

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Trimmed boundaries



Pembury House



A frozen beach garden

Hellebores and snowdrops at their best in February and March

COMING up next month are a series of openings for the National Garden Scheme's regular snowdrop and hellebore garden, Pembury House in Ditchling Road, Clayton, BN6 9PH.

In 2025 the plot will open every Thursday and Friday from 13th February to 7th March from 10.30am to 3.30pm with entry £12 which includes home-made teas. Pre-booking is essential and places book out quickly. If you'd like to visit, go to www.ngs.org.uk for all the details. Depending on the vagaries of the season, its hellebores and snowdrops are at their best in February and March. This is a country garden, tidy but not manicured. There are a number of winding paths giving a choice of walks through 3 acres of garden, which is in and enjoys views of the South Downs National Park.

On the subject of the National Garden Scheme, my regular broadcasts with Pat Marsh on the BBC Sussex's Sunday Gardening programme commence again on the 2nd February with me talking about gardens opening that month, with a further monthly one on the 2nd March and thereafter a weekly slot talking about gardens opening for the scheme each week right through until early October. This will be the 13th year that I have been joining the Sunday gardening programme to deliver the updates!

We've certainly seen our fair share of cold weather in recent weeks, with some very cold spells, especially overnight. There has been quite a lot of frost too but sadly, when the snow fell a couple of weeks ago, there was barely enough to make an impression on my garden, snowy images always look very magical and romantic! Maybe we'll see some in the next few weeks. You can see the beach garden pictured with the Bergenia leaves frozen, set around the rowing boat!

A task I used to undertake myself, until recent years, was to trim back all the garden boundaries. I now have to resort

to getting a garden maintenance team in to do it for me. They have been and chopped back much growth on all three sides. It always amazes me how much it can grow and they now need some decent ladders to be able to get up and complete the job as you can see. If I am being honest, I can't say I miss doing it, especially in the cold weather.

Looking resplendent in the back porch is a beautiful hibiscus that I have had for over 20 years now. It can always be relied upon to produce stunning blooms each year! You can see me wrapped up checking on the garden this week but it was too cold to spend too much time outdoors. Despite the lack of colour it still looks quite neat and tidy and there are lots of signs of bulbs, starting to push their way through the soil throughout the garden and in the many containers.

I've been out and started to protect their soft new green shoots. Even at this time of year there can be some active slugs and snails, especially if it is mild, and we have had a few milder days here. Barriers, such as lines of sharp grit or copper rings may be more successful than pellets. Winter wet will mean needing to reapply pellets more frequently, they will still do the job as long as you remember to top them up. Make sure they are scattered sparingly and not left in piles. Give it a few weeks and it will look quite colourful out there.

This year, I start my 2025 season of providing talks to local horticultural societies and the like on Valentine's Day, with a further 3 booked in the Spring in Friston, Lindfield and for the Sussex Hardy Plant Society in Henfield, then 2 more in the autumn in Ansty and Pevensey.

For any readers close to Seaford, you may be interested in the first talk I am giving on the 14th February for the Seaford Museum & Heritage Society at 230pm in the Little Theatre in Steyne Road, Seaford. Doors will open at 2pm and the talk is entitled "City Courtyard to Seaside Sanctuary" providing



A stunning hibiscus

the story of my moving my North London garden, (designed and created by others) to Seaford, 20 years ago and then creating my garden here, with no gardening knowledge whatsoever. The talk will include my successes in respect of charity fundraising, media coverage in print and on television, along with my encounters with royalty. All the tickets for this talk must be pre-booked and can be purchased by following links on Seaford museum's web site at www.seafordmuseum.co.uk/events. The theatre holds 95 so you may still be able to get a ticket. Make sure you come and say hello afterwards if you plan to come along.

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



Geoff Stonebanks