



*We Love March
for its harmonious performance*

“Marchons, marchons! *Qu’un sang impur, Abreuve nos sillons!*” For some reason, March makes me think of *La Marseillaise* (the French national anthem). I assume it’s the “*Marchons!*” bit, which sounds like a decisive way to greet the incoming spring. The next part is a little less relevant – about the impure blood of enemies watering our fields. That may be a step too far, although (bear with me here) it could be a timely reminder that this month we should think about nurturing the young shoots of plants. And that some mulch (with a sprinkling of blood, fish and bone) would do no harm at all.

Words by James Alexander-Sinclair

STAR OF THE MONTH
Muscari armeniacum

To continue the musical theme from the words above, *Muscari* also spurs me into song, this time an Italian one. This song (*Nel blu, dipinto di blu*), written and sung by Domenico Modugno, found fame as the Italian entry in the 1958 Eurovision Song Contest. It goes on to wax lyrical about the blue, blue sky, which is, as you can see, the same glorious colour as the flowers of this exquisite grape hyacinth. The little purple chap peeking out from the foliage is a viola, with deep blue/purple hyacinths at the back.

Very easy to grow. Plant as bulbs in autumn, in borders and containers. If happy it will self-seed, and clumps can be divided when dormant in summer. **Height x Spread** 15cm x 10cm

