



Green and pleasant

THE National Garden Scheme's annual Snowdrop Festival is upon us once again! On a winter's day, there is nothing better than visiting a garden gleaming with one of the earliest flowering plants of the year. Whether you enjoy carpets of naturalised white in woodlands, meticulously grown rare varieties of snowdrops or gardens boasting a colourful mix of snowdrops, hellebores and other early spring flowers – readers will find there is something for galanthophiles and garden enthusiasts alike. Now is the time to plan your visit.

By **Geoff Stonebanks**

We all probably ate more than we should over the festive period, so this might be the perfect way to get out and exercise in the fresh air and enjoy the beautiful, faithful, first signs of spring, epitomised by drifts of glorious snowdrops. They are indeed a reminder of the changing seasons and the promise of what's to come.

Snowdrop Festival

Snowdrops can be viewed in over 100 National Garden Scheme gardens throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland during February, and March. Here in Sussex, we have about ten gardens for you to see these beautiful flowers, notably *Pembury*

House in Clayton (pictured above) and *5 Whitemans Close* in Cuckfield.

The scheme recently published some fun facts about this delicate little flower, here are a few to whet your appetite. It's Greek name – 'Galanthus' translates as 'milk flower' but could you have possibly imagined that a single Galanthus plicatus 'Golden Fleece' sold for £1,390 on eBay back in 2015?

Snowdrops are tough little plants, adapted to pierce through snow and survive the cold. The tips of their leaves are especially hardened for breaking through frozen ground and their sap contains a form of antifreeze that prevents ice crystals from forming. A naturally occurring substance within the plant, called galantamine, is used to help treat the symptoms of Alzheimer's

disease, although the bulbs themselves are poisonous.

There are more than 2,500 varieties and they are symbolic of spring, purity and religion. Collecting snowdrop bulbs in the wild is illegal in many countries. For many, you need a license to sell them, as they're covered by CITES regulations – the *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna*. It's illegal to transfer them over borders, without a CITES permit too.

The snowdrop isn't a UK native. They became fashionable in the Victorian era but, due to it being known under several different names, no one knows for sure when they were first introduced to the UK. The first records of plants in the wild date from 1778 – but botanist John Gerard is said to have described the snowdrop in his writings from 1597.

So, now you know, why not plan your visit to a *National Garden Scheme* garden as part of their Snowdrop Festival, wellies and warm clothes will definitely fit the bill. All the details on how to visit, prices and other information can be found on the Scheme's website at www.ngs.org.uk Do note that many will require pre-booking online, including the two that I mentioned above.

Back at Driftwood

Meanwhile, back in my garden, the coming month will be a time for tidying up and making preparations, ready to open later in the year. For the last few years, it has been the month when I get people in to tidy up the boundaries. I have tall hedges and greenery on all sides of the back garden and it is just too

much now for me to climb ladders and keep it all in trim. The team can get it all done in a day and it is now very satisfying being able to watch others get on with it from the warmth and safety of my office desk in the roof. I have steep banks at the front and side of the drive which also get trimmed at the same time.

Openings this year will get off to an early start with a small tour group from the USA who booked their visit on the 27th May way back last September. So, between now and then, I'll be trying to make it look a little different. I've had a clear out of my many terracotta containers and cleaned some up ready to use again around my plot. I'm fortunate in having a great storage area for them at the top of the garden. Containers are a great way to change the look of the garden, repositioning them each summer in different locations.

My garden has always been made up of many small components, be they sculptural pieces to be relocated around the plot, creating a different feel, or new ideas or themes to change a corner or vista across the garden. There will be plenty of new ideas on show again this summer.

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.