

We Love April

for birds, bees and breaking buds

Well, well, well, April is finally with us. The sap is definitely rising and there is a tangible feeling of excitement in the air. Birds are scouting suitable nesting sites, bunnies are behaving in ways that would make your great aunt blush and bees are flitting around, building up their strength.

Unseen, seeds are germinating like crazy, there are buds as plump as babies' biceps and the world is transforming itself from a dour, beige place into something full of life, colour and vibrancy. At last we can venture out without scarves and get on with some proper gardening.

Words by James Alexander-Sinclair

STAR OF THE MONTH

Malus x hartwigii

Discovered by chance in Rochester, New York, USA in 1928, this crab apple tree sums up the best of everything about this time of year. You see before you a symphony of the softest pink blossom – as flushed as the rosy cheeks of a birthday party full of toddlers, as velvety as the lightest soap bubble and as elegant as a flutter of ballerinas. If that was not enough for even the stoutest heart to bear, the leaves are as fresh as new lettuce and in a few months' time this fine tree will produce a multitude of tiny, rosy, bead-like crab apples that will make your garden birds swoop for joy.

Plant in spring or autumn in moist or free-draining, fertile soil, in full sun or partial shade. Water well in the first year.

Height x Spread 6m x 6m

PHOTO: JASON INGRAM



good for pollinators

FROM THE HEART

Everybody has a shady corner that is crying out for a bit of spring colour. Here, a good sturdy hosta thrives under the canopy of *Lamprocapnos*, also known as bleeding heart. Dutchman's breeches or lady in the bath: one of those flowers that can be used to excite small children about plants.

Lamprocapnos spectabilis

Herbaceous, thriving in light shade or under deciduous shrubs. Divide in early spring or autumn, or take root cuttings in winter. **H x S** 60cm x 60cm

Hosta 'Barbara Ann'

Named after two lab technicians, Barbara and Ann. Good slug resistance for a hosta. Produces white flowers in midsummer. **H x S** 50cm x 90cm

Ajuga reptans 'Braunherz'

Useful evergreen, ground-hugging perennial. Good for retaining soil on banks. **H x S** 20cm x 80cm

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; JASON INGRAM

GOLD CUP WINNERS
 We still have another month of tulips to go although, sadly, we will soon wave a fond farewell to the last daffodils. A final trumpeting is worth engineering and this is a very handsome and harmonious group. The top-of-the-milk tulip colour goes perfectly with the pale petals of the narcissi.

Tulipa 'World Friendship'
 As with all bulbs plant in autumn, tulips are better dug in quite deep, about 20cm. Excellent in pots or borders. **H x S** 35cm x 15cm

Narcissus 'W.P. Milner'
 A very tolerant variety that can be planted any time between August and November. Lasts very well as a cut flower. **H x S** 25cm x 10cm

Narcissus 'Segovia'
 A choice, white-petalled variety with a flat lemon cup. Plant it close to paths or doors so you catch its distinct scent. **H x S** 20cm x 10cm

Narcissus 'Minnow'
 Another small variety (as the name suggests), so perfect for pots. Flat, pale-yellow flowers with a good scent. **H x S** 20cm x 10cm



ZIP-A-DEE-DOO-DAH

Some people find that euphorbias are just too zingy for their taste, but I think they are exactly what we need to wake us up after a long winter. They are like the sherbet lemons of childhood – sugary to start and then a shot of tongue-curling zestiness hits you just when you get a bit complacent. There are varieties for sunshine and the deepest shade, so there's something for every garden.

Euphorbia epithymoides

A naturally mound-like shape that makes it ideal for a border edge or in a pot. Looks very good in a terracotta bowl. **H x S** 40cm x 50cm

TOP HAT

People always worry that olive trees will hate our climate but they are surprisingly robust, as long as you give them sharp drainage. They also have no objection to being pruned so, as here, you can have a pompom of glaucous evergreen foliage to complement a vibrant display of tulips below.

Olea europaea

There is a very nasty disease called *Xylella fastidiosa* affecting olive trees in Italy and Spain. It will be very serious for our gardens if it gets to the UK, so only buy olives from reputable nurseries and never from markets or car boot sales.

