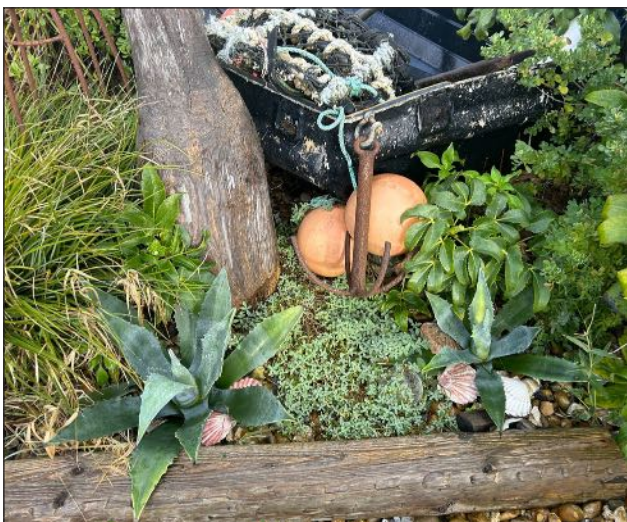


# The Driftwood Garden Diary

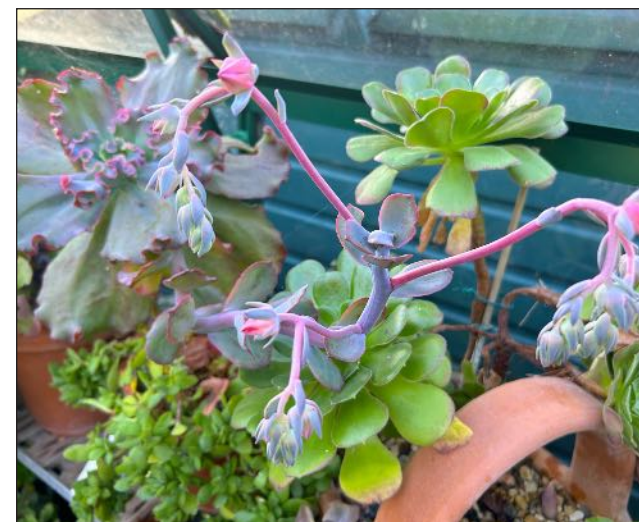
with Geoff Stonebanks



The frosted garden



The surviving agave



Echeveria Red Sea Monster

## Spring will soon be on its way

**H**ERE'S hoping all readers had an enjoyable Christmas with lots of gardening goodies. The New Year hits in a couple of days and before we know it spring will be on its merry way.

In recent months we have had significant amounts of strong winds blowing across the garden.

I have a couple of containers with standard bay trees in them and you can guarantee they will be the first thing to blow over. This year, to play safe, I have edged the two pots together and tied them to each other which seems to have done the trick so far.

I've not really done much outside this week, the temperatures have really begun to drop and it's not much fun being out there when it's really cold.

I have checked the many large containers of shrubs that don't like the wind and the cold, under cover in an alley to the side of the house. I've got about 25 sheltered there at the moment but they do need to be watered every so often, which has now been done.

Regular visits up to the heated greenhouse are needed too as the plants also need checking.

I have one of those probes that you can pierce the soil with and it will tell you how damp it is, allowing you to tell whether it needs watering, a really useful tool at this time of year.

My collection of tender plants there have also been carefully checked, the dead leaves removed and watered where necessary. The Echeveria Red Sea Monster growing there has started to flower, such a pretty plant.

As we head into a new year, the National Garden Scheme has just announced its annual donations. This year proved to be a record one for the scheme with £3,403,960 donated to the charity's beneficiaries.

This represents a superlative achievement by the garden owners and county team volunteers who together worked tirelessly to host open days at 3,389 gardens across the year.

The lion's share, £2,475,000, goes to some of the UK's best-loved nursing and health charities, many of which have continued to

provide vital support to the NHS and communities across the UK in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and who are now struggling to provide services in the new cost-of-living crisis.

For a full breakdown of how the funds have been allocated, log on to their web site [www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk).

The long-term nature of funding from the National Garden Scheme allows these charities to continue the provision of critical community nursing services, end-of-life care and respite for families and carers across the UK.

That said, it won't be long before gardens begin to open again for the 2024 open garden season. More on that in the coming weeks.

In my own garden we have seen some frosty mornings and the view from my office window never seems to disappoint, looking out across the plot, edged with white frost.

A great help in the winter garden is the use of carefully positioned sculpture among the planting.

The gorgeous juggling fish I purchased earlier in the year stands out and makes a real statement among the palms.

In my beach garden, regular readers may recall, I planted many of my larger agave Americana into the chalky ground back in the autumn of 2022, to avoid having to carry the extremely heavy containers from their winter shelter each year. Sadly, last winter was so wet that many of them did not survive.

This year, I have struggled to make sure nearly all are under cover. For some reason, they made it through the wet winter and have gone on to grow quite well though the summer months. Let's hope they make it through to the spring undamaged.

It is very important to make sure you remember the birds in the garden at this time of the year, especially on the cold frosty mornings.

All my bird feeders and water trays have been topped up to ensure our feathered friends don't go hungry and have an enjoyable New Year too.

I've found in previous years that it is very important to place food out of the reach of rats, not an



Geoff securing the bay and, right, the fish sculpture

easy task to achieve. Last winter, as soon as I placed the food in the trays, the rats seemed to find a way to get up there and take it, I was amazed at their aerobic antics to try and get to the food.

This year, I spent a lot of time digging out an area where they had tunnelled and created a home and so far, I have not seen any evidence of them back in the garden this winter, long may it continue.

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

