

We Love September

for dahlias' full-bosomed blooms

Everybody loves September,

except possibly schoolchildren as this signals the end of a long, lazy summer and they must go (to borrow a bit of Shakespeare), "creeping like a snail unwillingly to school". But, on the educated assumption that most of the estimable readers of this magazine are above school-leaving age, then I reckon this is one of the best months of the year. Not quite autumn, not quite summer, a delicious no-mans land of fruit, perfect temperatures, full-bosomed dahlias, and the deep satisfaction of having nurtured and steered our gardens through another frantic and uplifting growing season. Congratulations!

Words by James Alexander-Sinclair

STAR OF THE MONTH

Dahlia 'Totally Tangerine'

Just for a change we have gone a bit off-piste at We Love Towers this month, just to prove how much we care for our discerning readers. We give you not just a stunning portrait of one plant, but a whole cascade of September loveliness. So, as well as one of the most sensational dahlias in the realm we also have agapanthus (the blue number on the edge of the path), the strong foliage of *Ricinus communis* (the castor oil plant), an arch full of climbers and the soft light from a setting sun. See, 'We Love' you more than any other month.

Dahlias are the best plants for late season colour – you simply cannot get enough of them at this time of year.

Height x Spread 80cm x 45cm

PHOTO: JASON INGRAM

THE LONG AND THE BRIGHT

This rudbeckia is the result of a bit of clever breeding – part annual rudbeckia, part echinacea – that gives a really strong plant for the frontiers of autumn. The verberna, as we have already established, is always one of the best plants for any garden. Long lasting, self supporting and generally super-duper.

Rudbeckia Summerina Mix

Three different colours – yellow, copper and brown, with the added hardiness of echinacea. Take care overwintering in colder gardens.

H x S 60cm x 30cm

Verbena bonariensis

If happy, it self seeds and you will be able to dig up the babies and spread love with your neighbours. Best to dig out older plants as they get woody after a couple of years. **H x S** 2m x 45cm

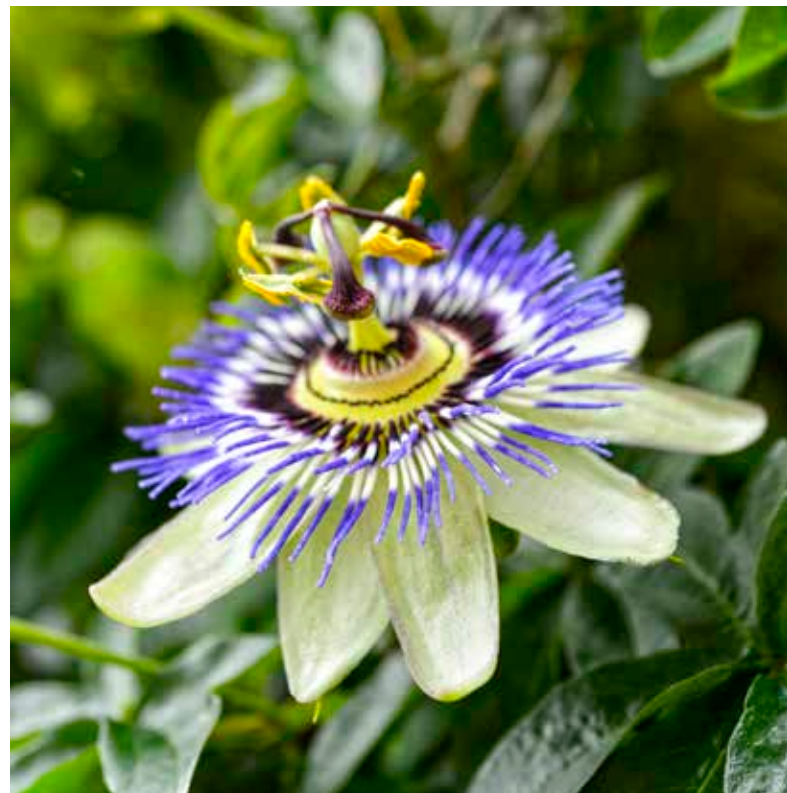


A PASSIONATE AFFAIR

Probably the most exotic-looking hardy climber that we have in our arsenal – it comes from South America but seems happy in suburbia. The flowers are very complex and can be used to interpret the crucifixion of Christ: there are petals for each apostle, the crown of thorns and other symbols. On a less theological level, it covers a fence quickly with grasping tendrils and these very spectacular flowers.

Passiflora caerulea

Fast growing and vigorous. Needs a sheltered wall in full sun. Good for bees and other pollinators. **H x S** 10m x 3.5m



bright spikes of golden yellow



YELLOW BRICK ROAD

Good, strong yellows come back at this time of the year and we have not seen many of them since spring was awash with daffodils. This is a fabulous late poker that is a solid part of an otherwise dreamy bit of planting. Like a stilt walker surrounded by cavorting sprites.

