Selenium 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.

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, good soil.
Hardiness USDA 7b-9b.
Origin Mexico.
Season of interest July – September.

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 any 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.
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.

**Hakonechloa macra Aureola**

The golden leaves, subtly variegated with lime green, flow outwards from the centre, 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. On it can be planted en masse, making an undulating carpet. In midsummer fine, feathery flowers add a haze of mist. The paper-like whisps whisper in the wind, reminding one of a small bamboo, and in autumn they flush 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.

**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, silvery flowers 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 kosh 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.