

*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Malepartus'

*Miscanthus* is a wonderful, very upright grass. It blooms in late summer with silky, slender-fingered flower spikes that gradually fluff out and stand all winter. The flowers of 'Malepartus' are dark red for a month then fade to silver and finally gold all winter. Books tell you to cut the plants down in March when you see new growth, but I can't be bothered. The skeletal dead flowers stay until almost July above the new green growth. I used 'Malepartus' to make a grass hedge between the grass of the orchard and the grass of the field

**Height** 1.8-2.1m.

**Growing conditions** Sun, any soil.

**Hardiness** USDA 5.

**Origin** East Asia.

**Season of interest** August – April.



# November plants



Derry Watkins chooses some of her favourite plants that are sure to give your garden one last blast of late-season colour

WORDS DERRY WATKINS PHOTOGRAPHS JASON INGRAM

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*Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Merveille Sanguine'

As summer turns to autumn, the leaves of 'Merveille Sanguine' gradually turn purple, setting off the dusky, deep purple-pink flowers to perfection. On acid soils the flowers are positively violet. I am not usually a hydrangea lover, but this one is an irresistible drama queen. Hydrangeas like good soil, which does not dry out, and a bit of shade and shelter, but don't give 'Merveille Sanguine' too much shade or the leaves will revert to green. Morning sun is usually best. The name translates perfectly – 'bloody marvellous.'

**Height** 1.5m.

**Growing conditions** Sun or light shade.

**Hardiness** USDA 7.

**Origin** Japan.

**Season of interest** July – November.



*Polygala* 'Africana'

Polygalas are tender evergreen shrubs from South Africa. The best make brilliant conservatory plants where they can bloom all year. Outdoors in a sheltered sunny position, perhaps against a wall, they will bloom for six months. A hard winter will see them off, but even one summer of the pretty pea-like flowers is worth it. Each flower has a tiny white beard like the closely related English wild flower, milkwort. *Polygala* 'Africana' has a particularly good compact habit, blue-grey leaves and lots of flower.

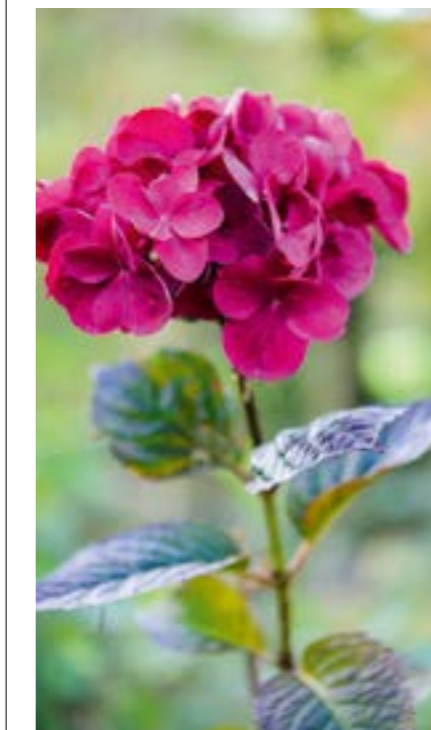
**Height** 80cm.

**Growing conditions** Sun, good drainage and shelter from hard frost.

**Hardiness** USDA 9.

**Origin** South Africa.

**Season of interest** Year round in a conservatory, June – November outdoors.



*Viburnum x bodnantense* 'Dawn'

An old, cottage garden favourite, one of the earliest shrubs to bloom. Tough as old boots, it is one of the plants that survives and even thrives in abandoned gardens, gradually spreading. Boring in summer, but worth having in a neglected corner so you can pick a few sprigs to bring into the house in winter. The pale-pink flowers are borne on naked stems in mild spells throughout the winter. The intensely sweet spicy fragrance promises spring is on the way as early as November. AGM\*.

