



Corydalis ochroleuca
(syn. *Pseudofumaria alba*)

A froth of pale, creamy flowers on pale leaves for month after month; it's the plant that just keeps giving. It looks frail but is perfectly hardy and grows in sun or shade. It might be a pest if it were not so easy to pull up. Great for filling in gaps until you get round to planting them up. I think it does best in damp shade but it seems quite happy self-sowing in south-facing stone walls as well. Bizarrely it is in the poppy family.

Height 25cm.
Growing conditions Sun or shade.
Hardiness USDA 5a-7b.
Origin Southeastern Europe.
Season of interest May – October.



Derry Watkins is the owner of Special Plants nursery near Bath. specialplants.net

October plants

Days may be getting shorter and cooler, but Derry Watkins finds plenty of warm colour to compensate, especially among the autumnal foliage

WORDS DERRY WATKINS PHOTOGRAPHS JASON INGRAM



Rudbeckia triloba

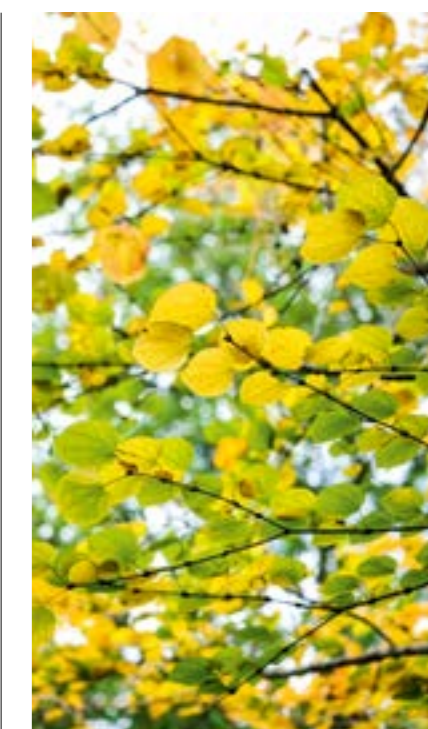
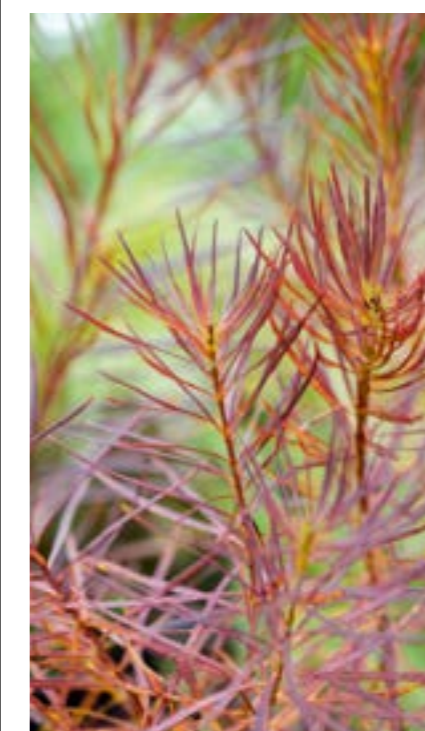
Rudbeckia triloba is one of the best of the many, many, bright-yellow, late-blooming American daisies. Relatively short, it provides a one-metre, airy mound of clear, brilliant yellow for two months. Commonly known as brown-eyed Susan, it has small flowers each with a vivid, almost black, central cone. They appear in continuous profusion for months, making the whole plant seem to dance with joy. Not long-lived, it is usually at its best in its second year, and will self-seed gently. It's also much loved by butterflies and flower arrangers. AGM*.

Height 1m.
Growing conditions Full sun.
Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 4a-8b.
Origin USA.
Season of interest August – October.

Amsonia hubrichtii

In the USA, where this species originates, it is sometimes known as the prairie blue star, and as such it is very well named. In May and June it is covered in pale-blue stars that are held above the finest of leaves. But the real glory of the plant comes in October when the thread-like leaves flush purple, then orange, then brightest gold until the whole plant glows like a setting sun, positively luminous. It will grow and flower in light shade, but if you want to get the best autumn colour, give it full sun and good soil to make it think it is back home on the prairie.

Height 75cm.
Growing conditions Sun.
Hardiness USDA 5a-8b.
Origin Arkansas, USA.
Season of interest May and October.



Cercidiphyllum japonicum

A graceful, multi-stemmed tree from Japan. Its heart-shaped leaves are flushed with pink when they first emerge, then gradually turn green. In autumn the leaves turn gold (or even orange, purple and red on acid soils), and as they fall the most delicious burnt-sugar smell tickles your nose. Hard to locate, you crush a leaf and can't find the smell but then another waft of caramel hits you as you wade through a pile of dead leaves. You know it is *Cercidiphyllum* playing tricks on you again. AGM.

Height 10-20m.
Growing conditions Sun or light shade, not too dry, said not to like alkaline soils, but thrives on my alkaline clay.
Hardiness RHS H5, USDA 4a-9b.
Origin Japan and China.
Season of interest April and October.

*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society. †Hardiness ratings given where available.



