

# The Driftwood Garden Diary

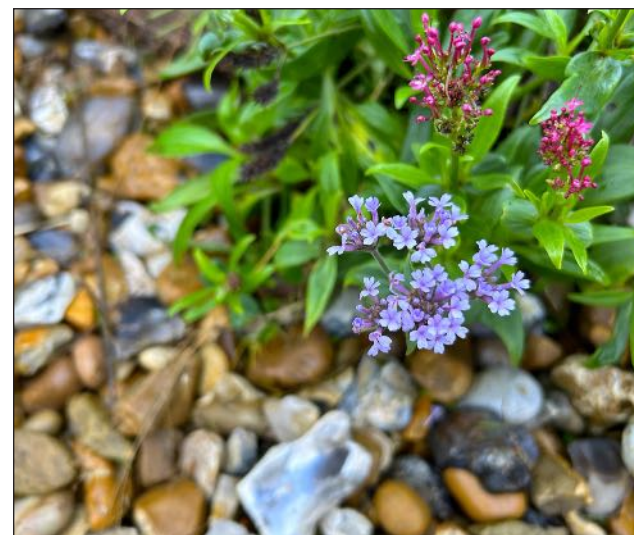
with Geoff Stonebanks



Flowering cactus



Miscanthus Nepalensis



Polaris

## Perfect plants for festive season

**I**N RECENT weeks, we have certainly seen our fair share of wet weather. The fields opposite the house have resembled a lake of late, with the incessant heavy rain. Not only that, the winds have been quite severe too, not ideal gardening weather for sure.

The perfect place to sit at Driftwood when the weather is bad is the front porch of the house.

I have a large collection of cacti and succulents and they love the south-facing space, especially in the winter months.

It's a great view to look out on, rain or shine, with the sailing club on the horizon next to the ocean.

More importantly, it is a great additional storage space, through the winter months, for some of the nicer containers of succulents that usually spend their summer in the garden.

Luckily there is a radiator in there too, so the temperature never drops too low for them.

The new kid on the block this week at Driftwood is my latest plant purchase Miscanthus Nepalensis. The plant is native to the Himalayas and Myanmar and forms bold clumps of elegant green foliage.

In summer airy plumes of yellowish drooping flowerheads are held high above the foliage, which persist into autumn and develop into architectural seedheads.

It's ideal for growing in sunny borders and gravel gardens but for best results grow Miscanthus Nepalensis in a sheltered spot. It will need protection from frost in winter.

Mine will be planted in a container which can be protected in the winter months. Cut clumps back to ground level in spring to make way for new growth.

A seasonal favourite, but this time a house plant, is the Christmas cactus.

Schlumbergera, to give them their proper name, flower over the Christmas period, from late November through until January, hence their name. They make good Christmas gifts too.

Their bright, trumpet-shaped flowers in shades of red, white, pink, purple and even yellow bring

a welcome splash of colour to any room.

Their flat, segmented and trailing stems look attractive all year round too. You can find Christmas cactus plants in garden centres or supermarkets during the festive period but for the widest range of varieties, it's probably best to buy from specialist retailers online.

They are forest cacti and in the wild they grow in tropical rainforests where they form attached to trees. They need to be kept away from bright sunlight and do best in a humid environment.

I bought one for my mother about ten years ago and it now resides all year round on a north facing bedroom window and is flowering like mad at the moment.

Back in the garden, I purchased a mini display greenhouse recently from a well-known Swedish store and decided to place it on the bench in front of the railway sleepers in the garden.

It was an easy and reasonably priced self-assembly item which is now housing a small selection of succulents that don't mind the cold but do not like getting too wet in the winter.

In order to increase its capacity, I have utilised some small perspex display risers to create two tiers of small pots inside.

A firm favourite with visitors to the beach garden is the pretty prostrate verbena called Polaris. It is a compact perennial forming dense clumps of rigid leaves. Tiny pale-lilac flowers are held in clusters on wiry, square stems from summer through to the first frosts.

Mine is continuing to flower and looks great set against the gravel. It is most suitable for planting in sunny, but also partially shaded locations.

Mine face due south and have done really well there for the last ten years.

They are also suitable for growing in pots and containers. The plants attract butterflies and birds alike and have a fragrant flower too.

Throughout the summer months it creates a pretty carpet of lilac flowers across the gravel.

It always surprises me how few visitors are familiar with it.

That said, I did stumble across it



Geoff with the new mini greenhouse

myself back in 2014 purely by chance.

It never ceases to draw attention and is probably one of the several plants throughout the garden that is regularly mentioned by visitors wanting to learn its name.

We could be in for a cold winter, as the long-range forecasts are indicating there could be plenty of snow ahead in the UK, let's hope we won't get too much here on the South Coast.

Now is certainly the time to make sure your prize possessions in the garden are well protected or stored undercover or in a heated greenhouse, depending on their requirements.

I find it harder every year to find the space to store my treasures through the colder months.

Read more of Geoff's garden at [www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk](http://www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk)



The view from the front porch