

GEOFF STONEBANKS

The Driftwood Garden Diary



Patios and the return of tulip season

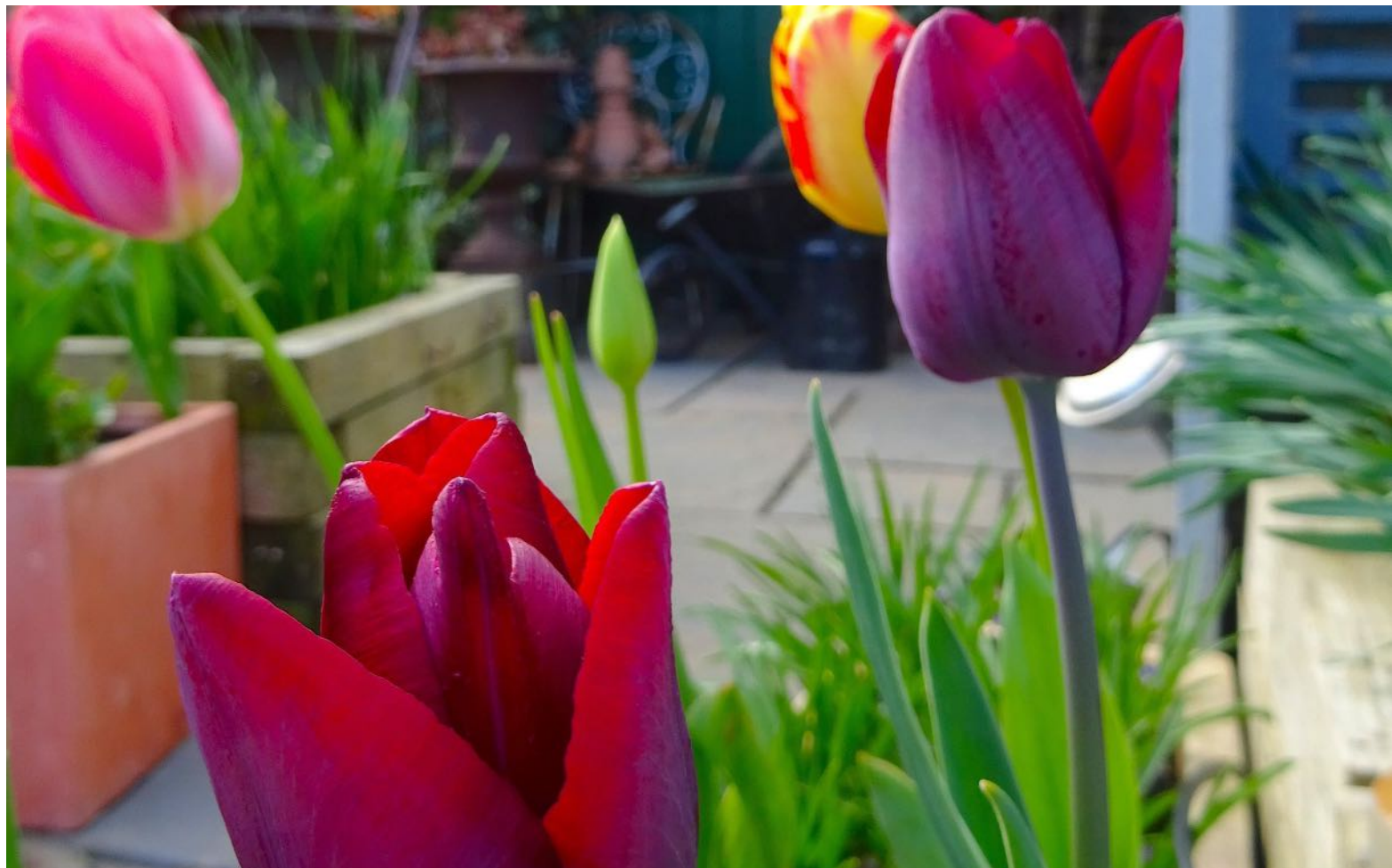
I MENTIONED my struggles with the power cleaning of the hard surfaces last week, and I'm pleased to say I have now completed the task in full at the back of the house.

I've found it very hard on my knees and equally hard on my wrists, having to engage the hand gun and hold tight while using the machine! Thankfully, you can see the results in the images. It has really transformed the patio behind the house.

This area is the most difficult to clean, as all the large containers need moving in order to get rid of all the debris behind. You can see the bare patio behind me, before I started to put back the bonsai trees on the shelves and other pots in front of the sleeper. All I've got left to do now are the paths at the front of the house and the drive!

I've got some lovely spring colour in the back garden at the moment too. There are several containers with beautiful tulips flowering away. Spring wouldn't really be the same without tulips. You can find tulips in almost every colour imaginable, from pale pastels to hot, vibrant shades, and, what's more, they are perfect for adding stunning colour to both borders and containers. Tulips are spring bulbs, planted in mid to late autumn. Technically they are perennial, with many varieties only flowering reliably for one year. Gardeners tend to plant new bulbs each autumn to ensure a good display, this is especially true if growing tulips in pots. Some tulips flower earlier than others, like those pictured in my garden this week.

You can prolong your displays by growing a mix of different types that flower at different times. Another favourite at this time of the year is the pretty hyacinth. Hyacinths are fragrant, easy-to-grow spring bulbs. They flower in a range of colours, from traditional purple and pink to white, and even mauve. You can plant them at the front of garden borders for a spring display, or in pots for a fragrant splash of colour near-



Tulips. Image: Geoff Stonebanks

er the house. They work well along with other spring bulbs like grape hyacinths (muscari) and tulips, and their small size makes them ideal for spring pot displays like those pictured in my garden.

You can also grow them in the house too, in a bright, airy spot, ideally with plenty of sunshine.

After flowering, hyacinth flowers and leaves die down back into the bulb, where nutrients are stored to aid growth the following year. Outdoor-grown hyacinths can therefore be left in the soil and should reappear the following year. Remove the flowering stem to stop the plant from wasting energy on seed production. Let the foliage die down completely and feed with

a potash-rich fertiliser like a tomato feed, which the bulb will use to produce next year's flowers.

I have a few crocuses in flower all planted in containers. These delicate little flowers appear mainly in late winter to early spring and are good in borders or seasonal containers, while others are best in a rock garden.

Robust types provide drifts of colour in lawns and underneath deciduous trees. They are grown from bulb-like structures called corms and are low-growing perennial plants from the iris family. In the UK, crocus flowers mark the arrival of spring. They can grow in a range of conditions, including woodlands, coastal gardens and

suburban lawns. Most of mine are mauve. If you don't have any, plant this perennial flower in the autumn for an early spring delight! They naturalize, meaning that they spread and come back year after year, with minimum care. Plant bulbs in groups or clusters rather than spacing them in a single line along a walkway or border. Single flowers get lost in the landscape. Plant a few inches apart, and plant in groups of 10 or more.

Tomorrow is Mother's Day. Have you got your gift at the ready? If your mum is into gardening and you still have to make a present choice, then you may be able to get your hands on a rose that I'd personally

never heard of until recently. It's called Rosa, Mum In A Million. Clearly a perennially popular choice, not just for its name but also for the profusion of large, well-scented flowers that appear continuously for several months throughout the summer. It can be planted in the border, or potted up and placed on a sunny patio and the flowers will last for ages after being cut and added to a vase. I've read that it is also known as Millie and makes an ideal gift, with classic, old fashioned quartered blooms with a wonderful strong, sweet rose fragrance.

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



Rear patio clean



Competed power clean at the back



Hyacinths



Mum in a Million