



Green and pleasant

Welcome to this brand-new venture in print and online and my monthly gardening column. I hope to be able to encourage and inspire readers to engage with their own plots. Some readers may know of me, or have perhaps visited my seaside garden, Driftwood, in Bishopstone.

By **Geoff Stonebanks**

Spring is fast approaching and it is a good time of year to think about buying plug plants, either online or in your local garden centre. If you buy online they generally get dispatched with step by step instructions. You don't even need a greenhouse to grow them on. A sunny windowsill in a spare bedroom or kitchen will also do the trick. A great tip is to give the ends a pinch a couple of times while the plants are young as this will help make them nice and bushy with more flowers.

Place your stakes

If you have any tall growing plants in the garden it always makes great sense to put stakes in place to support them now. New shoots can then grow up through them thus

avoiding any damage done if left too late. Adding supports afterwards is always difficult and often looks unattractive. Dahlia lovers should be checking any tubers that have been stored for the winter. Now is the time to get them into the light and start their growth. Check each tuber is firm, part fill pots with multi-purpose compost, place tubers inside and just cover with more compost, place somewhere warm and light and water. They should start to shoot within a couple of weeks. They can be grown on by transferring to the ground or, as in my garden, they are left in containers.

National Garden Scheme

Many will know I volunteer for the National Garden Scheme, so I plan to mention a garden each month that opens for the scheme. This month the

East Sussex County Organiser opens her garden at Butlers Farmhouse in Butlers Lane in Herstmonceux over the weekend of Saturday 28th and Sunday 29th March, between 2pm and 5pm. This is a lovely rural setting for her 1-acre garden, which surrounds the 16th century farmhouse, providing views of the South Downs. It is pretty in spring with daffodils, hellebores and primroses. Quite a quirky garden with surprises around every corner, including a rainbow border, small pond, Cornish inspired beach corners, a poison garden and secret jungle garden.

**Admission will be: £4.00.
Full details at www.ngs.org.uk**

Mother's Day

The 22nd March is Mother's Day, more often than not we all show our love for our Mum with flowers, or a plant that might suit her personality or style. It's always hard to know what to buy! My top three choices would be stunning tulips, they come in so many beautiful colours. A popular second choice, a gorgeous orchid, their blooms often last a long time and they can make a real statement. A third option might be some luscious lilies, their big blooms are often sold in bud, once they start to open up they are truly a wonder to behold. They can be found in a variety of soft and bold colours to match your Mum's mood.

Buddleia time

A garden favourite is the popular buddleia. Now is a good time to prune to a framework of branches and encourage lots of vigorous new shoots that will have time to mature and flower this summer. Cut back

last year's flowered stems to within one or two buds of old wood, or you can prune back harder if you need to rejuvenate. I've got a couple around my pond, two buddleia buzz magenta, this compact variety still needs a prune every year.

Pruning roses

Now is also the last time, before the summer, for pruning roses, leaving it any later may mean cutting away stems with well-developed new shoots. You can however be as ruthless as you are as you are unlikely to kill it.

**You can read more of Geoff's garden at:
www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk**

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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'.