



Make your plot a local attraction

How Geoff retired and transformed his everyday patch into a five-star spot



GARDENING
CIARA BYRNE

TO THE front and back of a bungalow in the Sussex seaside village of Bishopstone is a normal-sized garden – albeit one with spectacular views to the south over Seaford Bay.

But owner Geoff Stonebanks, who moved to Driftwood 22 years ago – after retiring at the age of 51 from his job as a personnel manager for the Post Office – has transformed the space into a series of garden areas.

There is lush, exotic planting, intriguing ornaments and plenty of places to sit and enjoy a cup of tea and cake.

Since then, Driftwood has appeared twice on BBC Gardeners' World, received more than 260 five-star reviews

on TripAdvisor, and raised more than £182,000 for charity.

Many visitors come back year after year, and Geoff's secret is that he is constantly changing the garden. 'I never feel as though I'm gardening. I always feel as though I'm dressing a film set,' he says. The garden is open for the NGS from June 1 to August 2 by arrangement.

In spring, he begins the huge job of moving the large number

of succulents, including agaves and aloes, out of their winter quarters into the garden.

At the front, he has made a coastal garden around a rowing boat, which was replaced by a fibreglass one gifted by visitors when the original rotted.

In addition, there are lobster pots sourced on eBay and an old fish crate inherited from his father and grandfather who were fish merchants on the

docks in Fleetwood, Lancashire. Around these are santolina, sea buckthorn and *Coronilla valentina*, with yellow flowers that last for months.

From here, visitors cross a 'jetty', created by placing a long trough of water planted up with pond plants underneath composite decking, to the back and an Alice in Wonderland-style world of flowers and ornaments.

When Geoff and his partner



Picture: ALAMY

Mark Glassman moved to the garden in 2004, it was a 'one-dimensional space' with alawn and fruit trees.

He set about adding height by installing archways and planting statement trees including an olive and yucca brought from his garden in London, a European fan palm (*Chamaerops humilis*), a Torbay palm (*Cordyline australis*) and a jelly palm (*Butia capitata*).

There are also bay trees in pots inherited from his Auntie Margaret, who was a keen gardener, as well as a container of peach-coloured lilies from her garden which are still thriving even though they have never been repotted. Geoff's secret is he feeds his plants with Richard Jackson's Flower Power.

Near the house is a terrace surrounded by upright railway sleepers, where he displays succulents from *Agave americana* to *Crassula ovata*, the jade plant. He includes set pieces, such as an old typewriter complete with poems by visitors, along with mirrors, animal sculptures, vintage teacups on sticks, and water features.

'I knew nothing about gardening when I started and I just had this image in my head of what I wanted to create,' he explains.

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