

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Rose Tess of the D'urbervilles



Poppy



Rose Macmillan Nurse

Roses and poppies brighten the early summer gardens

THERE have been some pretty amazing blooms across the garden in recent weeks, notably from some very pretty roses. Roses (*Rosa*) are a classic and instantly recognisable plant, ideal for almost every style of garden. They flower abundantly from early summer in a choice of colours including pastel shades of pink, peach, cream or snowy-white; vibrant yellow and gold; orange, crimson or red. Many roses are fragrant and some types flower in one flush of blooms while others flower all summer long. Some have colourful fruits (hips) and the plants come in a range of forms, from traditional shrubs and climbers to miniature plants for patio containers.

Roses have upright, arching, scrambling or trailing, usually prickly stems. Their leaves are glossy and mid to dark green but occasionally grey-green. Flowers vary in shape and include flat, cupped, rounded, urn-shaped, button-eye, pompon and rosette. Three of the stunners in my garden are pictured above.

Macmillan Nurse is a superb creamy white rose, with very double rosette type blooms, that flowers from June to November (though earlier flower buds sometimes appear a peachy colour). It has lovely glossy dark grey-green foliage and makes a handsome addition to any garden, mine was a gift from Macmillan Cancer Support for the charity fundraising I do. It is a modern shrub rose, one of a large assortment of mostly more modern hybrids of very mixed ancestry. It is best pruned very lightly in the first year, reducing stems by no more than a third. In subsequent years, growths can be reduced by up to a half to leave a beautifully shapely plant.

In the late 1940s, David C H Austin set out on his quest to breed the most beautiful and healthy roses. One such rose was Tess of the d'Urbervilles which always looks beautiful in my garden. However, as a result of their review process, Tess of the d'Urbervilles has now been retired from their English Rose Collection but remains part of their history, paving the way for many more new roses to come, creating the next generation of roses. Such a shame as I love it!

The third rose pictured is an absolute gem of a rose. Susie boasts the wonderful perfume and satisfying colour that make climbing roses such a welcome addition to any garden. Go

on a journey of colour with this climbing rose, starting with a reddish bud, which opens up with yellow and golden shades in early summer; then taking on a pink and blush colour as they fade, and the petals fall. The remarkable colours are even more eye-popping as they contrast so well against the dark green, healthy, and glossy foliage.

This repeat-flowering variety will continue to burst to life through summer and autumn. Not just a delight for the eyes, 'Susie' also produces a sweet strong lemony perfume that fills the air around wherever it is planted, making your summertime garden strolls even more pleasant. For best impact in your garden, consider growing this variety in large pots or directly in the soil.

The National Garden Scheme has some beautiful gardens to visit this weekend. You could join a trail of 5 gardens in Bexhill on Sea or a group of 3 brand new gardens in Steyning today, Saturday. Meanwhile tomorrow, Sunday, Steyning gardens open again along with a group of 7 pretty gardens on the Herstonceux Parish trail, then in Seaford there is a trail of 8 gardens opening in the town. You can find all the details on these and many more gardens opening at www.ngs.org.uk. One you won't find in the Sussex Booklet however, is a pop up opening for Butlers Farmhouse in Butlers Lane Herstonceux on Wednesday 25th June. Open from 2pm to 5pm with entry £5.

My first visitors to the garden were a group of 35 from Winchelsea at the end of last month. Although technically not open until the 16th June this year, due to my knee surgery, the visit had been pre booked for many months and as they were not requiring refreshments, I let the visit go ahead! Sadly, the weather was not great and it was a little on the cool side with a little drizzle! You can see me holding court in the centre of the garden, as they wandered around, taking it all in.

A very pretty flower at this time of the year along my drive is the stunning red, oriental poppy. It is a perennial growing up to 90cm high, with bristly stems and finely divided, dark green leaves covered with silvery hairs. In early to mid-summer, it produces pendant buds that straighten and open to large, bowl-shaped, orange-red flowers to 15cm across,



Geoff (center) with first visitors

Image: Mark Glassman

with small purple-black blotches at the base of the petals.

Read more of Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk or book a visit before 3rd August by emailing visitdriftwood@gmail.com

Geoff's garden, Driftwood has appeared twice on BBC2 Gardeners' World, most recently in March 2024. Featured in The Sunday Times in August 2024 and was a finalist in Gardeners' World Magazine Best Small Space. Read over 240, 5-star reviews, on TripAdvisor. Read all about Geoff's trips to Buckingham Palace and Royal Garden Party in 2018 and his work for the community, plus being named a Coronation Champion and third visit to Buckingham Palace in 2023.

Pre book a 2025 garden visit or visit the garden website. Read all Geoff's published writing for various garden media.



Rose Susie