

GEOFF STONEBANKS

The Driftwood Garden Diary



Preparations for shorter days

Work is still ongoing to get the garden ready for winter.

On Monday, a local landscaper will be here to make some changes at the top to make my life a little easier. There has always been very restricted access to the side of the greenhouse and the back of the studio. The older I get, the more dangerous it has become negotiating the access, so I'm having some troughs removed and widening the space on the left of the greenhouse, so I can get a sack barrow through to move heavy containers. All the rotten decking at the back of the studio is coming out and a new concrete base installed. Some repair work to the woodwork at the back of the studio will be completed, followed by a full re-varnish.

Despite the incredibly hot summer we have had, the garden is still looking pretty lush again with many shades of green radiating from the central path at the back. There are still several dots of colour around too. One plant in particular is the stunning La Villa Cotta, a mesmerising modern shrub rose with its bold, large blooms flaunting a captivating copper-orange hue, complemented by striking pink edges. The flowers, featuring an almost single form, create impressive clusters that generate a breathtaking focal point in any garden landscape, as you can see. This was a new rose back in the spring and it has flowered profusely, several times since. It exhibits a bushy, upright growth habit, reaching an elegant height of approximately 120 cm and spreading about 60 cm wide. One of its standout features is its extended flowering period. Its commendable heat tolerance ensures that this rose retains its health and brilliance, even in warmer conditions. Thank goodness, after the summer we've had. Versatile in nature, La Villa Cotta thrives across various growing conditions. Its ability to flourish in pots, less fertile soils, and even partial shade makes it suitable



Lush green garden. All images: Geoff Stonebank

for an array of settings. It's possible to use it for hedging to create a robust backdrop, or position it against north-facing walls for a display that will stand out.

In the beach garden at the front of the house, all the terra cotta pots of agave Americana have been lifted and placed under cover for the winter to keep them dry. They don't mind the cold but hate the wet. I've now got all 80 of them, large and small, under the perspex roof of the alley at the side of the house, with smaller ones, pictured, on a long shelf.

A pretty plant growing in a pot in a shady corner is the dramatic ceratostigma plumbaginoides or hardy Plumbago.

This plant forms a gorgeous mat of greenery with its spreading roots, making it great for ground cover.

The green matures into a beautiful red or purple in the autumn alongside lovely blue flowers which last from the summer into the autumn. As it is a deciduous plant the leaves will drop in the winter so that you can watch all the lovely green grow back in the spring.

You can grow this plant in any type of soil that is well-drained and kept moist. It should be grown in a sheltered spot where it will get plenty of sun. All that said, mine is in a container in a part shaded location and does very well.

Another job, in readiness for

the winter, is to cut back the two grape vines, one on the side of the studio and the other on the side of the garden shed, pictured.

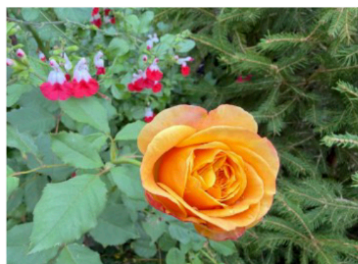
There had been quite a few grapes on both this year, which are always left for the birds to enjoy, as the fruit is very small and has pips in. That said, both were not planted for the fruit, but to soften the edges of both the shed and the studio in the garden vistas. They have been cut back a little early to facilitate my winter preparedness but won't suffer for it. They are best planted in full sun with a south or west-facing aspect, ideally trained against a warm wall, fence, or pergola.

You can see the bench that

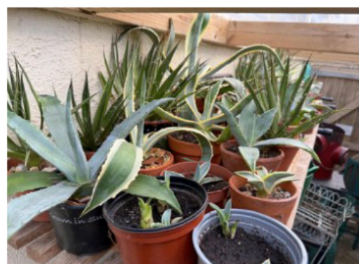
normally sits against the shed has been stored for the winter and some containers of white geraniums have been put there from the top of the garden, along with a large fancy chimney pot and some garden ornaments, to brighten the area up. I'll leave the geraniums there and chances are, unless we have a really hard winter, they may make it through to flower again next year. Fingers crossed.

Don't forget, the clocks go back this evening, plunging us deeper into the upcoming winter and shorter days to be out in the garden.

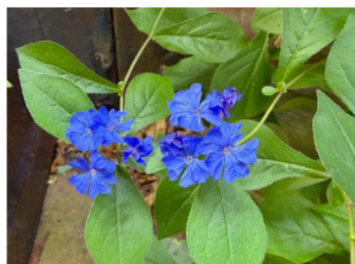
Read more of Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk or follow both him and the garden on social media.



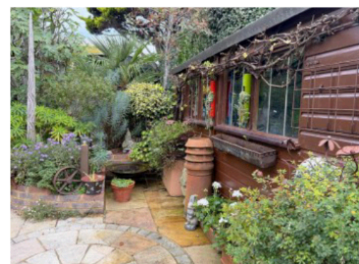
Third flowering flush for La Villa Cotta



Agaves under cover



Plumbago



Vine cut back