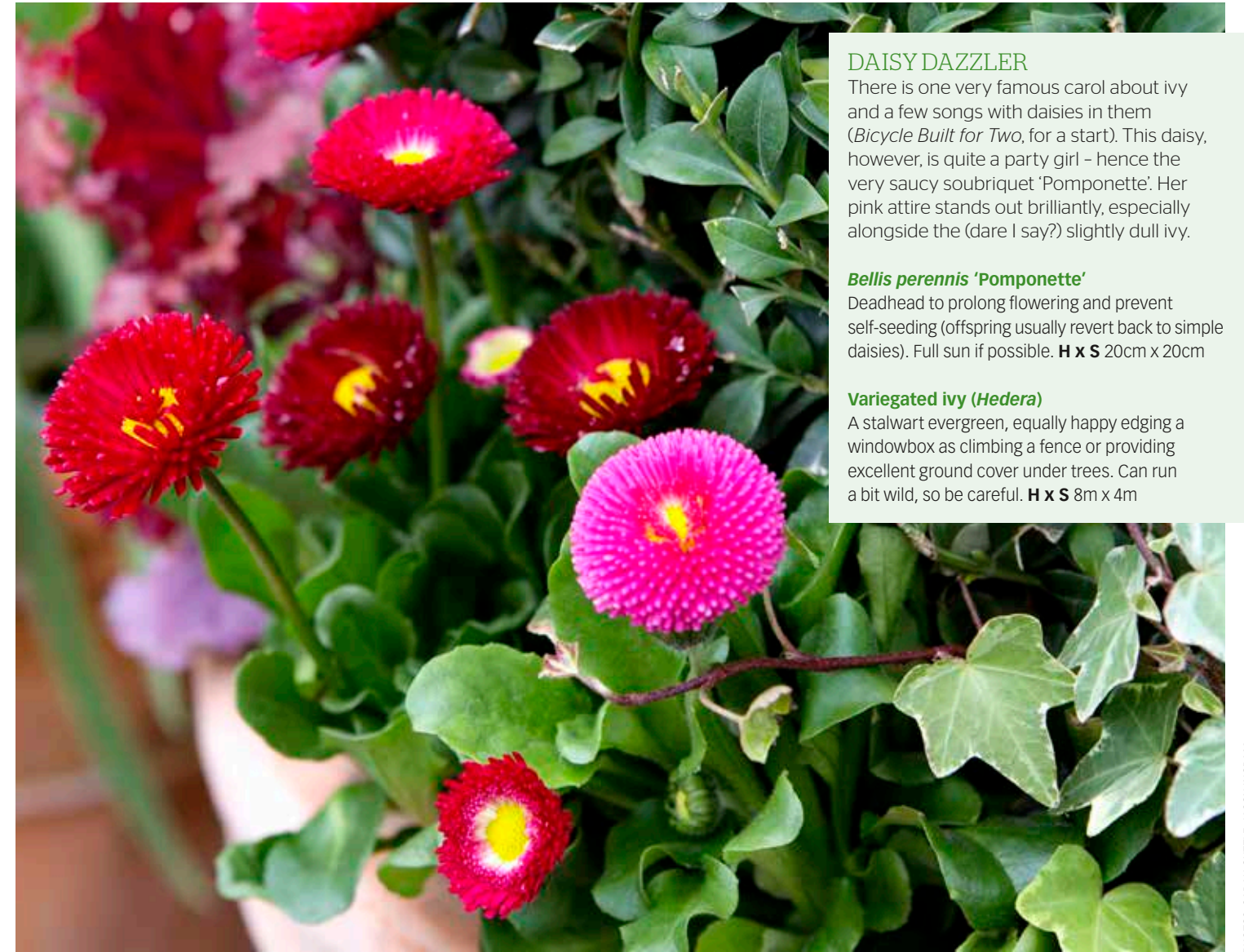
PHOTO: SARAH CUTTLE. LOCATION: BARBARA BROOKS/CHIDDINGFOLD

EYE OF THE STORM

Keeping (loosely) to music, the narcissus was named after a ludicrously vain Greek who spent most of his time singing to his own reflection. It did not end well, except that after his death he was turned into one of the finest flowers of spring, the daffodil. There are lots of varieties (about 13,000), but this, the pheasant's eye, is one of the best. There is also an Alanis Morissette song called *Narcissus*.

Narcissus poeticus recurvus

Plant as bulbs in early autumn. Highly scented and excellent for naturalising in grass with snake's-head fritillaries (*Fritillaria meleagris*). **H x S** 35cm x 10cm



DAISY DAZZLER

There is one very famous carol about ivy and a few songs with daisies in them (*Bicycle Built for Two*, for a start). This daisy, however, is quite a party girl - hence the very saucy soubriquet 'Pomponette'. Her pink attire stands out brilliantly, especially alongside the (dare I say?) slightly dull ivy.

***Bellis perennis* 'Pomponette'**

Deadhead to prolong flowering and prevent self-seeding (offspring usually revert back to simple daisies). Full sun if possible. **H x S** 20cm x 20cm

Variegated ivy (*Hedera*)

A stalwart evergreen, equally happy edging a windowbox as climbing a fence or providing excellent ground cover under trees. Can run a bit wild, so be careful. **H x S** 8m x 4m

