



Green and pleasant

IN MAY the days are longer and warmer, hopefully the risk of frost will have passed by the end of the month, and there is plenty to do in the garden, greenhouse and vegetable plot. You'll want to start tidying and cutting back your spring plants, planting out flowers and vegetables for summer and maybe preparing for autumn, sowing seeds and planting out chrysanthemums.

By **Geoff Stonebanks**

Once spring bulbs are over, rather than cutting down the foliage, leave to die and break down naturally. Doing this and adding liquid fertiliser around the clumps will encourage strong growth next spring. It's still an idea to deadhead any faded flowers to prevent plants wasting energy creating seed heads.

Driftwood

Over the *Queen's Platinum Jubilee Weekend*, 2nd to 5th June, we will be opening by arrangement, serving appropriately topped cakes for the Royal occasion, there may even be a chance encounter with a certain person too, see header. Throughout the month, in readiness, I will be busy dressing the area with my vast collection of succulents that have

been over-wintered in the heated greenhouse or the front and back porches of the house! The aim this year is to create a display that will win over visitors but be not quite so demanding on me, especially from a watering perspective. I have managed to cut right back on the use of containers of summer annuals and focus more on drought tolerant plants. Why not book a visit to come and see for yourself, Jubilee weekend or throughout June or July, full contact details can be found on my website!

National Garden Scheme

This month sees a brand-new garden open for the scheme in Burnt Oak Road in High Hurstwood, near Uckfield. *Hollymount* is a 7-acre garden, set on a sloping hillside brimming with interest. There are four large ponds, a stream, waterfalls, terraced beds with many interesting plants, some tropical. The garden opens over the weekend of the 21st and 22nd May from 11am to 5pm.

Admission is £7 with children free. It is a very peaceful setting with some amazing views.

A bit closer to home, two lovely gardens open in Eastbourne on Sunday 29th May too. *Hardwycke* and *Dittons End*, both in Southfields Road, open from 11am to 4pm with combined entry of £5. The former is a delightful south facing town garden with many usual and unusual plants. The latter, a small, well-maintained town garden. The back boasts a small lawn with pots and borders brimming with colour. A bonus here, you can take dogs on leads too. Full details on all three gardens can be found at www.ngs.org.uk

The Chelsea Chop

Well, as we all know, this month sees the return of the world-famous *Chelsea Flower Show* at this time of year, taking place between 24th and 28th May. A phrase all gardeners will know associated with the show is the "Chelsea Chop" and it is a pruning method by which you limit the size and control the flowering season of many herbaceous plants.

After you've cut back your plants, make sure you give them a thorough watering and some feed. According to the *RHS*, these three suggestions are made for it to be effective.

- a) Clumps of perennials can be 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 a few, but leaving others. This will prolong the overall flowering time.
- c) Another method is to cut half the stems back at the front of the clump which will extend the season of flowering rather than delay it.

I do have some in my garden that are suitable for the chop! I have a small bed with *Achillea Moonshine* which can get tall and leggy, so cutting them back in May encourages the production of more flowers. Another one that works well is *Nepeta*, some of which I have under a sea buckthorn tree. Some other suggestions for the chop are heleniums, penstemons, sedums, echinacea and phlox.

Preparing for summer

Whether you are getting your garden ready to open to the public, or just preparing it for your own summer enjoyment, there can be a hard-working regime to follow to get it just right!

Over the many years I have been doing it, the task always begins with the power cleaning of the hard surfaces. It's amazing what you can achieve in making your plot look good with just clean looking paths, brick work and garden sculpture. My box courtyard has a lovely brick finish but until you blast the bricks individually, you just don't realise how dirty they have become. It may be time consuming, but well worth the effort to pressure clean every individual brick as well as the grouting between. This year has not been quite so onerous as I have not had to spend too much time on the new patio area, just the older hard surfaces.

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.