

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



A wonderful weekend ahead on the coastal garden trail

NEXT weekend, locals to Brighton and Seaford are in for a real treat in terms of garden visiting. The annual Macmillan Coastal Garden Trail takes place across the weekend of July 23 and 24. Regular readers will know the event has been raising money for the Macmillan Horizon Centre in Brighton over the last 11 years and is organised by Driftwood Fundraising Group, headed up by myself.

This year's event will be quite special on two counts, the first, our total fundraising for Macmillan Cancer Support since 2012 will top the magical £100,000 mark with all the money going to the Horizon Centre in the city. It is a calm, friendly and welcoming place offering support so people affected by cancer in Sussex can still live their life. It opened in November 2016 and has been designed with input from people affected by cancer to make it the best place to offer the support and services that people in Sussex need. The centre offers all-round support from a team of specialists in a calm, friendly and welcoming environment. The information lounge and terrace is open to all to visit and gather information, chat to someone or just use the space to sit while they wait.

Our patron, The One Show's gardening expert Christine Walkden, will be present to open the event at 11am in my garden, Driftwood in Seaford. Why not come along and meet her and say hello?

She will be on hand from 11am until about 1.30pm to answer any gardening questions you may have.

This year, 17 gardens are taking part across the weekend, with nine in the city, seven in Seaford and one in Telscombe. All but one of the plots allow dogs on leads, so your four-legged friends can join in the fun as well. Along the trail there are three new gardens to see – an allotment in Hollingdean belonging to the Horizon Centre, 23 Cornwell Gardens in Brighton and 8 Downs Road in Seaford.

Two community gardens join in

too, one in Brighton and one in Seaford.

Weather permitting, it will be a memorable weekend with 11 of the gardens along the trail serving delicious home-made tea and cakes and five offering local garden art for sale too. Plants will be available for sale in several plots as well. You can even listen to live music between 3pm and 4pm both days in the Walled Garden in Bishopstone.

Tickets for the event can either be purchased in the first garden visited on the day or bought online ahead of the weekend, with all the information on the trail web site www.macmillangardentrail.co.uk. Alternatively, you can contact me on 01323 899296. Tickets cost £8 per day on both Saturday and Sunday, or just pay £3 per person at the gate, for each garden visited. Please check the details for each garden before visiting as four of the 17 are only open on the Saturday.

If the weather is good, why not visit Seaford one day and Brighton the next and take in as many gardens as you can. There will be lots of inspiration to be had along the way and the opportunity to talk to owners and discover any secrets in creating their plots that you may be able to borrow for your own.

My favourite plant this week in my own garden has to be a beautiful hydrangea, Annabelle. It is a stunning, large-flowered white hydrangea, often producing football sized flower over ten inches in diameter. The enormous, densely packed heads of creamy white flowers appear from July to September above pointed, dark green leaves. Up until last Summer I had mine in a container but it has been placed in the ground for 2022.

Unlike the better-known blue and pink hydrangeas, Annabelle blooms reliably every year even after severe pruning or intensely cold winters. The huge, white "drumstick" blooms will appear in profusion without fail. I've had mine for three years and it has not let me down.

Some people plant Annabelle as a hedge, since it can be cut back



Above, Geoff Stonebanks with Christine Walkden and, right, hydrangea Annabelle. Top row from left: Downs Road, Seaford; the Horizon Centre allotment; 33 Wivelsfield Road, Brighton

severely in the winter for a tidy effect. Deciduous and with an upright growth habit, hydrangea Annabelle makes a gorgeous feature for a partly shady border with moist, well-drained soil. It will also be happy in a roomy patio planter, provided it is kept well fed and watered in the growing season. The large flower heads can also be cut for use in a vase, and are particularly suitable for dried flower arrangements too. What's not to like?

You can read more of Geoff's garden in Seaford at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk or go and visit.

It is open on the trail and by arrangement until July 31.

