

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



The big tidy up at Driftwood



Groups visiting the garden



Volunteers Rosa and Celia

Another year... and time for a few changes ready for summer

AS we embark on a new year in the garden, I'm going to take a quick look back at the achievements of the National Garden Scheme over the last 12 months.

For those that are not familiar with the charity, it gives visitors unique, affordable access to over 3,500 exceptional private gardens and raises impressive amounts of money for nursing and health charities through admissions, teas and cake.

Thanks to the generosity of garden owners, volunteers and visitors, they have donated an impressive £67 million to nursing and health charities, since being founded in 1927 to support district nurses. They are now the most significant charitable funder of nursing in the UK and their beneficiaries include Macmillan Cancer Support, Marie Curie, Hospice UK and The Queen's Nursing Institute.

This year saw a return to near normality for garden opening and visiting for the first time in three years and despite the prolonged drought during the summer that led many gardens to close, the National Garden Scheme was still able to announce donations of £3.11 million to its beneficiary charities.

The lion's share, £2,450,000, went 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.

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.

The National Garden Scheme relies primarily on the income generated by admission at its garden gates and through the sale of plants, teas and cake. Additional income streams include fundraising events such as online talks, garden parties, and commercial partnerships.

Chief executive George Plumpton said: "The enormous contribution

by our garden owners and volunteers was added to by other fundraising activities in 2022. A special fundraising event at the iconic Temperate House at Kew raised over £48,000, and in July we hosted our third Great British Garden Party, giving the opportunity for anyone – whether they open their garden or not – to have an event with friends or family and raise funds for the National Garden Scheme, generating £30,000."

This year also saw two key funding milestones – over £10 million donated to Marie Curie since their partnership began in 1996 and ten years of continued partnership and over £1.7 million donated to Parkinson's UK.

Parkinson's UK now estimate that around 7,000 patients currently benefit from support from the nurse posts that have been funded by the National Garden Scheme. The scheme is now looking ahead to 2023 with optimism and the opening of over 3,500 gardens across England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands, with almost 150 locations across Sussex to choose from, one of which will be my own garden, Driftwood, between June 1 and August 11, by arrangement only.

Meanwhile, back in my garden, the coming month will be a time for tidying up and making preparations, ready to open later in the year.

For the last few years, it has been the month when I get people in to tidy up the boundaries. I have tall hedges and greenery on all sides of the back garden and it is just too much now for me to climb ladders and keep it all in trim.

The team can get it all done in a day and it is now very satisfying being able to watch others get on with it from the warmth and safety of my office desk in the roof. I have steep banks at the front and side of the drive which also get trimmed at the same time.

Next year marks the 15th year that I have been opening my garden to the public. That's a long time to enjoy and feel enthusiastic about the task of getting it ready.

Many visitors ask how do I renew and refresh my gardening enthusiasm each new gardening



Geoff clearing up for the new year

year. For me, it's all about trying to make it look a little different each summer. I've had a clear out of my many terracotta containers and cleaned some up ready to use again around my plot. I'm fortunate in having a great storage area for them at the top of the garden. Containers are a great way to change the look of the garden, repositioning them each summer in different locations.

My garden has always been made up of many small components, be they sculptural pieces to be relocated around the plot creating a different feel or new ideas or themes to change a corner or vista across the garden. So, January 1 tomorrow... will you be making any New Year resolutions to see you through the next year?

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



The National Garden Scheme is a huge success