

Over the FENCE

...Continued

Gardening and recovering

Before my knee replacement last month, two professional photographers came. Jon Santa Cruz took some portrait shots of me to use with associated articles this summer and John Glover's purpose was to just shoot the beach garden at the front of the house, which has looked pretty amazing this spring, with outstanding colour provided by the *Helleborus argutifolius*, *Coronilla valentina glauca* and the *Euphorbia characias*, three fabulous shades of yellow.

I really don't recall a spring where the front garden has looked quite so dramatic and stunning. That said, the warm weather through late March and early April really helped.

I've had to put my succulents out a little early despite the risk of frost, as I can't do anything in the garden through May. It's all pretty frustrating, I can tell you. All the succulents from the heated greenhouse are now laid out across the garden. They've all benefited from being out in the early April sunshine.

There was certainly a lot to do, trimming hedges and such



Geoff Stonebanks

A seaside garden in East Sussex that opens for charity, featuring sculpture and reclaimed objects.

like. I've acquired a couple of new plants for the garden, one purchased last autumn while on holiday in the New Forest, a dyckia 'Brittle Star' and two *Loropetalum chinense* 'Fire Dance'. The former is a highly unusual bromeliad. Native to southern America, dyckia has beautifully serrated foliage with silvery-white edges, forming a starry rosette. It isn't super-hardy, so has been kept indoors through winter. The latter originates from woodlands in China, Japan and Burma and forms a bushy mound of evergreen purple foliage, which also produces pink, witch hazel-like flowers from late winter to mid-spring. These have a sweet scent. I've had one come through last winter okay without any protection, so fingers crossed.

Another job I struggled to complete was the annual trim of



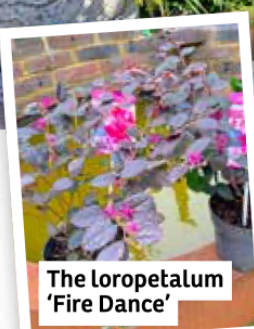
The spring garden is coming to life

the *Butia capitata* in the centre of the back gravel garden.

Its outer fronds get terribly wind burnt with the strong seasonal gales. I managed to get the chainsaw out and remove the offending ones and the palm looks quite regal again.

To help me garden after my recovery, I invested in a small, wheeled swivel seat to aid my working at lower levels. Time will tell if it proves useful!

The leaves on my two gunnera are



The Loropetalum 'Fire Dance'



Beach garden hues

starting to emerge after the winter and always look quite prehistoric as they dramatically unfurl and rise up in the garden. Both are in very large containers, one buried in the ground, the other sitting above it.

Read more of Geoff's garden at driftwoodbysea.co.uk. If you'd like to book a visit to the garden between June 1 and August 3, email Geoff at visitdriftwood@gmail.com



My new garden aid



The palm after its trim



Shooting with Jon Santa Cruz

My highlight
The triple whammy of the hellebore, coronilla and euphorbia dazzling in the beach garden.