**Height** 3m.

**Growing conditions** Sun or part shade.

**Hardiness** RHS H6, USDA 5†.

**Origin** Hybrid developed at Bodnant garden 1934-35.

**Season of interest** November – March.

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



*Solanum laxum* 'Album'

Originally called *Solanum jasminoides* 'Album', the pure white flowers are very jasmine-like, though only slightly fragrant. They appear in profusion from midsummer through late autumn. It is a fast-growing, vigorous, scrambling climber, and given a minimum of support it will grow up two storeys or more. Every few years I cut it back hard and tell it to start again rather than trying to control its free-form, extravagant growth. It is not completely hardy, so some years it dies back to the ground and some years it dies altogether. AGM.

**Height** 6m.  
**Growing conditions** Full sun, south-facing wall.  
**Hardiness** USDA 8.  
**Origin** Brazil.  
**Season of interest** July – November.

*Ruscus aculeatus* 'John Redmond'

*Ruscus aculeatus* will grow where almost nothing else will, nestling in dark, dry shade among dense tree roots. It grows very slowly, but it grows. And it is evergreen. The leaves, which are really flattened stems, are so tough and spiny they were used for scrubbing butchers' blocks, hence the common name of butcher's broom. Hermaphrodite forms, such as this, and females with a nearby mate, produce festive, red, shiny berries as big as marbles around Christmas, and the berries stay on for months. AGM.

**Height** 60cm.  
**Growing conditions** Sun or shade, even dry shade. Any soil.  
**Hardiness** RHS H6, USDA 7.  
**Origin** Europe (including UK).  
**Season of interest** November – April.



*Eryngium deppeanum*

If a plant could kick and bite and scratch, it would be *Eryngium deppeanum*. Reminiscent of some vicious sea creature with claws at the ready, each leaf is armed with double, forward-facing spines. Chainmail gloves would be useful for pulling out old leaves and flower spikes. Nonetheless I love it. In autumn it has clusters of tight, navy-blue flower heads, and its whorls of shiny, evergreen leaves look stylish all year. Coming from Mexico, it needs good drainage to survive an English winter.

**Height** 30cm (leaves), 60cm (flowers).  
**Growing conditions** Sun, very good drainage, poor soil.  
**Hardiness** USDA 7.  
**Origin** Mexico.  
**Season of Interest** Year round.

*Heptacodium miconioides*

Discovered in China in 1908 but not introduced into cultivation until 1980, *Heptacodium* is a wonderful small tree or large shrub. It is beautiful every month of the year. In winter its peeling bark and elegant silhouette make it stand out. In spring the pairs of deeply veined leaves start to grow, eventually meeting at the tips to make a circle. The circles line up so you can run your arm up the branch through a series of bracelets. Clusters of fragrant, white flowers appear in September, followed by rosy bracts. Truly a tree for all seasons. AGM.

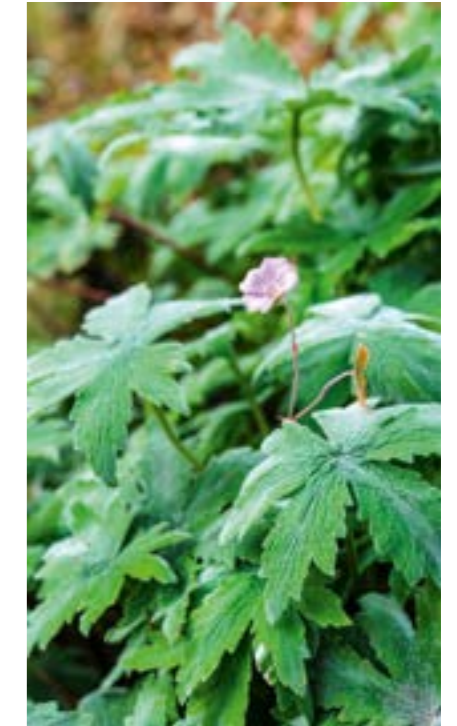
**Height** 4-8m.  
**Growing conditions** Sun or light shade.  
**Hardiness** RHS H5, USDA 5.  
**Origin** China.  
**Season of interest** Year round.



