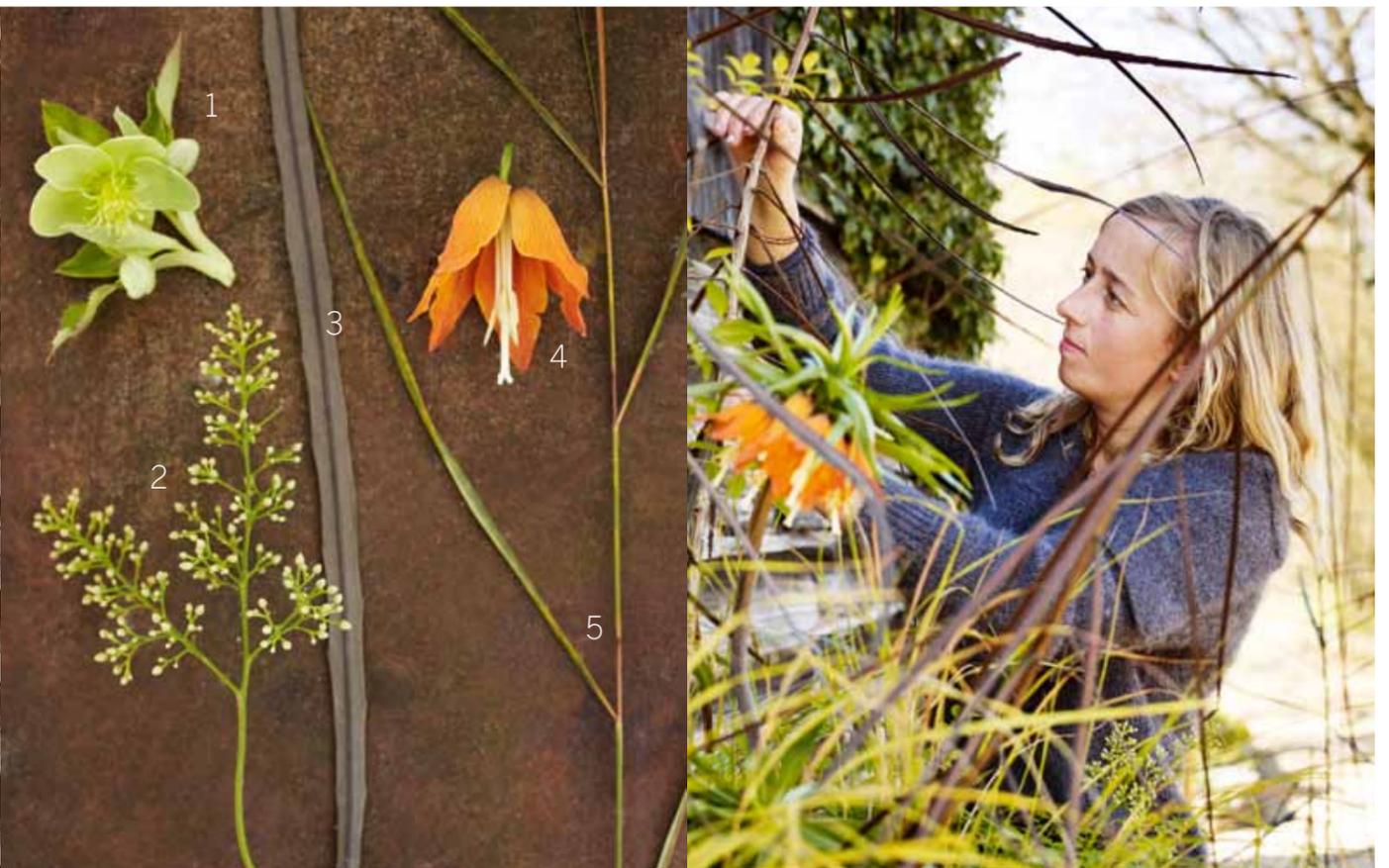


# Container planting

In her new series, gardener Julia Wylie guides us through tried and tested planting for containers with seasonal interest

WORDS JULIA WYLIE PHOTOGRAPHS ANDREW MONTGOMERY



## Tough tank

The plants pictured here are like old friends I can always rely on. They are suited to difficult situations such as shady courtyards, narrow borders and containers where the priority is for a year-round display. They are most valuable in late winter, especially if placed close to a window or entrance, but they can be spiced up for prolonged summer drama.

