



Green and pleasant

I'M sure readers will be well aware that the 2025 open garden season gets off to a wonderful bejewelled start from late January onwards, with the *National Garden Scheme's Snowdrop and Spring Flower* gardens. From swathes of snowy white blooms to colourful mixtures of aconites, hellebores, iris and crocus under early blossom there is a garden visit to lift your spirits as the year begins. Check out the two in East Sussex below, with 5 Whitemans Close pictured in header.

By **Geoff Stonebanks**

This month we will start to see the with bulbs appearing and wildlife waking up as day length and temperatures increase. There're will be plenty to do indoors this month too, making preparations for the season ahead. Outdoors, as the garden comes to life again, it will be time to prune some shrubs and climbers.

National Garden Scheme

As I mentioned above, there are two lovely gardens to visit this month in East Sussex as part of the scheme's early openers. First up is 5 Whitemans Close in Cuckfield which will be open for pre booked visitors only on Saturday 1st, Monday 3rd, Tuesday 4th, Wednesday

5th, Tuesday 11th, Wednesday 12th, Friday 14th and Saturday 15th February from 11:00am to 3:30pm with entry £8.50, inclusive of teas. Please phone **01444 473520** or email shirley.carmanmartin@ngs.org.uk for information & booking.

This garden shows that winter need not be dull, as there is much to see and enjoy in the depths of winter. See a collection of many single and double snowdrops, hellebores, bulbs and other winter treasures, some not widely known. It is a sheltered garden and there will be flowers to enjoy. Check out the enormous *Daphne bholua* that scents the garden for weeks on end in February.

Next up is the ever-popular *Pembury House* in Ditchling Road, Clayton which will open every Thursday and

Friday from 13th February to 7th March from 10:30am to 3:30pm with entry £12 and home-made teas included. Pre-booking is essential again, so please visit www.ngs.org.uk for all the details. There will be timed slots at 10:30am & 2:00pm available.

Depending on the vagaries of the season, hellebores and snowdrops are at their best in February and March. This is a country garden, tidy but not manicured. A number of winding paths give a choice of walks through three acres of garden, which is in and enjoys views of the *South Downs National Park*. Please wear suitable footwear and bring along macs and winter woollies. Plants for sale and ideally, cash preferred.

Camelias

February is the month the patio at the back of my house comes alive with beautiful camelias. Though roses top the charts for romance, these are equally dreamy flowers that bloom now! The ruffled flowers could easily be mistaken for a rose, if it weren't for the glossy, deep bottle-green foliage that makes it worth growing as a stand-alone evergreen shrub all year round. The blooms are particularly appealing and generally last through to March. I've got six shrubs in both pink and white that really liven up the outlook at this time of the year. They thrive in acidic soil, so benefit from being in a container or raised bed with other acid loving plants and shrubs. They can survive in neutral soil if needed too. Raised beds, made from old railway sleepers, work really well. Make sure you fill the beds with good ericaceous potting compost and if you plan to top off, use bark chippings. Other plants that work well with them are native primroses and pulmonarias

which finish off the woodland look.

Trimming shrubs and hedges

As the garden comes to life again, it's time to consider pruning shrubs and climbers as well as evergreen hedges. I've got many low trimmed hedges and divisions between my various garden rooms, so have to trim fairly regularly to keep them as I want them. They were extensively trimmed back last month but in the coming weeks, as it warms up and spring appears they will start to show signs that they need to be trimmed back again. Remember that if you usually have birds nesting in your hedges, it is vital to do what you have to do now, before they start making their nests this year, meaning you will cause much disturbance to them. Also, keep leaving food out for them, to help them through the cold spells.

Border checks

While the borders are still a bit sparse, it is a good time to see what needs to be done, either removing a plant or two, completely or transplanting it to another area of the garden. It is always useful to perhaps make notes, through the Summer, when the garden is looking its best, to remind you what plants are not performing as well as you would like, and then take action to deal with it now.

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.