

GEOFF STONEBANKS

The Driftwood Garden Diary



Plants endure the frosty weather

NEXT Sunday, February 1, sees the annual Seedy Sunday event in the city.

It takes place at Brighton Open Market, Marshalls Row, London Road, BN1 4JU, between 10am and 3pm and everyone is welcome, whether an experienced gardener or a total beginner.

Seedy Sunday in Brighton and Hove is the UK's biggest and longest-running community seed swap event. At the heart of the event is the huge seed swap table where seeds are donated and swapped. Everyone is welcome to bring seeds to swap, or make a small donation for a packet. Stallholders also offer seeds and gardening kit for sale. Event volunteers and local community groups are also on hand and happy to share their expertise and experiences of growing locally. Whether you have seeds to swap or not, Seedy Sunday is the perfect place to kick-off your growing season, getting seeds, materials & inspiration for the months ahead.

In addition, you can book to hear talks, from permaculture, forest gardens and ecology, to seed saving experts and container gardening. They have got you covered with a fascinating line-up of talks to keep you stimulated with something for everyone, from tentative beginner to seasoned grower. It is highly recommended to book your tickets in advance to avoid disappointment on the day.

Online ticket sales will end on Friday, January 30 but there will be a limited number of 'standing room only' tickets available on the day of the event. You can find all the details at bhfood.org.uk

We've certainly seen an extremely cold start to the year; it has been difficult maintaining the desired conditions in my greenhouse, as the temperatures really plummeted earlier in the month, despite having a heater in there. Fingers crossed everything will be OK. The heavy frosts have taken their toll on all the plants, but in my experience they will all bounce back once spring arrives and the temperatures warm up a little.

You can see the euphorbia mellifera drooping with the weight of



Sunny winter days. Images: Geoff Stonebanks

the heavy frost on it. That said, it looks quite interesting. *Euphorbia mellifera*, also known as the honey spurge or Canary Island spurge, is a visually stunning and drought-resistant evergreen shrub originating from the Canary Islands. It is highly sought after for its unique landscape characteristics. Typically reaching a height of 2-3 metres, it forms a dense, multi-branched structure with a domed crown. The flowers have a delicious, honey-like scent and the evergreen foliage provides year-round interest. It is also a favourite among gardeners and landscapers due to its resilience to drought and minimal upkeep requirements and can take temperatures down to about -5 degrees.

Also pictured is the frozen Chinese Elm bonsai tree on the wooden table on the back patio. Chinese Elms make excellent bonsai. In fact, they are good for bonsai, and I've read that they are actually one of the most sold bonsai around the world. The trees are hardy, can tolerate all sorts of climates, are ideal for styling and are really great at recovering if something does go a little wrong. They can be identified by their small leaves with serrated edges, and their twiggy structure. As they mature, the bark becomes interesting and gnarly.

The lifespan of a Chinese Elm bonsai tree can be hundreds of years, with proper tree care, they will outlive all of us. I've had the one pictured for over 30 years

now. They can be kept outdoors all year, but need protection from very cold temperatures, snow and prolonged frosts. Mine remain out all year round, as we tend not to get temperatures below about -5 degrees

The boundary hedges of the garden have just had their annual trim. This is a job I used to do myself but as I have got older, I've tended to get others to do it for me. It's not much fun, up and down ladders, balancing with the appropriate tools to get the job done. It is recommended to trim hedges in late winter or early spring for major shaping as this is their dormant season. In summer you can trim for regular maintenance, but avoid trimming during bird nesting season which falls between

March to August.

A real splash of colour in the garden this week, despite the recent cold weather, is provided by my euryops, an evergreen shrub with pinnately cut, grey-hairy leaves and long-stalked yellow daisies. They did look a little sorry for themselves in the depths of the cold spell but have soon revived and are shining again. They have the ability to thrive in hot, dry, coastal conditions too, making them popular ornamental plants for gardens, especially here on the coast. Euryops are valued for attracting pollinators and providing evergreen colour too.

Read more of Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk or follow both him and the garden on social media.



Annual trim



Bonsai in winter



Euryops



Frozen euphorbia