



Green and pleasant

SPRING is in full swing, but the weather can still catch us out. Here on the south coast, May is a month when the more tender plants can be put outside, but only to harden off, and not in more exposed areas. This month usually hosts the *Chelsea Flower Show* and is famous for the “*Chelsea Chop*”, which is great for stopping some plants getting too big and leggy.

By **Geoff Stonebanks**

There is no flower show again this month, it's scheduled for later in the year, but read on for more about the chop and don't forget to feed your plants in order to get the best from them all this summer. The advent of the clocks going forward now gives us all more time to spend outdoors.

Purple power

One of my favourite colours hues in the garden is purple. A plant that abounds throughout my garden, especially in the beach garden at the front (shown in header), is *Verbena bonariensis*, which rises majestically from the gravel in huge clumps swaying in the breeze. I started off with a single plant and over the last few years it has self-seeded and

I just let it go. I love it and would recommend it to any garden owner.

Then there's a plant that I bought back in 2014, not knowing much about it, *Salvia 'Amistad'*. It has been incredible in my garden for seven years now producing blooms up to six feet tall in the beds by the fence. It's almost electric blue blooms make a really dramatic statement and visitors to the garden love it too.

The National Garden Scheme

Some of you may have managed to get your hands on a copy of the scheme's Sussex Booklet. I am very pleased to say that Driftwood features on the cover! With government restrictions being eased, month by month, the opportunity to go further afield and visit a garden will, I'm sure, be very attractive. There are a large number of gardens scheduled to open during May across Sussex, some will need pre-booked tickets

others will also allow you to pay at the gate. Go to: www.ngs.org.uk/east-sussex to see all the local venues and booking arrangements.

Chelsea Chop

Most gardeners will have heard the phrase, the *Chelsea Chop*, but what is it and what does it mean? It's a pruning technique used at this time of the year which helps to control and limit the size and flowering season of many herbaceous plants. According to the RHS, there are three suggestions or methods to ensure the *Chelsea Chop* is effective. Which method you choose will depend on the type of plant, how big your plant clump is and the effect you want to achieve.

- a) Clumps of perennials can literally be chopped back by one third to a half, using shears or secateurs. This will delay the flowering until later in the summer and keep plants shorter and more compact.
- b) If you have several clumps of one plant, try cutting back some of them, but leaving others. This will prolong the overall flowering time as some will flower early and the others later.
- c) Another method is to cut half the stems back at the front of an established clump, which will extend the season of flowering rather than delay it.

Fuchsias

Garden Fuchsias are really easy plants to grow, though can be slightly fussy about moisture and temperature. They work very well in containers, perfect for my garden and most will thrive in part shade to full shade, which is a real bonus for the north facing patio at the back of my house. They don't like to be too hot, and they especially hate dry heat. Fuchsias are also much-loved for their long-flowering period from summer through into the autumn. They bear hanging bell-shaped flowers in a

range of colours, including white, pink, purple and red, which are often referred to as ballerinas!

For those that get addicted, there's a huge number of different fuchsia varieties available to grow – some are hardy, while others are half hardy and require winter protection. Hardy types are grown as garden shrubs, whilst half-hardy plants are ideal for using as bedding in summer displays in hanging baskets or pots. Check out your local garden centre for your favourites.

Summer annuals

For a successful summer bedding display, be it in containers or in the ground, make sure you don't bring your plants out of the greenhouse until you know the frosty nights are behind you. It's also important to acclimatise them in your garden before you plant them into their final positions. I was caught out last month with the sudden change in the weather and had to fleece some of mine just to make sure no damage could be inflicted on them. When planting up in containers, a trick passed on to me by my Aunt, many years ago to help with containers drying out too quickly, was to always line the base of each one, especially the smaller ones, with some aluminium foil, to create an inner saucer that will always retain some moisture and avoid plants drying out too quickly. Trust me it works a treat for me.

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.