The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks





Panther



Osteopermum



Combo catmint and phygelius

Sussex open gardens aplenty and a striking new perrenial

IT'S Moulsecoomb Forest Garden and Wildlife Project's open day on Friday 4th July running from Midday until 6pm. It provides a wonderful opportunity to see what the team get up to and meet those who keep the garden blooming. They provide outdoor education and therapeutic support for pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4 in the Brighton and Hove area, offering eco-therapy and outdoor education to complement the school curriculum.

They specialise in working with young people with learning difficulties such as Autism, Dyslexia and ADHD and offer horticultural, carpentry, woodland management, cooking, educational and social opportunities to everyone. You will be able to make pizzas, sip tea, hunt for bugs, pond dip, make some art, have a go on the tombola, find out about primitive technology and lots more and everyone is welcome. Established as a project back in 1994, they are celebrating 31 years in 2025. You can take a garden tour or explore the timber framed eco cabin, pictured. The garden café will be serving hot drinks and delicious cakes! You can find all the details at www.moulsecoombforestgarden.org

A beautiful combination of colour in my garden this week is provided by the pretty Phygelius, commonly known as Cape figwort or Cape fuchsia and they look fantastic as part of a sunny herbaceous border or in a large container. It is a vigorous semi-evergreen small shrub with triangular-ovate leaves to 8cm in length. Its nodding, tubular, bright orange-red flowers 3cm in length appear in large open terminal panicles. For best results, grow in full sun or partial shade in moist, fertile and well-drained soil. You can cut back the flower spikes once past their best to encourage further blooms. The other contrasting colour is provided by lovely Catmint (Nepeta) which is an attractive, hardy and easy-to-grow flowering perennial, renowned for its aromatic foliage which tends to attract cats, hence its name. Its aromatic leaves are green or grey-green and its stems are clothed from summer to autumn in small two-lipped mauve or blue flowers which are very attractive to bees and other beneficial pollinating insects.

This weekend you could visit some gardens opening for the National Garden Scheme. There are two trails of gardens one in Balcombe and the other in Hellingly. Additionally, there are many more gardens open across the county, including Hollymount in High Hurstwood, Town Place near Sheffield Park and the beautiful Luctons close to East Grinstead, to name but a few. Check them all out at www.ngs.org.uk and plan your visit.

A new plant in my garden this season is the dazzling Digitalis Panther. It is a striking, hardy perennial known for its unique and dramatic appearance. Often referred to as the "Panther Foxglove," it features tall spikes of pink flowers with speckled throats that create a beautiful contrast against its dark green foliage. These blooms appear all summer long, attracting pollinators such as bees and butterflies. The flowers' rich colour and bold stature make this plant a real standout in mixed borders, woodland gardens, or shaded areas. It is very hardy, grows vigorously and has dramatic flower spikes. It grows to about 60cm tall, preferring well-drained soil in sun or partial shade. Once established, it is relatively low maintenance, though it benefits from regular watering during very dry periods. Perfect for adding height and contrast.

Another great favourite in my garden is the pretty osteospermum, otherwise known as the Cape or African daisy. It is a brilliant choice for long-lasting, colourful blooms through the summer and into autumn. Often used as a front of border plant in milder parts of the country, or annual bedding, osteospermums also make great container plants. There are many colours and named cultivars to choose from and the vibrant daisy flowers are good for attracting pollinators. They used to be treated as an annual in this country but I have managed quite successfully to over winter them in situ and have them flower again the following year. I have quite a large number of them and the real benefit is they are quite drought tolerant too making watering a little easier.

You can see me pictured on the upper patio in the garden which has a lot of succulents in pots carefully arranged. To my right is a small collection of mangave and in the background some large phormiums in the gravel beds and a very large yucca in the far corner. Both of these plants have produced some wonderful flower spikes this summer too, which makes them look very dramatic. You can just see the large arrangement of aeoniums and other succulents along the side of the summer house too. All of which make this area of the garden seem very tropical.



Geoff on the patio

Read more of Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk or book a visit before 3rd August to see the garden by emailing visitdriftwood@gmail.com.

Geoff's garden, Driftwood has appeared twice on BBC2 Gardeners' World, most recently in March 2024. Featured in The Sunday Times in August 2024 and was a finalist in Gardeners' World Magazine Best Small Space. Read over 240, 5-star reviews, on TripAdvisor. Read all about Geoff's trips to Buckingham Palace and Royal Garden Party in 2018 and his work for the community, plus being named a Coronation Champion and third visit to Buckingham Palace in 2023.

Pre book a 2025 garden visit or visit the garden website. Read all Geoff's published writing for various garden media.



Forest Garden Cabin