

We Love April

for its floriferous spectacle

Did you know that this month is National Pet Month in the United Kingdom? Why only one month, you may ask? It would be foolish to have a National Garden Month as we love our gardens (and our pets) every month of the year. It is true that a spring garden is easier to love than a January garden in the same way that it is (usually) simpler to adore a smiling puppy than an old and irascible cat. But, when push comes to shove, we gardeners cannot help ourselves and we are eager to see the good side in everything.

Words by James Alexander-Sinclair

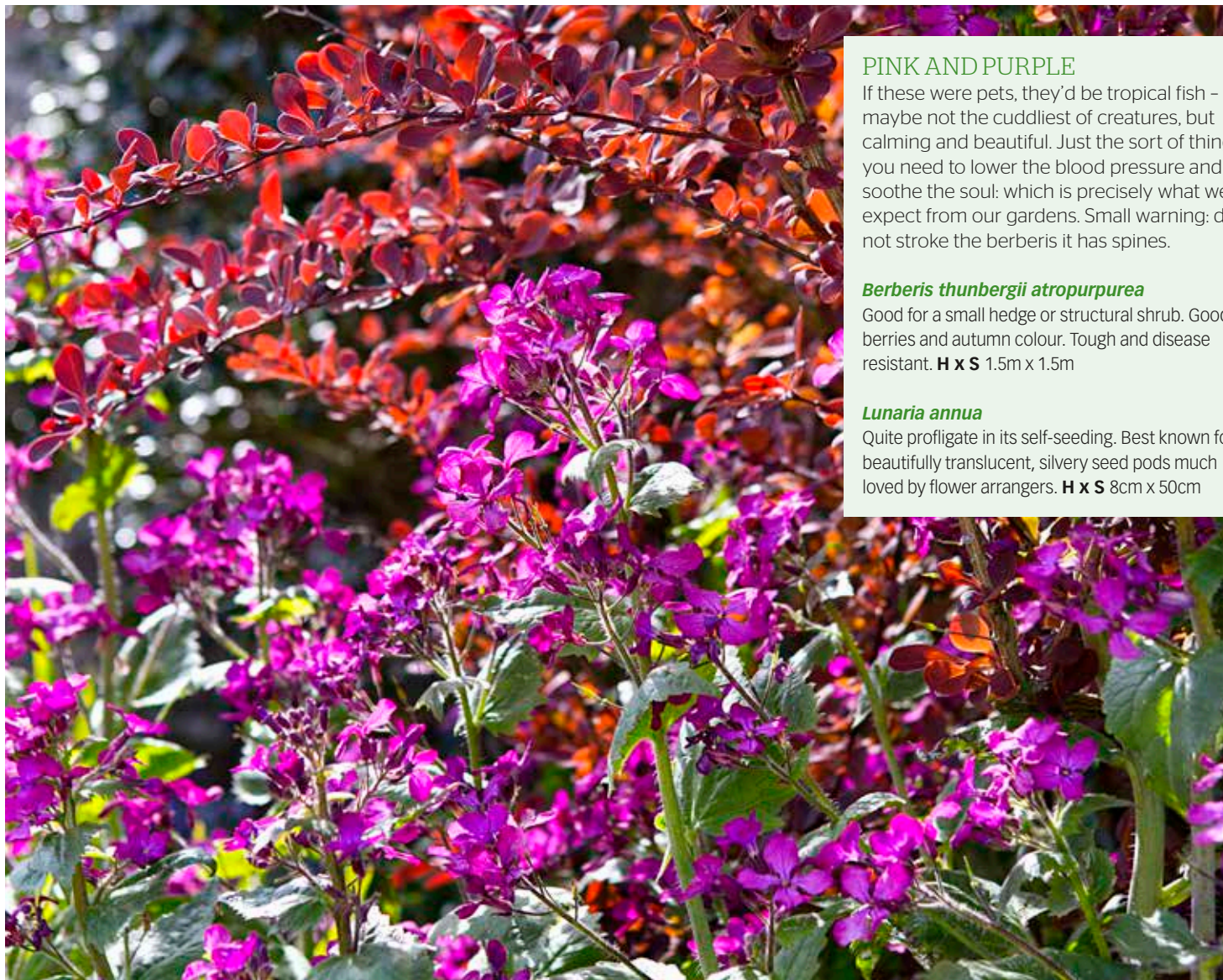
STAR OF THE MONTH

Kerria japonica 'Pleniflora'