Salvia leucantha 'Purple Velvet'

Salvia leucantha is a vigorous, tender salvia, rather late-blooming. It makes a mound of long, felted, grey leaves, usually nearly a metre high and wide by September when the flowers begin to emerge. In October it is a fountain of purple. The flowers are actually white, but the calyxes and the whole flowering stem are covered in furry purple velvet, making the long arching flowering stem look like scrunched up purple and white chenille, totally surreal. 'Purple Velvet' is all purple, less shocking but easier to use in the garden.

Height 1m.
Growing conditions Full sun, frost free.
Hardiness USDA 8a-10b.
Origin Mexico and Central America.
Season of interest September – October.

Gillenia trifoliata

This was my mother's favourite plant so I am sentimentally attached to it. In June exquisite, white, star flowers emerge from red calyxes on wiry red stems. From July to September it is a mound of green, then in October the whole plant turns gold and bronze for a final fling before it disappears below ground for winter. In flower it looks like a small shrub, but it is completely herbaceous. My mother grew it in the woods in Connecticut, but here in Wiltshire I find it needs at least half a day of sun to flourish. AGM.

Height 1m.
Growing conditions Sun or light shade.
Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 5a-9a.
Origin USA and Canada.
Season of interest June and October.



Polystichum setiferum
 'Pulcherrimum Bevis'

Its long, arching fronds taper to an almost braided tip as the final leaves intertwine giving it its characteristic elegant droop. The lacy leaves are more substantial than they look, almost plastic to the touch, making this tougher than most ferns. A metre high and a metre across, it looks a bit like a tree fern without a trunk, giving a luxurious tropical air to the garden all year round. Give it plenty of space to show off its sculptural shape. AGM.

Height 1m.
Growing conditions Light shade, best if not too dry, but tolerant once established.
Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 6a-8b.
Origin Europe, found in a hedgerow in Devon in the 19th century.
Season of interest Year round.



Beesia calthifolia

A slow-growing mound of dark, shiny, slightly marbled, heart-shaped, evergreen leaves, which look as though they have been lacquered. Tiny white flowers on thin, dark stems appear well above the leaves all summer. The tiny seedpods are like elegant slippers that pop open at the toe to release the seeds. A fairly new reintroduction from China, it rewards close inspection. I have mine in a raised bed in a shady border where I can see it close up. I only wish I had a whole drift of them.

Height 20cm (leaves), 35cm (flowers).
Growing conditions Shade, good soil, not dry.
Hardiness USDA 6b-8b.
Origin China.
Season of interest Year round.



Melianthus major

Easily my favourite foliage plant. The blue-grey leaves look as though they have been cut with pinking shears and cast beautiful shadows. *Melianthus* has a reputation for not being hardy but in my experience, once they get their roots below the frost line they are indestructible. The top growth dies back in January but I don't cut it down until I see new growth, usually in May. After a really hard winter it may not sprout until late June. In milder climates the top growth stays and produces handsome, red-brown flower spikes the following spring. AGM.

Height 2m.
Growing conditions Full sun.
Hardiness RHS H3, USDA 8a-11.
Origin South Africa.
Season of interest June – December.

Eryngium pandanifolium
 'Physic Purple'

In Europe we think of eryngiums as prickly sea hollies with flowers in a big ruff of bracts. But those from South America have long, sword-shaped leaves, looking more like kniphofias. This species is one of the biggest, with spiny-edged leaves, up to a metre long, radiating in every direction. In September a flowering stem emerges, each branching side shoot tipped with a small thimble in October and November. In 'Physic Purple' these are a deep, purply red.

Height 2m.
Growing conditions Sun, not too dry, better in a sheltered site.
Hardiness USDA 7b-9b.
Origin South America. This cultivar was selected at Chelsea Physic Garden.
Season of interest August – December.



Places to visit

Derry shares some of her favourite places to see plants at their best.

Knoll Gardens in Dorset is a four-acre showcase for nurseryman Neil Lucas to demonstrate his near encyclopaedic knowledge of grasses. I have never been, but I'm dying to go to see the hundreds of different grasses growing happily with a profusion of late-flowering perennials. Almost all are available in the adjacent nursery. Open



MARTIN HUGHES/JONES/ALAMY

Tuesday – Saturday, 10am-5pm (10am-4pm, November – March). Stapehill Rd, Hampreston, Wimborne, Dorset BH21 7ND. Tel 01202 873931, knollgardens.co.uk

Pan-Global Plants is full of weird and wonderful plants from all over the world, many collected by Nick Macer on his travels. His nursery, in an old walled garden, has trees, shrubs,

succulents and perennials you have never seen before, many of them planted in a fascinating small garden on site. Open Wednesday – Sunday, 11am-5pm, February – October. The Walled Garden, Frampton Court, Frampton-on-Severn, Gloucestershire GL2 7EX. Tel 01452 741641, panglobalplants.com

Westonbirt Arboretum covers an area of 600 acres

that is home to more than 3,000 species of tree. There may be more wonderful places to see trees in their glorious autumn colour, but if there are I don't know of them.

This is a great place for learning about trees or just taking a long walk at any time of year, but in October it is an explosion of colour. Laid out as an arboretum in the 19th



JOHN GLOVER/ALAMY

century to display the amazing diversity of trees plant hunters were sending back for the first time, it has been added to continuously ever since. They don't call it the National Arboretum for nothing. Open daily, 9am-5pm. Westonbirt, Tetbury, Gloucestershire GL8 8QS. Tel 01666 880220, forestry.gov.uk/westonbirt