

GEOFF STONEBANKS

The Driftwood Garden Diary



Elegant shrub looking fabulous

Looking fabulous this week in the garden at Driftwood are the two amazing *Nerium oleander* trees.

This is an elegant, evergreen shrub originating from the Mediterranean. It is admired for its narrow, dark green, glossy, lance-like leaves and its cerise-red and pink fragrant flowers. I have both a red one and a pink one, in front of which you can see me pictured. They are perfect for a mild or coastal garden, preferring a sunny, sheltered position in moist well-drained soil. Once established, though, they show good drought tolerance. The shrubs can ultimately reach around two metres tall and spread to about 1.5 metres across. My pink one is roughly this size now, while the red one is a little smaller. It's important to remember to wear gloves when handling the plant, as it is toxic if eaten and smoke from burning is harmful too. That said, nothing says Mediterranean elegance quite like an oleander in full bloom. These shrubs bring warmth and colour to patios, borders and conservatories alike and they thrive on sunshine, require minimal maintenance and bloom for months on end, so just the thing for creating a vibrant, sun-drenched retreat in your garden.

This weekend there are six gardens open for the National Garden Scheme across the county that you could go out and visit. All open Sunday. There's Architectural Plants and Cumberland House near Pulborough, The Folly near Chichester, Hollymount in High Hurstwood and Penns in the Rocks in Groombridge. Check out all the details and times of opening on the scheme's website, www.ngs.org.uk.

Regular readers will be fully aware of my love for succulents, particularly aeoniums. One of my favourites is a real standout plant called sunburst. One of the more impressive variegated aeoniums, when grown in good light, the leaf edges blush with a pinkish-red tinge as you can see from my plant in the garden. In the UK it's best to grow aeoniums in containers, using a free-draining mix (say 60 per cent multi-purpose compost



Geoff with the oleander. Images: Geoff Stonebanks

and 40 per cent grit or perlite). They are best placed in full sun to partial shade. The plants need to be watered thoroughly when the soil is completely dry in spring/autumn, but keep almost dry in summer and winter. They do need to be protected from frost by moving them indoors or to a greenhouse or conservatory in the winter months. Caring for aeoniums in the UK requires adapting to the country's wet, temperate winters and cooler summers.

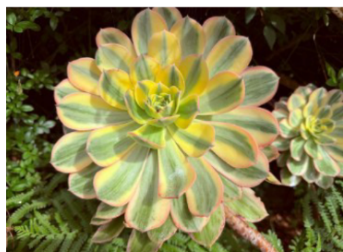
A plant often inquired about by my visitors is the gorgeous escallonia 'Pink Elle'. It is the epitome of elegance for your garden, and is renowned for its exquisite beauty and unparalleled charm. It is a really captivating shrub and a true showstopper.

With its glossy, dark green foliage and delicate pink blossoms, it adds a touch of sophistication to gardens of all sizes. Clusters of bright pink, five-petalled, tubular blooms form large nectar and pollen-rich flower heads at the end of each branch, from July to September. It attracts pollinators such as butterflies and bees – you can see a bee gathering pollen on mine in the garden – while providing your garden with life and vitality. Additionally, its compact size makes it perfect for container gardening, allowing you to bring a touch of elegance to patios, balconies and small gardens. Ideal for both novice and seasoned gardeners alike, this is a hardy evergreen shrub which requires minimal maintenance while providing maximum

visual impact. Mine started life in containers but are now both planted in the ground. Talking of butterflies, a great plant magnet is the buddleja. I have three of the world's first patio buddleja, 'Buzz'. The plants bear flowers the size of usual buddlejas but on plants that are half the size. These compact plants are loved by bees and butterflies, but won't take over your garden. This wonderful shrub maximises small spaces, boasting an exceptionally long flowering period whilst being easy to grow and disease-free. It is perfectly proportioned for patio pots and smaller gardens. I have three, magenta, lilac and white. Pictured is the white one with a pretty red admiral butterfly taking in the sun. A really pretty yellow flower-

ing plant in the beach garden is *Helichrysum italicum* or the curry plant. Its dark yellow flower heads appear from summer to autumn and it has intensely aromatic silver-grey leaves. Generally grown in the herb garden for its ornamental value and intriguing, curry-like scent. The silver-grey leaves contrast well with dark-leaved herbs and may be added dried to give a spicy aroma to pot-pourri. Equally, mine looks quite at home in the gravel garden at the front of the house.

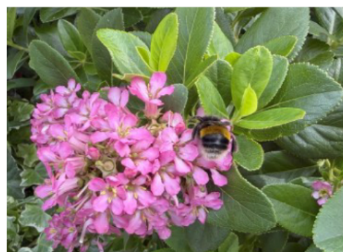
■ Read more of Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk or follow both him and the garden on social media. There's just a week left to book a visit to his garden this summer by emailing visit driftwoodbysea.co.uk



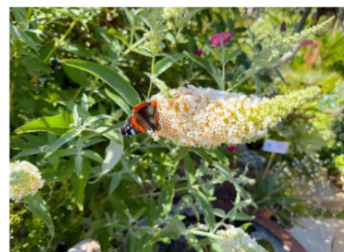
Aeonium sunburst



Flowers of curry plant



Escallonia pink elle and bee



Butterfly on buddleja