-affected temperamentality that makes growing so many plants a nail-biting exercise.

They also provide one of the most memorable links between gardens and our natural landscape. Because of their ability to spread or 'naturalise' over large areas if left undisturbed, especially in favourable sites such as typical native English woodland, they can produce spec-

tacular carpets of white that are made all the more enthralling by the starkness that surrounds them.

With such enticement, it is not surprising that people will put on hats, gloves and wellies and head out to enjoy such heart-warming pleasure at a time of year when often they have been confined indoors for weeks on end. And over the coming weeks there are gardens opening all over England and Wales, over 100 in all, which will welcome you and enable you to enjoy one of our great garden-visiting treats.

Some of the gardens also cater for that particular group of devoted specialists, the galanthophiles. It's all in the name...Galanthus is the Latin name for snowdrop and virtually all snowdrops originate from a small number of wild species of

which the most common is Galanthus nivalis.

But snowdrops are also adept at producing numerous variants and so there are now literally hundreds of different ones, many of them rare and these are the treasures that a galanthophile will travel for hundreds of miles to see – sometimes paying hundreds of pounds to buy a single plant.

Whether you are a committed galanthophile or someone looking for the simpler pleasure of enjoying a gardening treasure-trove that just lifts this otherwise dead time of year, the gardens opening this February offer the best array of snowdrops anywhere and many of them are only open to visitors for a day or so now to support the National Garden Scheme.

Here in Sussex, you could visit any of these before the end of the month!

Pre-book only to see the following gardens: The Old Vicarage in Washington on 19th or 26th, Pembury House in Clayton on 19th, 20th, 26th and 27th, and Denmans Garden on 16th.

Sadly, 5 Whitemans Close in Cuckfield have had to cancel their planned days on 14th, 17th and 18th due to the ravages of the rain.

Sandhill Farmhouse in Rogate is open tomorrow, 15th for visitors to turn up and pay at the gate. Full details, prices and tickets can be purchased online at www.ngs.org.uk.

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



Snowdrops at The Old Vicarage



Snowdrops at Pembury House



Snowdrops and hellebores at Whiteman Close



Snowdrops at Sandhill