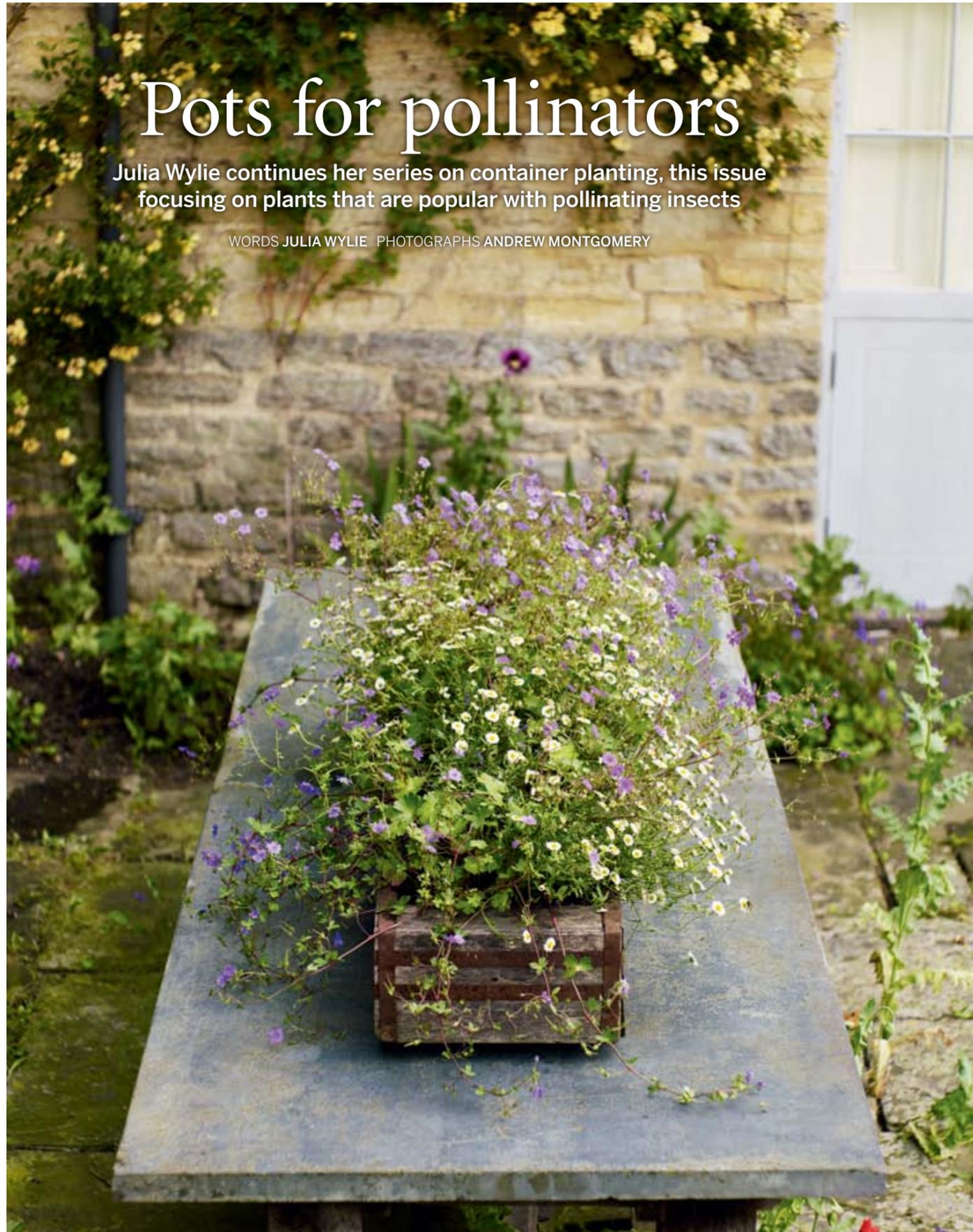


Pots for pollinators

Julia Wylie continues her series on container planting, this issue focusing on plants that are popular with pollinating insects

WORDS JULIA WYLIE PHOTOGRAPHS ANDREW MONTGOMERY



Daredevils

I first saw these two self-seeding perennials cascading down a rocky bank together, in a very exposed country garden in which I worked ten years ago. The owner was a 'plantaholic' and avidly grew plants for her own garden and to sell for charity. We were always struggling to find homes for the new arrivals in the already brimming borders and had to protect the tender ones in winter. This pair however flowered effortlessly all summer, growing where not many would have dared. So they are perfect for containers, which if placed on a wall, near paving or gravel, will result in offspring colonising any available crack or space.

How to achieve the look

Cultivation and care

Geranium pyrenaicum 'Bill Wallis' is sometimes difficult to find, because nurserymen don't appreciate its prolific seeding tendencies. *Agapanthus*, whose roots relish being constrained, are alternatives – I once admired them partnering erigeron daisies, which were peeping through a white picket fence in an Australian front garden.

