



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**

There is lots of forward planning you can do from the warmth of your house which 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 2026 website went live last month with all the gardens opening throughout the year and I'll talk more about that below.

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 alpines 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.

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 as I can attest.

Fun project

A fun idea for your garden this year might be to take a photograph from the same point, on the same date in each of the 12 months of the year! Maybe using several points of interest. This is something I've done over the years and it is quite surprising to look back at the collection and actually see the changes, across both the months and the seasons of the year! I'm planning to do the same throughout 2026 with my both my beach garden at the front of the house and the main garden at the back.

National Garden Scheme

The new year always heralds the beginning of the new open garden season and there are still gardens to see in the depths of winter. Why not book a visit to see the fabulous snowdrops at 5 Whitemens Close in Cuckfield, near Haywards Heath, RH17 5DE. The openings, for pre-booked visitors only commence on the 26th January and run through to the 18th February on these selected dates, 26th, 28th, 30th January and 2nd, 4th, 10th, 12th, 14th, 17th and finally 18th February. 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.carmanmartin@ngs.org.uk** for further information & booking.

This garden shows that winter need not be dull as there is much to see and enjoy in the depths of winter. Shirley has collected many single and double snowdrops, hellebores, bulbs and other winter treasures, some not widely known. It is a sheltered garden, and there are plenty of flowers to enjoy in January and early February. See the enormous *Daphne bholua* that scents the garden for weeks on end at this time of 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.