

GEOFF STONEBANKS

The Driftwood Garden Diary



Bluebells, guild honours and new wheels

WE'RE fast approaching April and the well-loved annual Arlington Bluebell Walk starts its 2026 season on Good Friday, through until May 10.

The trail is located at Bates Green Farm, Tye Hill Road, Arlington, Polegate, BN26 6SH and will open from 10am to 5pm daily. Beaton's Wood is a 24-acre ancient woodland, which was formerly part of the Michelham Priory estate. It was purchased by the McCutchan family in 1922 and has stayed in the family ever since. The wood consists of oak trees that form the upper canopy with an understorey of hornbeam, sweet chestnut and hazel. In spring, the magical display of wildflowers arrives, first the anemones and then the carpets of bluebells. Entry is £9 with children £4.50. Why not go along and help them celebrate their 53rd year of opening? Full details at bluebell-walk.co.uk.

I was recently very honoured to be accepted as a full member of the Garden Media Guild. It is the UK's national organisation of professional communicators associated with the garden and horticulture industry. The Guild's membership covers all aspects of garden media communication – including photography, videography, broadcasting, social media, lecturing, editing, illustrations and PR, as well as writing. The Garden Media Guild's aims are to raise the quality of garden media in all its forms and formats, and to keep their members up-to-date with events in the world of gardening and horticulture. It encourages and rewards excellence in garden communication, assists members with various aspects of their careers and helps with educational aspects of the gardening communications industry.

A gadget I purchased last autumn has been put to good use in recent weeks, assisting me working at low levels after getting my new knee last year! The low seat on 4 wheels has proved useful to work on borders and edges of the gravel beds adjacent to a footpath as you can see in the image. The only downside, once you get on it you have to get back up again! None-



Trialling my wheeled seat. Images: Geoff Stonebanks

theless I have found it quite useful.

Still looking really good in the back garden are the several large containers of camellia. I have the pretty white ones I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, plus a container with a really pretty pink one called William Bartlett, pictured, which is a slow-growing, hardy evergreen shrub featuring large, formal double, pale pink flowers with deeper pink streaking. Blooming from late winter to early spring, it reaches an eventual height and spread of 3m, making it ideal for shaded borders or containers in acidic, moist soil. It is hardy through most of the UK apart from inland valleys, at altitude and central/northerly locations and may suffer foliage damage and stem dieback in harsh winters in cold

gardens but the plant can withstand temperatures down to -10°C.

I've had quite a few pretty spring flowers come up again; one of my favourites every year is the delicate bloom of Narcissus 'Rip van Winkle'. You can see one of the flower heads pictured; it is a distinct, heirloom miniature daffodil (circa 1884) known for its star-shaped, double, golden-yellow flowers with narrow, pointed, greenish-yellow petals. They grow to just 15-30cm tall and thrive in full sun to partial shade. They are fully hardy too and ideal for rockeries, pots, or naturalising in lawns. Mine are growing out of a slate-covered raised bed. This early-flowering, hardy perennial brings a unique, "shaggy" or "sparkler" look to spring gardens but it is important to note that the

bulbs are harmful if eaten and can be a skin irritant.

At this time of the year, if you are lucky, you can get berries forming on your *Elaeagnus ebbingei*. The shrubs' leaves are leathery and oval, with a dark green upper surface and distinctive silvery undersides that shimmer in the wind. In autumn, it produces small, highly fragrant, creamy-white flowers that are often hidden within the foliage but emit a powerful, sweet scent. These are then followed in spring by small, edible orange berries, pictured, although fruiting is not always prolific in colder climates. It thrives in full sun to partial shade and tolerates poor soils, including dry, sandy and chalky conditions. It prefers well-drained soil and is highly tolerant of salt,

wind and pollution, making it ideal for coastal gardens like mine. Once established, it is drought-tolerant too.

Still dazzling in the beach garden are the several architectural plants of *helleborus argutifolius*. It has bowl-shaped, pendant, pale green flowers, pictured, that hang above leathery, prickly-edged, sea-green leaves from January to April. This popular evergreen, Corsican hellebore makes a real statement in the middle of a mixed or shrub border, or a gravel bed like mine. Its handsome foliage is a long-lasting source of interest after the flowers have passed.

Read more of Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk or follow him and the garden on social media.



Camellia William Bartlett



Rip Van Winkle



Elaeagnus berries



Hellebore argutifolius