

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Hector has been for a check up



Coronilla glauca



Viburnum

Hector knows it's time for bed

AT THIS time of year our tortoise Hector usually decides it's time for bed. We inherited him from my dad's sister when she passed away in 2004. She had bought him in the 1950s and experts now reckon he's over 100.

Each autumn we take him along to a clinic in Lewes for an annual check-up, prior to placing him in hibernation for the winter. He's pictured en route to the clinic and is now safely packed away in his winter home in the garage.

Despite the recent, dreadful weather, there is still some colour on show in the garden, starting with the pretty stems of the dogwood.

Dogwoods are mostly grown for their coloured stems and provide a bright flash of colour in autumn and winter.

Red stemmed dogwood has creamy, white flowers in spring, followed by blue/white berries, with oval, dark-green leaves, which redden in autumn, and then fall to reveal the gorgeous brightly coloured stems.

They look great with other species in a mixed hedge or grown on their own and can also be grown as a standalone shrub to add a pop of colour to shrub beds or borders.

Red twig dogwoods are very hardy and do well in sunny sites or partial shade and especially in moist areas.

They are also very good in front of an evergreen hedge where normally nutrients, water and sunlight would be in short supply. Mine is located in a border behind some buddleja and really comes into its own at this time of the year.

Adding colour elsewhere around the plot is one of my favourite plants, coronilla glauca.

It will light up a sheltered position with an abundance of lemon-yellow, pea-like blooms. Flowering from December through to mid spring, the sweetly scented blooms make this a useful shrub for bringing colour to those dull winter days.

The small blue-green foliage is evergreen, providing a fine backdrop for its fragrant display. This versatile shrub is perfectly hardy in most UK locations but performs particularly well in a

sheltered, sunny spot, even in difficult coastal areas. Its compact, rounded habit makes it ideal for borders and patio containers.

Alternatively train it as a wall shrub for a spectacular upright display that can attain a height of 180cm with careful training. The initial burst of flowers begins in late winter and carries on, often well into spring, while there is usually a second flush in later summer followed by slender seed pods.

It is a native of Southern Europe and Northern Africa and is not quite fully hardy so will benefit from the protection of a sunny, south-facing wall. That said, mine are planted in an exposed beach garden and still seem to do very well.

Growing at the top of the garden, by the studio, is a pretty viburnum, intertwined with the bright orange flowers of the pyracantha.

Viburnum tinus is a winter-flowering evergreen hedge that can be dense and bushy with dark green glossy leaves.

It has beautiful white scented flowers in winter and is a truly striking hedge plant that makes a wonderful decorative hedge, as it brings interest throughout the year.

This vigorous, bushy shrub has glossy, oval-shaped leaves that contrast with its elegant pink buds, before they blossom into fragrant white flowers from late winter through to early spring.

The flowers of the viburnum tinus then transform into lovely blue-black berries which are not toxic but it is not advisable to eat them.

The plant is easy to grow in partial or even full shade, but natural sunlight is best to allow it to flower.

This hardy shrub can also tolerate windy, exposed sites and even coastal locations, hence it does well at Driftwood. It can be mixed with other evergreen hedge plants that flower at different times so that you can have visual interest in your garden during every season.

Meanwhile, in the house, I have two poinsettia plants, one four years old and the other six years old. I am very pleased to say that



Geoff and dogwood

the former has already started to produce red leaves, a clear indication it is going to look good for the festive season, a few weeks away.

Besides the Christmas tree, the poinsettia plant is the most popular festive plant of the season. It perfectly decorates your home with its red and green colour. A few key tips to keeping them going that have worked for me are to not let the soil dry out but continue to water it like you would any other plant.

I've always left mine in the same place all year trying not to move them. This year, as they were both very leggy, I cut the stems down to about eight inches which seems to have done the trick.

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



The four-year-old poinsettia