

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Europyos daisy



Flowering aeonium



William Bartlett camellia

They have a fussy reputation but camellias are easy to grow

CAN you believe it, February is almost upon us. What's looking good in your garden at the moment?

If you grow hydrangeas as I do, hopefully you have some pretty amazing dried flower heads still on show. That said, the awful weather, late last year did end up blowing many of mine away in the strong gales. Fortunately, several still remain and look resplendent in the winter garden.

If you look online as to when you should trim the dead flowers, I guarantee you will find many different opinions. There are those that say you should trim immediately after flowering stops in the summer. Others that state you should not prune in the autumn, winter, or spring or you could be cutting off any new buds growing.

I've read that tip-pruning the branches, as leaves emerge in spring, can encourage multiple, smaller flower heads rather than fewer larger flower heads.

Removing the spent blooms triggers flowering shrubs to stop producing seeds and instead put their energy toward root and foliage development.

This makes plants stronger and healthier, so, some say, by deadheading, you'll be doing your hydrangeas a favour.

I'm in the camp that says leave the old flower heads on the plants as they add some interest to the winter landscape. So, for me it's best to save hydrangea pruning chores until the spring but just taking extra care not to cut off new buds.

The dried heads can also be removed and used for dried flowers in the house or even sprayed different colours to add further interest.

This is the time of year when top dogs in the garden tend to be camellias.

I'm fortunate to have quite a few growing at the back of the house which I've had for many years now. I reckon my favourite, by far, is a pretty pink one called William Bartlett, pictured.

Camellias prefer a position that is in dappled or full shade and the back of my house fits that bill

perfectly, as it is north facing and does not catch any morning sun which is best, as direct sun in the morning can dry out the developing flower buds too quickly.

Camellias are generally woodland plants and do not cope well in a sunny, south facing spot.

Despite their somewhat fussy reputation, camellias are quite easy to grow, once you understand a few principles.

First, put the plant in the right place and plant it right.

Ideal growing conditions are not unlike those of azaleas and so make great planting partners. Camellias are easy to grow in containers and will thrive with the right care and conditions. Camellia flowers range in size from 1cm to 13cm and they bloom in autumn, winter and spring.

Camellia bushes can live up to 100 to 200 years, although I've discovered that the oldest living camellia, planted in 1347, can be found in China's Panlong Monastery.

You should try to deadhead your camellias when the flowers begin to fade as this keeps the plant looking fresh, spent flowers will turn brown and can look unsightly.

However, it doesn't significantly improve the flowering for the next spring, so it's something you can do if you have time.

Regular column readers will know I have a large collection of aeoniums, many of which reside through the winter months in the front and back porches of my home.

Several are flowering like mad at the moment. You can see their delicate yellow flowers pictured here.

It is no big secret that most aeoniums are monocarpic plants, meaning they die after flowering. But do they really die after flowering?

Yes, they do but if you act swiftly after flowering, cut off the bloom stalk and instead of dying off, little clusters of baby plants will start growing on the stump where the bloom stalk was.

It doesn't happen overnight and will take weeks, even months for new growth to happen but you will retain the plant if careful.

A little beacon of summer in my



Geoff with a dried hydrangea

garden this week is the euryops daisy, pictured, a large perennial bush that seems to survive well here on the South Coast.

It blooms all season long or until cold temperatures appear, with yellow, daisy-like flowers.

The deeply cut, lacy leaves cover a bush that may get 5ft tall and up to 5ft wide.

You can cut back lightly after the blooming to renew the vigour of the plant. Its finely divided gray-green leaves provide a great backdrop to the cheery yellow flowers that appear, almost year-round and are attractive to pollinators which is a real bonus.

It should be planted in well-drained soil and get full sun for the best blooms, though it does tolerate some shade.

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



Hydrangea head