

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Th mangave collection



Geum Totally Tangerine



Agave

These unusual succulents make for a stylish design statement

THERE is much going on in the garden, lots of beautiful colour, like the stunning iris and the dazzling Geum Totally Tangerine. The former were given to me by a friendly neighbour, about ten years ago, so I regret I do not know the variety. This year they have produced many more flower heads than usual and now form two wonderful clumps in the beach garden at the front of the house. You can see how amazing they look in the photo.

The latter is a prolific flowering plant, with masses of single rich orange flowers blended with yellow carried on tall, well-branched stems way above a dense mound of large, hairy, mid-green leaves. This free-flowering plant is a tough and reliable addition to perennial borders where it will bloom non-stop from early summer right through until early autumn. The warm orange blooms of Geum Totally Tangerine also make fantastic cut flowers for a vase indoors.

There are many gardens opening for the National Garden Scheme at this time of the year, with several open this weekend for the scheme too. Tomorrow, you could visit Hollymount, in Burnt Oak Road, High Hurstwood, near Uckfield. The garden will open from midday to 5pm with entry £7. It is a new, seven-acre garden, set on a sloping hillside. There are four large ponds, a stream, waterfalls, terraced beds, interesting planting, some tropical, large rhododendrons, wildlife, alpacas, pigs, chickens, ducks, fish. The garden has a great variety of trees, two greenhouses, a shepherd's hut, summerhouse, paths, kitchen garden and many decks creating a very peaceful setting with great views.

Also tomorrow, and Monday is 9 Puttock Way in Billingshurst. It will open between 11am to 4pm with entry £5 but pre-booking is essential at www.ngs.org.uk It is a new plot for 2024 where you can see a very small, sloping, new build garden which has been transformed from bare heavy clay into a series of spaces with interesting hard landscaping features. An unexpected mix of

architectural shapes and textures greets you as you walk through the gate, a true plant lover's paradise. This space shows what can be achieved in a short space of time through hard work and passion.

Don't forget, I now join Pat Marsh on the BBC Sussex gardening programme every Sunday morning about 11.40am to update listeners on the gardens opening for the scheme each week across the county.

Blossoming beautifully in the beach garden is the fabulous Tamarix Tetrandra, it is a lax, medium-sized deciduous shrub with arching, almost black branches, minute green scale-like leaves and large plumes of light pink flowers in late spring. The shrub grows well in most soils but dislikes shallow chalky soil. It requires full sun and a well-drained sandy soil in coastal plantings and my two shrubs both look great in my coastal plot.

Regular readers will be well aware of my love for succulents, especially agave. I have a large collection of containers that get put out in the front garden through the summer months. They vary in size, but one of the largest is also one of my favourites, Agave Ovatifolia, otherwise known as the whale tongue agave. This relatively new species, which originates from the far north east corner of Mexico is, without question, one of the most stunning of them all. It has very chunky, perfectly formed rosettes, 180cm across and they can grow to 1m tall at their maximum, after over a decade of very fast growth and are composed of icy-blue, very deeply scalloped leaves. Mine has a long way to go yet. They have been proved to be one of the hardiest and easiest in the garden in the UK.

Another new addition to my collection in the last few years has been the mangave, a relatively new phenomenon, which is a cross between the genus manfreda and agave. These rare hybrids combine the best of both worlds: the better growth rate and the interesting patterns of manfreda, and the habit and refinement of agave. With their awesome colours and bold silhouettes, they really strike a pose on the patio.



Geoff and the irises

These unusual succulents form fleshy rosettes of evergreen spiky leaves edged with soft spines. Displayed as a collection they make a stylish design statement as you can see from my small collection near the summer house. Their strong symmetry and glowing colours form dramatic living sculptures which instantly capture attention.

They are fast-growing, drought tolerant, low maintenance and harder than agave, plus they come in a fabulous array of colours and forms. In very mild coastal and city gardens, these tender succulents can be grown outside all year.

I choose to pop mine into the back porch of the house through the winter months.

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



Tamarisk