

GEOFF STONEBANKS

The Driftwood Garden Diary



Quirky garden art and garden visits

A RECENT addition to the displays in my garden has been a pair of rusty stilettoes, planted up with some small succulents.

I saw them pop up on my Facebook feed several times, kept going back to them, and finally relented and bought the pair. I am very pleased I did, as they look very much at home on the railway sleeper bench on the patio behind the house. They just add to the very eclectic mix of sculpture and decoration amongst the planting in the garden.

The Digitalis Panther that I bought last year is really looking great. It is a striking, hardy perennial, known for its unique and dramatic appearance. Often referred to as the "Panther Foxglove," it features tall spikes of pink flowers with speckled throats that create a beautiful contrast against its dark green foliage. These blooms appear all summer long, attracting pollinators such as bees and butterflies. The flowers' rich colour and bold stature make it a stand-out in mixed borders, woodland gardens, or shaded areas. It grows to about 60cm tall, preferring well-drained soil, in sun or partial shade. Once established, it is relatively low-maintenance, though it benefits from regular watering during very dry periods. Perfect for adding height and contrast, it offers a captivating combination of elegance and boldness in the garden, as you can see.

A pretty little rose in the garden is Rosa 'Climbing Cécile Brunner'. Buds appear in clusters and open to sweetly scented, fully double, light pink flowers for a long period throughout summer and is well known for its prolific flowers with a vigorous climbing habit. It is perfect for an open, sunny wall or large pergola and is a cottage garden classic. It produces a generous amount of light pink double blooms from summer through to autumn with a pleasant scent against a dark green foliage. This rose grows to approximately 4m high and 2m wide and is almost entirely thornless. Perfect for training over archways or trellis works in the garden and is totally hardy.



Geoff and Digitalis Panther. Images: Geoff Stonebanks

Another rose in a large pot in the garden is Macmillan Nurse, which has a glorious rosette of about 41 petals arranged impeccably into a four-inch bloom of ruffled, white petticoats that sometimes veer towards a peachy colour. The heavily scented, old-fashioned flowers grow in clusters and will bloom continuously in the summer and may even repeat in autumn. The leaves are green and glossy and the whole plant will do well even in some shade. Fabulously resistant to all the various ailments to which roses tend to succumb. Its compact shape means that it'll slot in well into mixed borders with other perennial shrubs. Unfussy about the luxuries of life, Macmillan Nurse will thrive even in poorer soils and with a bit of shade; it's

hardy and makes a great subject for a pot on a terrace too, like mine pictured.

A really pretty flower in my beach garden is the verbenas Polaris. You can inject fresh colour and long-lasting summer interest into your garden with this amazing plant. It is a compact and free-flowering perennial producing neat clusters of soft sky-blue blooms. The delicate flowers are held above fresh green foliage on a naturally tidy, well-branched plant, creating a calm and uplifting display that works beautifully in borders, patio containers and mixed planting schemes. The shrub flowers from June to September, and delivers months of reliable colour and is highly attractive to bees, butterflies and other

pollinators. It is also hardy and easy to grow thriving in sunny positions and well-drained soil, offering excellent garden performance with minimal maintenance. Its compact habit makes it especially suitable for smaller gardens and container planting. I love it.

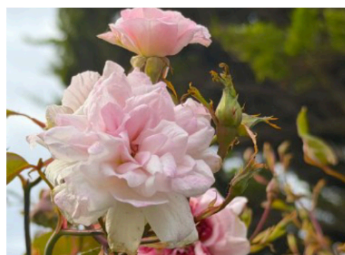
There are a few gardens opening for the National Garden Scheme this weekend that you could get out and visit. Over in Winchelsea, today, Saturday, there are 11 gardens opening as part of this year's garden trail. All open between 11am and 5pm with a combined entry of £10. Old favourites return with new owners, and the group expands to eleven, mostly cottage-style gardens, large and small.

A bit closer to home, Wanderdown at 2 Wanderdown Way in

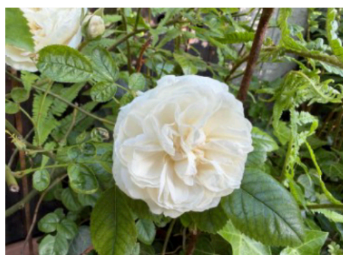
Ovingdean opens both days this weekend from midday to 5pm, with entry £5. Created almost from scratch six seasons ago, the garden is adjacent to the South Downs National Park with wonderful views of the Downs to the sea. Primarily a coastal chalk garden, the planting reflects the location with cultivated and wild flowers, set against a backdrop of subtropical plants and garden sculptures. Full details on both gardens can be found on the scheme's website at www.ngs.org.uk.

Read more of Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk or follow both him and the garden on social media.

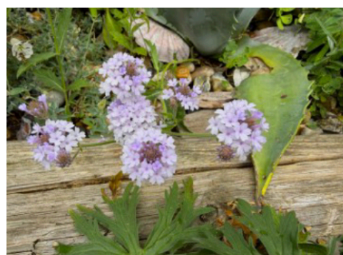
Book a visit to his garden before August 2 by emailing visitsdriftwood@gmail.com.



Rose cecile brunner



Rose Macmillan nurse



Verbena Polaris



Rust stilettoes with succulents