



Green and pleasant

AS we approach Christmas at a rate of knots, we also reach the shortest day of the year on the 21st. I must confess to not enjoying working outside in the cold and wet. It really is a case of wrapping up well and keeping warm outside. Remember to check your plants winter protection and if you have a greenhouse make sure the heater is working, both really important jobs at this time of the year. Hopefully, there are not too many tasks left to do outside, so you will have time for some fireside garden planning or simply viewing the garden from the house.

By **Geoff Stonebanks**

This is the month when cold, wet, windy winter weather can damage trees, shrubs and garden structures such as trellis. Be warned and take time to check things out, aiming to improve shelter for important plants, staking those that will benefit, mulch where needed and wrap pots where necessary!

Bringing the outside inside

If you have holly growing in the garden, as I do, why not harvest branches with berries for making Christmas garlands and wreaths or just fill vases for a festive touch indoors. It helps to stand the berry covered twigs in a bucket of

water until you're ready to use them. The perfect combination is the use of both holly and ivy over the Christmas period and I'm lucky to have a supply of both. You can always use spray cans of silver and gold paint to liven up the natural look too. Why not position along mantelpieces or create a centre piece for the dining table. Add a few baubles and maybe some ribbon and you'll be amazed what a difference it can make and at a fraction of the cost of shop bought decorations.

Outdoor Christmas Tree

If you have some time on your hands, why not have a go at making your own special Christmas tree for any

feathered friends around your plot? I have many birds visiting the garden at *Driftwood*, notably robins. Some years I place a small tree, where it can easily be seen from the house and then dress it with home-made edible decorations. 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 as you can pass the needle through the shell with some ease, keep going until you have an edible garland for the birds and hang on the tree.

You can also use oranges and lemons by creating small hanging baskets in which to place bird food. Cut fruit in half, remove flesh, leaving the peel. String the halves up with twine or wire, fill with bird food and hang on the tree. This year, I've got a pretty Nordman Fir tree sitting on the back patio, dressed with a few outdoor baubles and some fairy lights. It is a lovely festive sight viewed from the house, you can see it in the header.

Providing interest in the Winter garden

One of the great joys I have each winter is appreciating how useful the rusted metal features I have amassed over the years have become. 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!

Jobs to do in the garden

If you have any empty borders, they can be dug over ready for next year's planting. It is always a good idea to group potted plants together, in a sheltered spot in the garden, to protect them from the harshest winter weather that is likely to come. I always find there is a debate over whether to leave the faded flower heads on your hydrangeas or not. I do reckon that left until spring they will help to provide frost protection to the swelling buds further down the stems. I've got about ten different hydrangeas around the garden at *Driftwood* and tend to leave the old head on until spring.

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.

Read more of Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk or follow both him and the garden on social media.

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.