

# The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Lilac squirrel



Fuchsia magellanica



Succulent display

## Check out the fluffy lilac squirrel

**W**E'RE almost into August and the weather has been so changeable this summer, from gales and rain to incredibly hot days, one extreme to the other.

Looking good in my garden this week are the beautiful eucomis or pineapple lilies. There can be few more magnificent bulbs for your summer than these dramatic flowers because of their distinctive flower spikes and rosette of leaves. They are incredibly lush and architectural. The bulbs are best planted in spring and with a bit of care they will flower for years, giving you statuesque spires, for very little effort, flowering for up to three or four months each summer. I have several large containers, positioned on the central steps which always give a dazzling summer show.

This weekend the National Garden Scheme has a new garden opening in Hurstpierpoint. Pitfield Barn and cut flower farm and studio in Chalkers Lane is a working flower farm, tidy but not manicured. They sow, grow and harvest seasonal British cut flowers in approximately two acres, without use of chemicals or pesticides and all seedlings are grown in peat-free compost. They hand cut their flowers to order and are passionate about promoting British flowers. Tours available on explaining the British flower market, how the garden works and the philosophy are included. There is a converted barn and studio where various flower, art and craft workshops take place plus a café. Freshly cut bunches of seasonal flowers, local produce and gifts are for sale. It opens from midday to 4pm with admission is £4.

Meanwhile, over in East Grinstead, there are four gardens opening tomorrow, July 30, from 1pm to 5pm with entry £6. Full details on all the gardens can be found at [www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk)

An unusual plant in the garden, flowering well at the moment is sanguisorba "lilac squirrel". The plant produces erect stems which bear fluffy purple pink squirrel tail flowerheads with pink stamens, from midsummer to early autumn. They seem to hover in large

numbers above the foliage. They are a wonderful treat for adding vertical interest and movement to a mixed herbaceous bed or mixing with ornamental grasses for a naturalised effect. I'm growing mine along the central path, rising above a low hedge. It is a much commented on plant by visitors.

John Dann, the chairman of the Eastbourne Allotments and Gardens Society, has asked if I could publish this detail about their Summer Festival this weekend. They have over 1,100 plots across 13 sites around Eastbourne, are council controlled but independently managed and believe they are one of the largest societies in the country. Each year they hold a traditional show to which they welcome exhibits of vegetables, fruit, flowers, and home baking and preserves from their plot holders. They also have live music, barbecues and some stalls. This year's show takes place tomorrow, Sunday, July 30, commencing at 1pm at the Gorrings Road site. As well as the allotment plots, they also have a shop selling garden products and plants.

Regular readers will be only too aware of my love for both succulents and fuchsias. My garden has a plentiful supply of both to see. A great fuchsia to use as a hedge or large shrub is fuchsia magellanica. It is hardy with pretty, red flowers with long, tapered sepals. When other fuchsias fail to survive winter, this robust South American species can be relied on to retain a framework of branches. The purple and red flowers are small but borne profusely throughout summer. Like all fuchsias, magellanica thrives in fertile, moist but well-drained soil, in a sheltered spot in partial shade. I have four large plants along the borders on the left of my garden which have been flowering well for the past 15 years. Fuchsia is known for attracting bees and butterflies/moths too.

The railway sleeper area created in 2021 is a great foil against which to display my succulents, aeoniums, agave and other plants. The gorgeous colours of the fleshy leaves contrast beautifully with the dark sleepers. Aeoniums are fleshy,



Geoff and the eucomis

succulent plants native to Madeira, the Canary Islands and North Africa. They form members of the Crassulaceae family and have rosettes of glossy, waxy leaves and range in height from a few centimetres to up to a metre. They are mostly grown for their distinctive, unusual shapes and foliage that comes in shades of green or purple-black or variegated in shades of white, yellow and red.

They thrive on neglect and allowing the soil to dry out in between watering will make the colours more vibrant and the plant stronger. They look great grown with other succulents or cacti that thrive in similar growing conditions. They can also be grown outdoors in summer, in a pot with summer bedding plants or in a sunny, well-drained border.

Read more of Geoff's garden at [www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk](http://www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk)



Sunny aeoniums