

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



New wire plants



Agave kichiokan glow



Mangave

These stunning plants dwarfed those in my own collection

WHAT seems like many moons ago now, but was only at the beginning of the month, we had the chance of nine days' break on the Isle of Wight while my brother was back in the UK and able to move in with his wife and look after our 96-year-old mother who lives with us.

More importantly, we were away just before all the dreadful wet weather, so were able to visit many gardens and outdoor spaces with Chester, our beloved terrier.

One of the stand-out gardens we visited was the botanic garden in Ventnor, not far from our seafront apartment.

Although I had previously visited several years ago, I have to confess to have completely missed the area with the amazing agaves and succulents.

I could not believe how beautifully dramatic these very large and stunning plants looked in the setting of this garden.

While I have many similar agaves in my own collection, back at Driftwood, these dwarfed any I possess.

They had been beautifully laid out and I have no idea how I missed them on my last visit.

Needless to say, a visit to a garden by most keen gardeners inevitably means the purchase of more plants. So, yes, I succumbed and added a number to my ever-growing collection.

Inspired by the stunning agaves we saw, I decided to purchase a small specimen called agave "kichiokan glow", a beautiful compact plant with lovely fleshy, tinged leaves.

It will stand out among my collection on the new patio with the corten steel next year.

It is an evergreen, perennial succulent, forming a perfectly symmetrical rosette of thick, rigid, soft-silver blue green leaves.

The foliage is adorned with creamy white toothed margins and leaf spines which turn dark reddish-brown.

The mature plant produces offshoots that can be rooted and propagated easily. It should grow up to 35 cm tall and 45 cm wide.

Another purchase was a new mangave to add to the nine I already have in the garden.

This one is mangave "red wing", and will become more fully red once it gets out in some full sun next summer.

It is a tender, perennial succulent, boasting an evergreen rosette of thick, rigid, lance shaped deep burgundy red leaves, edged with short creamy teeth, tipped with cinnamon spines, sounds delicious.

It's easy to grow and will make a great focal point in a container on the new patio just built by the shed.

The very first mangave I purchased, about three years ago now, Moonglow, took me completely by surprise when we returned from holiday, it had thrown up an amazing flower head.

It has been in the back porch since late October and I took it outside to capture all its beauty on film.

Unlike other succulents that die after flowering, the mangave does not, thank goodness, although I have already produced four more plants from this one, which are doing well too.

Goodness knows how much taller it will grow. Quite a statement.

My final purchase was a couple more small plants.

I spoke about them a couple of weeks ago, creeping wire vine, its small, dark green leaves and reddish or brownish stems remain attractive through the winter and the plants fits will fit in well cascading over the containers adjacent to the new corten steel wall in the garden.

More importantly it is a perfect seaside plant, as it is very resistant to harsh coastal winds.

On a non-gardening note, those readers who have been following me for some time will know my other passion in addition to gardening is collecting Christmas decorations and this week I have had a visit from a German film crew.

A producer from their news desk in London approached me to make a film of my decorations to air on ZDF, the German national TV station, in the run up to Christmas.

The team have filmed me getting them all out of the loft and unpacking some crates and will return in a couple of weeks to film the finished decorations and interview me about my collection.

If you want to know more, you can see the results at www.geoffschristmas.co.uk



Geoff and flowering mangave and, right, Ventnor botanic garden on the Isle of Wight

Meanwhile, back in the garden, I have taken delivery this week of a 4ft pot-grown Nordmann fir Christmas tree that I am going to set up in the sunken patio area.

I've already purchased some new outdoor baubles to hang on it, along with a new set of festive lights.

It will be the first time I have put any decorations outside for the festive season but with the existing exterior lighting in that area as well, it will make a very festive outlook from the dining room and my mother's bedroom window.

I shall save the images to feature in my article to be published on Christmas Eve.

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

