

# GEOFF STONEBANKS

## The Driftwood Garden Diary



# Gardens are coming back to life

The garden is really starting to come alive with the full impact of spring.

The only plant that remained under a fleece is the white bottle brush, which you can see over my shoulder in the picture. I decided to remove it this week in preparation for my garden openings.

There have been many pretty flowers looking good recently, notably the delicate Narcissus 'Actaea', which is an old-fashioned daffodil.

The flowers are quite different from the traditional forms, having a ruff of large white outer petals and a small yellow cup edged with orange.

They have a lovely scent and are said to be largely ignored by deer, so a good choice for a wild meadow.

It's a great choice for growing at the front of a spring border or in pots as part of a spring container display. Mine are growing in a bed close to the house that will soon be filled with the fronds of new ferns.

I have quite a few camellia growing on the north-facing wall behind the house. A new one I purchased last autumn is April rose.

It has produced one small but perfectly formed flower this spring, pictured below. Camellias dislike lime and grow best in a neutral or acid soil (pH 7 or below) that is humus-rich, moist and free-draining. Hence all mine are in large containers.

They are happiest in a semi-shaded position with a westerly or sheltered northerly aspect. It is important to avoid south or east-facing positions because the flowers may be spoiled by the early morning sun following frosty nights.

Neither will they tolerate an exposed windy position, nor a soil which tends to become waterlogged in wet weather. The light dappled shade provided by trees and other shrubs is ideal as long as there is sufficient moisture at the roots.

This weekend there are two gardens opening for the National Garden Scheme you could visit across both days (18 and 19).

The first is Limekiln Farm in Chalvington Road, Chalvington, near Hailsham, from 2pm to 5pm with entry £8. The garden was de-



Geoff with his garden starting to come to life. Images: Geoff Stonebanks

signed in the 1930s when the house was owned by Charles Stewart Taylor, MP for Eastbourne. It has not changed in basic layout since then.

The planting aims to reflect the age of the 17th century property and original garden design.

The house and garden are mentioned in Virginia Woolf's diaries of 1929, depicting a particular charm and peace that still exists today.

Flint walls enclose the main lawn, herbaceous borders, rose garden and nepeta-lined courtyard. Informal pond and specimen trees, including a very ancient oak. Many spring flowers and tree blossom. See the new prairie-style garden with grasses and perennials.

The second is The Oast in Fletch-

ing Street, Mayfield, open from 11am to 5pm with entry £6. This is a one-acre garden in an idyllic High Weald setting with a beautiful view. See over 4,000 tulips and other spring bulbs blooming and wander through the half-acre wildflower meadow with old roses and an orchard.

There's a woodland-edge walk, wildlife pond, vegetables and soft fruit. Quality homegrown plants for sale. Full details on both gardens at [www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk).

I have some very pretty cyclamen growing close to the house. They are a hardy perennial, bearing delicate silver-lined dark green leaves and dainty blooms in shades of white, pink and red, from late winter to early spring.

They are perfect for growing at

the base of small shrubs and trees, and naturalising in grass. They grow to 10cm, with rounded dark green leaves sometimes marbled with silver on the upper surface.

Its flowers are 2cm in width often with a purple blotch at the base of each lobe and they open from late winter onwards. They are best grown in humus-rich soil in partial shade then mulched annually with well-rotted leaf mould to prevent the tubers from drying out in summer and from the winter cold.

Meanwhile in the back porch of the house the gorgeous clivia is looking pretty good. This is a showy, frost-tender houseplant that makes a bold feature in the home or conservatory.

It bears stocky stems topped with large, rounded heads of colourful

flowers, from late winter to spring. Clivia foliage is architectural and attractive year-round, with wide, dark green, strap-shaped evergreen leaves that grow from a swollen, fleshy root.

Flowerheads are made up of eight to 10 bell-shaped blooms, usually in shades of orange, but yellow and red-flowered varieties are sometimes available. Clivia is also known as forest lily, because in its native country of South Africa, it originates from woodland.

Mine was a gift to my Mum by her lifelong friend Edna Bradbury who passed away a couple of years ago!

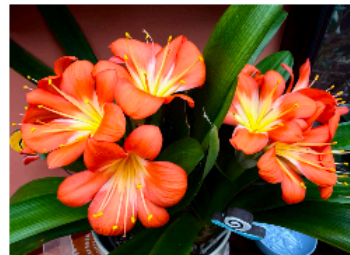
Read more of Geoff's garden at [www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk](http://www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk) or follow both him and the garden on social media.



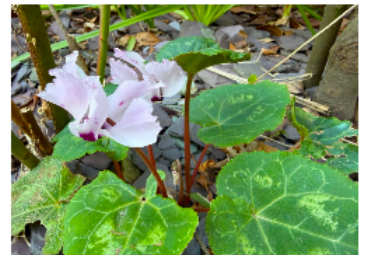
Narcissus actaea



Camelia April rose



Clivia



Pretty cyclamen