

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Fuchsia empress



Erigeron



Buddleja buzz white

Plant these flowers to attract bees and help the planet too

DESPITE fast approaching the end of the summer, there are many things still to admire in the garden.

A highlight in the beach garden is the dramatic acanthus as you can see. Acanthus, or bear's breeches, are bold plants, with evergreen architectural foliage and tall flower spikes in summer. It has enormous, glossy, deeply lobed leaves and tall flower spikes that are clothed in white flowers, each with a hood-like purple bract, in midsummer. It's perfect for growing at the back of an herbaceous border and makes a striking architectural presence. The flowers are much loved by bees and can be used in fresh and dried arrangements. It's an herbaceous perennial, so its foliage dies down in autumn, reappearing the following spring. While it doesn't spread, Acanthus mollis does grow into a large clump, which is relatively trouble-free unless you want to move it.

This weekend you could venture to Herstmonceux and see a lovely garden opening for the National Garden Scheme.

Butlers Farmhouse in Butlers Lane, Herstmonceux opening both today and tomorrow from 2pm to 5pm with entry £7.50. Enjoy a real bonus on this visit too, with live jazz played in the garden and you can take your own picnic and rug to sit and listen. Is this one of the quirkiest gardens in Sussex? It might well be, they are certain you will have fun and enjoy the secret jungle garden, Cornish-inspired beach corners, rainbow border, not to mention the poison garden. Enjoy six acres set in rural Sussex with the South Downs in the distance.

Wander across the mainly wildflower meadow and perhaps spot the odd orchid. Also open this weekend is Hollymount in Burnt Oak Road, High Hurstwood, near Uckfield, opening tomorrow, Sunday from midday to 5pm with entry £8. A beautiful seven-acre garden centred around water with streams running down the hill through waterfalls into ponds flanked by luscious planting. Thick jungle borders flank the top garden while the beds further down are

full of rhododendrons, acers, irises, day lilies and roses. Full details on both gardens at www.ngs.org.uk

Also in the beach garden are pretty clumps of Mexican fleabane or to give it its proper name, *Erigeron karvinskianus*. It is a charming slender plant native to Mexico, but has established itself in many Mediterranean areas and dry gardens in Britain.

It looks lovely creeping down the sides of stone or brick steps or tucked in wall crevices, where it both seeds itself and also spreads slowly with its rhizomatous roots. Best grown in well-drained soil in full sun, it is easily raised from seed, which may be scattered in the cracks between paving stones or mixed with a little clay and pressed into hollowed mortar joints in walls. Mine always looks fabulous, weaving its way through the many pots of agave put out in the garden from the summer months as you can see in the image.

Buddleja buzz ivory is a gorgeous compact shrub which has unique and interesting foliage; its leaves are a grey-green colour and woolly. Spikes of white flowers cover this plant from midsummer to autumn before the leaves drop for the winter.

It is a type of "butterfly bush", meaning it attracts bees and butterflies so is great for wildlife. Best grown in moist, well-drained soil; it will enjoy any soil type except for clay and a sunny spot in your garden will keep this plant happy. Mine is one of three planted behind the corten steel wall, alongside a lilac shrub and a magenta one. The three, side by side, look pretty stunning and draw lots of comments from visitors.

I have quite a few different fuchsias in the garden but one of my favourites has to be "Empress of Prussia". It is a popular, upright, deciduous shrub known for its large, single flowers with scarlet sepals and tube, and magenta petals flushed with red at the base.

It's a strong-stemmed plant, typically reaching about one meter in height. The flowers appear from summer to autumn. The one pictured is an original plant my father bought my mother for their ruby wedding anniversary over 30



Geoff and dahlias
Images: Geoff Stonebanks

years ago from which I have taken many cuttings over the years. I have about six different plants dotted around the garden now, all taken from this plant.

You can see me pictured with some pretty dahlias behind. These are planted in a container and have remained there now for over 10 years, reliably flowering every year. Summer wouldn't be summer without dahlias.

They come in a range of flower shapes, from small tight balls to lily-like blooms the size of dinner plates. They're perfect for adding late summer colour to borders from July to October and look good in any style of garden, from a cottage-style border to a jungle or exotic scheme.

■ Read more of Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk



Acanthus