

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Indian Summer



Crocismia



Empress of Prussia now a year on

Why fuchsia has special appeal

IT hardly seems possible that it is almost a year since the crew from BBC Gardeners' World visited the garden and spent the day filming. I was so lucky that the weather was on our side and I loved the short film they produced, which was finally broadcast on March 22 this year, in episode 2 of the current series.

One of the sessions we recorded was me propagating a well-loved fuchsia in my garden. You can see me pictured, demonstrating how to take cuttings and pot up the subsequent plant. I actually potted up three on camera and gave one to the producer and kept two for myself. The two that I retained are doing extremely well and are already quite substantial plants, flowering well as you can see from the image taken of one of them this week.

The plant has always been quite special to me as the original, from which I took the cuttings, was a gift from my father to my mother, now 97, for their ruby wedding anniversary many years ago.

The plant is a fuchsia Empress of Prussia, whose large single flowers are simply regal. The tube and sepals are glowing scarlet, while the corolla is a reddish magenta. It is free flowering, with an upright, vigorous, self-branching habit and can reach a height of 36".

It is also hardy, once established. If grown in containers and left outside all winter, they may not prove fully hardy as container growing does not afford the same level of root protection as growing in the ground, but mine have always done well both in the ground and in containers.

There are several plots opening across the county for the National Garden Scheme this weekend. On Saturday and Sunday, you could visit Holly House in Beaconsfield Road, Chelwood Gate between 2pm and 5pm, with entry £6. On Sunday only, there is Whitehanger in Marley Lane Haslemere, with entrance £6.50, between 10am and 4.30pm, Bourne Botanicals, in The Bourne, Chesterfield Close, Furnace Wood in Felbridge between 11am and 5pm, with entrance £8, with both needing to be pre-booked at www.ngs.org.uk.

Finally, 4 Hillside Cottages in Downs Road, West Stoke between 11am and 4pm, entrance £5.

Visitors to my garden will know, only too well, what an eclectic mix of plants and *objets d'art* are on display. A couple of weeks ago, a returning visitor, Caroline, came with a vintage typewriter she thought I might like to add to my collection! She had seen a similar one on show when she visited last year and, needless to say, I was thrilled to add the second one to my garden, as you can see. A friend, June Jaundoo, decided to pen a short poem in recognition of its arrival.

As I start my rest here at Driftwood

*My new life swiftly begins,
The visitor's eyes now upon me
I will never grow old and dim.*

*As beauty surrounds,
Driftwood's magical sounds*

*Our story will start here and now
Deep inside my old heart
Words form, bubble and start
A fairytale, in which you are in....*

Looking pretty good in the back garden this week are several beautiful stems of alstroemeria Indian Summer. It is such a hard-working plant. Alstroemerias have long been a staple of cottage gardens, but modern cultivars have an extended flowering season, with larger blooms and more vivid colours. They are excellent in summer borders and the clusters of lily-like flowers come in a choice of vibrant colours, including pinks, reds, purples, yellows, oranges and creamy-whites, often adorned with speckles, blotches and stripes. They open throughout summer and early autumn at the top of leafy stems, with the plants dying back over winter and re-sprouting again in spring. Indian Summer is my favourite as it brings a real sparkle to my borders.

Growing at the top of the garden in our tortoise pen is a pretty crocismia. These plants are multi-flowered perennials that come in a range of fiery colours. They are easy to grow and thrive in a range of soil types, in sun or partial shade. They provide a sumptuous mid-to-late-summer



Preparing fuchsian cuttings on camera

display as you can see. From clumps of sword-like or pleated leaves, upright, arching stems carry small, funnel-shaped flowers that open in succession. Most are orange, but there are also yellow and red-flowered cultivars. Some have bronze-tinted foliage.

With the garden now closed to paying visitors, we can enjoy the space a little more ourselves. All told, we have seen over 550 visitors book to visit, since we opened on June 1, which is slightly more than in 2023. I'm sure we would have seen more had the weather not been so erratic not really summer weather at all on many days. I'll update on monies raised for charity in the coming weeks.

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



Gift of new typewriter