

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Beautiful blue iris



Gunnera emerging



Japanese umbrella pine

The new patio area will take my American visitors by surprise

THE month is moving on at a pace and tomorrow my first paying visitors of 2023 arrive ahead of my official opening on June 1. It is a group from San Francisco, led by an English woman who has lived there for the past 25 years.

This is the third group of Americans she has brought to the garden over the last six years.

It has been especially hard getting everything ready due to the cold spring and the late development of flowers and shrubs. Fingers crossed it will all go to plan.

I have planted up several pots for the season. I have focused this year on geraniums and osteospermum, both of which are great drought-tolerant plants, mixed in with some silver and gold helichrysum, which weave their way through the planting.

I am very lucky to be able to purchase all my summer needs from a local nursery at trade prices which really helps.

The new patio area will take visitors by surprise and the two corten steel planters are looking wonderful, now planted up with a range of interesting succulents and a few ornaments, including ceramic fish.

These are among many new plants in the garden that will make life so much easier if we have a hot summer with hosepipe bans and they are all drought tolerant.

This weekend, The Beeches in Church Road, Barcombe, is open for the National Garden Scheme on Sunday from 1pm to 5pm with entry £6.

It is an 18th century walled garden with a separate orchard and rose garden.

An old ditch has been transformed into a flowering stream with gunnera, ferns and tree fern. Not to be missed.

Closer to home for me, in Seaford, six gardens are opening across the town as well on Sunday between midday and 5pm, with two of them serving tea and cakes.

Please note this is not a walking trail as the gardens are located throughout the town.

Also open this weekend is 96 Ashford Road in Hastings, 47 Denmans Lane in Lindfield and Legsheath Farm near Forest Row,

all three on Saturday.

Full details on all the gardens can be found at www.ngs.org.uk

Looking splendid in the beach garden at the front of the house is a large clump of beautiful blue iris.

They were given to me about eight years ago by a local neighbour and have spread out well.

I'm afraid I do not know their name but at this time of year they stand out and look dazzling.

Iris need full sun at least half the day but some varieties will tolerate part shade. The majority bloom in spring or summer.

Dwarf varieties tend to bloom earlier in spring, with intermediate sizes blooming later spring, and taller bearded varieties blooming late spring and summer.

Last autumn, with the garden redesign, I had to move my two gunnera.

One was planted in a large blue ceramic container, which now sits behind a large bank of beautiful ferns and the leaves are standing quite dramatically above the fronds.

The other had been in a large, rectangular container, by the side of the pond.

There was no place for this in the new look, so I had to take it out and plant it in a very large circular plastic container which has now been sunk into the ground. You can see the gunnera starting to emerge rather slowly, through the purple slate.

Once it gets plenty of sun its growth will take off and its huge architectural leaves will hang over the new corten steel pond.

A new addition to the garden is a pretty Japanese umbrella tree. It is a small, strikingly beautiful tree that never fails to draw attention.

It is called "koya-maki" in Japan and is one of Japan's five sacred trees.

They grow very slowly, in the landscape, it can take 100 years for a sapling to reach mature size. The tree is unusual, and people tend to either love or hate it.

In Japan, the trees are associated with Buddhism in the Kyoto Prefecture.

In fact, centuries ago Japanese umbrella pine trees were at the centre of worship in Kyoto temples



Geoff and planted pots

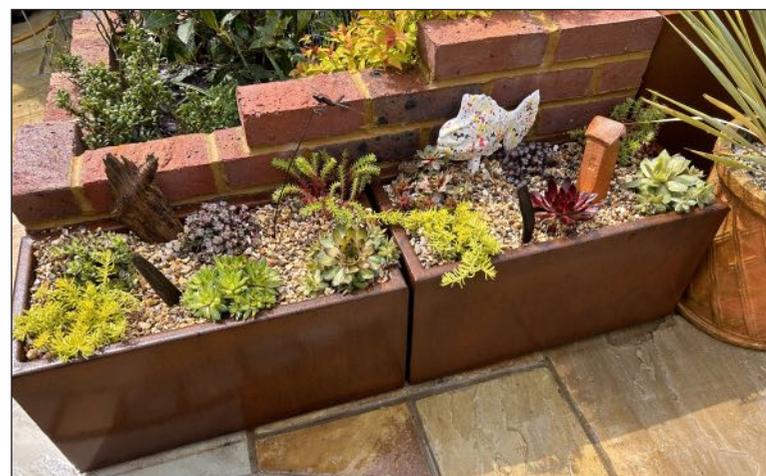
and became a part of Buddhist prayers.

Legends associated with the trees in Japan include the belief that the women who stroke the whorls of the wood will conceive healthy children.

In Mt Kiso, Japan, residents set koyamaki branches on the graves of their loved ones in order to lead the spirits back to the land of the living.

Mine was purchased with a gift voucher given for my birthday and now sits proudly in a large container against the railway sleeper boundary.

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



New planters