Pleniflora means 'lots of petals' so, if we were to carry the pet reference a bit further, then if this flower was a domestic animal it would be a flurry of small and boisterous ducklings (if you are allergic to waterfowl, I suppose they could also be a lot of slumbering hamsters!) In fact, this plant is a great deal less troublesome than ducklings – I had it growing by a shed once and it was very splashy indeed. As this is a dead easy shrub to grow, it is perfect for those corners that just need something straightforward and manageable.

Any aspect except deep shade. Very low maintenance – prune in autumn if you feel the urge. Propagate from summer cuttings.
Height x Spread 3m x 2m

PHOTO: JASON INGRAM



PINK AND PURPLE

If these were pets, they'd be tropical fish – maybe not the cuddliest of creatures, but calming and beautiful. Just the sort of thing you need to lower the blood pressure and soothe the soul: which is precisely what we expect from our gardens. Small warning: do not stroke the berberis it has spines.

Berberis thunbergii atropurpurea

Good for a small hedge or structural shrub. Good berries and autumn colour. Tough and disease resistant. **H x S** 1.5m x 1.5m

Lunaria annua

Quite profligate in its self-seeding. Best known for beautifully translucent, silvery seed pods much loved by flower arrangers. **H x S** 8cm x 50cm



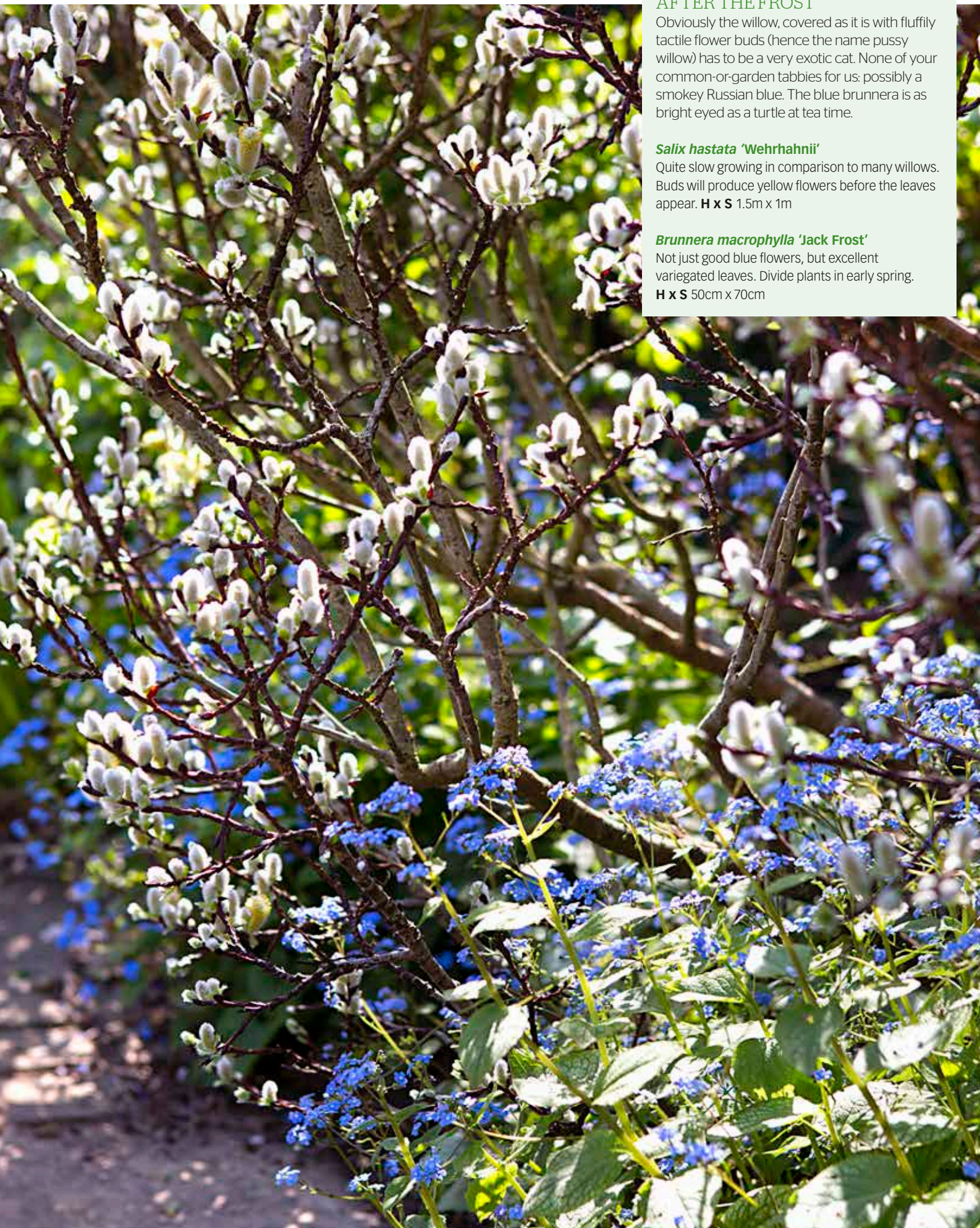
WHITE HOT HEART

Another plant that had its name complicated by science (you may remember it fondly as dicentra) – although it is still a treasure for a slightly shaded border. Pet-wise, I reckon this is a white mouse: with clogs on. Hang in there with me – one common name for this fine plant is Dutchman's breeches. At some point Dutch people were known for their voluminous trousers: worn with clogs.

Lamprocapnos spectabilis 'Alba'

Not brilliant on dry soil. Divide clumps in early spring or take root cuttings in winter. If healthy, it will shrug off most pests. **H x S** 60cm x 60cm

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE, JASON INGRAM.



