

We Love October

for celebrating fading glamour

October seems to be a month for far-flung festivals: Oktoberfest in Germany (lots of beer and sausages), the Concurs de Castells in Tarragona, Spain (where people compete to form nine-storey human pyramids), a matchmaking shindig for eager singles in Lisdoonvarna, Ireland, and almost all of India celebrates Diwali (the festival of light). But those of us who want to stay at home need not feel downhearted: October is when autumn begins to get into the groove. The summer flowers fade, the grasses do their thing and we can just begin to see a lick of autumn colour touching the trees.

Words by James Alexander-Sinclair

STAR OF THE MONTH

Hylotelephium 'Herbstfreude'

Look at that fabulous burst of bubble-gum pink in borders where the colour is beginning to dwindle: grasses look great but at this time of year they need a bit of extra fizz. Not that long ago *Hylotelephium* 'Herbstfreude' was called sedum: simple but not exactly exotic, and I think that a plant as spankingly spectacular and useful as this one deserves special treatment. Mind you, *Hylotelephium* is a bit of a mouthful and I would have been much happier if its new name was, for example, Zuleika or Esperanza – glamorous and easy to remember. Botanists sometimes like to complicate life for the average gardener.

Can flop under the weight of its flowers. To discourage this, cut back every other stem to the ground at the end of May – aka, the 'Chelsea chop'. **Height x Spread** 60cm x 60cm

MAJESTIC SPLENDOUR

This combination brings a bit of imperial grandeur to your garden. Purple and gold have always been the colours of the powerful. Think of Roman emperors and senators in sweeping togas, monarchs with golden coronets and jewel-encrusted sceptres, or even a bevy of bishops in cassock and mitre strutting their funky stuff.

Molinia caerulea

A deciduous British native grass best in damper soil but happy anywhere. Cut back remaining stems in winter. Divide in spring. **H x S** 1.2m x 60cm

Cotinus coggygia 'Royal Purple'

Propagate from semi-ripe cuttings in late summer. Prune if necessary in late winter. **H x S** 5m x 5m



FLASHES OF FIRE

There is a *Rhus* in a front garden in the next village to me. For much of the year it is a bit dull but, around this time of year, it livens up as the leaves start to blush pink, with a narrow fringe of gold, and finally a sunburst of orange. It doesn't last that long but, during the glory days, I make sure that I go past it every day.

Rhus typhina 'Dissecta'

Can become a nuisance as inclined to sucker, so best sited where it can be easily controlled or in larger areas. Propagate from seed or semi-ripe cuttings. **H x S** 2.5m x 2.5m



WEDDING BELLS

This is an interesting and seldom-seen plant choice, with the tinkling bells of *Gladiolus* and the wonderful spreading umbrella of *Cornus controversa* 'Variegata'. This tree lightens dusky corners of the garden with its sparkling variegations and shelters plants beneath its comforting boughs – like a broody hen over a clutch of gleaming-white eggs.

Cornus controversa 'Variegata'

Free-draining soil in sun. Good as a specimen tree in grass or a medium-sized front garden. **H x S** 8m x 8m

Gladiolus muriei

Plant bulbs in spring. Need lifting in cold areas, but in milder climates a thick covering of winter mulch should suffice. **H x S** 100cm x 40cm

BUSY BODIES

I have invented a new collective noun for this combination – a scurry of flowers. It is only applicable to plants, placed together, that all have an abundance of tiny blooms. It is like a cavalry charge of colour, a surging pack of petals and a multitudinous mob of movement.

Symphytotrichum 'Oktoberlicht'

Very dark-green leavers for good contrast. Keep well watered. Divide plants in spring.

H x S 100cm x 80cm

Verbena bonariensis

I've said it before – this plant is indispensable in any garden, flowering for ages and reproducing easily. **H x S** 1.5m x 30cm



COLD COMFORT

Very soon winter will begin to bite – the clocks will go back, the nights will close in and the last flowers of autumn will be a wisp of memory. However, all is not lost, for we will still have some things that keep on giving, such as this crab apple, with fruit until at least Christmas. Nice for us, even nicer for the birds.

Malus 'Winter Gold'

One of the best, with blossom, good leaf colour and fruit. What more could you want?

H x S 6m x 6m



PHOTOS: JASON INGRAM
WITH THANKS TO SIR HAROLD HILLIER GARDENS
AND WOLFGANG BOPP FOR THE LOCATION