



Green and pleasant

JANUARY can often be the coldest month by far, although we had some pretty cold days in December too. It might still be the middle of winter but as the days begin to lengthen, the garden will start to grow. Now is the perfect time, sat by a glowing fire indoors, to plan for the coming gardening year and maybe order seeds and plants, if not already done. Let's hope for some sunny days when we can enjoy the fresh air and check the winter protection, such as stakes, fleeces, ties and supports. I make sure that I put out food for the birds and if you have suitable areas in your garden, leave uncut a little longer to provide shelter for wildlife.

By **Geoff Stonebanks**

If you purchased a real tree for the festive season, you may be wondering what to do with it. Some suggestions I've picked up online are to let it rot as real trees are biodegradable, and unlike many other types of timber are free from wood preservatives. The rotting tree fragments support many insects and other wildlife, as well as improving the soil and feeding nearby plants. Shredding Christmas trees greatly speeds up their decomposition and the end result makes a good mulch. Alternatively, take it along to a council collection area and let them make best use of it.

The Winter Garden

Many summer visitors ask if I open my garden through the winter months, as they would like to come and see the bare bones of the plot. To date, this is not something I have done, primarily I suppose as everything is put away for the winter and I've got no undercover areas for anyone to sit and enjoy refreshments in colder weather. I always say to them if they are really desperate to come and see then to give me a ring and if it is convenient, then fine! Over the years, I guess a dozen or so people have done this but I've not charged, just asked for a donation to *Macmillan Cancer Support*.

In some ways it is a shame not to open, especially on a cold frosty winter morning. The garden becomes a winter wonderland with a light dusting of snow or a heavy frost. The large presence of rusty metal pieces, across both front and back gardens, creates the perfect framework upon which snow and frost are beautifully displayed.

There are many rusty metal flowers throughout the garden and they are beautifully decorated with glistening frost in the winter too. I always tell visitors that the excessive use of metalwork across the garden not only enhances its look through the summer months but really come into its own through the winter months. In the summer there is generally lots of colour on show but in the winter the vistas around the plot rely heavily on the range of greenery and metal sculptures.

National Garden Scheme

Late January sees the start of the open garden season for the *National Garden Scheme*. They begin with the wonderful snowdrop visits but at time of writing no final decision made for late January openings in Sussex, so please do check the scheme's web site for all the details. Last month, the *National Garden Scheme* published record donations for 2023 of £3,403,960 which has been donated to some of the UK's best-loved nursing and health charities.

Looking good in January

There are some plants that are really at their very best in the winter. One in particular is Siberian Dogwood and its gorgeous red stems. Its proper name is *Cornus alba*

"Sibirica", Dogwoods are mostly grown for their wonderful coloured stems and can provide a fabulous bright flash of colour in Autumn and Winter. They look good with other species in a mixed hedge or standing on their own. Dogwoods are very hardy and do well in sunny sites or partial shade and especially in moist areas. Mine is in the back garden, adjacent to the new patio by the shed where it is clearly visible from the house, especially through the winter months. Another gorgeous winter shrub is *camellia Yuletide*, producing stunning flowers. Mine is located in the shade near the house and can be seen from the kitchen to cheer up any dull winter's day. It is a very pretty shrub, flowering in the garden over the festive season and beyond. It is well-named for its profusion of rich red flowers, with each crimson bloom boasting a golden crown of stamens at its centre, creating a vibrant winter display.

My collection of ferns look great at the moment, see header. Some years I trim the old fronds in the autumn but this year I will leave them until the spring and trim just before new shoots develop.

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 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 2 Royal Garden Parties, in 2018 and 2023. Read the many published features on the garden in national, local and worldwide media, including TV.