

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



The bear and the bonsai Image: Geoff Stonebanks



New aeoniums



Sinningia

'This has to be one of the city's best kept secrets' - go see it

THIS week I have taken delivery of four new aeoniums to add to my ever-growing collection. They will stay indoors until I place all mine outside next month.

The four new beauties have some fabulous names, Plum Purdy, Blushing Beauty, Bronze Medal and Suncup. All have been potted up and need some sunshine for them to start to take on their usual appearance. Once I dress the garden with my collection in May, I'll place them into containers and position them all on the old railway sleepers on the back patio which is a real suntrap.

I've been working hard to ensure that all the 7 water features in the garden are cleaned and fully operative for when we open. I shut them down through the winter and empty the smaller ones of water to avoid damage if they freeze. My favourite still has to be the corten steel feature, close to the garden shed, which I installed in 2022. Also looking good are the two vintage children's horses, one of which you can see behind me, vaulting the hedge.

Opening for the National Garden Scheme this weekend is a wonderful trail of five gardens in Winchelsea, two of which are brand new for 2024. The gardens will be open from midday until 4pm today, the 20th and combined entry is £5. There will be clear signs directing you to a central paying point with teas served in the Winchelsea New Hall.

Right in the heart of the city on Sunday 21st, The Garden House at 5 Warleigh Road in Brighton will open its gate from 1pm to 5pm. Entry will be £6. This has to be one of the city's best kept secrets. It is a friendly garden, always changing, with a touch of magic to delight visitors, above all it is a slice of the country in the heart of the city. Full details on both gardens can be found at www.ngs.org.uk Don't forget to catch up with my weekly slot on BBC Radio Sussex tomorrow, with Pat Marsh, on Sunday Gardening at about 11.40. I'll be

talking about gardens that open for the scheme next week.

A lovely Christmas gift, bought for me by my mother last year, was the unique vintage wooden bear. It looks a bit sad and has seen better days but for me that is its attraction. I've now placed it on the sleeper bench, in front of the railway sleeper wall and it looks quite at home, next to one of my bonsai trees.

Right at the top of the garden I've got everything out ready to dress the old metal fireplace which is pinned to the wooden fence, behind the greenhouse. The old painted drainpipe tops are back, hanging above and the grate is ready, both waiting to be planted up next month. I'll be buying geraniums, osteospermum and gazenias to fill the gaps once the weather warms up a bit and it is safe to leave them out, without fear of frost.

I've owned a rather beautiful and slightly extraordinary plant for several years now and luckily, it is quite easy to grow. Brazilian Edelweiss or Sinningia leucotricha makes a fabulous house plant with its silver green, soft foliage that is delightful to look at and touch. This handsome, caudex style tuber is planted protruding from the soil. When in growth it reminds me of a tropical island with a palm tree in the centre. The tuber will grow up to 20cm across and last for decades. They should be planted into a good quality potting mix, then watered in, allowing the potting mix to almost dry out before watering again. Mine has been growing on an east facing bathroom window now for many years. The combination of a decorative tuber, bearing silver foliage as a foil for the contrasting pale orange flowers, makes for a very attractive sight as the picture shows.

They range in size from some of the smallest plants you can imagine, up to 1m tall or more. They are often found growing alongside Begonias and Bromeliads. Sinningia leucotricha grows on rocks around waterfalls, often in



Geoff and the water feature

accessible parts of Brazil. The showy salmon-coloured flowers begin to bloom just above the foliage in spring to early summer with foliage, losing the silver cast as flowers fade and then ultimately dropping off to begin a dormancy period but timing is not always predictable and leaves will sometimes stay on the plant longer, only shedding them when new leaves are emerging in early spring.

Throughout the years, mine has regularly produced two to three flower stems each year but, as you can see, it is currently throwing up over eight stems that will flower. The image also shows how it will look once in full flower.

Read more of Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk



The fireplace set