

Magazines have quite a long lead time so I am assuming that by the time you read this it will actually have rained – if it hasn't then we are right up the creek without a paddle. That is possibly too watery an analogy – up a sand dune without a camel? Anyway, the gentle rains of August will have fallen and the greenness restored to your borders in time for this most majestic of months. The stress of midsummer has abated, a whole new raft of plants are flowering and the children have gone back to school. Plenty of time for a bit of peaceful gardening.

Words by James Alexander-Sinclair

We love September

for its rain-refreshed greenness

STAR OF THE MONTH *Dahlia*: City of Leiden'

This month is quite warty. Lots of colour, lots of sprawling, generous sprinklings of lasciviousness and a bit of lushness. The dahlias are still going great guns except that they are even taller and more ferocious than they were last month. This is a great example: some varieties needs lots of canes and string to keep them upright, whereas this one magically combines very fancy pink flowers with the stocky solidity of a prop forward. For your information: Leiden is a Dutch city that's twinned with Oxford and is home to the Netherlands' oldest university, which has produced 13 Nobel laureates.

In warmer parts of the country dahlias will overwinter in the ground if well mulched. Further north they need to be dug up and stored in a frost-free shed. Pick in full flower for vibrant vases.
Height x spread 60cm x 45cm

PHOTO: SARAH CUTLER, WITH THANKS TO BARBARA BROOKS, THE COACH HOUSE, CHIDDINGFOLD, SURREY.

ECCLESIASTICAL ECSTASY

There are a whole series of gorgeous dark leaved dahlias named after prelates - the scarlet 'Bishop of Llandaff' is probably the best known, but there is also York, Leicester, Canterbury and Auckland. Shown here is the 'Bishop of Oxford' cavorting, in a most unseemly manner, with a very filthy cosmos.

Dahlia 'Bishop of Oxford'

Deathhead often for continued flowering. Take cuttings in spring or divide tubers, ensuring each section has a decent bud. **H x S** 70cm x 40cm

Cosmos bipinnatus 'Sonata Pink'

An indispensable annual; white or various shades of pink. Good for filling summer gaps. Sow seed in late spring. **H x S** 60cm x 30cm



DANGERS IN THE GRASS

The roses are no longer in full flow but we are rewarded by the occasional flash of flower - like a rock legend on yet another farewell tour. We are nudging into the best time for ornamental grasses so very soon the miscanthus will be the star and Darcey Bussell will have to retire.

Miscanthus sinensis Red Cloud

A more compact variety than most, so good for smaller gardens, pots and front of borders. Good with late perennials. Cut to ground in early spring. **H x S** 100cm x 100cm

Rosa 'Darcey Bussell'

A great rose bred by David Austin and named after the ballet dancer in 2006. Lightly fragrant and good in borders and pots. **H x S** 120cm x 100cm



varied leaf forms

FANTASTIC FOLIAGE

Begonias are loved and loathed by gardeners in equal measure. They have different manifestations and this one is grown for its striking foliage, which boasts silvery tracing and deep orangey-red undersides to the leaves. The echinacea gives the shot of colour while the pink in the phlox mirrors the begonia's rosey hues.

Begonia 'Gryphon'

