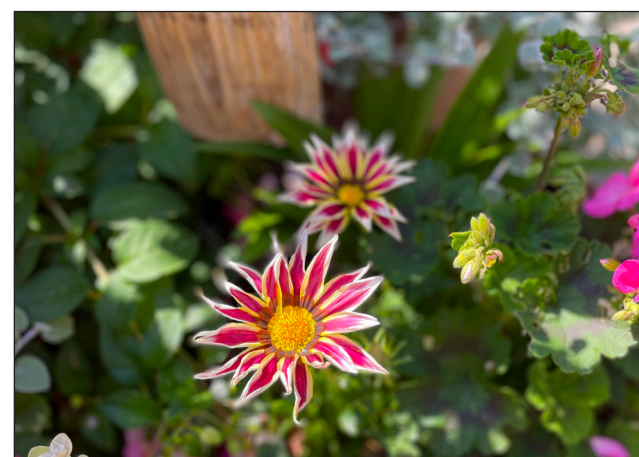
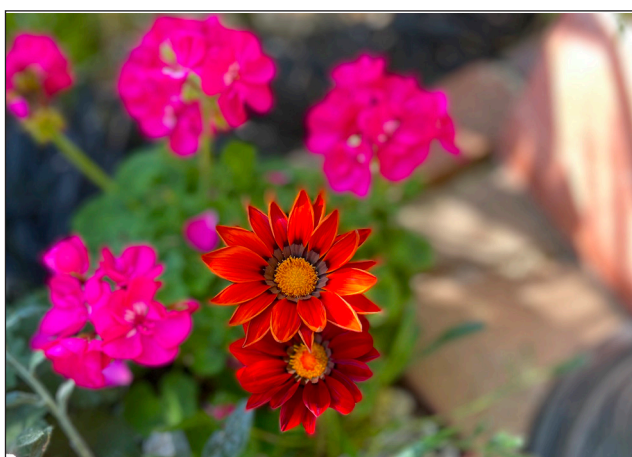
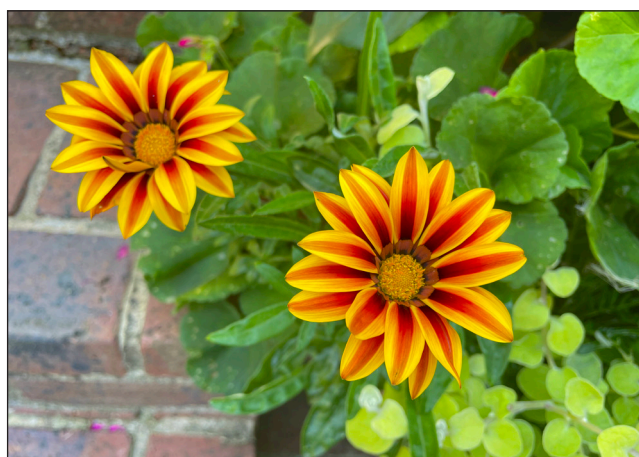


The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



The major attraction this year? It's Hector, our elderly tortoise

I CAN'T quite believe that this year's garden openings are virtually over. I'll be closing the garden gate here at Driftwood next week, on August 31. It has been quite a summer, the first with no public openings, apart from the Macmillan Trail weekend, yet we have still seen nearly 500 visitors pay to visit the garden, by appointment.

Through these visits, we have raised over £4,000 for charity, all going to either the National Garden Scheme or Macmillan Cancer Support. Certainly, a much better result than I had anticipated. Thank you so much to all those people who rang up or emailed in order to book a visit over the summer months.

A much-loved attraction once again in the garden this year, has been our elderly tortoise, Hector. We inherited him from my dad's sister, Auntie Margaret, back in 2004, when she passed away.

Her husband did not really want him, as it has always been rumoured that she loved Hector more than him. He's a very affectionate creature, loving human attention.

Local specialists have put him at over 100 years old and he is more than likely to see me out too, I reckon. I've left him in my will to her grand-daughter, who is now a vet.

Some beautiful sunshine plants to have in the garden, bringing any grey day to life, are gazanias.

They are a genus of flowering plants in the family Asteraceae, native to southern Africa. They produce large, daisy-like composite flowerheads in brilliant shades of yellow and orange, over a long period in summer.

They are often planted as drought-tolerant ground cover.

For the best results, plant them in areas that receive full sun. Shady areas can stifle the plant's ability to fully open its blooms.

Being drought-tolerant they do not require much watering. Care is simple, once they're planted and established in the garden, the plant does not require much of anything, other than watering. Expect more and bigger blooms though when you do water.

Gazania are annual or evergreen perennial plants that showcase vibrant two-tone or multi-coloured combinations atop strong, thick stems and bushy foliage.

Most have a spreading habit so will

require plenty of space to expand and grow.

They are also known as treasure flowers for their jewel bright blooms and are fantastic for bringing colour to patios and sunny borders.

The blooms come in shades of rose, red, pink, bronze, gold and orange and are set off by the cool green foliage.

This year I opted for two varieties in my garden, Tiger Stripes mixed and Red Shades. Both are undemanding and free-flowering bedding plants which tolerate drought, or the windy coastal location, here at Driftwood with ease. You can see how great they look above.

The number of gardens opening for the National Garden Scheme start to decline now, as the autumn approaches. Whilst there are none this weekend, you can venture out to see two lovely gardens in Lindfield on Monday between 1pm and 5pm.

The first is Lindfield Jungle, at 16 Newton Road in the town. This is a surprising, intimate garden which has been transformed into an atmospheric jungle oasis planted for tropical effect. It is lush and exuberant with an emphasis on foliage and hot colours.

From the planter's terrace enjoy the winding path through lilies, cannas, ginger and bamboo to the tranquil sundowner's deck over hidden pools.

The second garden is 47 Denmans Lane, a beautiful and tranquil one-acre plot which has been planted for year-round interest, with ponds, vegetables and fruit gardens to see too.

The combined admission to see both gardens is £6 with full details at www.ngs.org.uk

I shall be talking to Joe Talbot on Dig It, on BBC Radio Sussex on Sunday afternoon at about 1.40pm for my penultimate session this year.

Listen in to hear about gardens opening for the National Garden Scheme in September; across Sussex, Surrey and North East Hampshire.

Another great summertime showstopper is alstroemeria Indian Summer, or Peruvian lily. I've been growing it in my garden for many years now.

The plant is lovely and has a unique, strong, bronze purple tinge to the foliage which makes it attractive even before the stunning flowers emerge.

What's more, they will keep flowering all summer and are naturally hardy to about minus 7C.

It is a clump-forming perennial, reaching about 75cm to 90cm tall, with



Top from left, gazania Tiger Stripes mixed, gazania Red Shades and gazania tiger stripes. Above Geoff and Hector and, right, alstroemeria Indian summer

bronze-green lance-shaped leaves.

It is certainly a prolific plant, with its open clusters of funnel-shaped flowers from summer right through until the autumn. They are bright copper-orange, with yellow markings and purple-brown streaks on the inner petals.

A truly dazzling combination in my book. The plant will grow well in either full sun or partial shade, perfect in the border or they work well in containers too.

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

