

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Freshly trimmed standard bay trees



Grapes



Agave in beach garden

Open gardens, magnificent blooms and angel's trumpets

IT'S the time of the year when there is much to do in the garden in readiness for the inevitable winter, writes Geoff Stonebanks.

We've just had 10 days away in the Derbyshire Dales, staying in a beautiful cottage on the Chatsworth Estate, so returning to Driftwood this week has meant getting out in the garden to get on with it! I've got two standard bay trees in pots that belonged to my aunt, who passed away in 2004, and they have just been given a good trim to reduce the size and shape to more manageable proportions as you can see. They look great on either side of the central steps up to the Summer House.

This weekend, there are two gardens open for the National Garden Scheme in Sussex. The first is in West Sussex, Meadow Farm in Blackgate Lane in Pulborough, opening tomorrow, (Sunday) from 1pm to 5pm with entry £7. This two-acre garden, plus wildflower meadows has been designed and planted from scratch by the current owners. See the colour themed beds, including double borders, formal pond, gravel garden and white garden. There's a pleached hornbeam avenue to the Sussex countryside too. The walled garden provides fruit, cut flowers and vegetables and the orchard has a hazelnut walk.

The second is Tidebrook Manor in Tidebrook, near Wadhurst, opening tomorrow too, from 11am to 430pm with entry £8. However pre-booked visitors only due to difficult access. The tickets may be sold out but check on the web site www.ngs.org.uk to see if any remain. This opening is a welcome return for this beautiful four-acre country garden developed over the last 20 years providing outstanding views of the Sussex countryside. In the Arts and Crafts tradition, the garden features large mixed borders, intimate courtyards, meadows, hydrangea walk, kitchen garden with raised beds and a wild woodland garden.

Still looking quite good are the two large shrubs of Hydrangea paniculata 'Limelight'. As you can

see, they produce huge, conical blooms and open in a soft shade of pea green, and then gradually mature through shades of cream to a delicate soft pink. They produce quite a spectacle, particularly when flowers are at different stages of colour and maturity, giving a three toned effect. The magnificent blooms make elegant cut flowers, providing 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.

I'll be putting my vast collection of Agave undercover for the winter shortly. I've got over 80 of them in containers of various sizes and they all get lifted and placed in the alley to the side of the house which has a perspex roof to keep them dry until the spring. That said, there are just two large plants, pictured, in the ground, planted on chalk, in the beach garden which have now survived three winters left out to the elements. They have done really well and grown well.

I have got two grapevines in the back garden, one trained to grow over the side of the shed and the other over part of the studio, right at the top of the garden. There are a good deal of grapes on both again this year but the fruit are very small and contain pips, so I tend to leave them in situ for the birds to enjoy.

A stunning plant that has spent most of the season inside the greenhouse is now out in the garden as I have stripped everything out of the space to clean it and prepare for the succulent collection to go in there later this month. It is Brugmansia, also known as angel's trumpets. These tender tropical shrubs or small trees are grown for their highly fragrant flowers. White, red or pastel shades of pink, orange or yellow, the large flared trumpets hang from the branches throughout summer. The flowers can grow to an impressive size, up to 30cm long and waft their heady perfume far and wide, especially on warm evenings.

Brugmansias come from tropical



Brugmansia

regions of South America where most species are pollinated by moths, which is why the flowers are noticeably more fragrant in the evening. Plants can flower very abundantly over a long period, especially more mature specimens. But they do need lots of water and feeding throughout the growing season, and must be kept above 7-10°C in winter. Mine will go back into the greenhouse shortly where the temperature will be maintained at 8°C minimum. Brugmansias are often confused with datura, which have similar trumpet flowers. However, with brugmansias the flowers hang downwards and the main stem and branches are woody. They are a real show stopper plant to have around the garden.

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



Geoff and Hydrangea Limelight