The lime green Corsican hellebores provide early nectar for brave bumblebees, so for a smaller pot simply pair them with the grasses and a few spring bulbs such as white daffodils and tulips. I have used a couple of striking orange *Fritillaria imperialis* bulbs, which could be replaced with lilies for later colour and scent in summer. In late spring, fill any gaps with tall scented tobacco flowers (*Nicotiana alata* or *N. sylvestris*) that will flower until the first frosts.

### How to achieve the look

#### Long-lasting and dramatic

The quirky black-leaved *Pseudopanax crassifolius* (from New Zealand) is one of the few evergreen trees that will grow happily in a container. An alternative is the strawberry tree *Arbutus unedo*, perfect for roof terraces and exposed places. To accommodate further layers of planting, the lower leaves and branches of the upright evergreen shrub *Nandina domestica* can be removed. If the grass *Anemanthele lessoniana* becomes tatty or starts to crowd out any of its neighbours remove the older leaves or cut to the base in spring. They will happily self-seed.

#### Soil preparation

For permanent/perennial displays the pots need to be big and the growing medium well prepared. Use one part hydroleca or horticultural grit to three parts loam-based compost to aid moisture retention, aeration and drainage. Soak during dry spells and before applying slow-release organic fertiliser in spring. Top-dress with compost in winter.

#### An improvised container

I found this unusual water tank discarded at the edge of a nursery. The proprietors kindly loaned it to me.

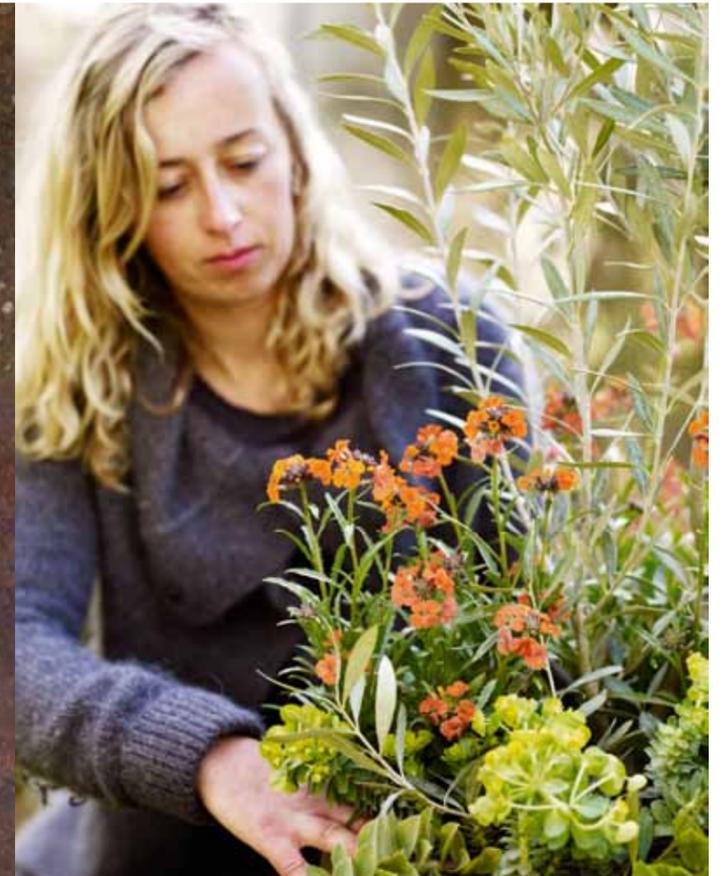
### Plants

- 1 *Helleborus argutifolius***  
AMOUNT 2-3. HEIGHT 50cm.  
SEASON Evergreen. AGM\*
- 2 *Nandina domestica***  
AMOUNT 2. HEIGHT 1-1.5m.  
SEASON Evergreen. AGM
- 3 *Pseudopanax crassifolius***  
AMOUNT 2-3. HEIGHT 3.5-10m.  
SEASON Evergreen.
- 4 *Fritillaria imperialis* 'Aurora'**  
AMOUNT 2-3. HEIGHT 60-120cm.  
SEASON Early to mid spring.
- 5 *Anemanthele lessoniana***  
AMOUNT 2-3. HEIGHT 75cm.  
SEASON Evergreen. AGM

