

# The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Fatsia camouflage



King John's Lodge

Image: Leigh Clapp



Power-washed rope

## Spring is here and so are the new season's early flowers

**C**UE the sunshine, birds, bees, and early spring flowers in the Northern Hemisphere. The spring equinox arrived on the 20th March, marking the first day of spring. In my garden the first of the daffodils have begun to appear, including the narcissus 'Tête-à-tête', which is a dwarf daffodil with bright yellow flowers that bloom in early spring. They are easy to grow and are a popular choice for borders, pots, and containers.

Daffodils are one of the most popular and cheery heralds of spring. Planted in September, they spend several months developing roots before the flowers burst forth, usually between February and May. They are ideal to plant in containers, borders and lawns and suit almost any garden style and situation. Its flowers are instantly recognisable with a central trumpet surrounded by six petal-like tepals. They are usually yellow or white, with the flowers standing on sturdy stems, above slender leaves, reaching from just 20cm tall up to 50cm.

Are you aware that daffodil bulbs are poisonous, causing a stomach upset if eaten. They are easily and regularly mistaken for onions, so to avoid any confusion always keep stored daffodil bulbs in labelled bags, and don't plant them where onions might be grown.

If you want to get out and about this weekend, why not visit a garden opening for the National Garden Scheme today, Saturday. King Johns Nursery in Sheepstreet Lane, Etchingham is open from 10am to 5pm with entry £5 and children free. The garden has been developed alongside the nursery and includes a romantic pond garden, gravel garden, long border, meadows and cutting garden. A garden of wild flowers that is brimming with ideas to take away. It is mostly flat, and areas with steps are generally accessible from other parts of the garden.

March is usually the month when I power clean all the hard surfaces and marine rope throughout the garden, in readiness for dressing it with my succulent collection in May and

the many agaves later this month. Once that is done, I begin the task of taking all the garden sculpture, stored away for the winter, out of the summer house, to display around the garden. Sadly, with my current dodgy knee, awaiting a replacement sometime this year and problems with my wrists, I have had to succumb to getting a contractor in to do the pressure cleaning work for me this year. That said, I have managed to just do the marine rope throughout the front and back gardens, as you can see. It never ceases to amaze me how well both the blue and the white rope respond, looking almost like new once complete.

A wonderful, structural and dramatic plant in the garden is the stand-out *Fatsia japonica* 'Camouflage', also known as Japanese aralia or castor oil plant. It is a captivating evergreen shrub celebrated for its striking and variegated foliage. The large, glossy leaves with intricate patterns of creamy white, green, and soft pink resemble a captivating camouflage effect, adding drama and visual interest to any landscape. 'Camouflage' thrives in partial to full shade and well-draining soil, making it a hardy and versatile plant. Mine is planted in a large container on the north wall behind the house, so is mostly in full shade. With a moderate growth rate, it can reach a height of about 1.5 to 2.5 metres. This eye-catching shrub creates an enchanting backdrop and a mesmerising focal point in any garden or outdoor setting. Japanese Aralia is a species of evergreen shrub native to the southern regions of Japan and South Korea. The plant was first introduced to Europe in the mid-1800s and later gained popularity as an ornamental shrub in gardens and landscapes worldwide.

One of my very favourite plants in the garden has to be the versatile *coronilla glauca*. You can light up your garden with an abundance of lemon-yellow pea-like blooms that just keep on coming. This easy to grow shrub tends to flower for 9 months or more in my garden, making it a hard-working addition to my plot.



Flowering Tête-à-tête

This hardy coronilla shows off its sweet-scented blooms against unusual blue-green foliage and is a truly versatile shrub, performing particularly well in my exposed location, here by the coast. It has a compact, rounded habit making it a tough little performer, ideal for patio containers too, where you really get to appreciate the scent and pretty petite blooms.

Alternatively, train it as a wall shrub for a spectacular upright display. The one pictured behind me in the image has been in the ground in my exposed beach garden now for over 10 years and stands 6 feet tall. The shrub flowers well over the Christmas period, really bringing some much-needed sunshine into the winter garden as well.

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



Sunny coronilla