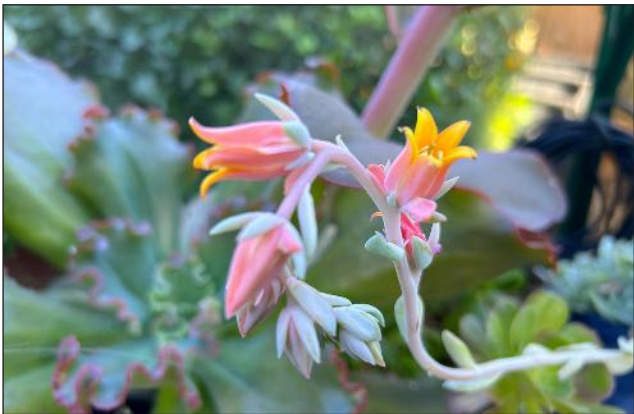


The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Echeveria red sea monster flowering



salvia hot lips



Coronilla glauca

Plants to bring colour and interest to your garden as winter looms

DESPITE fast approaching December, there is still a bit of colour around in the garden. A fabulous plant at this time of the year is the pretty coronilla glauca. It can be relied upon to dazzle both in the late summer and again through until late winter. The image is of a cutting I planted in the back garden this year but the shrub in the beach garden at the front of the house is covered in blooms. It is a small bushy evergreen shrub with blue-grey, pinnate leaves and heads of fragrant rich yellow flowers. Typically, it only grows to a maximum of one or two feet in height but there will be some exceptions. It is hardy in coastal and relatively mild parts of the UK except in severe winters. The plant can withstand temperatures down to -5°C but I'm sure mine have been exposed to slightly lower temperatures since being planted. It is a really useful shrub for bringing colour to those dull winter days. Its compact, rounded habit makes it ideal for borders and patio containers. Alternatively, it can be trained as a wall shrub for a spectacular upright display that can attain a height of 180cm (six feet) with careful training.

Growing just beyond the French windows in a raised bed is a large clump of salvia hot lips. It is a pretty bushy plant, evergreen if not cut back by frost, with small, ovate, aromatic green leaves. Its flowers are borne in loose terminal racemes, red in midsummer, bicolored red and white in July and August, sometimes completely white when the days shorten. The shrub is very floriferous in all its colour stages, continuing to the first frost. They are worth their weight in gold in borders, thanks to their summer-long displays of spiky, nectar-rich flowers. The flowers are extremely attractive to bees and other pollinators. For best results it should be grown in well-drained soil in full sun and may need protection in extreme winters.

A really lovely winter shrub is Mahonia x media winter sun which is a large, bushy, evergreen

shrub with long, slender racemes of bright yellow, richly fragrant flowers which are borne in dense clusters of arching racemes from November right through to March. Bunches of spherical purple berries will then follow through the summer. This hardy shrub forms rosettes of sharply toothed leaves to 45cm long with glossy, bottle green leaflets that are similar in appearance to holly leaves. It is a reliable architectural shrub for a shady spot providing a visual delight all year round. Mine was moved several years ago and cut back and has just started to come into its own again.

Meanwhile in the greenhouse the succulents are all doing well with one in particular dazzling! The flowers pictured are on the Echeveria red sea monster, which is very true to its name as it wants to grow big! The leaves are thick dark green and frilled at the edge and turn bright red with good light. The flower stems can be up to 50-60cm and are crowned with red/dark pink flowers on the ends as you can see in the image. It is a real favourite of mine and a display centrepiece all on its own. All Echeveria prefer to be watered from the bottom which can help keep the rosette free from excess water, as any water allowed to sit in the rosette can cause rot. They enjoy well drained soil and allow the soil to thoroughly dry out between waterings.

It has definitely started to feel a bit colder outside and I've already fleeced the more delicate plants in the garden, gunnera, oleanders and the one fleeced behind me in the picture, which is a white bottle brush from Australia. It is a stunning, evergreen shrub known for its striking, white bottlebrush-like flowers that bloom during late spring and early summer, creating a spectacular display. The slender, elongated petals are densely packed together, resembling a bottlebrush, hence its common name.

Its leaves are glossy and dark green, providing a pleasant contrast against the vibrant white flowers when they emerge. Even when the plant is not in bloom, the foliage maintains an



Fleecing done ready for winter

attractive appearance, adding visual interest throughout the year.

It is relatively compact, typically reaching a height and spread of around four metres, making it suitable for smaller gardens or containers. Its moderate growth rate ensures it can be easily managed and maintained with regular pruning to shape it according to your preferences.

In addition to its ornamental appeal, it is also known for its wildlife value. The nectar-rich flowers attract bees and butterflies contributing to the overall biodiversity of the garden. It can be planted as a standalone specimen, in mixed borders, or as part of wildlife-friendly gardens.

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



Mahonia x media winter sun in flower