These plants would also work well beneath potted olive trees. They are very attractive to bees and butterflies and will flower profusely from spring to late summer. Remove spent flower stems. Cut back the daisies in late winter. Grow both the erigeron and geranium from seed, or buy in 9cm pots if possible,

because they are quick to establish. Plant in pots in sun or part shade in well-drained loam-based compost (John Innes or similar) and water regularly, especially in dry weather.

Container

This long wooden box was built for the safe delivery of party glasses. A similar container could be made out of reclaimed scaffold or floorboards. It's worth using wood for containers if possible, because it is breathable and does not experience the same temperature fluctuations as metal containers, so it provides more natural growing conditions, especially on exposed roof terraces or coastal sites.

Plants

These are both very attractive to bees and butterflies and will flower profusely from spring to late summer.

1 *Erigeron karvinskianus*

Amount 5-7. **Height** 15-30cm.

Season Flowers May-November. AGM*. RHS H3, USDA 6a-9b†.

2 *Geranium pyrenaicum* 'Bill Wallis'

Amount 5-7. **Height** 30cm.

Season Flowers April-September. RHS H4, USDA 3a-9b.

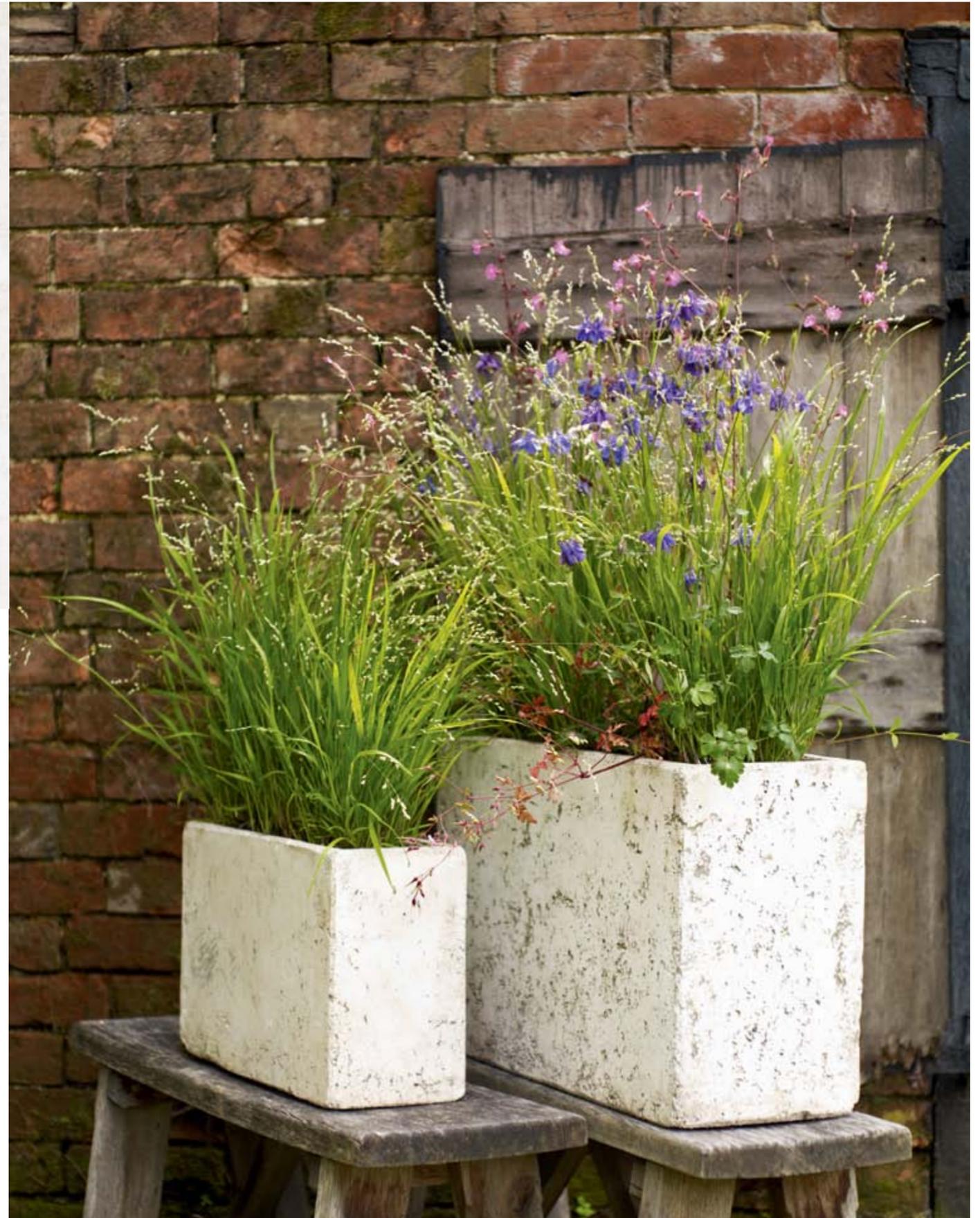
Suppliers

Cotswold Garden Flowers Tel 01386 422829, www.cgf.net

Whitewater Nursery Tel 0118 932 6487, www.whitewaternursery.co.uk

*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society.

