



Green and pleasant

IT'S February and, dare I say we can hope that Spring is in our sights. This month we'll expect to find some signs, with wildlife waking up as light levels and temperatures hopefully begin to increase. There's also plenty to do indoors this month to prepare for the season ahead. Outdoors, as the garden comes to life again, it's time to prune shrubs and climbers, such as Wisteria as well as evergreen hedges.

By **Geoff Stonebanks**

The next few weeks can almost feel like a turning point in the garden. It's still cold outside, but a wonderful indicator of the upcoming Spring are all the amazing bulbs that will slowly emerge from the ground, and more importantly, the days are finally getting longer. There will be open gardens to see with the National Garden Scheme too.

National Garden Scheme

There are two gardens opening through February for the scheme, not too far from Eastbourne. *Pembury House* in Ditchling Road, Clayton, BN6 9PH (pictured in header) will open its garden gate, by arrangement only, every Thursday and Friday from

12th February to 6th March from 10:30am to 3:30pm with entry £12, which includes refreshments. Please visit www.ngs.org.uk for information & booking to see the timed slots at 10:30am & 2pm available. Depending on the vagaries of the season, hellebores and snowdrops are at their best in February and March. It is a country garden, tidy but not manicured. See new borders and features with winding paths giving a choice of walks through three acres of garden, which is in and enjoys views of the South Downs National Park.

Last month I mentioned 5 Whitemans Close in Cuckfield, near Haywards Heath, RH17 5DE. Its openings, for pre-booked visitors continue through

February on these selected dates, 2nd, 4th, 10th, 12th, 14th, 17th and finally 18th. On all dates it will open from 10:30am to 3:30pm with entry £9 inclusive of refreshments. Pre-booking is essential, by phoning **01444 473520** or email **shirley.carmannmartin@ngs.org.uk** for further information & booking.

If you didn't know, you can listen out for Geoff on *BBC Radio Sussex's "Sunday Gardening"* with Pat Marsh, on both Sunday 1st February and again on 1st March and then regularly, every Sunday from 29th March until the end of September, to hear about all the beautiful gardens opening for the scheme across Sussex each week, throughout the year.

Jobs to do in the garden

This month is the perfect time to prepare yourself for the summer. Check your tools are sound and your garden machinery is in good working order and apply a little TLC to anything that needs it. While you're at it, why not tidy your shed ahead of the imminent planting & sowing season. I'm pretty sure you'll thank yourself for a clean & tidy space later! Weather permitting have a go at blitzing perennial weeds in your beds and kitchen garden. Dig them up, roots and all, to get a head start on the blighters before the weather warms up.

If you haven't already, cut back the old foliage from ornamental grasses before any new growth appears, clip them to within a few centimetres of the ground. Overwintered fuchsias can be pruned back to one or two buds on each shoot. If you have any winter pansies out there, make sure you remove the faded flowers, to stop them setting seed. More importantly, this will encourage a flush of new flowers when the weather warms up.

Hydrangeas

I've got quite a few hydrangeas in containers and now is quite a good time to go out and prune them. The dead flowers do give some interest over the winter and some say, they protect the new growth from frost. You should be able to see quite clearly the stems that need attention. Trim them down and this will give way to new growth in the next few weeks. You need to cut each flower stem back to a healthy pair of new buds and wait for the plants to dazzle again this Summer.

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 in the January when I paid to have all my boundary hedges cut back but they will need trimming by hand again before too long. 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 and keep leaving food and water out for them to help them through the cold spells.

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.