

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Chaerophorum humilis



Hedge magellanica



Verbena bonariensis

Still time for a splash of colour

CAN you believe it's the last day of September? It won't be long before we have to put the clocks back and lose an hour in the garden every day.

Still looking good in my garden are the gorgeous flowers of the rudbeckia deamii, set against the stunning hydrangea limelight. Rudbeckia deamii bears attractive, daisy-like flowers with cone-shaped, black-brown centres from August to October.

It's ideal for creating a splash of late-summer colour in ornamental borders and works well in prairie-style schemes with ornamental grasses. Mine are planted in a sunny border behind the old railway sleepers and are a very welcome reminder of summer. This plant tends to be more floriferous than other rudbeckia varieties. From now, through to the spring, is a good time to divide congested clumps and create more plants.

A real favourite plant across my garden, both in the beach plot at the front and the main garden at the rear, is verbena bonariensis. It has tall, narrow, sparsely-leaved stems on top of which flattened heads of bright lavender-purple flowers appear in late summer.

It's perfect for bringing height to an ornamental border and also works well in prairie-style planting schemes with ornamental grasses. It's a superb butterfly plant, rivalling even the infamous buddleja.

They grow best in moist but well-drained soil in full sun. Given the right conditions, plants will self-seed freely, but in colder regions they may need protection from frost.

You can leave dead stalks to provide winter interest but I tend to cut mine back in the autumn.

A real favourite of mine at Driftwood are fuchsias, they are a popular choice for summer bedding schemes and containers, due to their attractive, usually pendant flowers from summer to right through to the autumn. Some are hardy enough to be used in perennial planting schemes and may even be clipped into a low-growing hedge.

Once such variety is the pretty

fuchsia magellanica which 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, magellanica thrives in fertile, moist but well-drained soil, in partial shade. All the experts say best results are achieved by growing in a sheltered spot away from cold winter winds but my garden is far from sheltered and experiences cold winds, yet my three large shrubs seem to thrive well.

As the open garden season draws to a close, the National Garden Scheme has just one garden to offer in Sussex this weekend. Peelers Retreat at 70 Ford Road in Arundel opens its garden gate today, September 30, between 2pm and 5pm. Entry is £5, with children free. They will be serving homemade teas to enjoy. This inspirational space is a delight, with plenty of areas to sit and relax.

The many interlocking beds are packed with year-round colour and scent, shaded by some specimen trees, don't miss the inventive water feature and rill, raised fish pond and look out for the working Victorian fireplace.

Today is also the final day to vote for the nation's favourite garden which is now in the second phase of the competition. There will be one winner for each of the seven categories, along with one overall champion. Go over to the NGS website www.ngs.org.uk, on the news section, to find the link to make your choice.

A great addition to my coastal plot is a bushy evergreen palm which creates a medium-sized shrub, is chamaerops humilis. It is often stemless or multi-stemmed, with a rounded mass of fan-shaped leaves to 45cm in length.

Once established and more mature you can find short rigid panicles of small yellow flowers are borne. Its other common names are African hair palm or European fan palm.

Being UK hardy and because of



Geoff and Zinnia Zahara

its neat size, the chamaerops humilis palm is very useful in garden design with its strikingly distinctive form, beautiful large fan-shaped leaves and an attractive dense growing habit. I have four in the back garden.

A pretty flower making an impact in the new bed by the corten steel pond is a compact zinnia. It reportedly gives exceptional garden performance and is mildew resistant, meaning Zinnia Zahara will thrive in hot dry conditions as well as wet summer weather, making them ideal for our temperamental climate.

Whether you set our zinnia plants in containers or at the front of your border you are guaranteed a profusion of dainty blooms from June through to October.

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



Rudbeckia