



Green and pleasant

IN May the days are longer, hopefully warmer and there is plenty to do in the garden, greenhouse and vegetable plot. Perhaps begin to tidy and cut back your spring plants, planting out flowers and vegetables for summer and maybe preparing for autumn, sowing seeds and planting out chrysanthemums. The weather can sometimes catch us out though, so keep an eye out for, unpredictable changes from mild spells to low temperatures and chilly winds.

By **Geoff Stonebanks**

All gardening advice has to be adjusted though to consider the weather. Each Spring brings different weather from the previous year. Hopefully we should be frost free by the end of the month, but it is always an idea to have a fleece or cloche handy. With the world-renowned flower show later this month, May is the time we hear those immortal words, "Chelsea Chop" time. It is great method for stopping some plants getting too big and leggy, and with others, staggering their flowering times.

Driftwood opening 2025

2025 has been quite challenging so far. As you read this, I will be recovering from replacement knee

surgery. It's going to be frustrating in the coming weeks not being able to do what I want out in the garden. I worked very hard, up to being admitted into hospital, to get the garden as ready as I could. *Driftwood* is open, by arrangement only, from 1st June through until the 3rd August! That said, I would encourage visitors to book from mid-June onwards, as my expected 6-week recovery concludes then and hopefully I will be a little more mobile. I hope to have some trusty help on hand if I am still in difficulty. Email visitdriftwood@gmail.com to arrange a summer visit.

National Garden Scheme

There are a couple of brand-new gardens opening for the scheme this month. First up is *Kotamki* in Tottingworth Park, Broad Oak, near Heathfield on Saturday 17th May from 10am to midday with entry

£12 and children £6. Pre-booking is essential, at www.ngs.org.uk. A talk by the owners about the garden will take place at 10:30am. This is a large creatively planted garden featuring a long double border within yew hedging, rockery, shade garden, exotic garden, pot garden, wildflower meadows, and kitchen garden. There is an emphasis on continuity of interest via imaginative mixed plantings.

Secondly, we have *The White House* in Redbridge Lane, Crowborough opening both days on the weekend of the 17th and 18th May from 11am to 4pm with entry £6. Sitting high on a hill with 180-degree panoramic views, overlooking the downs for 25 miles in an area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The main garden has been redesigned to incorporate the borrowed landscape with herbaceous borders in a cottage garden style and see the moongates in the walled kitchen garden.

96 Ashford Road in Hastings opens on 3 Saturdays in May, 10th, 17th and 24th from 1pm to 4:30pm with entry £4. This is a small (100ft x 52ft) Japanese inspired front and back garden which is full of interesting planting with many acers, azaleas and bamboos. See over 100 different hostas, many miniature ones. Don't miss the attractive Japanese Tea House and courtyard with fish pond and the new Japanese bridge and pond in the lower garden too.

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 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 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.

Summer annuals

For a successful summer bedding display in containers, why not try a trick passed on to me by my Aunt, many years ago, to help prevent them drying out too quickly. She always lined 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. I've used the tip year on year and it works for me.

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.