



Green and pleasant

JANUARY might be the middle of winter and usually the coldest month of the year, but as the days lengthen the garden starts to grow, now is a great time to plan for the coming gardening year and to order seeds and plants. Enjoy the fresh air, on dry sunny days, and check your winter protection, stakes, ties and supports are still working after any severe weather. Also put out food for birds and leave some garden areas uncut, a little longer, to provide shelter for wildlife in your plot.

By **Geoff Stonebanks**

Forward planning can also include picking a date to visit some of the amazing snowdrop gardens opening for the National Garden Scheme over the next two months too. Their 2022 website went live last month with all the gardens opening throughout the year and I'll talk more about that below.

New Year's resolutions

Have you made any gardening related resolutions for 2022? I certainly have. As part of my desire to ease the burden of opening the garden to the public by simplifying the layout and complexity of planting, it still has to have the wow factor. The many containers, packed to the

gunnels with annuals, creating vast canopies of colour, will no longer be a main feature of the garden. Part of the overall plan for creating the new sunken garden was to drastically reduce the number of containers throughout the plot. The weather over the last few years has tended to beat their contents down and there is nothing worse than a soggy petunia! The challenge this Spring will be to create interest from the amazing sculpture in the garden and to create mini vistas that catch visitors eye as they wander around. I already have much rusty metal and it will go so well with the new bank of up-ended railway sleepers. The use of specimen palms and shrubs that had disappeared into the previous layout will not come into their own and be appreciated. A gorgeous fuchsia, that belonged to my father, has always faded into the mix of other plants, this

summer it will look extra special on its own at the top of the garden.

National Garden Scheme Snowdrop openings

This year Sussex can enjoy six plots opening their garden gates to display snowdrops, through late January and February. Four of those six will require you to prebook your visit online, so why not take a look and pick your slot now. The first is *5 Whitemans Close* in Cuckfield, opening on ten different dates between 25th January and 17th February. *Pembury House* in Clayton, will open every Tuesday to Friday between 10th February and 11th March. Over in West Sussex, *Denmans Gardens* in Fontwell opens on the 19th February and *Bates Green* in Arlington on the 20th February. The other two, *Highdown Gardens* in Goring by Sea on 16th February and the *Manor of Dean* near Petworth on 6th February can be visited and paid for on the day! Log on to www.ngs.org.uk for all the garden details on each of the seven and remember to book your visit as slots go quickly.

Frosty weather

The header this month shows a lovely image from my garden of the frost on a beautiful shrub that can be relied upon to flower all through the year, *Coronilla glauca* which hails from the Mediterranean. It is a perfect addition to the garden for the winter months as the flowers brighten up your outlook, with or without the frost! More importantly, they thrive on neglect. It is a small bushy evergreen shrub with blue-grey, pinnate leaves and heads of fragrant rich yellow flowers. The plant grows happily in a range of sunny, sheltered habitats and is generally pest and disease free. That said, the one pictured is in a very exposed part of my beach garden and does well.

I love a layer of frost across my garden, it transforms it into a winter wonderland as the droplets of ice edge all the rusty metal sculptures and features, a sight to behold on a cold wintry morning I can attest.

Garden tidy up

January is a good month, on dry crisp days, to clear away soggy, collapsed stems of perennials and compost/discard them. I've got some wonderful hellebores in the beach garden and have just removed foliage marked with black blotches, to limit the spread of leaf spot disease. Check that any small alpine in your garden don't become smothered by fallen leaves and other wind-blown debris, resulting in them rotting away. If you have some displays of winter pansies and other bedding then make sure you deadhead regularly, and remove any foliage affected by downy mildew. Don't forget to check on any plants in your greenhouse to ensure they have not dried out. Mine is so crammed full of plants, it is quite difficult to get around and access them all. I've always felt like I was completing a jigsaw each autumn, trying to pack everything in. I always find it quite useful to employ a moisture meter to check the compost before watering. Any plants that are over-watered through the winter stand less chance of survival.

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.