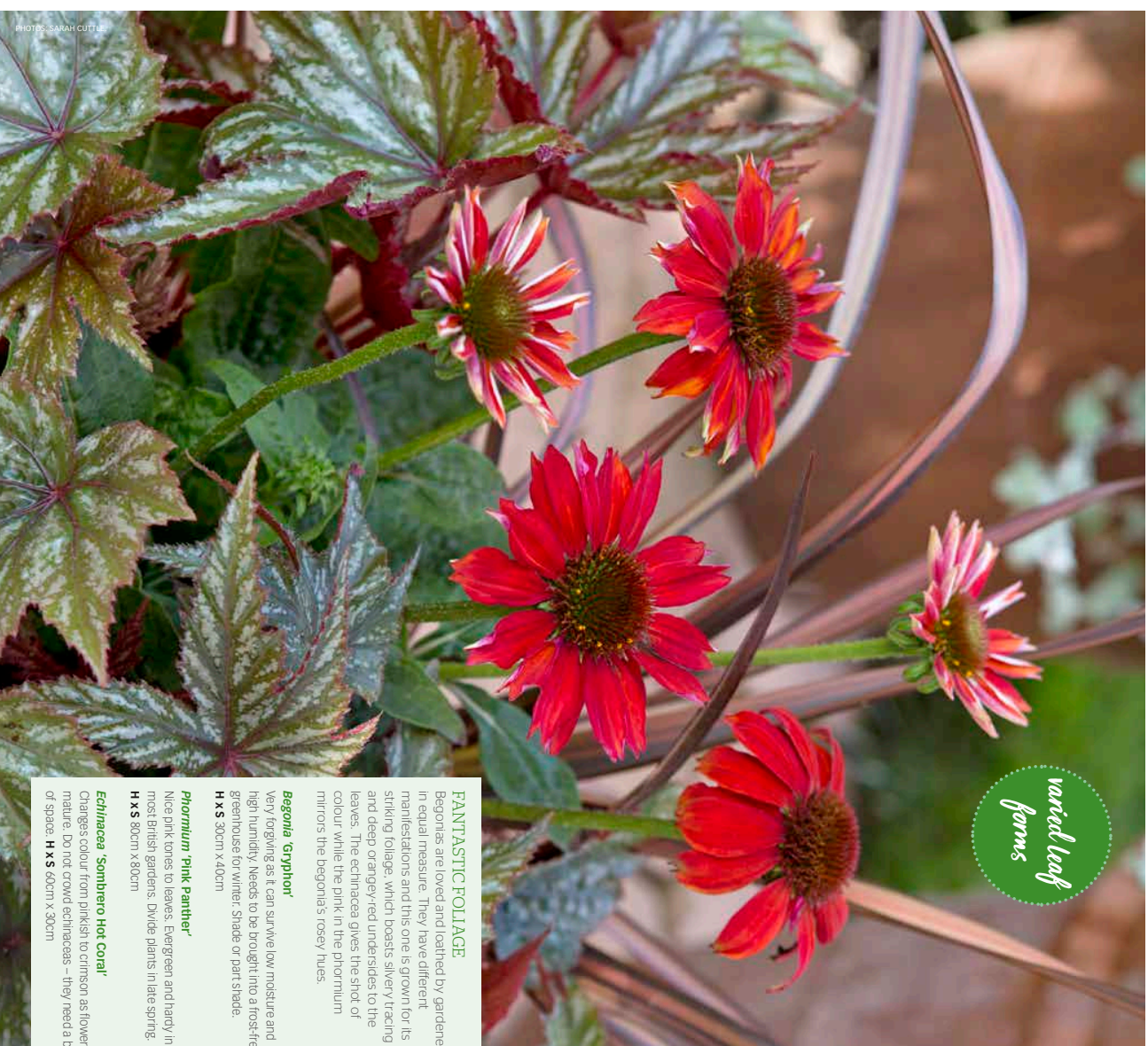
Very forgiving as it can survive low moisture and high humidity. Needs to be brought into a frost-free greenhouse for winter. Shade or part shade. **H x S** 30cm x 40cm

Phlox 'Pink Panther'

Nice pink tones to leaves. Evergreen and hardy in most British gardens. Divide plants in late spring. **H x S** 80cm x 80cm

Echinacea 'Sombriero Hot Coral'

Changes colour from pinkish to crimson as flowers mature. Do not crowd echinaceas - they need a bit of space. **H x S** 60cm x 30cm



PHOTOS: SARAH COTTLE

SUPPORTING ACTS

I have written before about this *Carex comans* which, summer or winter, is such a reliable background for so many plants. The star here is obviously the big show-off gerbera with flowers like fan dancers. There is a little begonia in there too - slightly overshadowed - but still lovely.

Gerbera [Garvinea Sweet Glow]

Hardier than many varieties (but don't get cocky if you live in a frost pocket). Semi evergreen. Take heel cuttings in summer. **H x S** 45cm x 40cm

Begonia sutherlandii

Grows from tubers. Protect from all frost. Needs excellent drainage as waterlogging will kill it. Propagate from leaf cuttings. **H x S** 50cm x 50cm

Carex comans bronze-leaved

Tough old evergreen (or everbronze if you are feeling pedantic) grass that goes well with loads of plants in borders or pots. Divide in spring. **H x S** 40cm x 50cm

Angelonia angustifolia

The summer snapdragon is an easy-going, half-hardy annual that flowers prolifically. Simple to grow and needs no deadheading, which is a bonus. **H x S** 35cm x 10cm



A KIND OF BLUE

How nice to finish on a good calm blue after all those zingy pinks and oranges. *Geranium* 'Rozanne' is still flowering - it started in May - which is pretty impressive. *Aster x frikartii* 'Mönch' is the immaculate herald who gallops ahead of the main force of asters, which is expected next month.

Geranium 'Rozanne'

Winner of the public vote for Plant of The Centenary at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show. Grows bigger than expected so not good for a narrow border. **H x S** 60cm x 75cm

Aster x frikartii 'Mönch'

Good dark foliage. Divide or take basal cuttings in spring. Cut back to the ground in winter. **H x S** 90cm x 40cm