

# The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Chrysanthemums enjoy a warm, sunny, sheltered spot



Hydrangea schneeball holds its colour into early autumn



Miscanthus nepalensis is ideal for borders and gravel gardens

## How to change the look of your garden with little effort

I'M very pleased to say that Driftwood and I will have a two-page feature in a national gardening magazine next month which will be published next week on the 20th. So, if you read Modern Gardens, look out for the article inside.

Looking good in the garden this week are the five large fascicularia bicolor or crimson bromeliad. They are all planted in the ground around the bow of the large rowing boat in the beach garden. They are a rosette-forming, terrestrial bromeliad with slender, spiny-toothed, rigid, mid to dark-green, evergreen leaves up to 50cm long. In summer each mature rosette produces a dense central cluster of pale sky-blue flowers surrounded by ivory-white bracts. The innermost leaves of the rosette turn scarlet red and mine are still looking great in November. These are unusual and interesting plants that will be a talking feature in your garden. Its brilliant colours erupt along the leaves giving this hardy plant a tropical appearance and are so unusual and spectacular they will become a real feature in patio containers or a sunny border. Mine have been growing well in the ground for over three years now in a south facing part of the garden, so they get full sun through the summer months.

In the centre of the back garden, I have a really lovely red dogwood plant. This deciduous shrub has oval, dark green leaves and produces small, creamy-white flowers in May and June. But it's really grown for the bright, coral-red stems that are revealed when the leaves fall. This lovely dogwood looks stunning planted in groups, beside water, or in a winter border. It grows best in full sun and works particularly well with orange or purple-stemmed varieties of dogwood. Mine is a solo shrub looking good in the winter border.

A new plant I bought just over a year ago is miscanthus nepalensis, or the Himalayan fairy grass. It is an ornamental grass providing a stunning display as summer takes hold with airy golden plumes arising on tall, slender stems high

above lush mounded foliage. Ribbons of green leaves cascade in neat arcs, a flowing base for the striking floral spires. It is an ideal grass for borders and gravel gardens, the delicate tassels of Miscanthus nepalensis shine in autumnal sunlight, holding their gilded colour even as their finch-friendly seeds take shape as you can see. At present, mine is growing well in a large container.

A shrub I bought back in 2007, the year my Dad passed away, was a glorious hydrangea, schneeball. I've always considered it to sit in the garden in his memory. This is a deciduous shrub that can grow up to 1.2m high with broadly oval, serrated dark green leaves. Its dome-shaped clusters of flowers are produced in the summer, with yellow-green buds producing large, pure white flowers with feathered edges. The colour generally holds well into early autumn, and then you can see some tints of pink and green as the flowers fade, as pictured.

A real garden favourite at this time of the year is the chrysanthemum. These traditional favourites bring a welcome boost of colour in the late summer and through the autumn. Their flowers, in a wide choice of shapes, sizes and hues, can reinvigorate borders and containers as the temperatures inevitably start to fall. The flowers have many different forms, from open daisies to multi-petalled pompoms, large and small and they come in lots of colours and shades, from pink, purple and red, to orange, yellow and white.

Chrysanthemums generally enjoy a warm, sunny, sheltered spot, with fertile, well-drained soil and should be watered and fed regularly. They benefit from being protected from frost. That said, I have several around the garden that are not protected through the colder months and have survived well over the last four years! Most won't survive heavy frosts or waterlogged soil and they don't perform well in dry conditions, poor soil or shade.

Chrysanthemums work well with other autumn-flowering border plants, such as salvias, sedums and asters, as well as ornamental



Fascicularia bicolor or crimson bromeliad are looking good

grasses.

In preparation for the garden openings in 2025, I've started thinking about relocating some of the rusty metal around the garden to try and create a different look for visitors' next season. By doing it this year any new growth then gets a chance to establish itself around the bases, meaning it looks as though it has been there forever. Now is a good time to think about what you want to do next spring and consider relocating large containers into different positions. It is a great opportunity to redesign your plot simply by juggling items around. I'm always amazed at the difference that can be made for a relatively small amount of effort. Why not give it a go?

Read more of Geoff's garden at [www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk](http://www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk)



Geoff taking a picture of dogwood