



Green and pleasant

IT looks like we will all be celebrating Christmas a little differently this year after the exceedingly difficult 2020 many of us will have had. Whatever the outcomes following the November lockdown, many of us, I'm sure, will still want to be cautious, so a quiet Christmas is on the cards for my family and I.

By **Geoff Stonebanks**

Weather permitting, the garden will play a large part in keeping me busy and maybe I'll follow my own advice below!

Outdoor Christmas tree

Whilst many of us probably buy bird food to put out in the garden, if you have some extra time on your hands and need to occupy fed up children, why not have a go and make your own special Christmas tree for any feathered friends around your plot? I have many birds visiting the garden at Driftwood, notably robins, including the one above, perched on a pot outside last winter. Some years I buy a small tree to put by the pond where it can easily be seen from the house. You can see from the header that small decorations can then be made to decorate it.

Dried fruit and nut garland

Get yourself a large needle and thread with some garden twine or

string. Purchase some nuts, I find the best to use are peanuts in shells (monkey nuts) as you can pass the needle through the shell with some ease. Check your food cupboard for dried fruit and you're away! Thread the twine with a nut then a piece of dried fruit and keep going until you have an edible garland for the birds to hang on the tree. Make sure children are supervised if using needles.

Citrus fruit decorations

Get a few oranges and lemons and create small hanging baskets in which to place bird food. Cut the fruit in half, remove the flesh, leaving the peel. String the halves up with twine or wire, fill with bird food and hang on the tree, refill as needed. You can also use whole oranges, studded with cloves. Create different designs with the cloves on the orange spheres. Use narrow ribbon, secured with the cloves to hang on the tree too.

Pine cone treats

See if you can find any pine cones while out walking and bring them home. You can push pieces of bird fat food in between the sections of the cone. Once complete use some wire, twisted around the top of the cone and suspend from the branches on your Christmas tree. Your creative tree will be a focal point for your feathered visitors and you and your family can enjoy watching them feed too.

Providing interest in the winter garden

One of the great joys I have each winter is realising how useful the rusted metal features I have amassed over the years have become. They are all displayed throughout my beach area and back garden at Driftwood. For me, they truly enhance the space. Not only do they provide real drama when there are fewer flowering plants around to please the eye, they really come into their own on a cold winter morning when the frost clings to the edges and defines the piece. On the relatively rare occasions it happens, they look even more dramatic after a fall of snow. Maybe invest in some pieces for your plot, perhaps even ask for one as a Christmas gift!

A favourite winter plant

By far one of my favourite plants in the garden at this time of the year is the beautiful *Coronilla glauca*. You can see a shot of some in my beach garden in the header above. It will light up a sheltered position with an abundance of yellow, pea-like blooms and flowers from December through to mid spring. Mine is in quite an exposed location and has still worked really well, with this year flowers starting to appear last month. The sweetly scented blooms make this a

useful shrub for bringing colour to those very dull winter days. It has small blue-green foliage which is evergreen, thus providing a fine backdrop for its fragrant display. It works well as a cut flower to bring indoors too.

This versatile shrub is perfectly hardy in most UK locations, but performs particularly well in a sheltered, sunny spot, even in difficult coastal areas. Its compact, rounded habit makes it ideal for borders and patio containers. You can train it as a wall shrub for a spectacular upright display that can attain a height of six feet, with careful training.

Christmas gifts

Friends always ask what they can buy me for Christmas. In my view, it's an easy choice if you are a gardener! You can never have enough secateurs or proper, practical gloves. So, if you have a family member who loves gardening, I'm sure they would appreciate either. There are also many innovative ideas for gardeners promoted online and through social media to choose from as well.

Wishing all my readers a very Happy Christmas and a prosperous New year. Here's hoping 2021 will be a little kinder to us all.

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.