



*Echinacea* 'Tomato Soup'

In general, echinaceas don't like me. They come from the American Midwest where winters are far colder, so the problem can't be hardiness. Perhaps the problem is that slugs like them so much? Or maybe the other plants in my garden crowd them out? They like plenty of air and light, especially when young. Of all the fancy coloured modern hybrid echinaceas, 'Tomato Soup' seems to be the only one I can keep in my garden. The flowers, which open with an orange tint then mature to a bold, deep red, are like brilliant giant daisies, brightening the garden in August and September.

**Height** 75cm.  
**Growing conditions** Sun and good drainage.  
**Hardiness** USDA 4a-9b'.  
**Origin** Bred by Terra Nova in the US.  
**Season of interest** July – September.



## September plants

With low evening light, late summer is a wonderful season in the garden. Derry chooses some of her favourite plants that really shine at this time

WORDS DERRY WATKINS PHOTOGRAPHS JASON INGRAM

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*Daphne tangutica*

A low-growing, evergreen daphne that blooms in spring then pauses and, just as the berries from the first flowers begin to turn red, starts to bloom again – so from July through to September you get pink and white flowers together with bright red berries. The flowers are fragrant in the day, intensifying as evening approaches. Plants are slow to get started but after three or four years they flex their muscles and begin to grow. They resent pruning, so site them carefully; I killed my first one by cutting it back. AGM\*.

**Height** 1.5m.  
**Growing conditions** Sun or light shade, good soil.  
**Hardiness** RHS H5.  
**Origin** China.  
**Season of interest** May – October.



*Dahlia merckii* 'Alba'

*Dahlia merckii* is a hardy dahlia with small lavender flowers on long stems. Graceful and demure, it is easier to use in the garden than most dahlias. I leave the tubers in and have never lost it in 15 years. About ten years ago I bought a white form, which I think was bred by Nori and Sandra Pope at Hadspen. The pure white petals are narrow and slightly flared back, giving the flowers a more star-like look. The plants are less vigorous but appear to be equally hardy, and the ethereal white stars on their long stems are enchanting.

**Height** 1.2m.  
**Growing conditions** Sun or light shade, and good drainage.  
**Hardiness** USDA 7b-9b.  
**Origin** Mexico.  
**Season of interest** July – September.

*Selinum wallichianum*

A mound of finely cut, bright green foliage sits quietly in the garden waiting for August when the purple-flushed stems begin to grow. The stems elongate and branch gracefully. By September, the swan-necked buds are beginning to open into flat platters of white cow parsley-like flowers. This is a stately and refined umbel that will lend authority and a sense of calm to any garden. EA Bowles called it 'the queen of umbellifers'. High praise indeed. Like all umbels, it is a Mecca for insects.

**Height** 1.5m.  
**Growing conditions** Sun or part shade and good, deep soil.  
**Hardiness** USDA 6b-10b.  
**Origin** Himalayas.  
**Season of interest** August – September.



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



*Dahlia 'Ragged Robin'*

A very small un-dahlia-like dahlia, which acts more like a herbaceous perennial. It is surprisingly hardy. I leave the tubers in the ground but try to remember to give them a few slug pellets in May so they can get up and away from the slugs. They have attractive, finely-cut leaves, often red-veined, with dark red stems, but it is the dainty, semi-double flowers with their twisted, deep-ruby red petals that captivate me. 'Ragged Robin' was a seedling of *Dahlia* 'Bishop of Llandaff', selected by Avon Bulbs.

**Height** 70cm.  
**Growing conditions** Sun, good soil, mulch in winter.  
**Hardiness** USDA 8a-10b.  
**Origin** Seedling at Avon Bulbs.  
**Season of interest** July – October.



*Pennisetum alopecuroides 'Black Beauty'*

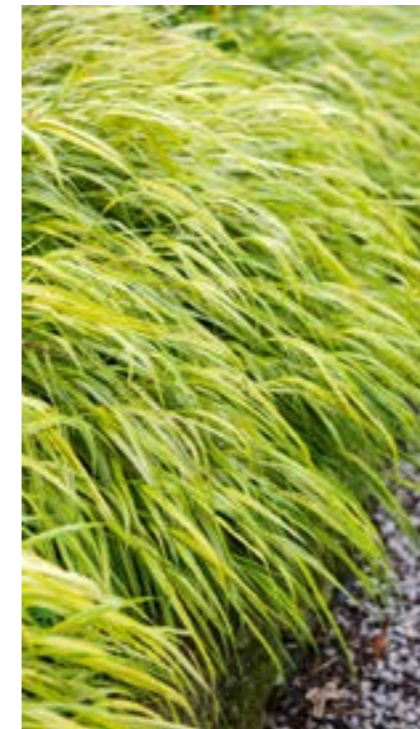
All through June and July the grassy clump of this fountain grass gets bigger and bigger, flowing outwards like a bubbling fountain (hence its common name). Just as you are getting fed up with all that green, masses of dark, silky flower heads like bottlebrushes begin to emerge. Through September nearly black, fluffy squirrel tails wave above the leaves. They eventually age to brown, but continue to look handsome until Christmas. Vigorous plants, they soon bulk up and are best divided every three or four years.

**Height** 1m.  
**Growing conditions** Sun, good soil, not too dry.  
**Hardiness** USDA 5a-10b.  
**Origin** East Asia.  
**Season of interest** September – October.

