



Green and pleasant

APRIL'S here and spring has sprung at last! As the weather warms up and early flowers start to bloom, all of a sudden there's a load of jobs to do outside. This month, there's plenty to sow and grow in your garden and greenhouse. But there's lots more to do besides sowing and planting out, especially in my eclectic garden.

By **Geoff Stonebanks**

This month provides us with many of our favourite spring flowers to enjoy but the weather can be unpredictable. We can have anything from a heatwave to ground frosts and sleet, so be prepared. The best protection for tender bedding plants, if frost strikes, are cloches or a horticultural fleece.

Succulents

I've recently transferred my collection of agaves from their winter home into the sunshine and this month it will be the turn of the many aeoniums (some pictured in header). Through the winter, I store as many as I can, either in the front or back porches of the house. Any I can't squeeze in there, end up in the heated greenhouse. During late April, weather permitting, they will be out

enjoying the sunshine. Aeoniums are dramatic evergreen exotics which I feel are best grown in containers. You can propagate them very easily by simply taking cuttings, usually best taken while the plants are still in active growth which encourages speedy rooting. Select young, slender shoots as they will root more easily and have more vigour than older, thicker shoots. Leave them uncovered, placing on their side somewhere dry and warm for a few days until the wound has calloused, this will reduce the chance of rot developing later on. Keep them indoors, in a well-lit place such as on a sunny windowsill. When ready, insert cuttings into 5cm or 8cm pots of soil-based potting compost mixed with equal parts of grit. Firm the compost at the base of the cutting and make sure that at least half of the stem is above compost level. Water sparingly until they have rooted, taking care not to water directly onto the leaves. Aim to keep the compost barely moist at all times. Your collection will soon grow!

Caring for Hellebores

I have some magnificent hellebores in my beach garden which are starting to fade. Depending on how they look, April is a good time to cut down their stems. The new growth can be seen at the base of the plant and care is needed to ensure this is not snipped instead. I have the taller hellebore, *argutifolius* or the Corsican hellebore and it is prone to flop all over the place. It is hard to stake, so best chopped, taking off the flower and stalks down to the ground although the other types Hellebores can be left alone.

Harden off plants

Plants grown in protected conditions, newly purchased from the garden centre or grown in a frost and wind free greenhouse, do not do well if they are planted outside in the garden without a period to "harden off", which means getting the plant acclimatised to the weather. On mild days in April, put the trays of bedding plants outside and bring back in at night under shelter or glass. Over a period of time, you can gradually extend the time outside.

National Garden Scheme

In line with the government's roadmap, the scheme is hoping to allow refreshments to be served in some gardens and larger venues will no longer need to provide entry by prebooked tickets. Three of the proposed Sussex gardens which are planning to open are, The Garden House in Brighton (10th and 11th), Banks Farm in Barcombe (17th & 18th) and Cupani Garden in Seaford (21st and 25th). All contact details and ticket arrangements, along with the other gardens opening this month, can be found on the scheme's website at: www.ngs.org.uk

Lily Beetle

Back in 2004 I inherited a wonderful ceramic container full of orange and red lilies from my Dad's sister, my Aunt Margaret. This is the time of year when I have to be extremely vigilant to check for lily beetles, some might say they are pretty red bugs, but they wreak havoc with the leaves on the gorgeous flowers. You really need to prevent them before any damage is done or the plants succumb to being stripped of foliage. Pick them off or with large infestations use a pesticide. The care you take now will repay you dividends when the beautiful flowers emerge.

Feeding regime

I'll be starting my feeding regime to ensure all the plants and shrubs look their very best for my "hoped for" open days this Summer. I feed everything! I have a large collection of shrubs which 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. No matter what they are, they all get fed throughout the season. The results I get from feeding every year are amazing. The product is soluble and I water by hand, with a watering can, a task that can take me up to five hours! You don't have to be as meticulous as me but feeding will help get the best from your plants.

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'. Read the amazing 5-star reviews on TripAdvisor. Amazing feature in Coast Magazine and an American magazine, Flea Market Garden Style. Read all about Geoff's trips to Buckingham Palace and Royal Garden Party in 2018 and his work for the community.