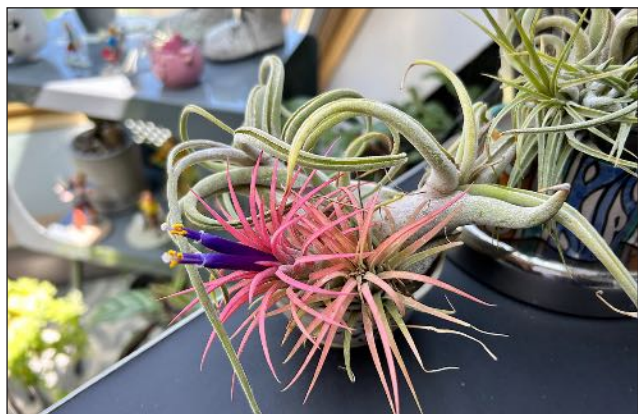


The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



The air plant on Geoff's desk



Gazania



Sienna, Destiny and Diamond

Busy preparing the garden for its close-up... it will take a while

THIS coming week it is all about getting the garden ready for its close-up. All being well, a BBC Gardeners' World crew, director/cameraman, sound recordist and assistant producer will be here all day on Thursday filming a short piece to be aired on BBC 1 later this year. More on this after the event.

There is much to do, as the recent spells of bad weather have not done the garden any favours, particularly the flower blooms, which have been beaten to death by both wind and rain. I'm confident however that I can work my magic and get it looking wonderful for the camera. Fingers crossed.

This weekend the National Garden Scheme has a few lovely gardens you could go and visit. Fairlight Hall in Martineau Lane, Hastings, is open both days over the weekend from 10am to 4pm with entry £8.

This is a welcome return to the scheme for this recently restored stunning garden.

The formal gardens extend over nine acres and surround the Victorian Gothic mansion.

It features semi-tropical woodland avenues, a huge contemporary walled garden with amphitheatre and two 110 metre perennial borders above and below ha-ha with far reaching views across Rye Bay.

Camberlot Hall in Camberlot Road, Lower Dicker, near Hailsham, is also open both days from 2pm to 5pm with entry £6. It is a three-acre country garden with a lovely view across fields and hills to the South Downs.

Created from scratch over the last nine years with all design, planting and maintenance by the owner. See a lavender lined carriage driveway, naturalistic border, vegetable garden, shady garden, 30 metre white border and dahlia garden.

Don't miss the new part-walled garden and summerhouse with new planting. Full details on both gardens at www.ngs.org.uk

Last week, I closed the garden gate on my first summer of only having pre-booked visitors. I was so pleased to be able to welcome 517 visitors to the garden over the ten weeks we were open.

We received some truly wonderful reviews on Tripadvisor which makes all the effort worthwhile.

I am extremely pleased to be able to confirm that we raised £801 for the National Garden Scheme and its nursing and caring charities and £5,009.44 for Macmillan Cancer Support, a grand total for 2023 of £5810.44, bringing my total charity fundraising since 2009 to a staggering £170,676.

Sincere thanks to all involved, including visitors and volunteers. Almost £1,000 of the money was made up of donations from visitors too.

One of the several air plants on my desk, *Tillandsia ionantha*, is flowering well. Part of the bromeliad family, this small epiphyte originates from the American jungles where it grows on trees.

Probably one of the most popular air plants it has a compact rosette of bristle-covered silvery grey leaves, which turn bright red for four to six weeks when it comes into flower.

The extraordinary violet/purple tubular flower appears from the central crown of leaves.

It doesn't need to be potted in compost, just grow it in a shell or on a piece of driftwood and it will take moisture and nutrients from the air.

One of the many fuchsias in the garden is *Empress of Prussia*. The flowers have a single red-purple and pink corolla with sepals of red which bloom in early summer through to late August.

The fuchsia has oval, green leaves and produce fruits that are edible but not appetising.

Mine was a plant bought by my dad, many moons ago, as a ruby wedding present for my mother. It is in a large container and I have propagated several other plants from it around the garden.

A couple of the plants that the BBC will be focusing on are gazania and semponium.

The former are also known as treasure flowers for their jewel bright blooms and are fantastic for bringing colour to patios and sunny borders.

They are either grown as annuals or as spreading, evergreen perennial plants. The daisy-type



Geoff and the Empress of Prussia fuchsia

flowers love sunshine and if they don't get enough of it, will close up.

The blooms come in shades of rose, red, pink, bronze, gold and orange and are set off by the cool green foliage.

The latter, semponium, is a ground-breaking, world-first cross between sempervivum and aeonium. The stunning and unique

rosettes of aeonium are combined with the hardiness of sempervivum to create vigorous hybrids in a range of completely new and unique natural colours.

Endlessly versatile, these specimen succulents are sure to draw everyone's attention whether they are displayed in a patio pot, used as gap-fillers in an exotic

border or planted out in a rockery or gravel garden. The three pictured as Sienna, Destiny and Diamond.

They form part of my approach to a more drought tolerant garden which is what the BBC will be focusing on.

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