

# The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Changing the patio after the succulents are put away



Eucomis



Aster

## Make the most of the final week before the clocks go back

**M**AKE use of that extra hour in the garden this week as the clocks go back next weekend, giving us all much less time to spend working outdoors.

This past week, I've been finishing off relocating all my delicate plants from the garden to the safety of the heated greenhouse along with the front and back porches of the house. This has inevitably meant I have had to revamp the patio we now look out on to through the new French windows. It will look good through the winter months once everything settles down.

The penultimate garden opening for the National Garden Scheme in Sussex takes place tomorrow, Sunday. Bates Green Garden in Tye Hill Road, Arlington, opens between 10.30am and 4pm with adult admission £6 and children £3. Pre-booking is essential at [www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk).

Home-made soup, cakes and scones, plus light lunches are available in the large insulated barn. This plantswoman's two-acre tranquil garden provides interest throughout the seasons. Visitors can see a woodland garden, created around a majestic oak tree and courtyard gardens with seasonal container displays. The front garden is a winter joy with coloured stems of cornus and salix. Visitors can enjoy spotting the many fungi abundant in the woods and see the wildlife pond and conservation meadow.

Back at Driftwood, there are still lovely displays of colour, like the hardy plumbago, *Ceratostigma plumbaginoides*. It is a low-growing, spreading, woody perennial with slender red stems, clothed in bright green leaves, which turn bright red before falling in autumn. However, it's grown mainly for its vivid blue flowers, which appear in small clusters from late summer to mid autumn. It makes a great ground cover plant and is perfect for adding late colour to the front of the border. It develops tolerance to drought when established. Mine are planted in a large container on the back patio. The plant dies back to below ground level each year in autumn, then fresh new growth appears

again in spring.

On the central steps I have several containers containing pineapple lilies. *Eucomis* is a striking and unusual flower from South Africa. The strange, tufted bloom that appears on top of a strong, upright stem looks remarkably similar to a pineapple and gives the plant its common name. It's an easy to grow bulb, flowering from late summer to early autumn and is perfect for adding an exotic touch to sunny borders or sheltered gardens.

Pineapple lilies also make a great feature plant in containers. All the expert advice says you should keep them well-watered during summer but dry in winter. They don't like winter wet so it is recommended to either dig up your bulbs or move pots indoors in autumn and keep them dry until the following spring. That said, I have left my containers outside for the last couple of years with no problem. You should water well through the summer in dry weather and remove dead leaves and spent flowers.

A plant I've had in the garden for over ten years now, that has probably been relocated several times in that period, is doing the best this year that it has ever done. It is *Aster* "Barbados". I moved it again last autumn when I created the new bed on the corten steel pond patio. It is flowering profusely. The plant is part of the Island Series. *Aster Barbados* is a neat, compact Michaelmas daisy, the delicate mauve-purple flowers of which are a real tonic for your fading borders, from late summer to the autumn. This cheery perennial is free-flowering, attracting attention from pollinating insects which are drawn to the nectar-rich flowers.

The upright stems and colourful blooms make this a lovely cut flower, although I prefer to leave mine in the border. It is a really useful perennial for providing gorgeous, late summer colour, at the front of perennial borders.

Height and spread is approximately 40cm. The plant needs feeding and watering frequently throughout the summer to ensure its endless supply of flowers.

Remember to deadhead the faded



Geoff and the new bonsai

aster flowers to encourage more blooms to be produced. Ideally, they should be planted into fertile, moist, well-drained soil, situated in full sun or semi shade.

Another new addition to my garden is a fifth bonsai tree. I purchased a small cork oak. I've kept three Chinese elms successfully now for over 30 years and a bonsai olive for the last six years.

This new addition will look good in the garden set against the old railway sleepers on the back patio. It too should survive well outdoors, like the other four. I shall be keeping my eye on it through the winter months and may well choose to protect if heavy frost is predicted, following the advice given when purchasing.

Read more of Geoff's garden at [www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk](http://www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk)



Blue ceratostigma