

The Driftwood Garden Diary

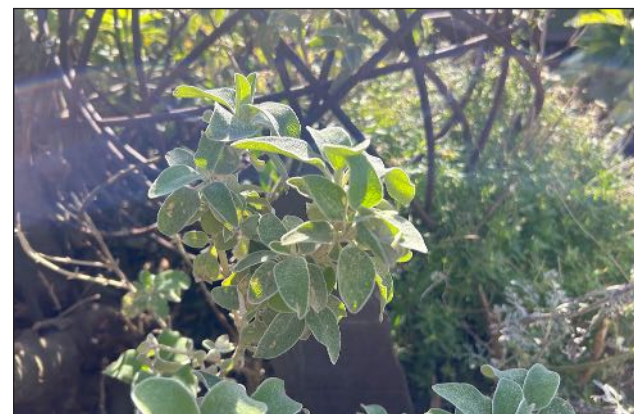
with Geoff Stonebanks



Everything laid out ready to begin my craft work



Fatsia sports a bold, tropical look



Phlomis flowers look great in winter when covered in frost

Thoroughly recommend having a go at making your own wreath

NOT long to go now! Are you all ready for the big day? I've certainly been getting into the Christmas spirit at home. I decided to have a go at making my own wreath to use as a table centrepiece. You can see the items used, laid out on the table, a moss ring I purchased, some wired gold and red berries, a couple of groupings of colourful mushrooms, some wired pine cones and other bits. After a walk around the garden, I had managed to gather some nice sprigs of both holly and ivy, even some holly with a few berries on too. The trick then is to use some thin wire to just work your way around the moss ring, wiring the greenery on and then finishing off with the decorations you have. You can see my finished work of art which I have to confess, I was rather pleased with. Why not have a go yourself? This week I've been lucky enough to feature on both ITV's This Morning, live on Monday and BBC SE Today on the same day's evening news to do with Christmas decorations. The wreath made an appearance too.

Tomorrow, you can hear me on BBC Sussex's Sunday gardening programme, at about 11.15am. I'll be joining Pat Marsh to talk about the highlights and successes the National Garden Scheme has had in 2024, including, revealing how much money they have been able to donate to their beneficiary charities this year. More on that in this column next week.

A couple of shrubs looking good in the garden this week, despite the awful storms we have been having recently are Fatsia 'camouflage' and Phlomis.

The former sports bold, almost tropical looks bearing large, deeply dissected leaves splashed with green gold. Clusters of globular white flowers in autumn are followed by black berries. This tough and reliable evergreen shrub provides all year-round interest and will lighten dry, shady corners or can be used as a feature plant in a container like mine shown

which sits in a large pot on a north facing wall at the back of the house. They can be combined with more finely textured plants such as ferns for an effective foliage display too. Their mature size is approximately two metres square. It is a relatively new form of a well-loved classic, which shares many of the characteristics of the species, but its leaves are a handsome blend of rich green, yellow-green and even a splash of cream. Its palm-shaped evergreen foliage is generously proportioned too, it can be pruned lightly in mid to late spring, trimming shoots that spoil the symmetry. The plants benefit from protection from cold, drying winds.

The latter, phlomis, flowers from late spring, right through to early autumn. Whorls of hooded, pale-yellow flowers appear at intervals on tall, erect stems with dramatic, heart-shaped leaves. It is a fairly vigorous, spreading perennial that's justifiably popular, due to its long flowering season and tolerance of drought. It looks great in a mixed border, but it needs room to express itself. The flowers are also worth leaving on in winter as they look magical when covered in frost. Mine is not that old, so has yet to be properly established but looks pretty emerging from the grey slate-covered bed in the centre of the garden with the rusty metal sphere behind.

I've not really done much outside recently as the temperatures have really dropped and it's not much fun being out there. I have checked the many large containers of shrubs that don't like the wind and the cold, undercover in an alley to the side of the house. I've got about 15 sheltered there at the moment but they do need to be watered every so often. Regular visits up to the heated greenhouse are needed to as the plants also need checking. I have one of those probes that you can pierce the soil with and it will tell you how damp it is, allowing you to tell whether it needs watering, a really useful tool at



I gathered garden holly for my wreath, some even with berries

this time of year! My collection of tender plants there have also been carefully checked, the dead leaves removed and watered where necessary.

I hope you have all bought and wrapped your presents. I'm one of those people who buy mine well ahead of time, as I can't bear pushing around the shops at the last minute. Inevitably, I get many with a gardening theme. It will be interesting to see what's under the tree. So, I reckon I'm all set for the festive few days. Here's hoping all my readers have a wonderful Christmas and receive some useful gardening gifts to boot.

■ **Read more of Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk and his Christmas news at www.geoffschristmas.co.uk**



Rather pleased with my finished wreath