

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Succulents



Jelly palm



Heather

Autumn is upon us so it is now time to tuck up the succulents

SEPTEMBER is rolling on and there is real evidence that autumn is upon us, indeed, the autumn equinox takes place tomorrow. As far as the garden is concerned, it is almost time to start putting all my delicate succulents away for the winter months. With a vast collection in the garden at Driftwood, it is quite an onerous task to get them all secure each autumn. The collection of aeoniums need full protection from the frost and the agave, primarily protection from the winter wet.

As their garden numbers start to decrease through this month and next, the National Garden Scheme has a couple of plots on offer this weekend over in West Sussex. Open both days is Sandhill Farmhouse in Nyewood Road, Rogate, near Petersfield, from 2pm to 5pm with entry £5. Both front and rear gardens are broken up into garden rooms including a small kitchen garden. The front garden has a white and green garden, a large leaf border and terraced area. At the rear, rose borders, a small decorative vegetable garden, a red border and grasses border.

Open Saturday only is Peelers Retreat at 70 Ford Road in Arundel, between 2pm and 5pm and entry £5. This inspirational space is a delight with plenty of shaded areas to sit and relax, enjoying delicious teas. Interlocking beds are packed with year-round colour and scent, shaded by specimen trees. Full details on both can be found at www.ngs.org.uk

In the centre of the back garden, I have a large 6m tall, jelly palm or *butia capitata*. This is an attractive palm from south Brazil and Uruguay, where it grows in grasslands and woodland edges. The palm produces large pinnate or feather-like leaves, usually a glaucous grey-green in colour and creates a stunning sight. They show remarkable hardiness in milder UK gardens where they can tolerate heavy frosts and perhaps more

importantly our wet winters. Unlike many other palms that may tolerate cold, they also seem happy to grow reasonably fast in our relatively cool summers producing both sturdy trunks and leaves, three or more metres long. The palm likes fertile but free draining soils and to be planted in a sunny or slightly shaded spot. In essence this is a tough palm for milder spots which gets its common name from the delicious jelly that is made from the sweet tasting ripe fruits. Mine has produced large flower heads in recent years.

Flowering well in the garden at the moment is a small clump of heather, with its very pretty, delicate, pink flowers. Mine is in a large pot, in full sunshine. It's easy to grow, works with many different garden styles, and comes in different colours, including shades of pink, purple and white. The spikes of the bell-shaped flowers attract bees too. Best of all, there are varieties that bloom in every season, including winter. Heather even grows equally well in landscape beds or containers. The plant has needle-like, evergreen leaves that are green or grey, but they also may turn yellow, orange, or bronze at various times of year, depending on the variety. They typically grow about one or two feet tall and wide and make great additions when massed on slopes or planted along borders. They don't mind poor soil and will tolerate salt spray, so you can plant them in coastal areas, too.

There's plenty to do in the garden this week. I've been busy tidying up the containers around the plot, removing dead heads, checking for watering and sweeping up fallen leaves and other debris. The fuchsias in the image look wonderful but it is surprising how many fallen flower heads there are each morning to pick up. That said, I would not be without them, as they look so amazing with their ballerina flowers, suspended in mid-air. The one I'm tending in the picture, is a cutting from one my father bought my mother for their ruby wedding anniversary, many moons ago. It's called



Tidying up the fuchsias

Empress of Prussia and the one growing in the raised bed behind is *Magellanica*.

One of the professional photographers who came to the garden last month took a few drone shots at the back and was kind enough to give me copies of them. It's a great shot and if you look carefully, you can see me standing in the centre, looking up. The *butia* palm I mentioned earlier can be seen in the bottom left of the image too.

Don't forget you can catch up with me, every Sunday, at about 11.40am on BBC Sussex's gardening programme, talking about gardens opening across Sussex each week.

There are just five more sessions to go for 2024. Read more of Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk



The garden from above