*Hakonechloa macra 'Aureola'*

The golden leaves, subtly variegated with lime green, flow outwards from the centre, cascading down in every direction, softening any hard edges and looking wonderful with stone. Slow-growing, it is one of the best grasses for a pot, just getting better and better year on year. Or it can be planted en masse, making an undulating carpet. In midsummer fine, feathery flowers add a haze of russet. The papery leaves whisper in the wind, reminding one of a small bamboo, and in autumn they flush with tints of purple. AGM.

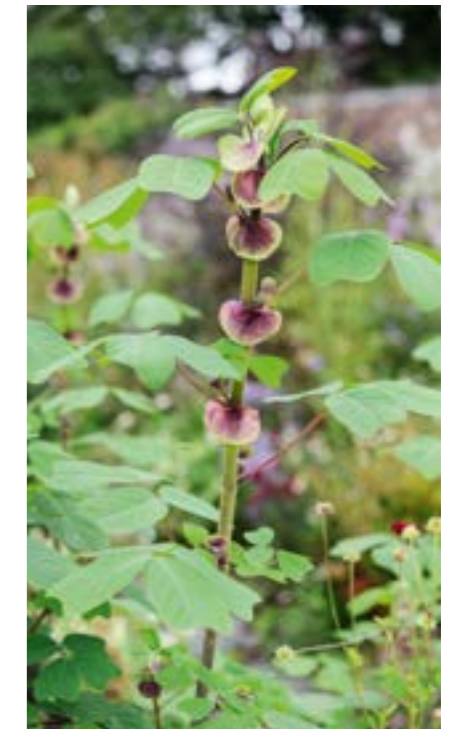
**Height** 40cm.  
**Growing conditions** Shade, or sun if soil is moist.  
**Hardiness** RHS H7, USDA 5a-9b.  
**Origin** Honshu Island Japan.  
**Season of interest** May – November.



*Amicia zygomeres*

An unusual perennial, *Amicia zygomeres* dies back to the ground in winter, then grows up to around 2m every summer. The tip of every sturdy stem and the base of every leaf is covered in a pair of fat purple bracts like a flower. Each leaf is divided into two pairs of round leaflets, which fold down neatly at night – altogether a weird design. Then in October the real flowers emerge and, horror of horrors, they are bright yellow pea flowers, which I could happily live without. A plant as strange as its name.

**Height** 2m.  
**Growing conditions** Sun, good soil, mulch in winter.  
**Hardiness** USDA 7b-9b.  
**Origin** Mexico.  
**Season of interest** July – November.



*Impatiens bicaudata*

Plants that bloom with brilliant colour in shade in summer are few and far between. *Impatiens bicaudata* is one of them. It is a tender perennial, but a few stems rooted in a glass of water in September will give you young plants to overwinter and plant out next spring. It is vigorous, growing to a metre high if allowed, and nearly as wide, supported on a thick succulent stem. The exotic, hooded, red-orange flowers have a yellow throat and an adorable tightly curled yellow tail beneath.

**Height** 1m.  
**Growing conditions** Light shade, good soil, not too dry.  
**Hardiness** USDA 10a-11.  
**Origin** Madagascar.  
**Season of interest** May – October.

*Caryopteris x clandonensis 'Dark Knight'*

A compact, tidy-growing caryopteris with the deepest blue flowers of any. The aromatic grey leaves set off the fragrant blue-purple flowers to perfection. It is a small, hardy shrub if given sun and good drainage. Cut the stems hard back in spring to keep the plants bushy and compact. After a hard winter it may die back to the roots, but it will usually grow back and flower again the same year unless the roots get too wet. A favourite with bees and butterflies at a time when few other shrubs are in bloom.

**Height** 60cm.  
**Growing conditions** Sun and drainage.  
**Hardiness** USDA 5a-9b.  
**Origin** Hybrid.  
**Season of interest** August – September.



Places to visit

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

**Marchants Hardy Plants** is an immaculate nursery full of interesting plants, most of which can be seen growing in the adjacent garden where the curving paths and flowing lines of the plants echo the gentle curves of the South Downs. Specialising in grasses and late summer perennials, it is a joy to visit. The nursery is open 9.30am-5.30pm, Wednesday – Saturday



Marchants Hardy Plants

mid-March to mid-October, the garden the same from early May to mid-October. 2 Marchants Cottages, Mill Lane, Laughton, East Sussex BN8 6AJ. Tel 01323 811737, marchantshardyplants.co.uk

**Great Dixter** is the late Christopher Lloyd's garden, built around a Tudor house converted and extended by Edwin Lutyens for Lloyd's

father. Fabulous at any time of the year, but magnificent in late summer. It is ever changing, demonstrating that gardening is really a form of creative play. Though Christopher is sadly missed, the garden hasn't missed a beat; head gardener Fergus Garrett carries on developing it with the same joy and energy. Open 11am-5pm, Tuesday – Sunday and Bank Holiday

Mondays, April to October. Northiam, Rye, East Sussex TN31 6PH. Tel 01797 252878, greatdixter.co.uk  
**East Ruston Old Vicarage** is a truly extraordinary garden close to the sea, so it hardly ever freezes. Enormous amounts of love, effort and money have been expended on this garden, which just keeps growing. Fabulous planting, sculptures, vistas, fountains,



East Ruston Old Vicarage

wildflower meadows and, my favourite, the Desert Wash garden, a bit of Mexico in Norfolk. It's so varied there is something to love – and hate – for everyone. Open 1-5.30pm, Wednesday – Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays, April to October. East Ruston Old Vicarage, East Ruston, Norwich, Norfolk NR12 9HN. Tel 01692 650432, e-ruston-oldvicaragegardens.co.uk