

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Dicentra scandens



Heleniums, Lemon Sundae, Okra Sundae and Strawberry Sundae

It's still a riot of colour out there, thanks to the Sneezeweed

IT IS HARD to believe that we are already halfway through September. Next week, the window fitters arrive to install the French windows in the spare room, opening out on to the patio. The area has now been fully cleared, both inside and out, to allow them access to complete the work.

It looks so different now, with no planting against the wall and window. Once the doors are in, I'll decide how to lay out the patio again taking account of the new additions.

Gardens opening for the National Garden Scheme start to become a little thin on the ground this month. There is only one in the Sussex booklet open this weekend and it is Sandhill Farmhouse in Nyewood Road, Rogate.

It opens both Saturday and Sunday from 2pm through until 5pm, with entry £5. Both the front and rear gardens are broken up into garden rooms including a small kitchen garden.

At the front there is a small woodland area, planted with ferns and bulbs, a white and green garden, a large leaf border and terraced area. The rear garden has rose borders, a small decorative vegetable garden, a red border plus a grasses border.

In addition, on Wednesday, September 20, the Ashling Park Estate, West Ashling, Chichester, has a special opening for the scheme from 10am to 11.30am with a tour of the estate, entry is £8 but pre booking is essential at www.ngs.org.uk.

On offer is a truly fascinating vineyard tour with wine tasting that starts promptly at 10am. First created in the 19th century, Ashling Park was cited on the Tithe map and has had a new lease of life when a vineyard was planted in 2017.

Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier, Chardonnay and Bacchus grape varieties are grown. See the chef's kitchen garden and large collection of 50 beehives.

To help boost some colour in the garden for some recent television filming, I purchased some new plants that flower well at this time of the year, three of which were lovely heleniums – Lemon Sundae,

Okra Sundae and Strawberry Sundae, all in a row adjacent to the central path.

Its common name, which to be honest I did not know until I wrote this piece, is Sneezeweed.

They bring warm colour to borders from mid-summer into autumn, what's more, these sun-loving perennials are tough, hardy and easy to grow. They combine particularly well with grasses and other late-flowering perennials in prairie-style plantings.

These daisies come in a choice of rich, fiery hues – yellows, deep oranges and reddish coppers.

The centres become more prominent as the flowers age and the petals curve backwards. The upright, leafy, branching stems emerge from sturdy clumps and look magnificent in the garden.

A real favourite in the garden at this time of the year is a beautiful hydrangea, paniculata "Limelight".

I have two large shrubs in the back garden. Limelight hydrangea is an upright shrub with intense colouring, the leaves are yellow-green, stems grey-green with pink flushes, and the large flowers are green, fading to creamy white before turning pink in autumn.

They will flower from summer into autumn and it is an excellent shrub for a small garden. The large blooms make good cut flowers too.

Grow Limelight hydrangea in moist but well-drained soil in full sun to partial shade. Cut back hard in early spring, removing the previous season's shoots to a few buds of older wood. Mine have been doing well, for about seven years now.

A pretty plant given to me several years ago now by a garden visitor is dicentra scandens.

The yellow flowers look really pretty, tumbling down over the old railway sleepers behind the house. It won't be long before I cut it right back to the ground after it has finished flowering.

It will send up fresh foliage almost immediately but frost will kill the shoots off and it will then throw up new growth again in the spring.

It won't be long before I start to gather up my very large collection of succulents and move them to



Geoff and hydrangea Limelight

their winter homes. I have two small Agave Americana, planted in a vintage colander, sitting on a table in the beach garden. These are just two of probably 70 agaves across the garden, some now quite large.

It is always the hardest of tasks at Driftwood to move them all somewhere safe, usually from late September/October through to April/May.

I somehow have to squeeze them all under cover, as they don't like getting too wet in the winter months.

Luckily, I have had a clear perspex roof built over the alley to one side of the house, which means I can store them on shelving, ensuring they stay dry, the plants really don't mind the cold.

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



Agave Americana