

# The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Agave kichiokan glow



Flowering aeonium



Agave kichiokan glow babies

## Striking aeoniums, gorgeous Agave and some wonderful open gardens

A COUPLE of years ago, while on holiday on the Isle of Wight, I purchased a gorgeous Agave in the shop at Ventnor Botanic Garden! It was a small Agave kichiokan Glow, a stunningly compact and imposing looking succulent with ferociously red spiny leaves. This slow growing small agave has an amazing symmetry, most apparent due to its tightly packed upright leaves, growing in a rosette shaped spiral pattern. It is best planted in a pot and displayed on a hot sunny patio before returning to a frost-free conservatory for winter. They are easy to grow with regular water and feeding in summer, with no feed and sparingly watered in winter. Mine has produced some small babies, growing at the base of the plant. I have successfully removed all four and planted them up to create some new ones, as you can see. I am going to have to wait a while before the rosette forms, due to their slow growth.

This weekend there is a beautiful garden open for the National Garden Scheme, Limekiln Farm, Chalvington Road, Chalvington, Hailsham, BN27 3TA. It opens both Saturday and Sunday from 2pm to 5pm with entry £8 and children free. The garden was designed in the 1930s when the house was owned by Charles Stewart Taylor, MP for Eastbourne. It has not changed in basic layout since then. The planting aims to reflect the age of the C17 property and original garden design. The house and garden are mentioned in Virginia Woolf's diaries of 1929, depicting a particular charm and peace that still exists today. Flint walls enclose the main lawn, herbaceous borders and rose garden. See the nepeta lined courtyard, informal pond and specimen trees including a very ancient oak. Many spring flowers and tree blossom. The new prairie-style garden is filled with grasses and perennials and there is a talk in the Physic garden at 3pm about medicinal plants.

If you fancied a drive over to Arundel, there also is Peellers Retreat at 70 Ford Road, BN18 9EX. It will open on Sunday from 2pm to

5pm with entry £5 and children free. This inspirational space is a delight with permanent gazebos and comfortable seating to sit and relax, enjoying delicious teas. When cold they light the outdoor fire for guests. Interlocking beds are packed with year-round colour and scent, shaded by specimen trees, inventive water features and a range of quirky woodland sculptures. Full details on both gardens can be found at [www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk)

I mentioned a fabulous plant a few weeks ago, Brazilian Fuchsia or *Justicia floribunda*. This bushy evergreen shrub, with small, ovate, dark green leaves and small nodding clusters of tubular, yellow and scarlet flowers is worthy of mentioning again as it is flowering so profusely in my greenhouse at the moment. The colours are dramatic and really stand out, they flower over a long period too, from late autumn to early spring. It is a truly stunning winter-blooming shrub which adds a touch of the tropics to the colder months with its vibrant flowers. It makes a lovely, compact plant for containers, ideal for a warm conservatory or heated greenhouse. In very mild areas Brazilian Fuchsias may be grown in a sheltered, frost free border on any well drained soil in sun or semi shade.

My collection of aeoniums are doing well in the heated greenhouse. They are known for their striking rosettes and can flower in the spring and summer, producing tall inflorescences with clusters of small, yellow flowers. They are monocarpic, meaning the rosette that flowers will die, but branching varieties will continue to grow. Many people cut the flowers off but I tend to leave them and appreciate them as you can see from the picture. These conical-shaped flower heads have hundreds of small, daisy-like flowers, often yellow in colour. Aeoniums make excellent, low maintenance house plants that need very little care. They thrive on neglect, indeed, 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



Geoff pruning

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. All mine are moved out of the greenhouse for the summer, usually in early May.

Meanwhile, in the rest of the garden, I have begun to tidy up the lower hedges by giving them a trim so they maintain their desired height. You can see my tending to the hedges along the central path, created using *griselinia littoralis*, with its characteristic upright habit and bright, glossy evergreen leaves which makes it a popular choice for hedging in the UK. It is tolerant of salty air and strong winds too.

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



Brazilian fuchsia in full bloom