

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Agave stored in shed



Limelight and Buddleja



New gift for the garden

Putting the garden to bed each year gets harder and harder

CAN you believe it, we are fast approaching the end of the month with the clocks going back on the 27th. Working days in the garden will be much shorter days and the weather is inevitably going to get much colder. Are you prepared? I think I am well ahead of the game, fortunately! Fingers crossed.

The hard job for me in recent weeks has been the need to try and extend the garden's summer life right into the autumn. In late September, I was contacted by a television production company, on behalf of one of the major TV channels, seeking to allow them to use my garden for some filming! As part of the new programme being made, a designer visits beautiful and unique gardens where they gather inspiration to incorporate into their own garden designs for the homeowners involved in the TV project. Through their research they found Driftwood and thought it would be perfect inspiration for a seaside garden that is being designed. At first, I worried the garden had gone over and was going to decline the request but they asked me to take some film and I sent it over to them, which sealed the deal, as they said yes, they would still like to film here. Decision made, it has been hard work getting it under the circumstances. More on this next near when the programme hopefully airs, as I'm sworn to secrecy!

Hector, our beloved tortoise, went for his annual check-up at a local clinic last week and is now about to go into hibernation for the winter. We just have to make sure he doesn't eat anything for the final 10 days as he has to hibernate with an empty bowel. He's quite a loveable character, as you can see and this year, we celebrated 20 years of caring for him. He was inherited from my aunt, back in 2004 and she had owned him since the 1950's. The experts at the clinic reckon he is

over 100 years old now! Sleep well until next March Hector!

The task of putting the garden to bed each year seems to get harder and harder with an ever-increasing number of succulents that need to be safely stored for the winter. This year, I have tried not to place any in the front and back porches of the house, as it creates so much additional work making space and then lifting them all out again in the spring. I opted to buy a second wooden work bench, to aid fitting more in, which seems to have worked. As a consequence, the greenhouse is really crammed to the gunnels with little room to move. The heater is all set up ready to kick in when the temperatures start to drop.

The collection of 80 potted agave, in all shapes and sizes, have now been lifted from the beach garden, where they have looked wonderful, right up to the end of September. I have split them this year between the shed (pictured) and the covered side alley.

I received a lovely gift for the garden this week, from my partner, of the outline of a metal snail. It has already started to go rusty which will blend in well with the many other rusty artifacts around the plot.

My 2 large shrubs of hydrangea paniculata Limelight are looking rather grand at the moment. Limelight hydrangea is an upright shrub with intense colouring: the leaves are yellow-green, stems grey-green with pink flushes, and the large flowers are green, fading to creamy white before turning pink in autumn.

They flower from summer to autumn and it is an excellent shrub for a small garden. The large blooms make good cut flowers too. Best grown in moist but well-drained soil in full sun to partial shade. You should cut them back hard in early spring, removing the previous season's shoots to a few buds of older wood. I've had mine several years now, starting life in containers and then being placed in the ground. Limelight is quite a spectacle, particularly when



Geoff and Hector

flowers are at different stages of colour and maturity, giving a three toned effect. The magnificent blooms provide exceptional late summer colour in woodland gardens and mixed borders before the vibrant autumn foliage takes centre stage. A wonderful specimen shrub for a prime position. Growing behind one of the shrubs is a large buddleja, Butterfly heaven, which you can see in the picture and the combination of the two colours looks a good mix. It has been a real pull for butterflies, especially in the latter part of the summer, as there seemed to be so few in our gardens throughout the earlier months of the year.

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



Maintaining seaside garden for filming