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE, JASON INGRAM

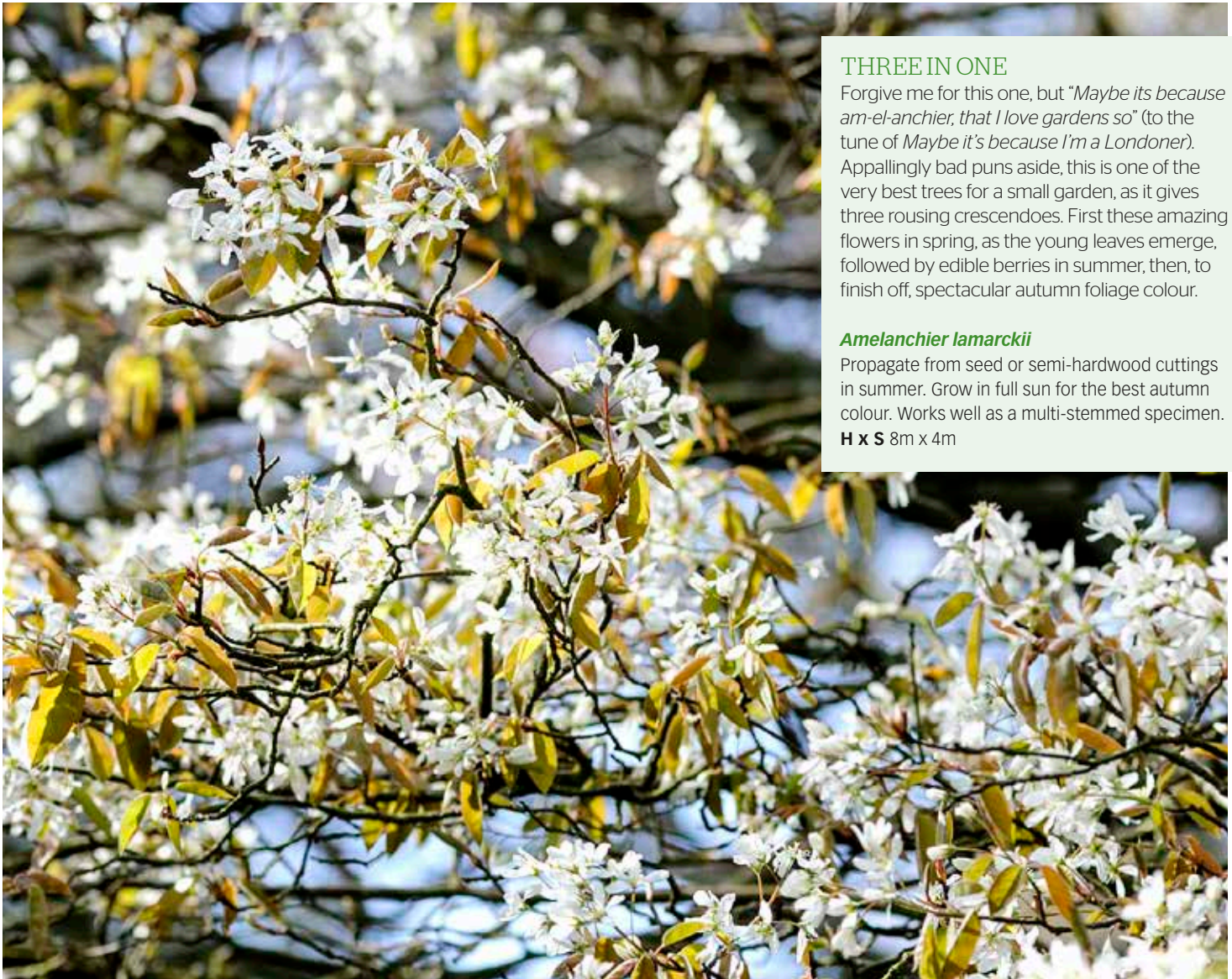
SHADY LADY

Ah. I'm a bit stuck for musical metaphors here. Pulmonaria is commonly known as lungwort, so I suppose it could draw attention to the importance of breath control while singing? No? Okay, then let's just talk about how useful this plant is as a bit of shady ground cover. It will happily spread around and bring joy to the tricky areas under trees. It also provides very useful early food for bees.

Pulmonaria angustifolia

Remove any old, dead leaves to keep neat. Propagate from seed or by dividing plants after flowering. **H x S** 20cm x 20cm





THREE IN ONE

Forgive me for this one, but “*Maybe its because am-el-anchier, that I love gardens so*” (to the tune of *Maybe it’s because I’m a Londoner*). Appallingly bad puns aside, this is one of the very best trees for a small garden, as it gives three rousing crescendoes. First these amazing flowers in spring, as the young leaves emerge, followed by edible berries in summer, then, to finish off, spectacular autumn foliage colour.

Amelanchier lamarckii

Propagate from seed or semi-hardwood cuttings in summer. Grow in full sun for the best autumn colour. Works well as a multi-stemmed specimen. **H x S** 8m x 4m

PINK PERFECTION

This is easier: think plush drawing rooms, Verdi and the opera *La Traviata*, which is based on *La Dame aux Camélias* (a book by Alexandre Dumas). Courtesans, tragedy, love and regret. A suitably grand and dramatic analogy for this majestic shrub: camellias are glossily evergreen with spectacular flowers in every shade of pink, white and red. This one is remarkable for its semi-double blooms and pointy petals.

Camellia japonica ‘Yours Truly’

Evergreen. Best in acid or neutral soil – grow in a large pot if your soil is alkaline. **H x S** 1.5m x 1m



PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; JASON INGRAM