

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Thalictrum



Sea campion



Fuchsia magellanica

So pretty... but folklore warns us not to pick this 'dead man's bell'

WHAT a strange month June has been, some days it's felt more like winter, with the rain, strong winds and lower than usual temperatures. We can only hope that the forecasts for July being much hotter turn into reality. That said we have still seen more than 200 visitors to the garden, with many more booked to visit in July. Looking good at Driftwood this week are the three shrubs of fuchsia magellanica. Fuchsias are a popular choice for summer bedding schemes and containers, due to their attractive, usually pendant flowers from summer to autumn.

Some are hardy enough to be used in perennial planting schemes and may even be clipped into a low-growing hedge.

Fuchsia magellanica is a hardy fuchsia 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, it thrives in fertile, moist but well-drained soil, in a sheltered spot in partial shade. Despite the experts saying it is best grown in a sheltered spot away from cold winter winds, my three are pretty exposed and have done really well over the last ten years or more. They have all been pruned back fairly hard, each spring, to maintain the right size and shape in my plot.

If you happen to be near rocky places such as sea cliffs, shingle coastlines or even gravel paths during the summer months you will most likely come across sea campion. It is usually found growing alone but it can also occasionally be seen in small clusters. Each sea campion flower has a pink and purple veined calyx flowerhead and five white, bi-lobed petals. This means that each individual petal is split down the middle, giving the illusion of ten petals instead of five. The sea campion's upright grey-green stems are covered in small, waxy, lance-

shaped leaves. The plant has also been referred to as dead man's bells, witches thimbles and Devil's hatties. According to folklore, this plant should not be picked as it is said to bring death. I've got quite a few clumps growing in the beach garden at the front of the house and they look really pretty.

A plant that was already growing in the back garden when we moved here 20 years ago, was thalictrum, commonly known as meadow rue. To be honest, back then, I had not come across it and believed it to be a weed and kept pulling it out.

When a garden expert was visiting she told me what it was and now it is quite prolific but has such pretty, delicate flowers. A hint of yellow and mauve atop long delicate stems.

On the central steps I have several large containers with some eucomis or pineapple lilies. These plants go dormant through the winter and begin to emerge through May and June.

In tubs or planters, as mine are, they will need more protection in winter, but needing no moisture or light when dormant so they could spend the coldest months in a dry shed. In summer the flowers are topped off by a crown of small tufted leaves, hence the common name for them, pineapple lilies. They last ages in flower and architectural seedheads follow the flowers till the frost cuts the stems down as dormancy returns. Looking a bit exotic they are much easier to grow than first imagined, only requiring deep planting in reasonably fertile and moisture retentive soil in the sun, to do well. Mine are beginning to emerge, a little later than usual this year.

I've had many positive comments about the large number of succulents displayed across the garden. As well as being a hardy and easy to look after indoor plant, succulents are an amazing addition to any outdoor garden space. The use of succulents in your garden simply adds another level, to both the look and feel, of your outdoor living space.



Geoff with succulents

Grow succulent plants in free-draining soil or compost, such as cactus compost, in full sun to partial shade.

Water sparingly from spring to autumn but avoid watering altogether in autumn and winter. Most succulents are slow growing and love light, so need about six hours of sun per day, depending on the type of succulent. Though most varieties of succulents will not survive with full shade, they also don't need to be blasted with hot rays all day. The new railway sleeper area I created a couple of years ago is the perfect backdrop for many of my vast collection.

Read more of Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk or email visitdriftwood@gmail.com to arrange a visit before the garden closes on July 31.



Emerging eucomis