### Suppliers

- Architectural Plants** Tel 01403 891772, [www.architecturalplants.com](http://www.architecturalplants.com)
- Avant Gardener** Tel 07831 196416, [www.avantgardener.co.uk](http://www.avantgardener.co.uk)
- Burncoose Nurseries** Tel 01209 860316, [www.burncoose.co.uk](http://www.burncoose.co.uk)

\*HOLDS AN AWARD OF GARDEN MERIT FROM THE ROYAL HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY



## Sun lovers

Multi-stemmed olive trees make pleasingly wild subjects for pots. The uplifting silvery-grey leaves catch the weak winter sun and contrast with the acid green euphorbia and orange perennial wallflower. I generally plant the longer flowering purple wallflower *Erysimum* 'Bowles's Mauve', because not many of my clients like orange as much as I do! Both are very attractive to butterflies and bees, and will flower on and off for most of the year, including late winter in sheltered places. The dark brown containers give a warm earthy feel, but the plants would look equally good in large terracotta or silver metallic tubs.

### How to achieve the look

#### Planting and pruning

If you only have a small pot to plant up, then the *Euphorbia* will be fine on its own. I have seen it trailing from the top of a narrow-necked terracotta urn and it would also be striking, if slightly eccentric, in a chimney pot. The new shoots will push from the centre so spent flower stems should be removed to encourage new growth. The wallflowers will also require regular deadheading and a light trim (if they ever stop flowering) to keep them from becoming leggy. They are easy to propagate from semi-hardwood cuttings in spring or summer, so could be replaced every few years if necessary.

#### Compost and care

In sheltered parts, you might be able to harvest a few olives, especially if watered well during the growing season (March-September). All these plants are drought tolerant, but will require more water and care when growing in pots, so the bigger the pot, the better. A mulch of gravel will help to keep their roots cool and conserve moisture. They will appreciate a loam-based, free-draining, moist growing medium, as described on the previous page. A sprinkling of 'blood fish and bone' – be careful not to get any on the leaves – in late spring will encourage growth and flowers. I often wish to plant something similar at the base of potted olives outside restaurants.

### Plants

- 1 *Olea europaea***  
AMOUNT 1. HEIGHT 5-7m.  
SEASON Evergreen.
- 2 *Euphorbia myrsinites***  
AMOUNT 2-3.  
HEIGHT 15cm, spread 30cm.  
SEASON Evergreen. AGM
- 3 *Erysimum* 'Apricot Delight'**  
AMOUNT 3-5. HEIGHT 60cm.  
SEASON Evergreen.

### Suppliers

**Neal's Nurseries Garden Centre**  
Tel 020 8874 2037,  
[www.capitalgardensgroup.co.uk](http://www.capitalgardensgroup.co.uk)



## Bulb bowl

When I first started gardening 16 years ago I was living on a farm in Buckinghamshire. I planted hundreds of *Fritillaria meleagris* bulbs in the grass beside the drive, which ran alongside a spinney. Unfortunately, mice must have discovered them, and the few that did manage to flower were pecked to shreds by the pheasants who obviously found them a curiosity. Now that I am living in London, I still have mice to contend with, but by planting a few bulbs in pots in autumn I am able to protect them with chicken wire. I can then elevate them to a prominent position to fully appreciate their delicate snake's head chequered bells. After flowering I plant them out so that they can naturalise in my garden.

