



Green and pleasant

THANKFULLY, April's here and spring has finally sprung! Expect the inevitable April showers this month but with sunny days too, when you can focus all your attention on the garden. As the weather warms up and early flowers start to bloom you will find that there's a load of jobs to do outside and in the greenhouse. It's an exciting month with daffodils and flowering trees starting to bloom and indoor-sown seeds well into growth. It is also time to start sowing outdoors but just watch out for any frosts. Easter is behind us, the clocks have gone forward, so let's hope all the dreadful wet weather has gone away and we can finally enjoy some pleasant time outdoors with family and friends.

By **Geoff Stonebanks**

I've just finished delivering a series of 10 talks over the winter months, about my own garden and gardening by the sea generally. It is about now that garden clubs, horticultural societies and WI groups start looking for speakers for their next season! Over the years I've presented over 100, so, if you know of any groups or societies that are still looking for speakers across Sussex or the borders of Kent and Surrey this autumn or next spring and beyond, please get in touch.

The Bluebell Walk 2024

This year the well-renowned *Bluebell Walk* is open every day from the 10th April until the 14th May from 10am to 5pm. Since 1972, the Arlington *Bluebell Walk and Farm Trail*, based at *Bates Green Farm*, has developed into seven interesting walks over three working farms. A circular walk of 2/3 a mile in *Beatons Wood* has been made suitable for wheelchair users. This is where you see white anemones followed by the vistas of bluebells, established over centuries. On this walk there are seats for you to enjoy the peace and tranquility of

this oak and hornbeam ancient wood. Along the walks there are signs illustrating the flora and fauna of the countryside for your information. Full details at www.bluebellwalk.co.uk

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 am always amazed how effective it is with, using the circular spray nozzle rather than a fan, straight line one. It just seems to sail 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.

National Garden Scheme

This month the scheme has an interesting new garden opening across the weekend of the 13th and 14th. The iconic, *5 Coastguard Cottages*, overlooking the *Seven Sisters* (pictured in header) will open the gate for the very first time from 10am to 5pm, serving homemade teas with a view! Not to be missed. On the 6th and 7th of the month, *Butlers Farmhouse* opens between 2pm and 5pm in Butlers Lane, Herstmonceux and across the weekend of the 27th and 28th, *Banks Farm* in Boast Lane, Barcombe will open between 11am and 4pm. Another great afternoon

out can be had on the 20th, visiting the secret gardens of Winchelsea between midday and 4pm. Full details on all openings can be found at www.ngs.org.uk

Time to take softwood cuttings

This time of the year is a perfect 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.

Feeding regime

I'll be starting my feeding regime to ensure all the plants and shrubs look their very best for my garden visitors this Summer. 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 the plot and provide shelter and are a great food source for wildlife. No matter what, they are, they all get fed throughout the season. The product is soluble and I water by hand, with a watering can, a task that can take me up to four hours! You don't have to be so 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 is a multi-award-winning garden owner, garden writer & broadcaster. Driftwood has appeared on BBC2 Gardeners' World and was a finalist in Gardeners' World Magazine Best Small Space. See the amazing 5-star reviews on TripAdvisor. Read all about Geoff's work for the community, appointment as a Coronation Champion and trips to Buckingham Palace including 2 Royal Garden Parties, in 2018 and 2023. Read the many published features on the garden in national, local and worldwide media, including TV.