AFTER THE FROST

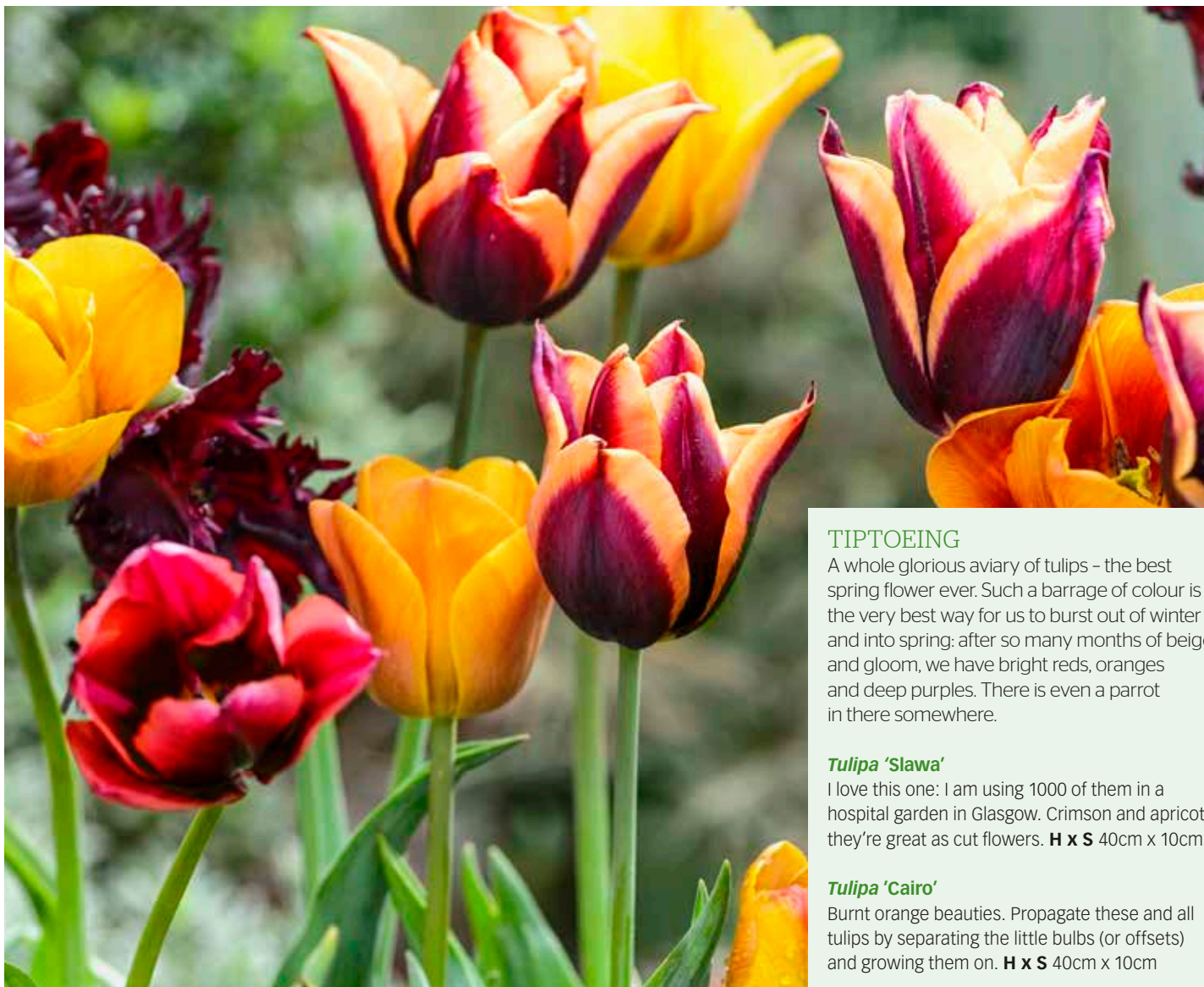
Obviously the willow, covered as it is with fluffily tactile flower buds (hence the name pussy willow) has to be a very exotic cat. None of your common-or-garden tabbies for us: possibly a smokey Russian blue. The blue brunnera is as bright eyed as a turtle at tea time.

Salix hastata 'Wehrhahnii'

Quite slow growing in comparison to many willows. Buds will produce yellow flowers before the leaves appear. **H x S** 1.5m x 1m

Brunnera macrophylla 'Jack Frost'

Not just good blue flowers, but excellent variegated leaves. Divide plants in early spring. **H x S** 50cm x 70cm



PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; JASON INGRAM.

TIPTOEING

A whole glorious aviary of tulips - the best spring flower ever. Such a barrage of colour is the very best way for us to burst out of winter and into spring; after so many months of beige and gloom, we have bright reds, oranges and deep purples. There is even a parrot in there somewhere.

Tulipa 'Slawa'

I love this one: I am using 1000 of them in a hospital garden in Glasgow. Crimson and apricot they're great as cut flowers. **H x S** 40cm x 10cm

Tulipa 'Cairo'

Burnt orange beauties. Propagate these and all tulips by separating the little bulbs (or offsets) and growing them on. **H x S** 40cm x 10cm

HEALTHY GLOW

Tricky to find an animal this colour - unless it is an exotic crustacean - but in shape it is a little like a flamboyant caterpillar or silk worm crawling along a branch. Maybe that is a step too far and we have exhausted this particular metaphorical meander. Suffice to know that this is a good solid plant as reliable as your favourite spade - great for giving a good injection of strong pink in spring.

Bergenia cordifolia 'Winterglut'

Its large, evergreen glossy leaves give it the common name elephant's ears. Remove faded flower spikes. Divide in autumn.

H x S 50cm x 50cm

