

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Silver helichrysum



Brugmansia



Greenhouse preparation

Tight fit in the summerhouse as I try to squeeze everything in

THIS week it has all been about tidying the greenhouse and the summerhouse, getting the former ready to overwinter tender plants and the latter, my vast collection of sculpture and objets d'art.

The greenhouse has been a mini shop through the open garden weeks but next month, I'll begin to transfer my treasured collection of succulents and tender plants from their summer homes around the garden to protect them from the cold and wet of the winter.

It is no mean feat and I always feel like I'm building a large jigsaw puzzle as space is at a premium and it is very tight getting everything in.

The summerhouse, on the other hand, is always cosy and practical through the summer months, ready for visitors to sit and enjoy their tea and cakes, especially if the weather is not playing ball.

All the furniture comes out and is stacked, covered up, all to make room for the large amount of sculpture and ornaments.

The cushions are carefully cleaned and stored in zipped bags until the spring. Once again, it is always a tight fit to get everything inside.

This weekend sees some of the final openings of the season for the National Garden Scheme in 2023, two of which are Limekiln Farm and Bates Green.

The former in Chalvington Road, Chalvington, opens on Sunday, between 2pm and 5pm with entry £7. The garden was designed in the 1930s when the house was owned by Charles Stewart Taylor, MP for Eastbourne.

It has not changed in basic layout since then. The planting aims to reflect the age of the 17th century property and original garden design.

Enjoy the physic garden and join the talk at 3pm about medicinal plants. There is an informal pond and specimen trees with a prairie-style garden under development.

Bates Green is in Tye Hill Road, Arlington, and opens from 10.30am to 4pm on Sunday with entry £6 and children £3. Pre-booking here is essential at www.ngs.org.uk

See the courtyard gardens with

seasonal container displays. The front garden is a winter joy with coloured stems of cornus and salix. Autumn guests can enjoy spotting the many fungi which are abundant in the woods.

Tomorrow sees me broadcasting on BBC Sussex, on Dig It, for the final time in 2023 and possibly for the last time.

Due to major local BBC radio changes, which are scheduled to kick in this autumn, the format we all know will disappear and be replaced with more national programming.

We'll have to see what the new year brings so I can approach the broadcaster and see what other options might be available.

Doing well in the garden at Driftwood and flowering well in a large pot, is the brugmansia. Its common name is Angel's trumpet. With its large, scented, trumpet flowers, hanging in abundance from its branches all summer, this tropical shrub or small tree is a real show-stopper.

Grow it in a large container outdoors in summer or indoors all year. It needs to be protected from winter cold and benefits from being watered liberally and daily throughout the growing season.

Its exotic floral trumpets, with their flared rim, can reach 30cm long, and hang from the branches over the summer months. It grows vigorously to form a branching canopy.

However, it is well worth remembering that all parts of this plant are highly poisonous and the sap can irritate skin, so always wear gloves when handling it and keep away from pets.

Also looking good in the garden is a large clump of golden rod. Also known as solidago, it is an herbaceous perennial that is mostly native to North America, where it is found growing in sunny, open areas such as meadows and prairies.

It is a member of the daisy family and has vivid yellow, often conical flower heads that are made up of many, small, daisy-like flowers.

It can take over but smaller, less invasive garden hybrids are now available and they look great in a herbaceous border or in a naturalistic or prairie planting scheme. They combine brilliantly with blue



Geoff and the golden rod

asters and ornamental grasses and Verbena bonariensis for a stunning late summer show.

Mine look great growing up through a tall rusty metal frame along the central path in the garden. The flowers are extremely attractive to butterflies, bees and other pollinators, too.

One of my favourite plants to use each year is helichrysum which prefers full sun, or partial shade with free-draining soil or compost.

They are brilliant for baskets, bowls and tubs, particularly at the edges to allow the plant to demonstrate its full trailing ability and will act as a foil for any container plant.

I love the way it knits together the planting, as shown, through the fuchsia.

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



Preparing the summerhouse