

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Korean snow



Raspberry lemonade



Hibiscus

Last chance to enjoy open garden season as autumn rolls

I mentioned last week that we had a week away in a cottage located on the Chatsworth Estate earlier in the month.

Some of the gardens we visited throughout the week were pretty spectacular. One we stopped off to see while travelling up was Wrest Park in Bedfordshire.

The house at Wrest Park is a 19th-century mansion in the style of a French chateau, but its grand gardens are its real glory. Together, they tell a story of 300 years of garden design and they're a great place for a fantastic day out. Right in front of the house you'll find formal gardens, the Long Water and the Archer Pavilion. Elsewhere you can explore the enchanting Bath House; the Chinese Bridge and Chinese Temple; and stroll along the intricate woodland paths of the 18th-century Great Garden. All this remarkable garden history is being brought to life in a 20-year restoration project by English Heritage. My picture shows the beautiful beds adjacent to the house.

The open garden season is fast coming to a close for 2025. This weekend High Beeches Woodland and Water Garden in High Beeches Lane, Handcross, near Haywards Heath opens for the National Garden Scheme, tomorrow, Sunday from 1pm to 5pm with entry £11 and children £4. Wander through 25 acres of enchanting, landscaped woodland and water gardens with many rare and beautiful plants, an ancient wildflower meadow and absolutely glorious autumn colours. There is a picnic area and you can also see the National Collection of Stewartias. Full details at www.ngs.org.uk

My regular weekly broadcasts on BBC Sussex's Sunday Gardening with Pat Marsh, talking about gardens opening for the scheme each week, conclude for 2025 next week too, it's been a long haul with a regular Sunday broadcast, every week now since the 6th April.

A lovely new hydrangea I added to my collection recently was a pretty one called Raspberry Lemonade! It is a hardy and very floriferous Hydrangea with strong branches and beautiful full

mophead flowers with a lovely raspberry red colour. It not only looks good in a container on your terrace but also planted in your garden. The plant flowers all summer long and grows to a height of about 90 cm, old flowers should be pruned in spring and it is frost resistant to -25°C. It also attracts pollinators and is very easy to grow. Mine has been planted in a large container at the back of the house!

The pretty indoor hibiscus I've had growing in the back porch for many years now has produced more stunning flowers. Hibiscus are beautiful plants, bearing large trumpet-like blooms in a range of colours, depending on the species. There are two main types, hardy deciduous hibiscus used in outdoor planting schemes and tender evergreen hibiscus, like mine, which is grown as a house plant. Although the flowers are similar, hardy hibiscus are different from tropical hibiscus in several ways. Native to southern China, hardy types tolerate our winters, while tropical ones, native to tropical China, need a minimum temperature of 7°C to thrive. The indoor types flower in shades of pink, orange and yellow and have darker green, glossy leaves.

Hibiscus makes a fine house plant, flowering from May to October if happy, but it can be tricky to grow. Thankfully that has not been the case for me, as mine dates back to 2006 and was bought as a gift by my late father.

A few years ago, I had a fabulous sanguisorba called Lilac squirrel growing in the garden. Sadly, it died and I replaced it with a sanguisorba Korean Snow, a compact, clump-forming herbaceous perennial with dark green, fern-like foliage and tall, slender stems forming a dense mass of nodding bottlebrush white feathery flower spikes in summer and early autumn. You can see mine pictured and beginning to flower.

They will need to be cut back in late autumn or you can leave the seed head structure for winter interest. They will grow well in moderately fertile, moist but well drained soil in full sun or partial shade but are likely to require



Geoff with a collection of succulents

support to avoid collapsing.

You can see me pictured with some of my many succulents on display by the railway sleeper patio wall. I am in the process of putting them all to bed for the winter months. It is quite a drawn-out task, carefully lifting each pot and checking the plants, removing dead foliage and positioning it in the heated greenhouse. I always feel like I am putting together a jigsaw trying to fit everything in. The task inevitably gets harder each year as I tend to acquire more plants though the summer! Once the greenhouse is full I allow an overflow into either the front or back porches of the house to make sure they are all safe for next season

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



Gardens at Wrest Park