

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Sedum atlantis



Sea Lavender



Dicentra Scandens

How I am preparing my garden for the coming winter months

IT certainly feels as though the days are drawing in and autumn is on its way. That said, it is still not cold out in the garden.

I've started to think about tidying the beach garden and organising my large collection of Agaves for the upcoming winter months. I've probably got almost 80 of them around the garden but some are still small babies in containers. Over half though, are larger specimens like the one I'm holding in the picture.

I made a conscious decision last spring to place the largest plants into the ground, as they were just getting far too difficult to carry under cover for the winter. It's not so much the cold they dislike, it's the wet, but being on chalk they should make it through OK.

This weekend, the National Garden Scheme has several plots you might like to venture out to see. On Sunday, Hamsey House opens for the scheme, for the very first time.

The garden, will open between 1pm and 5pm with entry £6. It is nestled within the South Downs National Park, just a few miles from Lewes. The country garden incorporates an orchard with a wildflower patch, a vegetable and cut flower garden, large herbaceous borders and a parterre. Succulents for sale too.

Meanwhile, today there are two gardens to visit, Holford Manor and King Johns Lodge. The former is in North Chailey and opens from 11am to 4pm with entrance £7. It is a 5-acre garden with far reaching views to open fields with lots to see. The latter is in Etchingham and opens from 11am to 5pm with entry £5. It is a four-acre romantic garden for all seasons. Full details on all three gardens can be found at www.ngs.org.uk

Four plants that are still holding their own in my garden are pictured too. The first is yellow bleeding-heart vine, or dicentra scandens, which is an herbaceous climber with deeply lobed leaves 15-30cm long, some with tendrils. Mine is yellow and the flowers emerge from mid-spring to late summer.

Dicentra can look a little messy after they finish blooming and I cut

mine right down to the ground in autumn. It thrives in shade and is sometimes called the king of climbing dicentras, with its origins in Tibet and Nepal.

Sedum Atlantis was a prize-winning plant from Chelsea 2019, with its brightly coloured foliage and chartreuse flowers, which are also sought after by bees. It is a sun-loving, drought tolerant (once established) plant, each leaf is attractively variegated, and has a scalloped margin. These form in neat, ground-covering rosettes, which are crowned for several months from midsummer with flowers.

It's easy to grow and is ideal for pots or the edge of borders. Mine flourish in the gravel garden, front and rear.

Growing in my back gravel garden is a wonderful perennial, sea lavender, much asked after by garden visitors who are not familiar with it. It is very easy to grow and performs best in full sun.

A great advantage is that is drought tolerant, once established and is a welcome addition to coastal gardens. It will require cutting back after flowering. Limonium platyphyllum, to give it its correct name, is a clump-forming perennial boasting attractive sprays of tiny papery light purple flowers in summer. Blooming in a cloud, they add a soft haze and airy touch in the garden.

They are borne on slender and multi-branched stems which rise from a basal rosette of large, broadly spoon-shaped leaves 15-25 cm, which lay nearly flat against the ground. Their dry, papery petals retain their colour well, making them an excellent choice for fresh cut flowers or dried arrangements. Attractive to bees, butterflies and other pollinators, Sea lavender is a relatively easy perennial to cultivate.

The fourth is hydrangea Vanille Fraise. Its exuberant flower heads are what transform an ordinary paniculata hydrangea into an extraordinary one! The stunning flower heads turn from vanilla-white, through shades of pink as they age, to a sumptuous rich raspberry pink.

These cones of starry flowers are an absolute dream in any garden!



Geoff and Agaves

With flowers of so many different shades of pink present on this hydrangea at any one time, Vanille Fraise is perfect for adding colour in the late summer border and is particularly useful for north-facing gardens where it will add colour and light, as mine does.

Vanilla Fraise also makes a great cut flower and the glorious heads can also be dried and sprayed for a stunning winter decoration. The shrubs are very hardy and easy to grow, the loose cone-shaped clusters of blooms form at the tips of red-stemmed branches in summer.

I've had mine now for several years. It began in a container and when I redesigned the back of the house area last autumn I decided to pop it in the ground.

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



Vanilla fraise