



# Green and pleasant

**If you have found that your containers have dried out quickly this summer, try this trick. I always cover the surface of my containers with a layer of gravel, which helps retain the moisture in the soil. It also helps prevent weeds popping through too!**

By **Geoff Stonebanks**

## Garden has been my sanctuary

**If, like me, you have been lucky enough to own a garden, I'm sure you will have appreciated it even more over the last three months!**

I know I have. Maybe you've even developed a few green fingers! The trick now is to keep everything going that you started, you never know you might get to enjoy it all! We've been self-isolating since March to protect my 93-year old mother who lives with us, so she too has enjoyed the benefits that the garden can provide, not least of which, the fresh air in being able to sit out there in complete safety.

## Ponds

If you have a pond in the garden, a little time spent on it each week will help keep it healthy. All too

quickly, a pond can turn into a bit of an eyesore if not looked after. You need to weed it as you would your border. You'll be able to see the pond weed and algae but there will be weeds between the pond plants too, chop them back before they take over. I tend to use an old kitchen sieve to scoop out the duckweed which works really well. Remember to deadhead the pond plants too. You can see my pond in the header above, surrounded by pots of plants.

## Fuchsias

Some of my favourite plants in the garden are fuchsias. I have quite a large collection. Two of them are quite special though. One is a standard Geneii that belonged to my Aunt who passed away in 2004. The other, also a standard, called Empress of Prussia that my father bought for my mother for their ruby wedding

anniversary many moons ago. Dad passed away in 2007. Both of them are very precious plants. It helps to improve flowering generally with fuchsias, if you remove the seed pods that develop behind the spent flowers. These small green bumps can develop into striking reddish-black berries, which are actually edible, but not very tasty. Allowing the plants to go to seed can weaken them and reduce their flowering cycle, so it is best to remove seed pods, which should mean it will keep blooming into the Autumn.

## National Garden Scheme

Like everything else, the scheme's gardens were unable to open throughout the lockdown. With the relaxation towards the end of June, some garden owners decided they would like to open, ensuring they complied with social-distancing guidelines. The scheme has developed a very successful online booking system which requires all visitors to book a timeslot for their garden of choice and pre-pay the entrance ahead of the visit. No gardens are serving refreshments and most will not have toilet facilities. Some larger plots will allow visitors to take their own picnics! Gardens opening for the following ten days are listed every Monday on the website.

Just log on to the garden booking page at: [www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk) to make your choice.

## Houseplants

If, like me, you have many plants in the house as well as the garden then don't forget to keep an eye on them too. High temperatures can make indoor plants wilt and they may need

moving to a cooler spot in the house. Don't overwater them, just check the compost and if it is dry apply a little water. Over time plants leaves can attract dust, so just wipe them down with a cloth and a bit of water, don't use polish or oils as this will block their pores. While wiping the leaves, it gives you a great opportunity to check the underside for insects and damage that can be removed. If I'm honest, while I might remember to feed the plants in the garden religiously, I'm not so hot on remembering to do the same with the house plants. They still need nourishment like their outdoor partners, so do remember to feed them, I tend to use the same feed I use in the garden.

## Looking Ahead

If you have camellias and rhododendrons in your garden, it is really important at this time of the year to keep them really well watered. It is now that the new buds for all next years' flowers are starting to develop and form. A lack of water at this stage will ensure you don't see any blooms next spring. It is so easy to forget them when concentrating on shrubs and flowers that are blooming now.

**You can read more of Geoff's garden at:**  
[www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk](http://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.