

The Driftwood Garden Diary

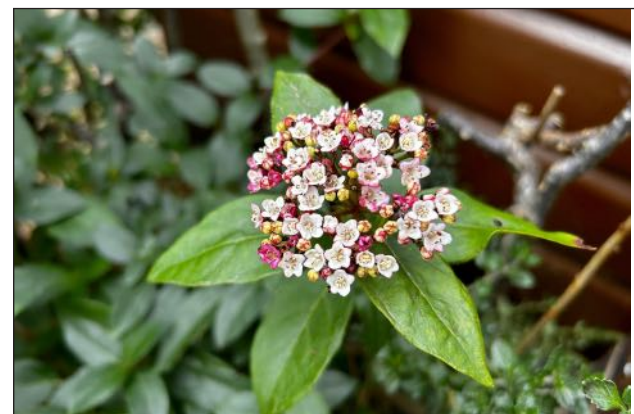
with Geoff Stonebanks



A busy bee



Dogwood



Viburnum

Nearly spring and it's already a blaze of bright colour out there

MARCH is just around the corner providing the opportunity to plant some summer flowering bulbs, such as lilies and gladioli, both of which can provide dramatic, tall blooms that are beautifully scented.

I have quite a large collection of lilies, all in containers.

They really do make a dramatic statement in the garden. The pretty peach-coloured ones were planted by my aunt, prior to her passing 20 years ago. I have carefully nurtured and fed the pot every year since to ensure magnificent blooms. After flowering, in June, I simply lift the container out and replace it with something else for the rest of the summer. Bulbs always make a fine display, planted in containers or borders, especially daffodils, snowdrops and tulips at this time of year.

My first daffodils are just popping up, fortunately beneath some shrubs, which gave them a degree of protection from the strong winds.

At this time of the year, the patio at the back of my house comes alive with beautiful camellias. Though roses top the charts for romance, these are equally dreamy flowers that bloom now. The ruffled blooms could easily be mistaken for a rose, if it weren't for the glossy, deep bottle-green foliage that makes it worth growing as a stand-alone evergreen shrub all year round.

The blooms are particularly appealing and generally last through to March. I've got six shrubs in both pink and white that really live up to the outlook at this time of the year.

They thrive in acidic soil, so benefit from being in a container or raised bed with other acid-loving plants and shrubs.

They can survive in neutral soil if needed too. Raised beds, made from old railway sleepers, work really well. Fill the beds with good ericaceous potting compost and if you plan to top off, use bark chippings. Other plants that work well with them are native primroses and pulmonarias which finish off the woodland look.

Ironically, when they were first introduced to the UK back in the

18th century, they were thought to be tender plants and were grown extensively in greenhouses. Later, gardeners realised they were hardy enough to grow outside, this was truly confirmed after the glass was blown out of greenhouses during the Second World War.

The plants continued to survive despite the low temperatures. Now they are deemed hardy in most parts of the UK. However, flowering so early, their flowers can sometimes be damaged by frost.

Looking good in my garden this week is a bright cornus or dogwood. The stunning red stems make a real winter feature in the centre of the back garden.

Some plants have winter flowers, others offer stunning bracts in late spring, colourful winter stems and striking autumn foliage or berries. They are perfect specimens for a small garden.

In almost every month of the year there's interest from one cornus or another.

At the top of the garden, I have a viburnum tinus which is flowering. This is a large, evergreen shrub to 3m tall with a dense bushy habit, and glossy dark green, oval leaves. Flattened clusters of small, creamy white flowers, often pink-tinged in bud, are produced over a long period in late winter and spring, followed by metallic blue then black berries.

Viburnum are versatile, easy-to-grow shrubs that thrive in a wide range of situations, with many to choose from, large or small, evergreen or deciduous, with winter, spring or summer flowers.

These shrubs produce rounded or flat clusters of white or pink flowers, often highly fragrant, in winter, spring or summer.

These may be followed by ornamental berries in a range of colours.

Some keep their leaves all year while others lose them over winter. They grow well in any reasonably fertile soil in sun or light shade and many are also tolerant of chalky soils.

If you fancy bringing a bit of sunshine to your garden this summer, why not buy a pack of sunflower seeds?

They make brilliant starter plants to get youngsters growing



Geoff with a lovely display of lilies

too. Annual sunflowers, coaxed to grow straight up a single stem, never fail to delight and amaze gardeners.

Few annual plants are as versatile too, with a range of heights available, allowing most varieties to find a home.

Get some pots and fill with multi-purpose compost, make a hole in the centre of each and pop in one or two seeds. The seeds need to be planted at twice their depth, then cover and level the compost. Gently water, keeping at room temperature but avoid drowning the seeds. Label and track their progress, the seeds should germinate in two to three weeks and can be planted out in the garden in late May to early June, when risk of frost has passed.

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



The beach garden