

If one was of ungenerous mood, then one might think of November as a bit of a waiting room: sitting in a grey miasma, twixt the last breath of late summer warmth and the onrushing froth of tinsel and cranberries that is Christmas. Naturally, at *Gardeners' World* we would never be so ungenerous: we regard every month as something lovable and cute. We glory in the comfort of log fires, warm scarves and hot crumpets. We exult in the clarity of frosty mornings and the last scattering of falling leaves. As it says on the left, We love November!

Words by James Alexander-Sinclair

STAR OF THE MONTH

Cardoon (*Cynara cardunculus*)

I have always loved cardoons for their massive leaves and towering flower stalks - they're a real statement plant for a large border or standing on their own in a front garden. The thistle-like flowers rise to 3m tall and seem to provide enough nectar for every bee within shouting distance. By this time of year the colour has gone, but this plant still stands like an Assyrian temple worn down by time and weather, battered but unbowed. This one is accompanied into decay by a handsome smoke bush (*Cotinus coggygria*), whose once deep purple leaves are now fading to rust.

Happy with every aspect except a north-facing border. Flower spikes need a strong stake to stop them falling under their own weight. **Height x Spread** 2.5m x 1.5m

PHOTO: SARAH CUTTLE. LOCATION: WAKEHURST

*We Love November
for glowing hues and frosty mornings*

ALL FIRED UP

I have only recently started growing this shrub – I was first attracted to it by the idea of autumn foliage as flaming and unapologetic as you see here. Since then I have become rather intrigued by the berries too, which, I believe, are packed with antioxidants, polyphenols and vitamins. The problem is that some darn varmint eats them all before I get there, so I guess I will have to be satisfied with the leaves alone.

Purple chokeberry (*Aronia x prunifolia*)

Grow in good soil in sun (although it will tolerate a smidgin of shade). Usually grows as a multi-stemmed bush. **H x S** 2.5m x 2.5m



DRY AND MIGHTY

First of all, a gentle warning for the uninitiated: acanthus can be a bit thuggish and intrusive for the more refined flowerbed. Once it has got itself established, it's almost impossible to remove, as the roots go deep and will regrow enthusiastically. But if you have an empty corner that needs something architectural, long flowering and trouble free, then this is the chap for you.

Acanthus seedheads

Grows in any aspect and any soil (except waterlogged). Propagate from root cuttings or by division. **H x S** 1.5m x 1m



SOFT TOUCH

The essence of all good planting schemes is the balance of structure and fluff, and this is a fine example. Cornus (or dogwood if you wish to be informal) is always reliable in winter – bright scarlet stems shining in the sunshine. It looks great teamed with these bottlebrush pennisetum flowers.

Pennisetum alopecuroides

Best in full sun and free-draining soil. Propagate by sowing seeds in spring. May need winter protection in colder areas. **H x S** 60cm x 60cm

Dogwood (*Cornus*)

Prune the stems in late winter or early spring, as the younger shoots provide the best winter colour. Propagate from hardwood cuttings. **H x S** 2.5m x 2.5m



PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE. LOCATIONS: GRAVETYE MANOR AND WAKEHURST

FADING GLORY

If you happened across this plant in the summer you would probably greet it like an old friend. "Hello," you would say, "those bright yellow flowers are a sight for sore eyes." In November its charms are not quite as obvious, relying as it does on an elegantly fading leaf, a scattering of turning buds and some alluring reddish seed capsules. A good, colourful but undemanding small shrub.

St John's wort (*Hypericum kouytchense*)

Some of the leaves will remain green, so it is seldom completely naked. Propagate from semi-hardwood cuttings. **H x S** 70cm x 1m



STRUCTURALLY SOUND

This photograph could have been taken at any time of year, for this is one of those classic combinations that lend a bit of solidity to more seasonal schemes. Box balls (when beautifully clipped) are like galleons drifting through borders. The festuca are silver skerries, through which they weave their stately way.

Box (*Buxus sempervirens*)

Make it into whatever you wish – topiary, hedging or a big sprawling evergreen shrub.

H x S 5m x 5m

Festuca glauca

Better in slightly poor soil, so avoid fertilisers and mulches. Comb out old leaves in spring.

H x S 30cm x 30cm



PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE. LOCATION: WAKEHURST