

GEOFF STONEBANKS

The Driftwood Garden Diary



Visitors made heatwaves worthwhile

SO, the heatwaves kept coming! It has been such a dry hot summer it's quite amazing anything in the garden has survived. I shut the garden back on August 2 for the 2026 open garden season. I have to say it was a highly successful season, despite the intense heat and near drought conditions, I managed to keep the garden looking lush for visitors with the help of many drought tolerant plants, like the mangave, pictured, on the upper patio in front of the large gravel bed, which has coped very well too.

Little did I know, when I opened the garden gate back on June 1, that the upcoming season would be one of the most challenging in the 17 years since we began, back in 2009. Despite the intense heat, 401 visitors pre-booked to see the garden. I have to say that this number would have been higher, but for the cancellations of bookings, ahead of planned visits, due to the high temperatures.

Over 40 people have subsequently written glowing five-star reviews of their visit on TripAdvisor; despite the immense difficulties I've encountered, keeping it looking its very best. This is the highest number ever, since we were registered on the website, seven years ago.

This is an extract from an amazing comment posted in August 2026: "What a lovely garden to visit. We had a wonderful hour and a half looking around all the different parts of the garden – we could have spent longer! A garden that is created from the heart with so much creativity and inspiration that makes us feel we could do something lovely with our own garden. Well worth the visit and the extra few pounds for absolutely amazing homemade cake and coffee! Hands on host who shared his experience in a relatable and unassuming way. Go visit!"

While the first half of the season was slow going, as the final closure date of August 2 loomed, there was a real rush to get to see the plot.

In the end, I baked 323 portions of my famous homemade cakes, much commented on by visitors



Marta and Geoff in the garden. Image: Geoff Stonebanks

on TripAdvisor.

"Tea in a teapot with delicious home-made cakes – absolutely faultless," so said Dominique back in July, when visiting to celebrate her mother's birthday.

We had quite a few dogs visit, along with their owners, and they too were always hopeful of sampling my delicious cakes, like the lovely Archie and Murphy, pictured, who visited with their owner Lynne from Yorkshire, earlier this month.

There have been other, non-human, visitors to the garden who have enjoyed the fruits on offer, like the starling pictured, enjoying the figs on the fig tree.

Just under half of the visitors opted to hear the story of the garden talk, prior to their visit, which

I provided, so that everyone really understands how it was created and developed and to place everything in context.

There was only one day, throughout the nine weeks, when rain threatened to spoil proceedings, but it never materialised. Some 26 members of the Grafty Green Garden group in Kent were scheduled to visit on July 26. As a precaution, I had to clear out the garage and lay up tables and chairs in there to serve all the tea and cakes undercover.

Thankfully spirits were not dampened, with organiser Sue Birch emailing after the visit: "Thank you Geoff for making us so welcome and giving the group a super experience, what an amazing garden; so inspirational."

The biggest surprise however was when a school friend of mine, who I had not seen since we left school in Northamptonshire, back in 1970, arrived with his wife from Bedfordshire to see the garden. 56 years since the last meeting, created a great deal of catching up over tea and cake in the garden.

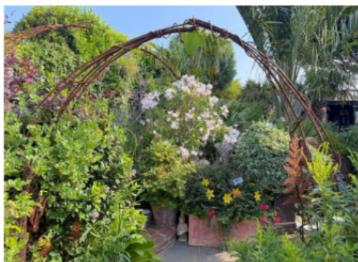
There were other visitors too, like Kristen and family from California, who really loved the garden, Petra from Dortmund in Germany and Marta, originally from Spain but now living in London, who is pictured above with me in the garden. She especially wanted to see the garden, after reading about it.

After closing, I reconciled all the income from the garden entry,

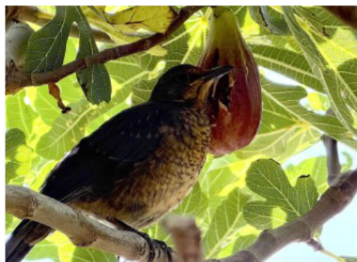
payment for garden talks, donations, receipts from BBC Gardeners' World 2for1 visits and the proceeds from my tea and cake sales, to produce a magnificent £4,502.50 raised for the National Garden Scheme, bringing the running total raised for all charities since 2009 to a whopping £186,548. Thank you to everyone who visited this summer.

I will be opening again in 2027, so perhaps pencil in to visit in 2027, when the National Garden Scheme is celebrating 100 years. My open dates will be between June 7 and August 1.

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



The garden looking lush



A starling enjoying a fig



Dogs visiting



Drought tolerant planting