



Malus transitoria

A graceful, spreading tree, which has such copious amounts of fine, white, fragrant blossom in spring – no more transitory than any other crab apple – that it looks as if a white cloud had alighted in the garden. Known as the cut-leaf crab apple, it makes a tracery of small leaves all summer that cast a delicate shade. The leaves turn bright yellow in autumn before they fall to reveal a myriad tiny, round, yellow crab apples, each the size of a pea. Too small to be worth picking for jelly, but very decorative and much loved by birds. AGM*

Height 4-8m.
Growing conditions Sun or light shade.
Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 4+.
Origin China.
Season of interest May and October – November.



December plants

In the last of her series, Derry Watkins chooses some favourite plants that help see the year out in style

WORDS DERRY WATKINS PHOTOGRAPHS JASON INGRAM

Derry Watkins is the owner of Special Plants nursery near Bath specialplants.net



Lupinus chamissonis

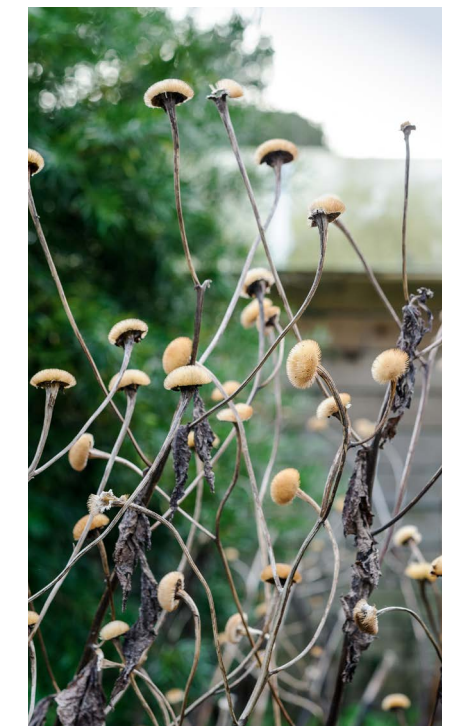
This dwarf evergreen shrub is generally hardy – unless we get a really bad winter. It does, however, need sun and perfect drainage and only lives for four to five years. Fortunately, it is easy to grow from seeds or cuttings. Its fine silver leaves are so beautiful I would almost grow it just as a foliage plant. It is wonderful after rain, each leaf holding a single drop of water like a glittering drop of mercury. Then in June it has short, fat spikes of blue-purple lupin flowers making it utterly irresistible.

Height 30-70cm.
Growing conditions Sun and drainage.
Hardiness USDA 8a-10b.
Origin California.
Season of interest Year round.

Erysimum Winter Orchid

All perennial wallflowers are worth growing, blooming for months and months. Winter Orchid stands out from the rest because it comes into bloom in October and flowers sporadically throughout the winter culminating in an explosion of colour in early spring. The flowers are fragrant and larger than most wallflowers; copper-red when young, gradually turning purple so there's an amazing array of colour. The plants are tidy, compact mounds. Like all perennial wallflowers it only lives a few years but cuttings root very easily.

Height 25cm.
Growing conditions Sun and drainage.
Hardiness USDA 8.
Origin Bred in Germany.
Season of interest October – May.



Telekia speciosa

A bit of a thug, but a handsome one. Its big leaves smother out any competition allowing it to conquer a large area. Branching 2m stems tipped with large, yellow daisies spray out in every direction all summer. The flowers have many thin petals, like a raggedy fringe around a flat, golden-orange centre, which eventually turn into handsome, dark-brown, disc-shaped seedheads. These seedheads on their branching stems stand all winter, gradually fading to buff as the birds peck them clean. Unusually for a daisy, it is happy in shade.

Height 1.5-2m.
Growing conditions Sun or shade, not too dry.
Hardiness USDA 3.
Origin Central Europe, Russia, Caucasus.
Season of interest August – February.

*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society. †Hardiness ratings given where available.



Euphorbia characias
Silver Swan (= 'Wilcott')

