

The Driftwood Garden Diary

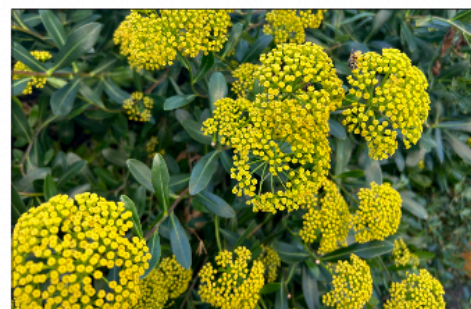
with Geoff Stonebanks



Helichrysum petiolare "Goring Silver"



Pear crop



Shrubby hare's ear

Driftwood on the small screen and another great crop of pears

REGULAR readers may recall a TV production company paying to use my garden for some location shooting last Autumn. All can now be revealed, it was for a new George Clarke series of four programmes on C4, entitled George Clarke's Kitchens VS gardens. The series focuses on homeowners who want to give their property a much-needed refresh. They have an allocated budget for kitchen and garden but are undecided which one to prioritise. The four programmes will help them decide and one of the locations is a seaside property in Exmouth, which will incorporate some of the ideas from Driftwood, filmed during the shoot with Luke Millard and the team last October.

The crew were very impressed with the garden, as it generated some fabulous ideas for them to introduce into the seaside garden being designed as part of the programme. They spent three hours across both the back and front gardens taking away many ideas. The four-part series began last Wednesday, 13th August on Channel 4 at 8pm, so watch out for the episode set around a seaside location, which should air on Wednesday the 27th August.

This weekend, Holly House in Beaconsfield Road, Chelwood Gate, near Haywards Heath opens its garden gate for the National Garden Scheme on both days from 2pm to 5pm with entry £6. This is an acre of English garden providing views and cameos of plants and trees around every corner with many different areas giving constant interest. See the fish pond and a wildlife pond beside a grassy area with many shrubs and flower beds. Among the trees and winding paths there is a cottage garden which is a profusion of colour and peace. Enjoy the exhibition of paintings and cards by the owner. Full details at www.ngs.org.uk

A lovely plant growing at the side of the house, fully exposed to the salt winds, is Bupleurum fruticosum. It is an elegant, rounded, evergreen shrub with glossy, blue-green leaves and clusters of yellow flowers,

pictured, in summer. They have a similar colour and texture to those of eucalyptus, no doubt as an adaptation to coping with dry summer heat. In late summer, each branch terminates in a hemispherical umbel of acid green flowers, similar to those of dill. In many ways, Bupleurum fruticosum gives a similar effect to the Mediterranean euphorbias, only at the opposite end of the year.

The flowers are petal-less and don't remain 'in flower' for long, but the umbels of developing seeds last for months, gradually darkening from olive green to brown, before finally dropping at the very end of autumn, whereupon the heads dry off to chocolate brown and remain intact all winter, looking very nice above the unchanging foliage. It is commonly called Shrubby hare's ear. It can get a little wild after a year or two, and benefits from a good, hard cut back by two-thirds to keep it tight. If you cut it back at the very end of winter/beginning of spring, it won't be without foliage for very long.

This season there seems to be another great crop of pears forming on the tree in the back garden. The tree was one of the original items in the garden when we moved in back in 2004. There were actually two but sadly one was in a difficult location to work around and had to be removed as I created the existing garden. We never seem to get to eat them so I usually peel and poach them every autumn and freeze to use in pies and crumbles through the winter months.

A real favourite of mine, every year, in the containers is Helichrysum petiolare "Goring Silver". It is a trailing perennial grown, usually, as an annual, with rounded, grey-white leaves. The experts say that it has insignificant flowers in summer which are best removed as they appear. Personally, I love them and am always pleased when they appear, see image. They are a pretty muted yellow and rise high above the plant. For me, it is a great plant to put in containers, to weave everything together as it grows quickly and threads its way through other plants beautifully.



Geoff and Luke Millard

Helichrysum generally can be annuals, herbaceous or evergreen perennials or shrubs, usually with grey-hairy foliage and papery everlasting flower-heads. Best grown in moderately fertile, well-drained soil in full sun and watered in prolonged dry spells. They work really well in coastal locations too and you can also get one with slightly gold coloured leaves too. Helichrysum Gold has bright golden yellow trailing foliage (no flowers) and is great for adding structure and interest to hanging baskets and mixed plantings. An excellent foil to flowering plants, also called the liquorice plant. I have managed to over winter several in the garden too that have done really well in their second year!

Read more of Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk



Filming for Channel 4