



Green and pleasant

MARCH is the official beginning of spring but it can still be very cold at times, so keep an eye on the weather forecast and wait to do jobs if conditions aren't quite right. The clocks also go forward on the 27th of the month, so the lengthening daylight hours will help plants to really get growing. Spring bulbs start to take centre stage in the borders and in patio pots, rewarding your efforts for planting them last autumn.

By **Geoff Stonebanks**

If you are into growing vegetables, now is the time to get seeds started in the greenhouse, and you can sow hardy seeds straight outdoors into their final positions. It's also time to kickstart your flower displays. Start sowing flower seeds undercover to enjoy colourful displays come summer.

Bulbs take centre stage!

This is the month when any spring bulbs we planted last autumn really take centre stage in our gardens. I suppose the main ones we all like to plant and grow are tulips, daffodils, crocus and hyacinths. I have quite a few of each at *Driftwood*, the stunning hyacinths in the header are in my garden now. I have a over 30 containers planted with spring bulbs and many planted directly in the ground too. The great

advantage of having them planted in a container means you can move the pot and place that fabulous splash of colour anywhere in the garden to maximum effect! Then, as the flowers die back, move the pot back to a less eye-catching spot.

Alternatively, if you adopt the lasagne method of bulb planting, which involves planting layers of bulbs in pots, just like making lasagne, the result is a pot crammed with wave after wave of spring flowers, giving you colour right through spring. To achieve this, place the latest-flowering bulbs at the bottom of the pot, with layers of earlier-flowering bulbs above them.

National Garden Scheme

This year sees the welcome return to the scheme of a beautiful plants woman's garden in Arlington. Opening for the first time, at this time of year, is *Bates Green* in Tye Hill Road, Arlington, BN26 6SH. The plot is a 1.5-acre tranquil space with

a woodland garden created around a majestic oak tree with courtyard gardens and seasonal container displays. The front garden is a winter and spring joy with narcissi, primroses, violets, early tulips and coloured stems of cornus and salix.

This garden has been owned by the McCutchan family since 1921 and was developed and skillfully planted by Carolyn McCutchan when she moved to the property in 1968. The garden was renowned for its colourful imaginative planting and *Bates Green* has featured in many magazine articles. Since Carolyn's death in 2019, the garden has been undergoing a period of restoration by a small team of gardeners led by Emma Reece who was a student of Carolyn's in 2002.

Pre-booking is essential for its only March date, Sunday 20th from 10:30am to 4:00pm, when refreshments and light lunches will be available too. Entry will be £6 for adults and £3 for children and you must buy your tickets at www.ngs.org.uk

Mother's Day 2022

This year the day the clocks go back and Mother's Day both fall on the same day, Sunday 27th March. In the UK and across the world the favoured gift for Mothers always seems to be a bouquet of flowers or a pot plant. We're told that the pink carnation specifically represents a mother's love, but white, which symbolizes pure or unconditional love and good luck, is another good choice. As a bonus, carnations are one of the longer lasting cut flowers that you can buy, which means your gift will last. It's all down to personal choice, my mother is not a lover of carnations and I tend to buy her favourite which are freesias. It seems the top five chosen for Mum each year are tulips, roses, peonies, carnations and orchids. Take your pick and buy what you think your Mum will enjoy!

Spring perennials for March

Here are three lovely perennials for this time of year, all of which I have in my own garden.

The first is *Pulsatilla*, this delightful little hardy perennial is perfect for filling gaps in rockeries and gravel gardens. From late March to May, *Pulsatilla vulgaris* produces bright purple flowers above clumps of finely dissected, downy foliage. Attractive, furry seed heads replace the flowers as they fade, extending the season of interest into summer. Best grown where it can be left to establish without disturbance, and it will seed about to create spreading groups.

The second, *Hellebore Argutifolius*, pale green flowers hang above leathery, prickly-edged, sea-green leaves from January to March. This popular evergreen, Corsican hellebore makes an architectural statement in the middle of a mixed or shrub border, its handsome foliage is a long-lasting source of interest after the flowers have passed.

The third is *Bergenia*, commonly known as elephant's ears, because of their large, leathery, oval leaves. They are low maintenance, evergreen, will grow in sun or shade and tolerate a wide range of soils, including dry soils and clay.

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.