

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Firethorn pyracantha



Hydrangea



Thompsonia

Pretty plants that will give your garden plenty of autumn colour

THERE are lots of plants that really come into their own in the autumn garden, providing some striking colour to boot. One such plant is pyracantha, a genus of large, thorny evergreen shrubs in the family Rosaceae, also known as firethorn.

They are native to an area extending from Southwest Europe, east to Southeast Asia. They resemble and are related to Cotoneaster, but have serrated leaf margins and numerous thorns. Pyracantha is a pretty shrub with attractive flowers, producing magnificent red, yellow or orange berries in autumn and winter. It can be trained against a wall or fence and also makes an excellent evergreen hedge. I have two shrubs of "Orange Glow", a large, strong-growing, spiny evergreen shrub of upright habit, with oblong, glossy dark green leaves. Clusters of small, white flowers in early summer are followed by long-lasting, bright orange berries shown above, which the birds love too.

At the front of the house is situated a large hydrangea. It was there when we moved in, so I am not sure of its correct name, but it is a magnificent plant. In July, the flower heads are a stunning bluey-mauve colour and then by autumn they have changed to the glorious ruby red you can see in the image. Hydrangeas do best in moist, well-drained soil and dappled shade, not too sunny and not too shady. All the experts say avoid south-facing positions, especially if the soil is very dry. This one, however, was planted by the previous owner, directly facing south and in full sun most of the day. So, it goes to show they can survive as it's been there for over 20 years now. Ideally hydrangeas prefer a very shaded spot, such as a north-facing wall.

A plant I purchased several years ago now on a visit to Highgrove Garden is *Teucrium x lucidrys*. It is a low-growing, woody-based evergreen perennial to 30cm tall, with small, lobed dark green leaves and clusters of small rose-pink flowers in mid to

late summer. Relatively hardy in coastal gardens and fast growing, it is an architectural evergreen shrub with striking silver/grey foliage upon square grey stems, which makes it a great contrasting plant. Its chief value is in its dark green shiny leaves and draping habit and the fact that its fresh-looking foliage persists through the long, dry summer months. This wall germander, as it is commonly known, is a species of ornamental plant native to Mediterranean regions of Europe and North Africa, and to the Middle East as far east as Iran. It was historically used as a medicinal herb for the treatment of gout. Mine are still flowering now.

Aloe striatula, the hardy aloe or striped-stemmed aloe, is a sturdy succulent plant that naturally occurs on the summits of mountains along the south of the Karoo region of South Africa. It is extremely tough and hardy, with bright yellow flowers, which works beautifully as a garden ornamental. In its natural habitat, summers are hot and dry, and winters are very cold. It's therefore an incredibly hardy aloe, which can be grown outside all year round in most parts of the UK. It has a sprawling, scrambling habit and may even climb if given support. Its fleshy leaves are striped different shades of green. In summer it bears tall, dramatic flower spikes not dissimilar to those of *kniphofia*, and it eventually forms a branching, woody trunk. It's perfect for growing in a dry, gravel garden, where you don't have to worry about getting it through winter. Grow *Aloe striatula* in free-draining soil in full sun. Deadhead spent blooms and tidy up foliage when necessary. In very cold winters, the foliage may shrivel but it quickly puts on new growth in spring. I have two large plants in the gravel garden at the back of the house.

A new addition to my garden this autumn has been a stunning *Yucca thompsoniana*, which is native to Mexico and Texas in the USA. It can grow up to three metres tall and 80cm to one metre

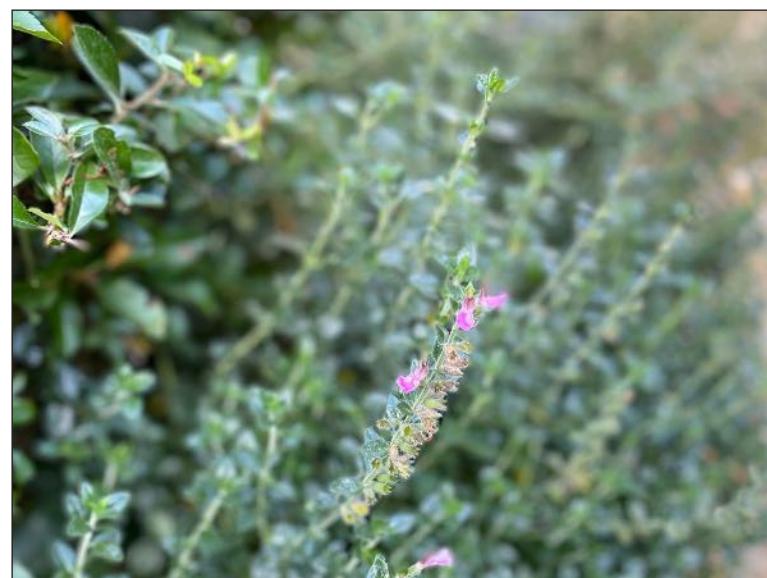


Geoff and aloe striatula

wide. The plant can flower in the early summer and produce a flower spike of up to one metre covered in fragrant white flowers. After flowering it can encourage the plant to form new heads and branch. It can be grown in pots of free draining soil in the garden. This is an incredibly tough and hardy plant that can survive cold temperatures as well as drought.

Once established this plant can give you good, lush colouration and good growth rates. It will grow well with regular feeding and watering. It is a sculptural yucca perfect for providing a dramatic accent to your garden design. Mine is going to look perfect next summer adjacent to the new corten steel water feature on the new patio

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



Wall germander