

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



The beautiful new area



Ferns unfolding



White bottlebrush

Everything is coming up roses now the weather has improved

AS YOU read this, I'll be preparing the garden for a group of visitors from Philadelphia who arrive about 3pm for a look around, followed by tea and cake. The organiser of the horticultural society has been once before with a group. They are in the UK visiting gardens and have been to the Chelsea Flower Show. Here's hoping they are suitably impressed with Driftwood.

Don't forget, you can hear me on Dig It on BBC Radio Sussex on Sunday morning at about 11.40am talking about gardens that open for the National Garden Scheme in June.

Talking of gardens, there are a few open for visitors this weekend too.

This afternoon from 1pm to 5pm and again tomorrow, you could pop over to see Skyscape at 46 Ainsworth Avenue in Ovingdean.

This is a beautiful 250 feet south facing garden on a slope with fantastic views of the South Downs and the sea, well worth a visit, plants for sale too and you can take your dog with you as well.

Another favourite is Holford Manor and Chailey Iris Garden in Chailey near Lewes.

It too is open today and tomorrow, from 11am to 4pm. It is a five-acre garden and the largest iris nursery in the UK.

Don't miss the secret Chinese garden and the 700 varieties of iris on show, with many available to purchase. Full details on both gardens can be found at www.ngs.org.uk.

The white bottlebrush in the back garden is full of pretty brush flowers at the moment.

Callistemon Salignus, to use its full name, is a half hardy evergreen shrub that provides an exotic effect with clusters of white/yellow flowers displayed in late spring and early summer, unlike the usual variety that has stunning crimson-red flowers.

This lovely plant has bottle-brush spikes of pure white that are carried on the plants and make it a refreshing and eye-catching treat.

It is the perfect specimen for a sunny shrub border but will need protection though the winter.

I place three fleeces around mine each year and it has flowered well now for over ten years.

A couple of new purchases recently have been a gorgeous yucca carnerosana and a chiastophyllum oppositifolium.

The former, also known as the Giant Spanish Dagger, is a large, broad-leaved, tree yucca, native to Northern Mexico.

It is a magnificent and fast-growing species, with large impressive leaves and of the various desert species of yucca.

It is one of the more hardy for UK conditions, tolerating temperatures down to at least -12 C and probably lower, if kept completely dry in winter.

The guidelines say a double covering of horticultural fleece would be good in the winter too, which will not only keep it warmer but will also keep its crown dry while allowing air to circulate.

Ensuring that both the ground and the crown are kept dry during the winter are key for these desert plants. Mine is in a large container at present.

The other new purchase is an alpine succulent, closely related to sedum but more suited to shady gardens.

It is a clump-forming perennial, ideal for using to fill gaps in shady borders, where its unusual dangling yellow flowers contrast beautifully with its fleshy leaves, which change colour from mid-green to red.

Chiastophyllum oppositifolium is easy to grow and is also suitable for growing in containers, rockeries and rock walls. I'm holding mine but it will stay on the new patio, with the corten steel wall as a backdrop.

Talking of the new patio, it is really starting to come into its own as the plants start to grow with the better weather.

All the beautiful ferns in the ground, behind the wall have now unfurled and look amazing rising above the corten wall and the plants I cut right back at the time of the building work last November are also starting to grow back, especially the euphorbia mellifera.

The two heucheras, Marmalade and Obsidian, are also growing well, after being moved from other places in the garden last year.



Geoff and chiastophyllum oppositifolium

I was quite ruthless pruning the fig tree last autumn as it had really started to expand.

It sits at the back of the new patio area and I needed to control its shape so it did not dominate the new area.

The net result is a much better shaped tree but it has been very slow this year to produce new leaves.

Over the years, we have had quite a bit of fruit from it and I love to roast the figs with some honey in the oven and eat with vanilla ice cream.

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



Yucca carnerosana