



Green and pleasant

MAY is a bumper month for Bank Holidays, with two coming up on the 4th and 25th. Perfect opportunities for long weekends to get out and prepare your garden for the upcoming summer. It is certainly my busiest month, preparing for Driftwood's *by arrangement* openings throughout June and July. 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.

By **Geoff Stonebanks**

This month hosts the Chelsea Flower Show and is famous for the "Chelsea Chop", which is great for stopping some plants getting too big and leggy. 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.

National Garden Scheme

Due to a typing error the May 10th opening of the fabulous *Legsheathe Farm* was omitted from the Sussex Booklet and the annual handbook. It is however listed correctly on the website at www.ngs.org.uk. The garden

can be found in Legsheathe Lane, near Forest Row, Sussex, RH19 4JN and it opens from 1:30pm to 4:30pm with entry £10. There is an image of the garden in the header. *Legsheathe* was first mentioned in Duchy of Lancaster records in 1545. It was associated with the role of Master of the Ashdown Forest. Set high in the Weald, with far-reaching views of *East Grinstead* and *Weirwood Reservoir*. The garden covers 11 acres, with a spring-fed stream feeding ponds. There is a magnificent *Davidia*, rare shrubs, *embothrium*, and many different varieties of *meconopsis* and *abutilon*.

Other gardens to visit this month are 96 Ashford Road in Hastings open on three dates through the month on the 2nd, 9th and 16th from 1pm to 4:30pm with entry £4. This is a small Japanese inspired front and back garden.

In the town, on the 31st of the month is 51 Carlisle Road, BN21 4JR and *Chelmsford Lodge* at 12 Granville Road, BN20 7HE, both open from 1pm to 5pm with combined entry of £5. The former is a secluded, award-winning small garden with glorious early summer colour and the latter is a beautiful ¾ acre garden featuring a magnificent collection of unusual and mature trees. Full details on all four plots at www.ngs.org.uk

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.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

Driftwood opening 2026

Don't forget, Geoff's multi-award-winning garden, will be open again this summer, for pre booked visitors only, from 1st June through until 2nd August. Book your slot by emailing visitdriftwood@gmail.com or by calling Geoff on **01323 899296**, for individuals or groups of up to 25.

Read more of Geoff's garden at: www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk or follow both him and the garden on social media.

Geoff is a member of the Garden Media Guild and 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.