**Centaurea atropurpurea**

The fat buds emerging above the intricately cut grey leaves are so beautifully patterned with shiny dark-edged, overlapping scales that there seems almost no need for any flowers. But soon the top of the bud is forced open by the dark, wine-red thistle flowers spreading outwards like a stain of blood. Flowering all through July and August, they add a touch of drama to the garden.

*Height* 1m.
*Growing conditions* Sunny spot with good drainage.
*Hardiness* USDA 5a-9b.
*Origin* The Balkans.
*Season of interest* July – August.

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**Clematis x durandii**

A herbaceous climatis that does not climb but if supported well will climb. A bit of a handful – happy to straggle two metres in any direction – but infinitely rewarding, producing showers of big, deep-blue-purple flowers month after month. Books tell you to grow it through a shrub but you never see the flowers that way. Best with plenty of sun and a support of its own that you can keep tying it back into. It will grow up to 2m and then cascade back down, covered in flowers. AGM.

*Height* 1.5-2.5m.
*Growing conditions* Good soil in sun or light shade.
*Hardiness* RHS H6, USDA 5a-9b.
*Origin* A 19th-century hybrid of *C. integrifolia* and *C. lanuginosa*.
*Season of interest* June – September.

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**Agrostemma githago** 'Ocean Pearl'

A pure white corncockle with the faintest brown lines stippled down the centre of each petal. Corncockles were lovely weeds of cornfields before herbicides put paid to their life cycle. We now grow them as ornamental hardy annuals. This one has extra big flowers that waft about on long, slender stems. Best tucked in among other plants, otherwise it can look lanky and flop a bit. Ravishing with grasses. A wonderful cut flower. Unfortunately, it does not self sow for me, but easy to grow from seed.

*Height* 80cm.
*Growing conditions* Sunny with good drainage; not rich soil.
*Hardiness* USDA 4a-10b.
*Origin* UK.
*Season of interest* July.

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**Iochroma australe**

I bought this as a conservatory plant many years ago. It was nice enough, but after a few years it had grown far too big and I had to chuck it out. I planted it in the garden for one last summer of glory, and it has never looked back. Fifteen years later it is a three-metre shrub, soaring through the hardest of winters without a qualm. In June and July the undersides of every branch drip with deep-purple bell-like tiny Datura flowers, replaced in autumn with seedheads like green marbles. AGM*

*Height* 2.5-3m.
*Growing conditions* Sunny spot with reasonable drainage.
*Hardiness* USDA 8a-11.
*Origin* South America.
*Season of interest* June – July.

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

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**July plants**

There are so many great plants for high summer that it’s hard to know where to start, but Derry has managed to narrow her choice to ten favourites

*Words* DERRY WATKINS  *Photographs* JASON INGRAM

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*Derry Watkins is the owner of Special Plants nursery near Bath speicalplants.net*
**Places to visit**

*Wollerton Old Hall*

Four acres of harmoniously gardened heaven. The height of plant lovers’ delight, even for those with ‘green fingers’. An enormous 28th-century walled garden recently renovated by Piet Oudolf. You walk round the entire garden in a narrow, densely hedged alley way admiring at close range a collection of rare plants, then suddenly you come to a corner and a breathtaking zigzag of grasses takes you out into the huge central space. A modern garden design full of excitement. Open mid April until October, 10am-5pm, Wednesdays and Bank Holidays, Easter until August, Wollerton, Market Drayton, Shropshire TF9 3NA. Tel 01630 685760.

*Wolterton Old Hall*

www.woltertonoldhallgarden.com. Scampton Walled Garden is an enormous 28th-century walled garden recently renovated by Piet Oudolf. You walk round the entire garden in a narrow, densely hedged alley way admiring at close range a collection of rare plants, then suddenly you come to a corner and a breathtaking zigzag of grasses takes you out into the huge central space. A modern garden design full of excitement. Open mid April until October, 10am-5pm, Wednesdays and Bank Holidays, Easter until August, Wolterton, Market Drayton, Shropshire TF9 3NA. Tel 01630 685760.

*Coleton Fishacre*

was once the country house of the D’Oyly Carte family. Its glory is in the garden. Now owned by the National Trust, it has the mildest climate of all the National Trust’s gardens, sloping sleepily down to the River Tor. Amazing semitropical plants survive outside, so go in summer. Brownstone Road, Kingswear, Devon TQ6 OEQ. Tel 01803 842382, nationaltrust.org.uk

*Scampston Walled Garden*

an enormous 28th-century walled garden recently renovated by Piet Oudolf. You walk round the entire garden in a narrow, densely hedged alley way admiring at close range a collection of rare plants, then suddenly you come to a corner and a breathtaking zigzag of grasses takes you out into the huge central space. A modern garden design full of excitement. Open mid April until October, 10am-5pm, Wednesdays and Bank Holidays, Easter until August, Scampton, Market Chateries, East Riding YO17 8NG. Tel 01944 758890, scampton.co.uk

*The University of Oxford Botanic Garden*

RHS H7, USDA 3a-8b. Cally Gardens, Scotland. Tel 0131 283 3915, callygardens.co.uk

*Brownstone Road, Kingswear, Devon TQ6 OEQ. Tel 01803 842382, nationaltrust.org.uk

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