### How to achieve the look

#### Habitat

Native to Europe, these fritillaries would prefer to be in their traditional habitat of ancient low-lying hay meadows subject to winter flooding, but sadly these have mostly disappeared. So choose a sunny or partially shaded site, which will remain damp in summer. They will do well in flower borders, but are more likely to self-seed if planted in areas of long grass, uncut until August.

#### Planting

Perhaps another reason why my initial attempt failed was due to the bulbs' fragility. They might have dried out while in storage. Some experts

believe in soaking them in lukewarm water for a few hours before planting to increase your chances. If you don't succeed, buy them in pots 'in the green' in spring.

Plant the bulbs as soon as possible in early autumn in moist, humus-rich, loam-based compost at four times their own depth, ensuring that the pots have holes for drainage. Protect with plastic netting or chicken wire.

Using small pots helps to prevent disturbing their roots when eventually planting out and if grouped together on a window ledge or table in decorative containers they will still create the meadow look. They should easily slide out of this cement bowl.

### Plants

- 1 *Fritillaria meleagris***  
 AMOUNT 30-50 bulbs.  
 HEIGHT 30cm.  
 SEASON Flowers March-May.

### Suppliers

- Specialist bulb nurseries such as  
**Avon Bulbs** Tel 01460 242177,  
[www.avonbulbs.co.uk](http://www.avonbulbs.co.uk)  
**Broadleigh Bulbs** Tel 01823 286231,  
[www.broadleighbulbs.co.uk](http://www.broadleighbulbs.co.uk)

Egg-shaped cement bowl from Indian Ocean. Any pot that allows easy transplanting after flowering will be fine. [www.indian-ocean.co.uk](http://www.indian-ocean.co.uk)

NOTE: Quantities and plant sizes may vary, depending on container size and growing conditions.

### Contact details

For more examples of Julia's work go to [www.juliawylie.com](http://www.juliawylie.com)

## Bright lights

Most silver evergreens need full sun, but the antipodean *Astelia chathamica* is an exception, ideal for lighting up dark corners. It prefers moist, rich soil in part shade, although I have found it on windy roof terraces, surviving in containers without irrigation in full sun. It makes a bold statement on its own, or as a series of formal pots with pebbles to shade its roots. The small black grass-like *Ophiopogon planiscapus* 'Nigrescens' would be an obvious companion, but I couldn't resist planting it with *Ranunculus ficaria* 'Brazen Hussy' and *Erythronium* 'Pagoda', which give a contrast of foliage, have similar requirements and provide nectar for bees. These pots would suit a shady courtyard, roof terrace or coastal garden.

### How to achieve the look

#### Planting and aftercare

Both the ranunculus and the erythroniums are woodland perennials, so they come into leaf early in the year. Their foliage will die down after flowering, so either plant them in a suitable place in your garden as soon as they have flowered or remove the spent foliage and mulch the pots with fresh compost.

*R. ficaria* 'Brazen Hussy' would be happy in the window box for years, so could be moved out of sight during their dormant phase and swapped with another window box for summer. Any dead or damaged astelia foliage should be removed completely from the base of the plant as

necessary. The silver leaves would also be complemented by pink or white cyclamen, which are widely available.

All three plants are perennials, so will appreciate moist loam-based compost. Hydroleca will help to retain moisture and aerate the soil conditions within the pot.

#### Containers

I chose the grey polystone pots to accentuate the bright yellow flowers and allow the purple and silver foliage to shine. They are made of a compound of stone and resin, which makes them lighter and easier to move around.

### Plants

- 1 *Ranunculus ficaria* 'Brazen Hussy'**  
 AMOUNT 7-11. HEIGHT 10cm.  
 SEASON Early spring.  
**2 *Astelia chathamica***  
 AMOUNT 1. HEIGHT 1.5m.  
 SEASON Evergreen. AGM  
**3 *Erythronium* 'Pagoda'**  
 AMOUNT 3-5. HEIGHT 35cm  
 SEASON Flowers March-April. AGM

### Suppliers

Grey polystone pots from Evergreen Pots & Soil Ltd, New Covent Garden Wholesale Market, but readily available at all good nurseries and garden centres.

