

# GEOFF STONEBANKS

## The Driftwood Garden Diary



# A busy time with garden revamps

**T**he last few weeks have been a busy time in the garden. As I mentioned last week, I had a carpenter here recently to do some restoration work on the summer house that my dad had paid for back in 2006.

The doors and window frames were in a pretty poor state of repair so now, as you can see, it is looking pretty robust again, currently filled to the brim with lots of the treasures that are on display in the garden through the summer months, including the wooden house of our tortoise, Hector, now packed away in the dry, while he is hibernating in a tea chest in the garage until the spring.

We recently had new neighbours and they tackled their front garden, which had become very overgrown and uncared for by the previous owners.

Sadly, though for me, the extreme cut back given to the boundary between our two plots left my beach garden somewhat exposed, with the once thick hedging now sparse in places, meaning you could see right through to their garden.

It completely changed the look and feel of the front garden and I knew I had to find a quick fix to resolve the issue. I already had a single line of old railway sleepers running in front of my hedge, so I decided to buy seven more old sleepers and have them fitted on top of the existing ones, meaning the gap beneath my hedges would be eliminated.

The area beneath the large tamarisk tree was particularly bad, so I got the team who helped me to build up the sleepers to four deep as you can see in the image.

This has really solved the problem and the sleeper wall looks great dressed with some marine objects and some of the old marine rope I have that used to tie up the ferry in Newhaven. Hopefully, by the spring, the gaps higher up in the hedges will have filled out with some new growth.

Growing close by these sleepers is a large clump of euphorbia characias. It is an architectural perennial, perfect for adding a touch of drama to any border.



**Coronilla glauca**

The pretty bluish-green foliage looks fresh all year round as you can see.

By next summer this foliage will have dome-shaped, lime-yellow flowers that tower above it. It's ideal for growing in my gravel garden. It is best planted in moist but well-drained soil, in full sun and you can cut down the flower stems to ground level as the blooms fade.

Do be careful when handling the plant as the thick, white sap can irritate the eyes and skin.

Another favourite growing in the beach garden is the very pretty coronilla glauca. This winter-flowering evergreen shrub can stop you in your tracks with its gorgeous, bright yellow, pea-like, lemon-scented blooms from De-

cember to mid-spring as you can see.

The shrub is much hardier than its delicate appearance may suggest and it will tolerate temperatures down to -10 C, although to flower well it requires a sheltered, sunny spot. That said, mine is hardly in a sheltered spot and still does well.

With a compact height of 90cm, this coronilla is well suited to container growing or positioning at the front of a border. Alternatively, it may be trained against a wall, in which case a height of 180cm can be achieved – quite a spectacular sight during winter when covered in bright yellow flowers! More importantly, it is very easy to grow.

I've had a pretty Jatropha po-

dagrica now for over 25 years. It sits on the window ledge of a south facing window and gets lots of sunshine.

It is a shrubby perennial with a short stout caudex and branched fleshy, spiny stems bearing leathery three or five-lobed leaves, whitish beneath, clustered at the tips, and small bright scarlet flowers, pictured, in branched terminal clusters. Jatropha like to be kept in a bright location, with the possibility of either morning or evening sun.

You must avoid deep shade at all costs due to the risk of over-watering and gradual decline. They like to be kept on the drier side, so allow the soil's top third to dry out in between waters, reducing watering slightly in the

autumn and winter to reinforce its dormancy. Remember though, the brighter the location, the more watering you'll need to do to ensure thorough hydration.

Don't leave close to a radiator, due to the enriched chance of browning leaf-tips. This plant rests in the months of December to April. During this time, it's natural for some (or all) of its leaves to slowly yellow and drop off, leaving you with a near-naked specimen. The plant will tell you when it's awakening from a dormancy period as it'll produce small leaves at the stem tips.

Read more of Geoff's garden at [www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk](http://www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk) or follow him and the garden on social media.



**The revamped beach garden**



**Geoff and the revamped summer house**



**Euphorbia characias**



**Jatropha podagrica**