



Green and pleasant

Easter is almost upon us, followed by the official, first day of Spring on the 20th of the month. Both these key events always seem, to me, to herald the start of the true gardening year. The end of March also saw the clocks go back, giving us much longer days in which to get the jobs done and we generally hope that the weather starts to warm up.

By **Geoff Stonebanks**

Feeding your plants

I'll be starting my feeding regime this month to ensure all my plants and shrubs look their very best for the seven public open days.

I tend to go overboard and feed everything! I have many shrubs, both deciduous and evergreen woody plants. They provide a variety of fragrant flowers, berries, autumn colour, foliage and coloured stems. In addition, they add shape and a basic structural framework to my garden and provide shelter and a great food source for wildlife. They can be evergreen (retain leaves in winter) or deciduous (lose leaves in winter), although there are some that lose their leaves only in very cold

weather (semi-evergreen). Whatever they are, they get fed in my garden throughout the season. I use a well-known brand available through a TV Shopping channel. The results I get from it are amazing. The product is soluble, I water by hand, with a watering can, every plant and shrub throughout the garden, a task that can take me up to six hours to feed everything! You don't have to be so meticulous but feeding will help get the best from your plants.

National Garden Scheme

On the 25th of April the beautiful Cinque Port village of Winchelsea has seven secret gardens which will open their gates in support of the National Garden Scheme. There are many styles of walled gardens to be

seen, in all shapes and sizes. Spring bulbs will abound with plenty of tulips on show too. All the gardens open from 1:00pm to 5:30pm and entrance will cost £6 with children free. Delicious tea and cakes will be served all afternoon.

Full details on whether they will open in the current climate at: www.ngs.org.uk

Talks to Horticultural Societies

I've just finished delivering a series of ten talks over the winter months about my own garden and gardening by the sea generally. Now is the time garden clubs and horticultural societies start looking for speakers for the next season! Over the years I've presented almost 100, I charge £85 plus expenses and all my fees are donated to Macmillan Cancer Support. So, if you know of any groups or societies that are still looking for speakers across Sussex or the borders of Kent and Surrey, please get in touch. Following a recent talk to a group in Lewes, the speaker secretary wrote and said, *"Thank you for coming and delighting us with you talk about Driftwood and your various fundraising activities. I think I enjoyed your talk last night even more than the first time because I had visited the garden in between times and everything made more sense this time."*

Pressure cleaning in the garden

This month one of my main gardening activities will be to tackle the algae growing on the hard surfaces. Contrary to popular belief, they do not damage what

they are growing on, but can cause the patios and steps to become very slippery. I use a high-pressure washer to remove it from the paths, it's easier at this time of year before too much has grown. I've just had to buy a new one and I am amazed how much more effective it is with a circular spray nozzle rather than a fan straight line one. It is just sailing through the task. While you've got the machine out, why not try it on any sculpture or furniture you have in the garden too. My garden has a lot of marine rope that used to tie the ferry up in Newhaven. It's used to create border edges or laid decoratively across grass banks and gets very dirty throughout the winter. A quick spray with the pressure cleaner and it comes up white and good as new.

Time to take softwood cuttings

This time of the year is a good time to take softwood cuttings from new, young shoot growth on deciduous plants such as pelargoniums, fuchsias and penstemons. Pick non-flowering shoots, trim off older leaves, dip in rooting powder and plant into small pots of cutting compost and water well.

You can read more of Geoff's garden at: www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk

Geoff's garden, 'Driftwood' has appeared on BBC2 Gardeners' World, was a finalist in Gardeners' World Magazine Best Small Space and a finalist in Lewes District Business Awards 2018 as 'The Tourist Destination of the Year'.