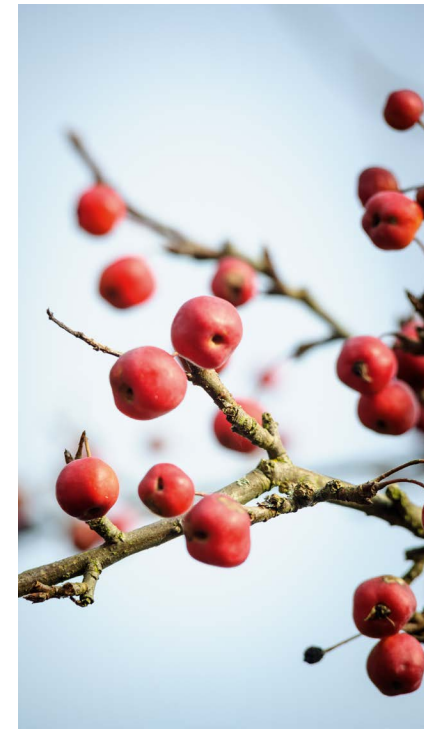
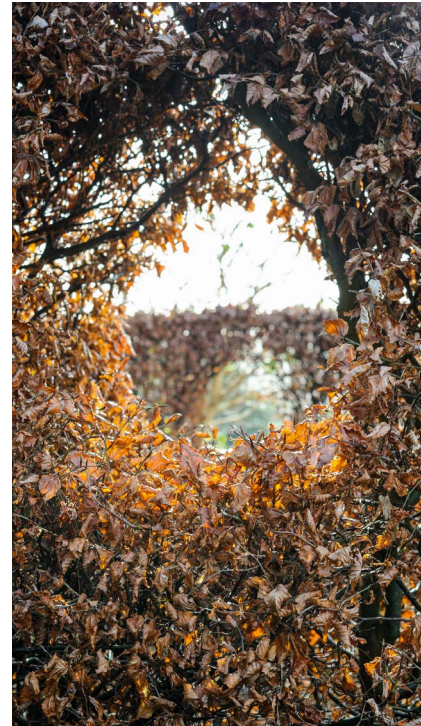
I've mixed feelings about variegated plants, often finding them exciting in prospect but too strident when I put them in the garden. This has a subtle, grey-green and white variegation, making rounded, evergreen mounds of a soothing mistiness. Adorned with matching green and white flowers in spring, they go with almost everything, flattering stronger colours and bolder shapes. Like all forms of *E. characias* they need to be replaced every few years. Cut the old flower spikes out with extreme care, the white sap causes blisters. AGM.

Height 3m.
Growing conditions Sun and drainage.
Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 7.
Origin Mediterranean.
Season of interest Year round.

Fagus sylvatica

The common beech is one of our great plants. It makes the most beautiful of trees if allowed to grow but accommodates itself happily to being clipped to shape. The young growth holds its leaves all winter, so hedges (which are constantly cut back forcing them to make young growth) hold their leaves really well. We have made a circular hedge of beech inside which is an empty space lined with gravel, a place to rest your eyes from the hurly-burly of flowers in the rest of the garden. AGM.

Height Up to 50m as a tree, can be kept to 90cm if pruned annually.
Growing conditions Sun or light shade.
Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 4.
Origin Europe.
Season of interest Year round.



Malus x robusta
'Red Sentinel'

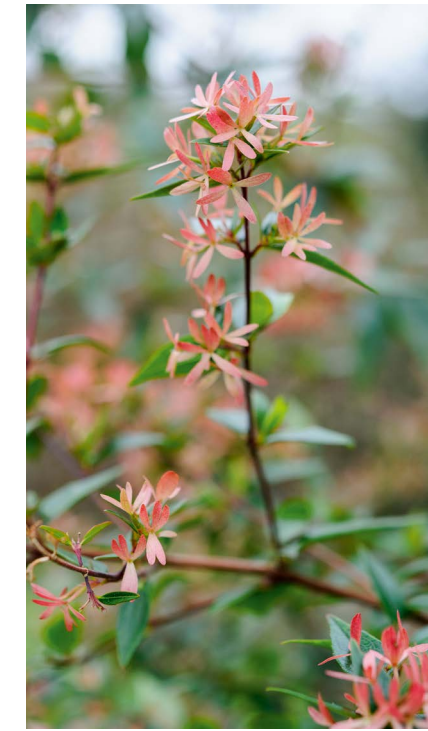
Crab apples may be the perfect garden tree – not too big, not vulnerable to many problems and good for pollinating other apples. Most have a profusion of fragrant, white flowers from pink buds in spring, attractive autumn colour and shiny red fruit, which is good for wildlife and for making jellies. These crab apples are the reddest fruit, ignored by the birds until well after Christmas. They stand out brilliantly against a blue sky or peek out from under a mantle of snow almost like cherries in winter. AGM.

Height 5-7m.
Growing conditions Sun, good soil.
Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 4.
Origin Bred in 1950s from two Asian species.
Season of interest April – May and October – January.

Acer griseum

Known as the paperbark maple because its beautiful, red-brown bark peels off in thin, paper-like curls to reveal the paler rosy-brown bark beneath. When the evening sun shines through the peeling bark the whole trunk seems to light up. It is a slender, slow-growing tree whose little leaves cast only light shade allowing other plants to grow well underneath it. In autumn the leaves turn orange and red, colouring better in sun. Beautiful as a specimen tree on its own or lined up where the evening sun can catch the bark. AGM.

Height 5-10m.
Growing conditions Sun or light shade, not too dry.
Hardiness RHS H5, USDA 4.
Origin China.
Season of interest Year round.



