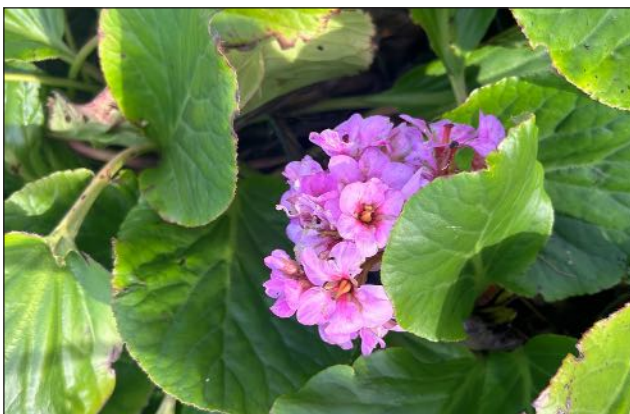


# The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



The beautiful hellebore argutifolius is a stunner



Bergenia is looking great in the beach garden



Winter jasmine is a popular, reliable shrub

## It has been an amazing year for the National Garden Scheme

As we fast approach the end of the year, it seems appropriate to celebrate the amazing 2024 that the National Garden Scheme has had. The year has been another landmark one with the charity donating a record £3,501,227.

The impact of these donations to their major nursing and health beneficiaries means that thousands of people who live with health conditions such as cancer or Parkinson's, who have poor mental health, or who struggle financially as unpaid carers, have been supported by their funding of the nurses, health professionals and case workers who support them. The scheme's funding also provides support to those in the Gardens and Health sector, to community gardens and to those working in horticulture.

The lion's share, £2,550,000 went to some of the UK's best-loved nursing and health charities, many of which have continued to provide vital support to the NHS and communities across the UK in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and who are now struggling to provide services in the current cost of living crisis. The long-term nature of funding from the National Garden Scheme allows these charities to continue the provision of critical community nursing services, end of life care, and respite for families and carers across the UK. The impact of this long-term commitment was celebrated in 2024 by the scheme's milestone of 40 years of continuous funding for Macmillan Cancer Support, during which time they have handed over more than £19.6 million.

The National Garden Scheme relies primarily on the income generated by admission at its garden gates and through the sale of plants, teas and cake at these gardens. Additional income streams include donations, sponsorship and advertising, fundraising events and commercial partnerships.

Commenting on these activities, the scheme's chief executive said: "In 2024, the owners of nearly 3,500 gardens opened, once again giving us the most fabulous commitment and raising another record amount. Together with the support they are given by our county team members

this is a remarkable example of the power of volunteers who are so vital for charities like ours. In addition to their fundraising operation, throughout the year our gardens gave immense enjoyment and relaxation to the thousands of people who visited."

Those of you who visited Driftwood, via the scheme, last summer helped swell this total too and we'll be doing it all, again in 2025, between June 1 and August 3. Read the scheme's full impact report at [www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk)

There's no question, 2025 is going to be a very challenging year in the garden for me. It was confirmed last month that I need a new left knee, so my mobility around the plot is going to be difficult, especially preparing the garden ready for visitors in the summer. The current waiting list, I'm told, is nine months, but who knows, it may happen sooner.

Looking great in the garden this week is the bergenia in the beach garden. These easy-to-grow, evergreen perennials really earn their keep, making a year-round contribution to borders. Their large leathery leaves, often tinged red in winter, make attractive ground cover, while the flowers are an early bounty for pollinating insects. Another stunner at this time of year, at the front, is the beautiful hellebore argutifolius. Its bowl-shaped, pendant, pale green flowers hang above leathery, prickly-edged, sea-green leaves. This popular evergreen makes a fabulous architectural statement in the middle of a mixed or shrub border. Mine is planted around the large black rowing boat and really stands out.

Meanwhile, at the back the mahonia x media winter sun is looking really good. Its slender spikes of bright yellow flowers appear from November right through to March, sitting above rosettes of large, handsome, dark green, holly-like leaves. The flowers have a fragrance, reminiscent of lily-of-the-valley, and seem to glow in the wintry sunlight. They are followed by bunches of highly ornamental, round, deep purple berries. This mahonia makes a lovely focal point for a shady spot in the garden, where its glossy, architectural leaves can be



Mahonia winter sun at the back which flowers until March

appreciated all year round. Give it space, as its leaves will spread and although it prefers shade, it will tolerate sun as long as the soil remains moist. Mine pictured does get quite a lot of sun but has thrived.

Winter jasmine is a popular and reliable shrub, valued for its cheery, bright yellow flowers, which appear on bare stems. Mine was in the original garden when we moved in, back in 2004 and has done well. It is a hardy jasmine, unlike others its blooms are unscented, but they make up for this by appearing very early in the season. In its native China, winter jasmine is often called 'Yingchun' which means 'flower that welcomes spring'. It is a very welcome addition to your winter garden.

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



The National Garden Scheme has supported Macmillan for the last 40 years