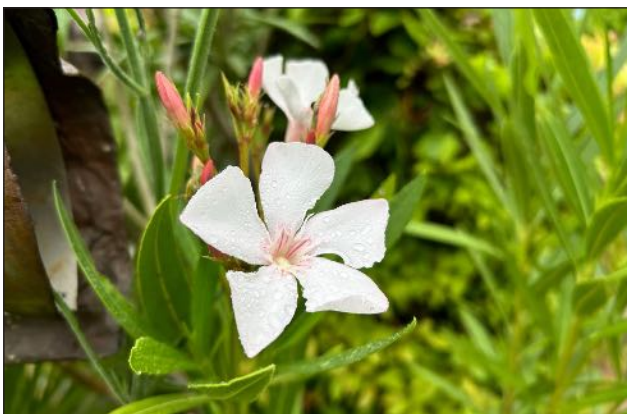


The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Acanthus



Oleander in flower



Oleander

How the cutest dog ever helps me plan my garden changes

SUMMER is moving on at a pace and I never seem to find time to sit down and enjoy my own garden. Sad to say, every time I give it a go, I tend to see something that needs attention, that is to say, until our gorgeous rescue terrier, Chester, jumps on my lap and forces me to stay put.

He is the cutest dog ever, as you can see and is most definitely a lap dog. These opportunities force me to stay put and provide the perfect moments in which to consider any potential changes to the plot. Most of the recent garden changes have come about by sitting in one place for a while and deciding in my head how I would like the area to look.

Last winter was by far the coldest and wettest few months we have had since moving to Sussex in 2004. I and many other gardeners lost plants that would usually survive. In my case that was several oleanders. Oleander plants (otherwise known as nerium oleander) are among the most versatile of shrubs, with dozens of uses in southern and coastal landscapes.

They tolerate a wide range of conditions, including difficult soil, salt spray, high pH, severe pruning, reflected heat from pavements and walls, and drought.

The one thing they can't withstand, though, is winter temperatures below -7 C. However, in cooler climates, you can grow an oleander plant in a container and bring it indoors when temperatures drop, or as I have been doing successfully for several years, heavily fleecing them outdoors.

Last winter, as normal, I protected all five shrubs in the garden with several layers of protective fleece.

Sadly, when I removed the protection in the spring, three had obviously died. Two, however, the red and white ones, survived and are flowering well in the garden now. The red was in the ground and the white in a large container, so, no logical explanation.

That said, I decided to cut the three damaged plants right back and I am pleased to say that they are now showing signs, albeit slowly, of new growth, so will live

again for next year.

Opening for the National Garden Scheme this weekend, on both days between midday and 5pm, close to the city, are two gardens in Woodingdean and Saltdean. Number 5 Crescent Drive North in Woodingdean is a small garden on the Downs created on a challenging site with shallow chalk soil.

The garden looks more mature than its seven years of planning. Water features, topiary, carnivorous plants, succulents and many pieces of sculpture are on show with lots of seats throughout the garden.

It has a combined entry with The Jungle Garden in Rodmell Avenue, Saltdean, which is a fun jungle garden, created in 2012, but completely revamped in 2021 and returning to the NGS after a three-year break. It measures just 65ft by 36ft, but appears larger, with winding paths that lead you through lush jungle and insect friendly planting. Listen out for jungle sounds. Tea and home-made cakes are served overlooking the garden. There is exquisite planting of exotic plants. Full details on both at www.ngs.org.uk

Two great seaside plants in my garden are acanthus and sea kale. The former is also known as Bear's Breeches. Acanthus form mounds of bold, eye-catching foliage.

The leaves are deeply lobed, some are spiny and they have long stalks. The hooded, spiny flowers which rise up on statuesque stems, are in muted shades of purple, pink, green or white.

I have two large clumps in the front garden and two in the back garden which never seem to disappoint each year. Mine are all *Acanthus spinosus* L and are very drought tolerant.

Sea kale, *crambe maritima*, is a striking plant that is both ornamental and edible.

The large leaves are a lovely glaucous green with wavy edges and in summer these are crowned with a cloud of tiny white perfumed flowers.

These nectar-rich flowers are great for attracting pollinating insects. As the name suggests, sea kale is often found growing wild on the coast. There is lots growing wild across from me on Tide Mills.



Geoff and Chester in the garden

In gardens, it looks good planted in dry sunny beds or into gravel, with other plants that favour this habitat, such as thrift.

Or you could include it in your vegetable plot and harvest the young shoots in spring to eat raw or steamed – they taste like asparagus. For best results, grow in full sun or partial shade in fertile, very well-drained soil.

The position needs to be deep enough to accommodate the long tap root of the plant with plenty of space for it to spread out, it is not suitable for growing in containers.

Read more of Geoff's garden or check details for visiting up until August 11 on his website at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk



Sea kale