

# The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



## I love my containers... but now age has forced a slight rethink

REGULAR readers of my articles over the last five years will know that I have always favoured the use of containers in my seaside garden.

I've probably got over 100 that I use on a regular basis now, many with large established plants in too. One of the largest containers houses a camellia which I've had for over 30 years, having brought it with me from my previous garden in London.

With planters this size it's really important to have a good trolley of some sort to help you move them around.

The older you get, the more important it becomes, something I am fast realising, approaching 70.

This time last year I had over double that number but age has forced me to rethink slightly, in order to make it easier to garden.

The most important thing to remember is that containers dry out much quicker than the earth does.

This does not mean avoid drainage for water retention, as this can be the single most important factor in whether the plants live or die.

Something to be borne in mind is to install a self-watering system that you can use to water during the summer, even acquire a small battery operated timer to water when you are away.

They are not too expensive and very easy to set up.

Using a digital moisture tester allows you to check which pots actually need watering so sometimes watering by hand can be more beneficial.

Most of my containers though are much smaller than the camellia and watering can be a problem when the weather is really hot, as they do dry out.

I've got quite an eclectic mix around the garden. Attached to the back porch is a lovely orange boat window box which looks good at the moment, planted with geraniums and gazanias.

Beneath, I have two wire troughs on stands, also planted with brightly coloured geraniums.

The first thing I do each spring is to organise both the empty and part-filled containers around the garden.

I try and relocate them every season, so that visitors can appreciate a different feel to the plot, if they've seen it before. This is where containers come into their own.

With an exposed seaside garden, it also allows me to move shrubs that need some protection from the harsh winter winds into shelter for the winter months.

Once they have all been allocated their spot for the season I can then set about planting them up, always a big job, but much fun too.

I tend not to go for a theme or a set scheme.

By positioning the pots first you can see how much sun hits them daily which will help with decision making on which plants to put where.

I buy all my annuals from a local nursery at trade prices and buy whatever they have available at the start of May.

I do however jot down what sort of plants I want in terms of sun/shade, large/small.

Once home, I just decide how I'm going to plant them as I go. In order to make things a little easier this year, I opted primarily use geraniums, as they are more drought tolerant than the usual range of annuals I've used in the past.

I have some in a vintage metal trough that was a wedding present to my parents, back in the 1940s.

When planting, one thing to be very careful of is removing the plants from the plastic trays or single pots, taking great care not to damage the roots.

Plant it at the same depth it was in the pot or tray to ensure growing success.

I have quite a few wall pots too, which are great for displaying the many trailing fuchsia plants I have acquired over the years.

Don't forget to keep your plant tags.

I wash mine and store them in one of those concertina cardboard files.

They will tell you how big your plant will get, how much light, water and food it needs and how much care is required.

The tag will also tell you if your plant is annual or perennial and if it's a perennial, what zones it will



Top row from left, terracotta pots; a fuchsia in a wall pot; wire trough and boat planters. Above, Geoff with some of his containers and, right, geraniums in a vintage trough

survive in.

So, if like me, you begin as a novice, it's always useful to be able to refer back to.

Oh, and probably the most important thing to remember with containers... don't forget to feed them, religiously, throughout the summer season too.

You can read more about my garden in Seaford at [www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk](http://www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk) or go and visit.

It is open by arrangement, now extended to August 31, with money raised going to Macmillan Cancer Support for which I have raised over £100,000 in recent years.

