

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



The last few butterflies



Passion flower



Turks turban squash

Season of spectacular squashes

SHORTER days in the garden begin tomorrow with the clocks going back to-night. Winter is really going to be upon us by tomorrow. It will start to get dark, so much earlier. Thankfully, I'm well ahead in my preparations for the colder weather at Driftwood, let's just hope the winter is not as cold and wet as last year.

It's Halloween next week too, on Tuesday. I love all the gourds and squash that you can find in the garden centres to use around the home and garden for decoration.

Turks turban squash is a fabulous decorative item, shaped rather like a cottage loaf. They look like a smaller squash is bursting out the top of a slightly bigger squash. They have hard, multi-coloured skins with shades of orange, green, yellow and white.

This is one of the most spectacular of all the squashes.

The fruit is so handsome, in fact, that it's often used as a harvest decoration, but it also makes good eating with a taste similar to butternut squash.

This weekend sees the final 2023 opening for the National Garden Scheme in Sussex.

Denmans Garden in Denmans Lane, Fontwell, opens tomorrow, Sunday, between 11am and 4pm.

Entrance will be £9, with children free but pre-booking is essential at www.ngs.org.uk.

The garden was created by Joyce Robinson, a brilliant pioneer in gravel gardening and was the former home of influential landscape designer, John Brookes MBE.

Denmans is a Grade II registered post-war garden renowned for its curvilinear layout and complex plantings.

On site there is a plant centre with unusual plants for sale, a gift shop and recently opened cafe offering breakfast, lunch and a selection of sweet treats.

Look out for my updates in the new year, advising readers of the annual snowdrop and hellebore openings for the scheme.

Still looking good in my garden is the lilac buddleja Buzz. I have three, white, magenta and lilac. It looks

well, growing through a large rusty metal support in the back garden. They are bushy, dwarf shrubs with woolly grey to green leaves and masses of scented flowers which are produced from the summer until the autumn.

Buddleja plants are really low maintenance, but they do benefit from pruning.

Prune buddleja in March, once the hardest frosts are over, as the new growth begins to show.

Firstly, remove any dead, diseased, damaged, or weak stems, before pruning all off the remaining stems back to form a low framework.

In future years you can simply shorten the previous season's growth back to two pairs of buds from this permanent framework.

A top tip for pruning buddleja is to always use clean, sharp secateurs and make your cuts squarely, just above a healthy pair of buds.

With the late Indian summer we enjoyed, well into October, there were lots of butterflies around which made up for the real shortfall at the beginning of the summer. I took a great shot of a red admiral this week in the garden.

At the top of the garden growing beneath the pear tree is a fabulous passion flower.

They have the most incredible flowers from July to October, usually followed by edible, but not particularly tasty, egg-shaped fruits.

The plant is a rampant climber that will quickly cover a wall or fence.

Mine is a common passion flower, *passiflora caerulea*, which is hardy in most regions of the British Isles, despite being native to the tropics of South America.

Most passion flowers are evergreen with dark green leaves and either white or purple blooms. They grow best in full sun to partial shade, in well-drained soil in a warm and a sheltered spot.

Cut back after flowering to keep plants neat, or cut away damaged growth in spring. Mine has been in the ground, unprotected, now for many years.

This time of year is perfect to see the lovely Cape fuchsia, also known as Cape figwort, they are native to South Africa.

In fact, the name refers to that



Geoff and the buddleja

country's Cape of Good Hope. The bushy plant can reach mature heights and widths of about three to five feet.

They can be purchased in a range of colours, including creamy yellow, peach, magenta, soft coral, apricot, pale red and creamy white, often with yellow centres. Mine is a lovely coral orange.

Their blooms can appear all summer long, with mine lasting well into the autumn.

There's one thing to be aware of when growing cape fuchsia, the plant spreads by underground stems, which can be a little on the aggressive side and may overwhelm other plants in your garden.

If this is a concern, growing cape fuchsia in large pots will keep the plant contained.

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



Cape fuchsia phygelius