Abelia x grandiflora
'Lake Maggiore'

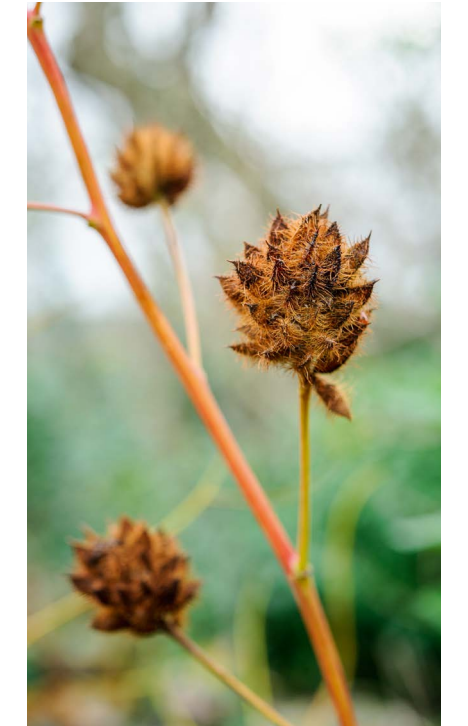
A glorious, late-summer, flowering shrub, smothered in flowers in August, September and October. The white flowers are so numerous they weigh the branches down. By November the flowers have fallen but the red bracts remain, keeping the show going almost until Christmas. It has small, glossy, more-or-less evergreen leaves and reddish stems. Allowed to grow freely, it will become a large, gracefully arching mound, but I cut out all the new long stems to keep it more compact and floriferous.

Height 3m.
Growing conditions Sun, shelter.
Hardiness USDA 5.
Origin Bred in Italy in 1886 from two Chinese species.
Season of interest July – November.

Glycyrrhiza yunnanensis

A close cousin of liquorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*), *Glycyrrhiza yunnanensis* is rather boring in summer with dull, little, pale-purple flowers on willow stems. But in autumn as the seedheads develop it's another story. The seedpods are almost as big as plums, bristly, with pointed facets like intricate sculptures. They gradually turn shades of purple and bronze and rust. They will stand, rattling slightly in the wind, through most of the winter. If you cut them you can bring them inside as rather eccentric dried flowers.

Height 2m.
Growing conditions Sun or light shade.
Hardiness USDA 8.
Origin China.
Season of interest October – January.

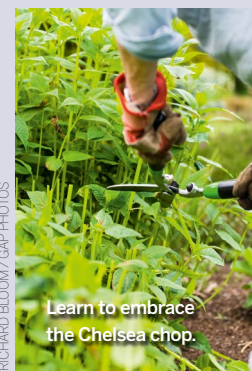


Derry's lore

Derry shares her six golden rules of garden care to help you make the most of your garden in the coming year.

1 The Chelsea chop.

In late spring most herbaceous plants benefit from being cut back by one third to one half. Do a few the first year and see what you think. Generally, they will be shorter, bushier more floriferous and less in need of staking. They will probably bloom a week or two later and on some plants the flowers will be a bit smaller. Try a partial Chelsea chop.



RICHARD BLOOM / GARDEN PHOTOS

Learn to embrace the Chelsea chop.

cutting just some of the stems on each plant so you stagger the blooming and encourage more sideshoots lower down to support the taller stems.

2 **In autumn think hard about your garden** and write down changes you want to make. Don't get carried away by spring madness and just throw in all the pretty plants you were tempted into buying.



JOHN GLOVER / ALAMY

Plan your garden in late autumn.

3 Keep florist's scissors on you at all times.

Small, strong, florist's scissors are more useful than secateurs and can do most of the same jobs other than tree pruning. And they are my best weeding tool because they are always to hand. If you keep the points together you can get under the roots of any weed and neatly fork it out. Particularly good for dandelions.

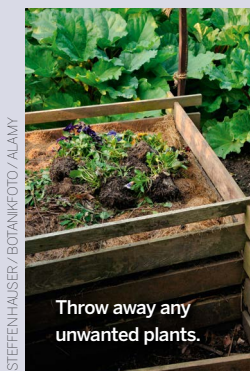


JOHN WORTH / GARDEN PHOTOS

Keep florist's scissors to hand.

4 Feel free to throw plants away.

The compost heap is a fine place for any plant you are bored with. Don't inflict boring plants on your friends, they probably don't want them either. 5 **Give plants room to breathe.** Sun and air are more important than any artificial fertiliser, which shouldn't be overdone. Compost, compost and



STEFEN HÄUSER / BOSTON PHOTO ALAMY

Throw away any unwanted plants.

more compost is the answer to everything. Adding three or four inches of compost every year will improve any soil. Mulch as much as possible and don't dig. Let the worms do the digging.

6 **Less is more.** For me this is the hardest rule, and my husband's annoying mantra. But he is right. It is almost always better to have fewer varieties, and more of each one.