H x S 6m x 2.5m

Tulipa 'Ronaldo'

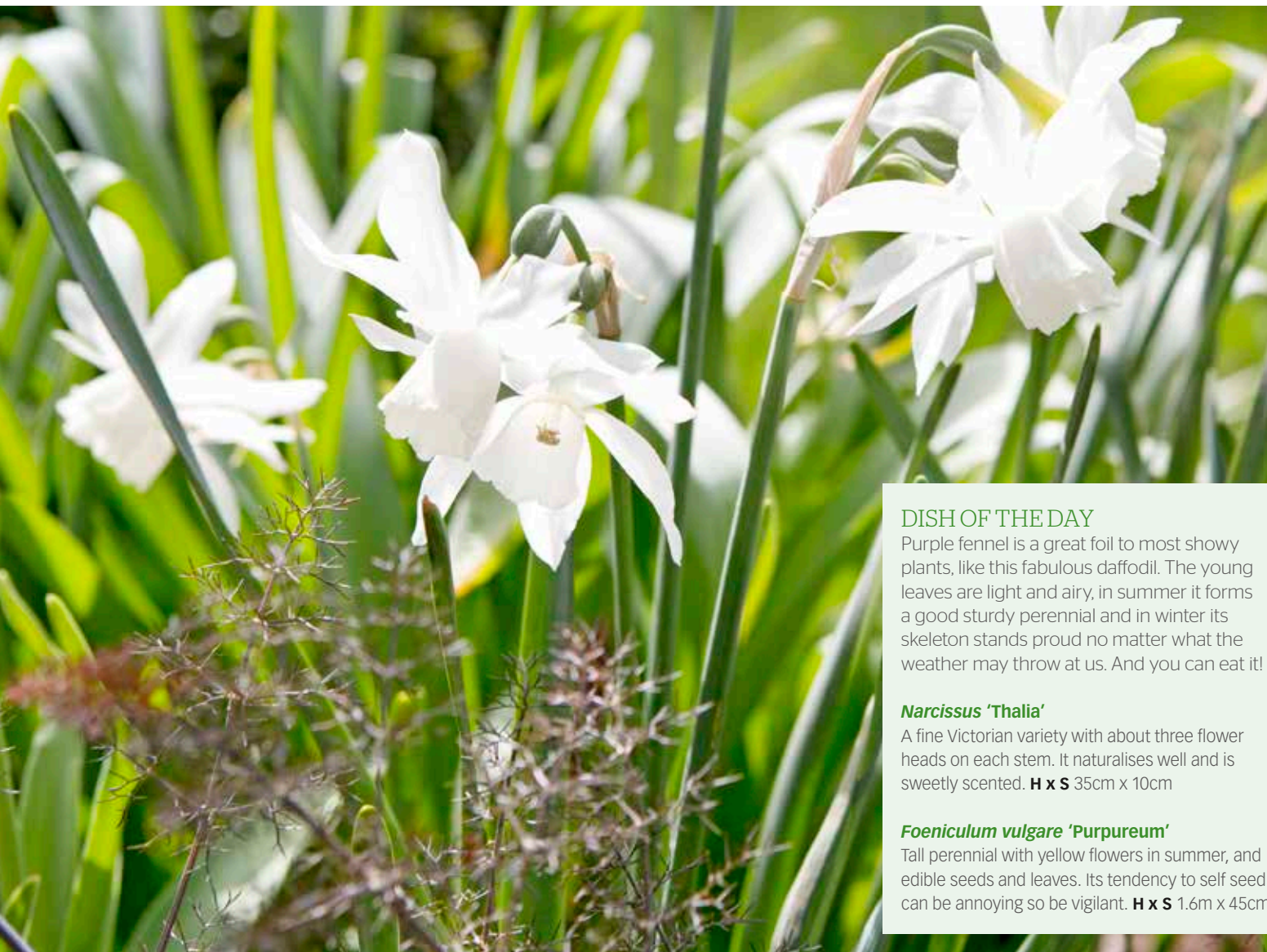
No connection to the footballer of the same name. Plant in late autumn – try to resist planting until the weather is colder to avoid any fungal diseases. **H x S** 40cm x 10cm

Tulipa 'Affaire'

Good for cutting. Propagate tulips by growing on the little offset bulbs in the summer. Will need a few years to get them up to a flowering size.

H x S 45cm x 10cm





DISH OF THE DAY

Purple fennel is a great foil to most showy plants, like this fabulous daffodil. The young leaves are light and airy, in summer it forms a good sturdy perennial and in winter its skeleton stands proud no matter what the weather may throw at us. And you can eat it!

Narcissus 'Thalia'

A fine Victorian variety with about three flower heads on each stem. It naturalises well and is sweetly scented. **H x S** 35cm x 10cm

Foeniculum vulgare 'Purpureum'

Tall perennial with yellow flowers in summer, and edible seeds and leaves. Its tendency to self seed can be annoying so be vigilant. **H x S** 1.6m x 45cm

SPOT CHECK

I defy anybody not to be captivated by snake's head fritillaries. Those nodding chequered flowers and viper's tongue leaves are cuter than kittens and more inspiring than Bach (mostly). For the best effect, plant lots of them in long grass or on the margins of shrubberies.

If you only have a small garden, then plant a big potful that you can see from the kitchen.

Fritillaria meleagris

Plant bulbs in autumn. Happy in a damp clay soil and grow well in water meadows. Propagate from seed in autumn. **H x S** 30cm x 10cm



PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE