

August (and, indeed, late July) for those blessed people among you who subscribe to this excellent publication) is the time for Leos. I am not usually given to believing horoscopes, but Leos are undoubtedly fine people full to the gunwales with passion, colour and *joie de vivre*.

Our gardens this month are much the same - hot reds, samba yellows, pouting pinks and effervescent oranges abound. Annuals are at their glorious peak, dahlias are getting into their stride and the background foliage everywhere has the air of being experienced and worldly. Just like Leos. My birthday, incidentally, is on 30 July.

Words by James Alexander-Sinclair

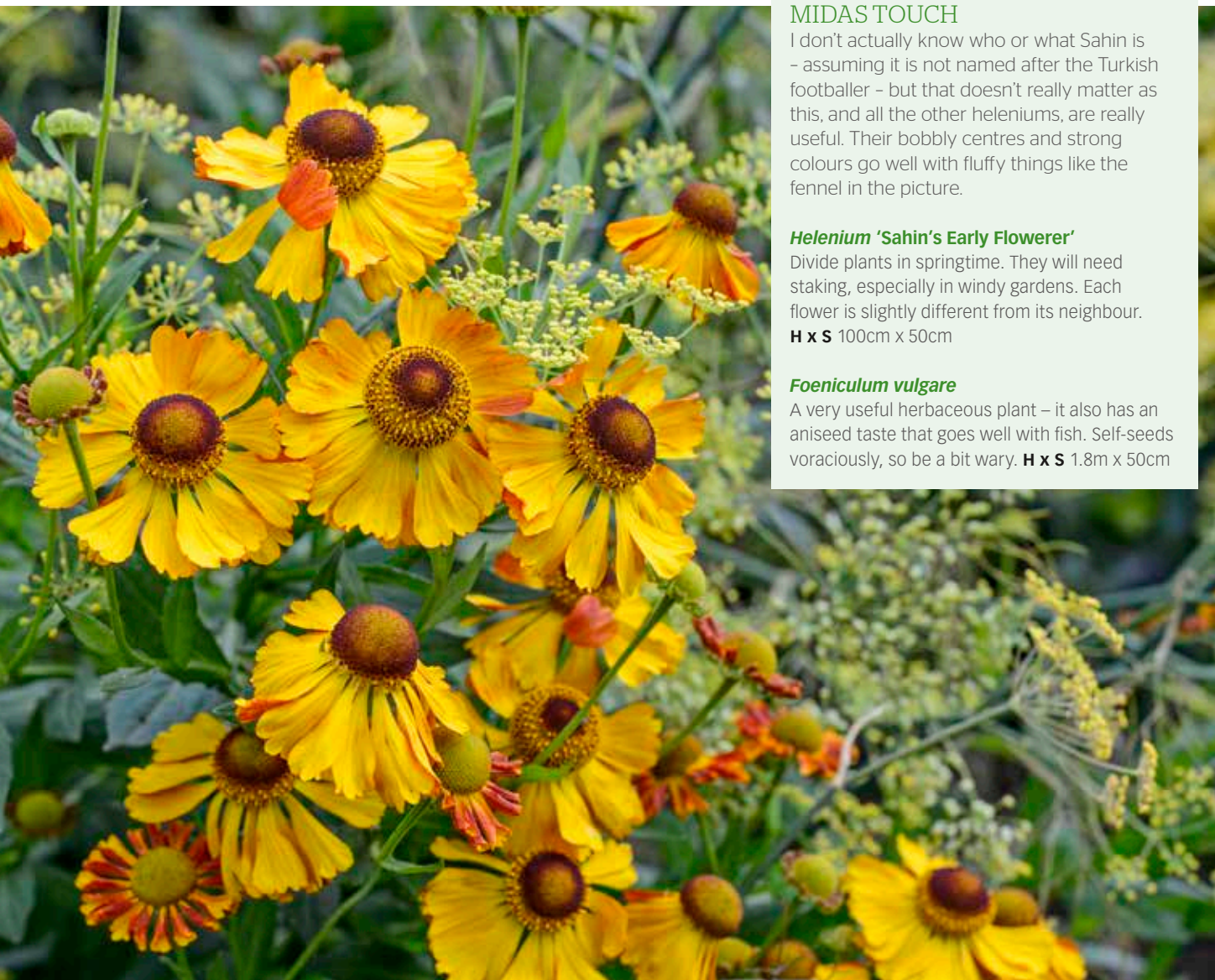
STAR OF THE MONTH
Crocosmia 'Lucifer'

This plant is not a shrinking violet - it struts. There is as much chance of your ignoring it as you would have if you found Beyoncé in your bathroom, or Mick Jagger in full preening mode in your kitchen on a Monday morning. It is a fabulously fiery plant that livens up the late summer border with its bold, sword-shaped leaves and those glorious flowers that arc over the surrounding plants like cobras being charmed from a basket. And as for that blazing red - it is as intoxicating as a bucket of vodka and as brazen as a squirrel on a bird feeder.

Grows very easily from corms that are easy to divide when dug up in autumn or spring. Its really strong foliage combines well with grasses. **Height x Spread** 100cm x 10cm

PHOTO: SARAH CUTTLE

We Love August
for its opulent hot hues



MIDAS TOUCH

I don't actually know who or what Sahin is - assuming it is not named after the Turkish footballer - but that doesn't really matter as this, and all the other heleniums, are really useful. Their bobbly centres and strong colours go well with fluffy things like the fennel in the picture.

Helenium 'Sahin's Early Flowerer'

Divide plants in springtime. They will need staking, especially in windy gardens. Each flower is slightly different from its neighbour.

H x S 100cm x 50cm

Foeniculum vulgare

A very useful herbaceous plant - it also has an aniseed taste that goes well with fish. Self-seeds voraciously, so be a bit wary. **H x S** 1.8m x 50cm



great
eyecatching
contrasts

THREE CHEERS

Not all of August is about bright colours - there is scope for the subtle. A soft grass, a flat-headed yarrow and little sprays (not sure if that is a word but you get my drift) of bright pink echinaceas. Here they are all gathered around a pond so you get reflections as an extra.

Stipa tenuissima

Best in free-draining soil. Cut it back in spring and replace often as it is not a long-lived plant.

H x S 60cm x 30cm

Achillea millefolium 'Lilac Beauty'

There are lots of achilleas in different colours, from bright yellow to deep cherry red. Tidy the foliage in spring. Avoid heavy clay. **H x S** 80cm x 60cm

Echinacea 'Sensation Pink'

Do not crowd echinaceas too much as they will not like it. Divide established clumps in spring.

H x S 45cm x 20cm

GLORIOUS GLOBES

A garden without dahlias is a garden without rumbustiousness. There are so many fabulous varieties that we are completely spoiled for choice. This is a ball (or pompom) dahlia, the colour of strong Ribena, which looks great in a border and, like most dahlias, is equally sexy in a vase. A good idea is to keep a few spares in pots to use as gap fillers in your borders.

Dahlia 'Tam Tam'

Deadhead regularly to ensure continued flowering.

Store the tubers over winter in a frost-free shed or greenhouse. **H x S** 100cm x 60cm





SCARLET LADY

"Ladybird, ladybird, fly away home, your house is on fire and your children all gone" is one of those nursery rhymes that always sounds a bit harsh. Fortunately, in order to compensate the poor ladybirds for living in a state of constant anxiety, we have this amazing poppy. As scarlet as a guardsman's tunic with bold black spots, it will never fail to bring joy to even the grumpiest gardener.

Papaver commutatum 'Ladybird'

Easy to grow by direct sowing in spring, it will flower about 12 weeks later. Good in a vase if you dip the cut ends first in boiling water.

H x S 45cm x 30cm

*ideal
for cut
flowers*



STARS & SPIKES

Judging by the number of succulents that I have seen for sale at flower shows this season, they have to be one of the most popular plants among the young. Perfect for people without gardens or in rented accommodation. Easy to look after if you are short of time, they offer lots of variety and are simple when it comes to propagation.

Succulent collection

Many varieties, but not all, require good gritty soil and protection from frost. Great in shallow bowls. **H x S** Most are about 15cm x 10cm