

The Driftwood Garden Diary

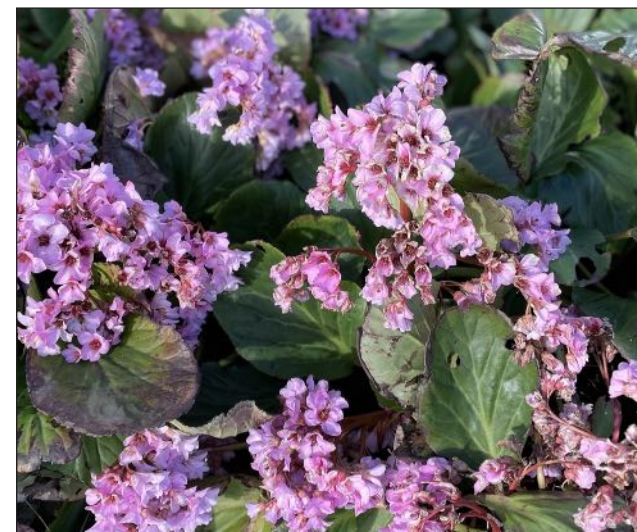
with Geoff Stonebanks



Sorbaria sorbifolia sem



Coronilla



Bergenia

We're really in the pink now

PINK is the in colour in my garden at the moment. Looking very dramatic is the large potted shrub, Camellia William Bartlett. It is a compact and tidy evergreen shrub with oval, leathery, glossy, dark green leaves, producing an abundance of beautiful, light pink, flecked with darker pink, fully double flowers bloom in early spring, from March to April.

Mine is beginning to flower already, it prefers fertile, slightly acidic, consistently moist, well-drained soils. It thrives in partial or dappled shade, and has to be protected from direct sunlight.

Mine is in full shade meaning it produces thinner leaves and fewer blooms.

It can withstand frost but needs to be sheltered from harsh and dry winds. It is possible that late frosts may damage the flower buds.

It is a very low maintenance plant, doesn't require regular pruning and is very suitable for growing in containers.

Another pink favourite is the Bergenia, or Elephant's Ears.

This robust, dense, evergreen, clump-forming plant has large, rounded, wavy edged, leathery, purple-tinged green leaves which develop attractive shades of rich purple during the winter.

Clusters of spectacular bell-shaped deep magenta-pink nectar rich flowers on red stems are held well above the foliage in late winter and early spring.

These are attractive to insects and make good cut flowers. It tolerates dry windy conditions too and it is tolerant of poor soil. Mine has many flowers on at the moment.

There are three gardens you could visit over the next week through the National Garden Scheme. The first is Pembury House in Clayton, which has slots you can pre-book, on either the Thursday, February 22, or Friday, February 23, the second is Manor of Dean in Tillington, near Petworth on Sunday, February 18.

The former is a wonderful snowdrop garden with winding paths giving a choice of walks through three acres of garden.

The latter will open from 2pm to 5pm and is a three-acre traditional

English garden with early spring bulbs and a bluebell woodland walk. Full details and option to book for both gardens can be found at www.ngs.org.uk

If you are looking for something to brighten up the garden on cold grey winter days then coronilla glauca will bring much needed cheer with its gorgeous display of small, yellow flowers, held in crown-like clusters above neat blue-grey evergreen foliage, that continues well into spring. It is deliciously fragrant too.

Native to Portugal, like many Mediterranean shrubs it needs a sunny, sheltered spot in fertile, free draining soil with some moisture, but avoiding excess winter wet.

A site close to a south or west facing wall would be perfect, perhaps close to a path or in a container by a window. It is also a veritable bee magnet.

Just starting to produce its new growth, in a large container in the back garden, is sorbaria sorbifolia sem, it is a little-used but very useful compact, deciduous shrub.

It forms thickets of fern-like foliage, flushed pink-bronze in spring and turning green in summer.

From midsummer, plants are topped with narrow panicles of small creamy flowers and in autumn the leaves turn a vibrant shade of red before falling. For best results, grow it in full sun or partial shade in moist, well-drained soil.

Regular readers will be only too aware of my love of succulents. They are still tucked up for the winter but require regular checking over the winter months. My collection is split between the front and back porches of the house and the heated greenhouse.

You can see me in the doorway of the greenhouse at Driftwood, having checked all the plants.

It is bursting at the seams and its inhabitants can't wait to get out, hopefully in six or seven weeks, depending on the long-term forecasts.

It is quite amazing now to start to see all the bulbs starting to come through, it won't be long before there is a blaze of colour out there again.

I've got quite a few hydrangeas in



Geoff checking the greenhouse

containers and now is quite a good time to go out and prune them.

The dead flowers do give some interest over the winter and some say they protect the new growth from frost. You should be able to see quite clearly the stems that need attention.

Trim them down and this will give way to new growth in the next few weeks.

You need to cut each flower stem back to a healthy pair of new buds and wait for the plants to dazzle again this summer.

Take time to check your borders while they are still a bit sparse, it is the perfect opportunity to see what needs to be done, by either removing a plant or two or transplanting it to another area of the garden.

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



A beautiful pink camellia