*Geranium pulchrum*

An evergreen sub-shrub, which I grow as much for its leaves as for its flowers. The grey-green leaves are covered in fine, velvety hairs, becoming positively furry in winter when they look like they are covered in frost. The mauvey-pink flowers in summer are the icing on the cake. If it starts to look straggly in midsummer, cut it hard back and it will quickly re-cover itself in its handsome foliage. More tolerant of damp than most geraniums, it is hardy for me in all but the very hardest winters here in Wiltshire.

**Height** 50cm.  
**Growing conditions** Sun.  
**Hardiness** USDA 7a-9b.  
**Origin** South Africa.  
**Season of interest** Year round.



*Pittosporum tenuifolium* 'Tom Thumb'

A slow-growing evergreen shrub making a dense, compact mound of shining, purple-black foliage. Its naturally tidy habit makes it a good substitute for large box balls, if lightly clipped to shape in spring. The new leaves emerge pale, lime-green, astonishing against the old purple foliage. By June the whole plant is nearly black. The small leaves are shiny and wavy-edged, reflecting light at different angles. Not always hardy, but mine have survived our worst winters here against a south-facing wall. AGM.

**Height** 1m.  
**Growing conditions** Sun.  
**Hardiness** RHS H4, USDA 8.  
**Origin** New Zealand.  
**Season of interest** Year round.

Places to visit

Derry shares some of her favourite places to see plants at their best.

**Bodnant Garden** in the far corner of North Wales is one of the great British gardens. Gardened by five generations of keen plant collectors, it has 80 acres of unusual trees and shrubs, wonderful views of Snowdonia, and now a new Winter Garden. Tal-y-Cafn, Colwyn Bay LL28 5RE. Tel 01492 650460, nationaltrust.org.uk/bodnant-garden



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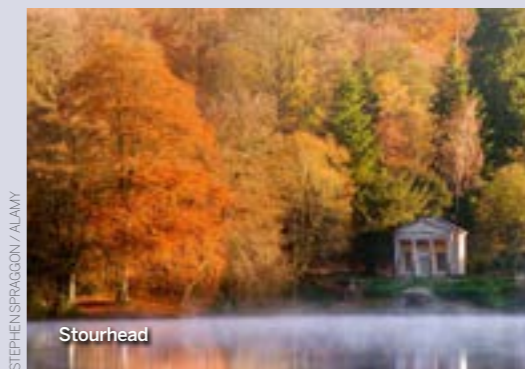
**Cambridge University Botanic Gardens** is home to a rock garden and alpine house, both of which are wonderful places all year round. And while you're there, don't forget to walk the chronological bed – it's astonishing what we don't know about when plants were introduced. Even woad is not a British native. The winter garden is at its best from November to March,

full of ideas for winter interest in your own garden. 1 Brookside Avenue, Cambridge CB2 1JE. Tel 01223 336265, botanic.cam.ac.uk.

**The Eden Project** in Cornwall has become an all-year favourite. And when the weather turns wintry, what better place to be than a tropical biome? Like giant soap bubbles set in an old china clay quarry, the

biomes allow you to wander among beautiful plants no matter what the weather throws at you. In summer the outdoor planting is also spectacularly good.

**Stourhead** was described by one magazine when it opened, way back in the 1740s, as 'a living work of art'. Almost 300 years later it can still succeed in



STEPHEN SPRAGGON / ALAMY

taking away the breath of even the most cynical. Well known for its beautiful central lake surrounded by classical temples, mystical grottoes, and rare and exotic trees, at this time of year it's simply a fabulous place to take a long walk and blow away autumnal cobwebs. Near Mere, Wiltshire BA12 6QF. Tel 01747 841152, nationaltrust.org.uk/stourhead