



Green and pleasant

HISTORICALLY, August is considered to be one of the hottest months of the year, meaning lots of watering required, assuming no hosepipe bans. Try to use grey water wherever possible, your water butts may be running low. August is also traditionally holiday-time, so you might need to enlist the help of friends and family to look after your plants while you are away. When you are at home, take the time to prune Wisteria and summer-flowering shrubs such as lavender once they've finished flowering.

By **Geoff Stonebanks**

Most flowers lose their attraction as they fade, thereby spoiling the overall appearance of your beds, borders and containers. Not only does regular deadheading improve the appearance, it also directs energy into stronger growth and more flowers. Once the flowers are pollinated, seed heads, pods or capsules will form at the expense of further growth and flower development, so keep an eye on things.

Oleander

A glorious plant in my garden at the moment is the pretty Nerium oleander. These shrubs are a mainstay of Mediterranean gardens

and widely used for screen planting, on hillsides and alongside roads. They flower in summer, the large open flower clusters can be single or double, and come in many colours including white, pink, red and peach. Mine as you can see in the header is a pretty pink. Upright stems are clothed with evergreen leaves which are long, slender, and an attractive shade of silvery-green. It is worth noting however that every part of the oleander plant is extremely poisonous if ingested and consuming even a small amount can be fatal. While oleander is toxic only if consumed, contact with the foliage may cause skin irritations. Wearing gloves when handling oleander is strongly advisable, along with thoroughly washing hands and exposed skin after handling or pruning.

National Garden Scheme

This month there are several gardens you could visit with the *National Garden Scheme*. A brand-new garden for 2025 is **Pekes Manor** in Nash Street, Golden Cross, near Hailsham opening on Sunday 10th August from 2pm to 5pm with entry £6. Now allowing dogs on leads in too, for this opening. *Pekes* garden was created in 1908, surrounding a pre-Tudor Manor House and includes several distinct gardens, spanning approximately two acres. The garden features an ancient pond, a formal front garden, large topiary lawn, rose border, column garden, and a walled garden. **Butlers Farmhouse** in Butlers Lane, Herstmonceux opens across the weekend of the 23rd and 24th August from 2pm to 5pm with entry £7.50. Enjoy a real bonus on this visit too, with live jazz played in the garden too and you can take your own picnic and rug to sit and listen. Is this one of the quirkiest gardens in Sussex? It might well be, the owners are certain you will have fun and enjoy the secret jungle garden, Cornish-inspired beach corners, rainbow border, not to mention the poison garden. A third option might be **Limekin Farm** in Chalvington Road, Chalvington, near Hailsham, opening on the weekend of 30th and 31st August from 2pm to 5pm with entry £8. The garden was designed in the 1930's when the house was owned by Charles Stewart Taylor, MP for Eastbourne. It has not changed in basic layout since then. The planting aims to reflect the age of the C17 property and original garden design. Flint walls enclose the main lawn, herbaceous borders and rose garden.

Hydrangeas

With immense flower heads, hydrangeas flaunt an old-fashioned charm in summertime that's hard to resist. While these flowering shrubs are low-maintenance, proper care

will keep them blooming. Unrivalled in the shrub world for beautiful flowers, these elegant plants are easy to cultivate, tolerate almost any soil, and produce abundant blooms. Colours beguile with clear blue, vibrant pink, frosty white, lavender, and rose blossom, sometimes all blooming on the same plant! They are excellent for a range of garden sites from group plantings to shrub borders to containers. I have several types in my garden, one of my favourites is "Annabelle". It is a stunning, large flowered white hydrangea, often producing football sized flower heads over 10" in diameter. The enormous, densely packed heads of creamy-white flowers appear from July to September above pointed, dark green leaves. It blooms reliably every year, even after severe pruning or intensely cold winters. Some people plant 'Annabelle' as a hedge since it can be cut back severely in the winter for a tidy effect. Deciduous and with an upright growth habit, hydrangea Annabelle makes a gorgeous feature for a partly shady border with moist, well-drained soil. It will also be happy in a roomy patio planter, provided it is kept well fed and watered in the growing season. The large flower heads can also be cut for use in a vase, and are particularly suitable for dried flower arrangements too.

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 twice 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 two Royal Garden Parties, in 2018 and 2023. Read the many published features on the garden in national, local and worldwide media, including TV.