



Green and pleasant

WITH any luck we can expect to see Spring arrive by mid-March and the more frequent sunny days will provide the opportunity for an increasing range of gardening tasks. The clocks spring forward on Sunday 31st March, giving us a clear indication that better, and hopefully longer, gardening days are on their way. It's time to get busy preparing seed beds, sowing seed, cutting back winter shrubs and generally tidying up around the garden. Once you've finished all your labours you could treat yourself to a garden visit, perhaps looking for inspiration. With daffodils, spring flowers and blossoms adding colour, there will be some lovely gardens waiting to be explored through March with the *National Garden Scheme*.

By **Geoff Stonebanks**

If you grow herbaceous plants that benefit from support, such as phlox or delphiniums get the supports in place as soon as your plants have sufficient growth then their growth will cover them as they fill out. If you are growing snowdrops, now is the best time to move them or divide up clumps, after flowering but their leaves are still showing. Moving and dividing them will increase the number of flowers you have and encourage better flowering next season from your invigorated clumps.

Mother's Day

The 10th 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, see some growing in my garden in the header, 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, 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.

Garden tasks

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 three lovely plants around my corten steel pond, three buddleia buzz, magenta, lilac and white. This compact variety still needs a prune every year.

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 go on planting summer flowering bulbs into April, especially those that flower in late summer and autumn. It's a bit late for most lilies, but there are plenty of other options that will look great in borders, or will make a real statement in a pot, tub or window box.

Positive planning

Gardening really begins in earnest for me this month. There are just over 12 weeks until I plan to open *Driftwood* to the public for the 2024 season. The winter months have not been kind with extensive winds and there is much to do. A key task this month, will be to pressure clean all the paths and patios. The difference should be very clear to see, as the patios and paths are really dirty! To be honest, it is not a job I enjoy, but one that needs doing before all the garden

ornaments and furniture are taken back out of winter storage. It can take me over a week to accomplish in stages, from the top of the garden, right through to the drive at the front of the house.

National Garden Scheme

Pembury House in Clayton opens on the 7th and 8th March for pre-booked visitors. Depending on the vagaries of the season, hellebores will be at their best in March. Traverse winding paths which give a choice of walks through three acres of garden, which enjoys views of the *South Downs National Park*.

Bates Green Garden will open for the scheme on Sunday 17th March between 10:30am and 4pm with entry £7 adult and children £3. Pre-booking essential at www.ngs.org.uk This plants woman's tranquil garden provides interest through all the seasons. See the woodland garden, created around a majestic oak tree then move on to the colour themed middle garden. Enjoy courtyard gardens with seasonal container displays. The front garden is a spring joy with narcissi, primroses and violets. Visitors can walk through a wild daffodil glade and there is wheelchair access and mobility scooters area available to borrow, free of charge.

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.