

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Coprosma Pacific Sunset



Coprosma Pacific Night



Muehlenbeckia wire vine

It's time to wrap up your more delicate plants for the winter

MUCH darker days are on the way for gardeners now, the clocks go back tonight, meaning shorter days and lower temperatures. I generally spend less time in the garden at this time of year and focus on other writing commitments to occupy my time.

That said, I'm just making the finishing preparations for landscapers to come to Driftwood next weekend and start work, filling in the pond at the back and creating a small new patio, bounded with a corten steel low wall.

I've also purchased a corten steel circular pond to sit on the patio.

I will be writing about the changes in the next couple of weeks.

This week has seen me placing fleeces around some of the more delicate plants. The one pictured behind me, right, is a lovely white bottlebrush, which unlike its red counterpart is quite tender.

I play safe and put two fleeces on each winter so that it can reappear next spring, looking good with lots of beautiful flower heads on.

I have two shrubs in the garden that look very dramatic and colourful at this time of the year, Coprosma Pacific Sunset and Coprosma Pacific Night.

The former has unusual pink-red leaves, which darken to brown towards the edge. It's a fantastic choice for a container display, slowly growing into a rounded mound and a good choice for year-round interest.

It does benefit from a slightly sheltered spot, in moist but well-drained soil. Mine is in a border, protected by the plants around it, although, if a heavy frost is predicted I will place a fleece over it. It is remarkably easy to grow and needs little maintenance.

It grows to an average height and spread of 1.5m or more, but can be kept more compact with trimming.

The latter is a dense evergreen shrub which has glossy, deep purple-red rounded leaves that hold their colour throughout the year, looking particularly good in the winter months.

It is a beautiful foliage plant which grows to be a small shrub, ideal for warm and sunny,

sheltered gardens.

It can be grown in a large pot if required, like mine, so I can protect it from frost in the winter if needed. It enjoys full sun in well-drained soil.

Coprosma are also known as the looking-glass plant, the evergreen foliage is so glossy you expect to see your reflection in it.

Their year-round colour is amazing, however, the real highlight is their incredible flourish in the autumn.

Two plants that I love to use in my displays are helichrysum, the one pictured is Goring Silver, but this year I have also used helichrysum gold.

Goring Silver is a trailing perennial usually grown as an annual, with rounded, grey-white leaves.

The experts say that the insignificant flowers in summer are best removed as they appear but I do leave them sometimes.

The thing I love most about this plant is that it will knit and weave itself through other planting, almost sewing them all together and creating a wonderful tapestry of plants.

It works well in both full sun and shade. The same is true of the gold too.

I've successfully managed to overwinter them, as they look good all through the year.

They are both brilliant for baskets, bowls and tubs, particularly at the edges to allow the plant to demonstrate its full trailing ability and they will act as a perfect foil for any container plant.

The second plant is a Muehlenbeckia wire vine. I've got three of the them at Driftwood, two in large metal urns and one larger plant in a container on the back wall of the house.

Creeping wire vine is a fairly uncommon garden plant that can grow equally well as a houseplant, in an outdoor container, or as a mat-forming groundcover.

It is a low growing, twining plant that originated in Australia and New Zealand.

The small, dark green leaves and reddish or brownish stems remain attractive through the winter, and the tiny white flowers appear in



Geoff and the fleeced bottlebrush

late spring.

Unusual five-pointed white fruits follow the flowers in late summer. This plant fits in well in a rock garden, or growing alongside a walkway, or cascading over a wall.

You can also try growing it in a container along with other plants of contrasting colours and heights.

Pruning is optional, but it can help to control the plant's rapid growth in warm climates.

The plant can tolerate light or heavy pruning at any time of year.

I let mine go wild through the summer months, weaving its way up through shrubs around it and then trim it back in the autumn, ready to push up fresh trailing shoots next spring.

It is a perfect seaside plant as it is resistant to harsh coastal winds.

Read more of Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk



Helichrysum Goring Silver