



Pictured above, sea campion, in the Driftwood beach garden.

Green and pleasant

AT last, summer is on its way, as proven by our bulbs fading and our herbaceous borders growing in leaps and bounds. We can begin planting out summer bedding and take softwood cuttings. There is such a huge variety of plug plants available that it's not easy to know where to start, but the easiest to look after are tender geraniums, also called pelargoniums. They come in either trailing or upright varieties and will withstand a certain degree of neglect, which plants like lobelia just won't take. If you're putting bedding plants or hanging baskets in the shade, busy lizzies are perfect, especially the white flowered ones, as they lighten up and thrive in darker corners.

By **Geoff Stonebanks**

It's also time to get back into the lawn mowing regime, if you have one, as it will be loving the warmer temperatures this month brings. Take care and watch out for any late frosts forecast and take last minute steps to protect your tender plants. Frost can affect many plants, and is particularly damaging to tender new growth and blossom in the spring. The risks of frost damage can be reduced by taking some simple steps to protect the plants in your garden like covering overnight with a fleece.

Summer visits to Driftwood

May sees me swing full-time into getting the garden ready for visitors at *Driftwood* from 1st June through until the 31st July. As in 2023, all garden visits will need to be pre-booked by either calling **01323 899296** or emailing **visitdriftwood@gmail.com**. I'm very pleased to say that almost 200 have already booked to visit. Several local gardening societies or Women's Institute groups have made bookings for visits too, so it promises to be a busy two months. There will be eight local artists selling their wares, all beautifully displayed throughout the

garden. Full details on the garden website www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk

Chelsea Chop

This month sees the *Chelsea Flower Show* take place and May is traditionally the time to deliver the "*Chelsea Chop*", so called because it's often done around the time of the event. It is great process for stopping some plants getting too big and leggy, and with others, staggering flowering times. If you haven't used the *Chelsea Chop* before, it has two main purposes.

Firstly, it makes the plant more compact, which makes it useful to use on plants with a sprawling habit, such as *Nepeta*. It will reduce the length of its flowering stems so it's shorter and less top heavy. It will also make the plant bush more, which means it is ideal for plants which have a tendency to become leggy later in the summer.

Secondly, using the *Chelsea Chop*, which is in effect cutting the plant back, also delays flowering, because the plant needs to grow on more before it can flower. This means you can have some plants, of the same type, flowering later to stagger the flowering period.

National Garden Scheme

This month sees more gardens opening up for the scheme across the county. Just along the coast, in Seaford, readers can find *Lavender Cottage*, in Steyne Road opening on Wednesday 22nd May between 1.30pm and 5pm. Opening up for a combined admission, at the same time, is *Cupani garden*, located at 8 Sandgate Close in the town. You will need to book online to visit and the combined entry, including a home-made tea, is £12. Please phone **01323 899452** or email **sweetpeasa52@gmail.com** for information & booking.

Lavender Cottage has a flint walled front garden with cottage, coastal and kitchen gardens and the back has a terraced bank planted with trees, shrubs and lavenders. Climb the steps to the balcony and enjoy an iconic view of Seaford Head. *Cupani* is a tranquil haven with a delightful mix of trees, shrubs and perennial border, a courtyard garden, gazebo, summerhouse, water features, sweet pea obelisks and a huge range of plants.

Along the coast in the other direction, 96 Ashford Road in Hastings will open on Saturdays the 11th, 18th and 25th of the month. The garden will be open from 1.30pm to 4.30pm, with entry £3. It is a small (100ft x 52ft) Japanese inspired front and back garden, full of interesting planting with many acers, azaleas and bamboos. See over 100 different hosta, many miniature ones and step inside an attractive Japanese Tea House. Full details on the three gardens can be found at www.ngs.org.uk

Hector

This year has been a worrying time dealing with our tortoise, Hector! He was so very early waking up from his hibernation due to a very warm February. He's now out in the garden and seems to be his old self again and slowly starting to enjoy his food. He loves interacting with visitors and looks forward to welcoming them back this summer.

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 twice 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 two Royal Garden Parties, in 2018 and 2023. Read the many published features on the garden in national, local and worldwide media, including TV.