Kniphofia 'Sunningdale Yellow'

For the best flowering plant in sunshine. Sandy or free-draining soil. Divide well-established clumps in spring. **H x S** 90cm x 50cm

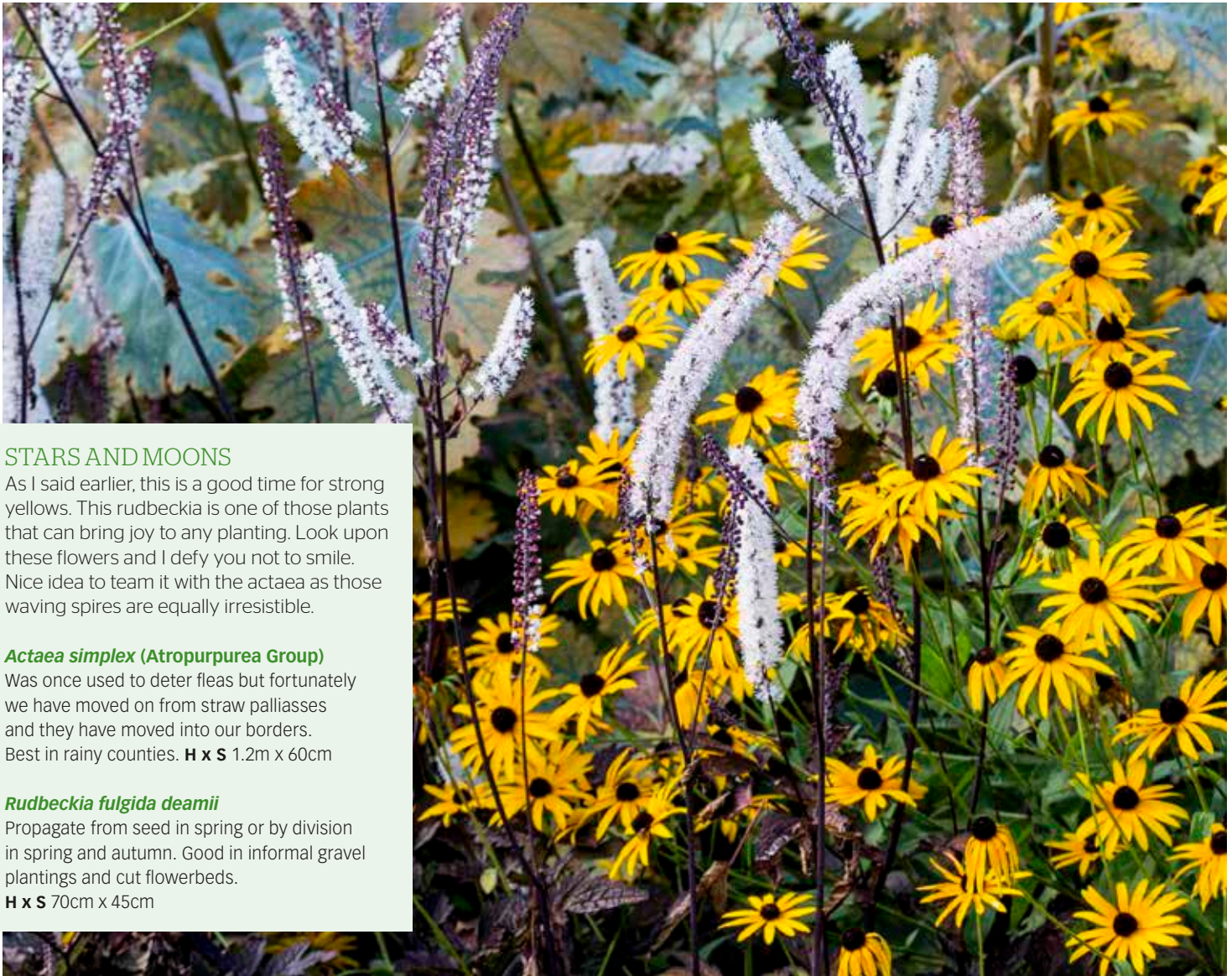
Coreopsis verticillata 'Moonbeam'

A good edging plant for any soil (except wet). Deadhead regularly to extend its flowering season. Sow seed under glass in late winter.

H x S 50cm x 45cm

Perovskia 'Little Spire'

Really useful for any border. This variety is a bit shorter, so less likely to snap in summer winds. Cut back hard in March/April. **H x S** 60cm x 60cm



STARS AND MOONS

As I said earlier, this is a good time for strong yellows. This rudbeckia is one of those plants that can bring joy to any planting. Look upon these flowers and I defy you not to smile. Nice idea to team it with the actaea as those waving spires are equally irresistible.

Actaea simplex (Atropurpurea Group)

Was once used to deter fleas but fortunately we have moved on from straw palliasses and they have moved into our borders. Best in rainy counties. **H x S** 1.2m x 60cm

Rudbeckia fulgida deamii

Propagate from seed in spring or by division in spring and autumn. Good in informal gravel plantings and cut flowerbeds. **H x S** 70cm x 45cm

OUT OF THE BLUE

In China, this shrub is known as Bluebeard: if you look carefully, it is definitely a bit bristly but to credit it with a full beard might be a bit optimistic. It is a really useful small shrub with lavender-scented foliage and great flowers that (top tip) dry well to be added to winter flower arrangements. There should be room for one in every garden.

Caryopteris x clandonensis 'Dark Knight'

Fine in all but the coldest gardens (where it needs a bit of shelter). Prune back to the framework in March. Good for bees and can cope in a drought. **H x S** 100cm x 75cm



PHOTOS: PAUL DEBOIS; TIM SANDALL