†Hardiness ratings given where available.



Meadow styling

These plants will always remind me of Sarah Price's garden at 2012 Chelsea Flower Show, where she used them to great effect under a grove of multi-stemmed silver birch trees. As one of her team of planters, I found some peaceful respite from the busy show ground while helping to create the mossy woodland corner. I was entranced by how the lime green leaves and delicate rice-like flowers of the grass *Melica altissima* caught the light and allowed the dark blue aquilegias, bright pink silene and tiny pink flowers of *Geranium robertianum* to gleam in the dappled shade. These marble-like pots of concrete and recycled polystyrene capture a memory of the meadow in that tranquil space.

How to achieve the look

Cultivation and care

After the flower show I planted a similar composition along a shady path in my garden. The silene (red campion) flowered on and off throughout the summer, even though I had only planted them as tiny plugs the previous autumn. The melica seedheads also looked wonderful for most of the summer, but can be cut down after flowering to encourage a fresh flush of leaves and flowers – either way, the spent foliage and seedheads will need to be removed in late winter, because they start into growth from the base very early in the spring. Deadheading the aquilegias can encourage a second flowering, but leave a few seed heads

to mature, because they, the silene and the geranium will self-seed readily. Occurring naturally in alkaline, free-draining meadows, woodland edges and hedgerows they will all appreciate a rich loam-based, free-draining compost. Ensure containers have good drainage and holes.

Container

These stylish recycled pots look like stone or marble and can be painted to great effect, but unfortunately are not as 'eco' as I first thought, because they are made with concrete in order to recycle the polystyrene. Salvaged terracotta pots would be more sustainable.

Plants

These all attract pollinating insects.

- 1 *Silene dioica***
Amount 3-5. Height 60cm.
Season April-Nov. USDA 5a-9b.
- 2 *Aquilegia alpina***
Amount 3-5. Height 45cm.
Season April-May. USDA 4a-7b.
- 3 *Melica altissima* 'Alba'**
Amount 5-7. Height 60cm.
Season April-June.
- 4 *Geranium robertianum***
Amount 1-2. Height 10-40cm.
Season Pink flowers early spring onwards. RHS H4, USDA 5a-10b.

Suppliers

Crocus Tel 0844 557 2233,
www.crocus.co.uk
Whitewater Nursery Tel 0118 932
6487, www.whitewaternursery.co.uk

NOTE: All quantities and plant sizes may vary according to container



Holiday snapshot

While walking through olive groves in Tuscany two summers ago, I was excited to see *Dianthus carthusianorum*, *Centaurea nigra* and *Daucus carota* flowering on the grassy banks, where they were able to escape the farmer's fastidious strimmers. I was so inspired that on our return to London I planted a group of three olive trees in our new empty garden with a similar collection of wildflowers and grasses beneath them. The olive trees screen the overlooking windows and along with the wildflowers transport me back to those dreamy days in the Tuscan countryside.

How to achieve the look

Cultivation and care

I have substituted the perennial wild carrot with the similarly white lacy annual *Orlaya grandiflora* – *Ammi majus* would also work. Plus I have squeezed in the ladybird poppy for a clash of red and pink – it looks fantastic at Great Dixter, seeded among the silver-leaved, shocking magenta-pink-flowered *Lychnis coronaria*. I have also added a few clumps of *Allium sphaerocephalon*, whose small egg-shaped buds will soon swell and form claret-coloured cones.

For the annual orlaya and poppies to flower so early in the year, the seeds need to be sown September-October. Sow directly where they are to flower or into cell units or

individual pots, to avoid disturbing their roots.

There is still time to sow the seeds – until the end of May – directly where you want them to flower later this summer. Or the perennial dianthus, centaurea and daucus can also be grown from seed, but won't flower in their first year – for more instant gratification buy them as plug plants or in pots.

Container

Place the pot in an open sunny site, with free-draining loam-based compost with added hydroleca or grit. Water regularly, because they are at your mercy in a pot. One that is a similar size to this water tank will help to make them feel as if they are growing in the ground.

Plants

These all make great cut flowers.

1 *Orlaya grandiflora*

Amount 5-7. **Height** 60cm.

Season May-Oct. AGM.

2 *Papaver commutatum*

Amount 2-3. **Height** 45cm.

Season Late spring to early summer. AGM. RHS H4.

3 *Dianthus carthusianorum*

Amount 3-5. **Height** 40-60cm.

Season May-Sep. USDA 5a-9b.

Suppliers

British Wild Flower Plants

Tel 01603 716615,
www.wildflowers.co.uk

Emorsgate Seeds Tel 01553 829028,

www.wildseed.co.uk

Seedaholic Tel +353 (0)98 506666,

www.seedaholic.com

Contact details

For more of Julia's work go to www.juliawylie.com