

# Bright and bold

Julia Wylie uses colourful pots and architectural plants to say goodbye to summer in style

WORDS JULIA WYLIE PHOTOGRAPHS ANDREW MONTGOMERY



## Hockney homage

David Hockney's 2012 exhibition *A Bigger Picture* inspired me to be braver with colour. His subjects were mainly trees, wildflowers and landscapes, which made the bright paintings even more magical. I used water-based emulsion to retain the porous nature of the terracotta and develop a more weathered look. Vibrantly painted terracotta is not new: I was first inspired by the iconic Majorelle blue and bright yellow pots in the Jardin Majorelle in Marrakesh, where they accentuate the architectural green leaves of cacti and succulents. Having grown up on a farm in the arid eastern cape of South Africa, I am drawn to the plants' curious shapes and tough nature.

### How to achieve the look

#### Cultivation and care

Containers allow you to give your chosen plants the exact growing media and conditions they prefer, so are perfect for cultivating exotic plants that evoke far-off places, especially if they need to be brought inside during the winter. For example, the large aloes remind me of my South African roots. They were a gift eight years ago and although they are relatively slow-growing, have more than doubled from their original size, and will soon be too big to fit into our living room – meaning I'll finally be forced to find space for a greenhouse.

During one of the aloes' winters inside, I started to put corks and driftwood around their bases. These are great for moisture

retention and suppressing weeds, but also as a nostalgic reminder of fun escapades and evenings spent with friends.

#### Colour and shape

It was great fun choosing the plants whose shape or colour best suited each pot and its colour co-ordinated saucer. The quirky *Aeonium* looks even more eccentric in this curvaceous, narrow-necked Alhambra pot.

For a similar display to brighten dull autumn days try scented-leaved pelargoniums, *Eucomis* (pineapple) flowers, *Hedychium* (gingers), sunflowers and colourful vegetables. Painted food tins would look equally dramatic and are perfect for small succulents.

Plants (see above left)

**1 & 4 Asters Autumn Jewels range**

**Height** 25cm.

**Season** Late summer.

**Amount** 7-14 depending on container size.

**2 Dahlia 'Honka Red'**

**Height** 50cm-1m.

**Season** July – October.

**Amount** 1-3 depending on container size and growing conditions.

**3 Nerine bowdenii**

**Height** 60cm.

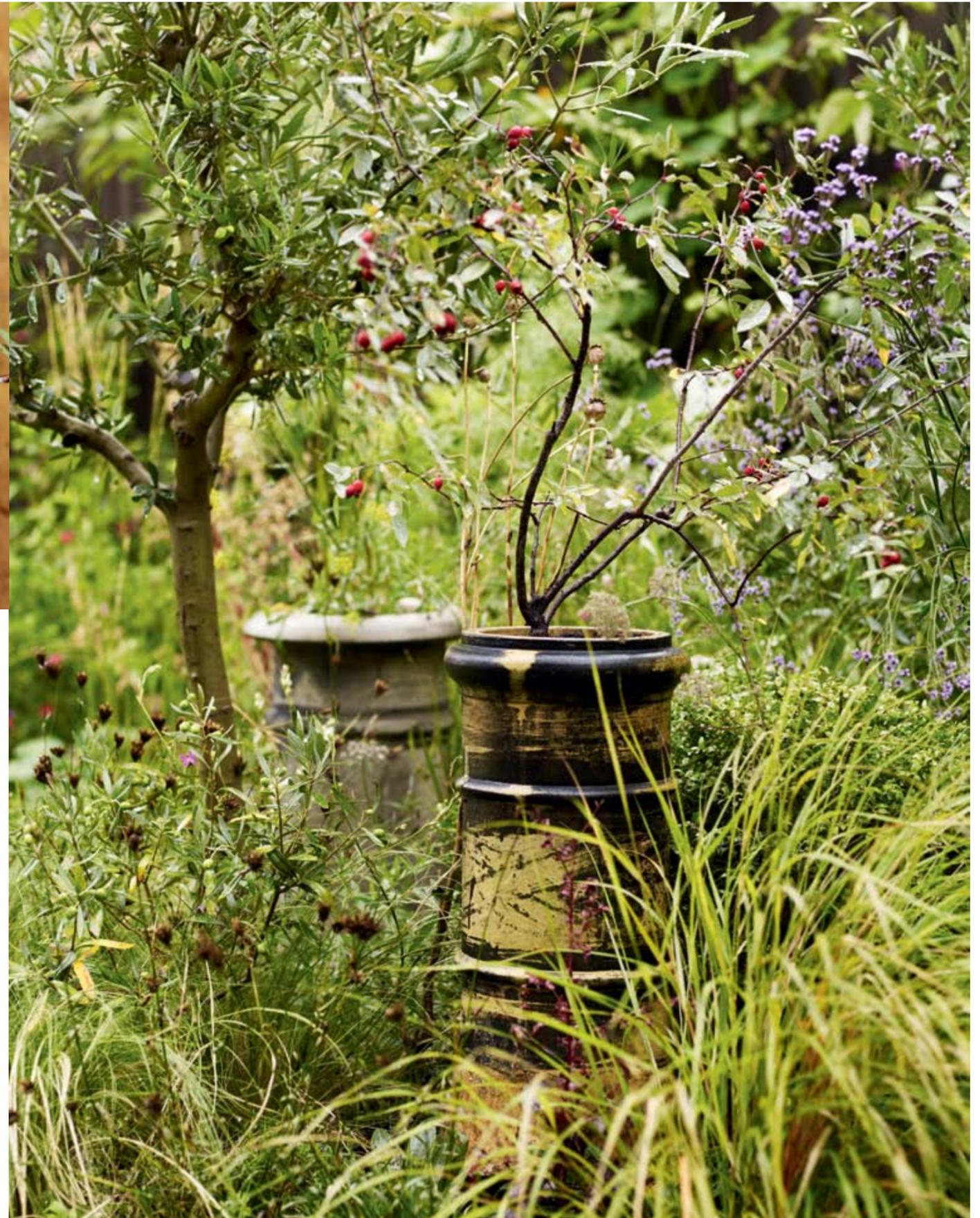
**Season** September – November.

**Amount** 5-9 depending on size of containers used. AGM\*. RHS H4', USDA 8b-10b.

### Suppliers

**Wilsey Plant Centre (RHS)** Woking, Surrey GU23 6QB. Tel 01483 211113, [www.rhs.org.uk/wisleyplantcentre](http://www.rhs.org.uk/wisleyplantcentre)

**Trewhidden Nursery** (for succulents) Penzance, Cornwall TR20 8TT. Tel 01736 362087, [www.trewhidden-online.co.uk](http://www.trewhidden-online.co.uk)



## Gone to pot

Like a ruin, these chimney pots will soon be colonised by surrounding self-seeders, such as the grasses *Stipa tenuissima* and *Anemathele lessoniana*, and *Dianthus carthusianorum*. This species rose could also have seeded itself, but I have accelerated the process, in my impatience to make the garden appear more established. The rose's wild arching habit contrasts with the vertical lines of the chimney pot and the dark glistening red hips will hang on long after the first frosts. Next spring its fresh purplish glaucous foliage will be a perfect foil for the neighbouring plants and its own delicate pink flowers in early summer.

### How to achieve the look

#### Cultivation and care

Chimney or cylinder pots create a dramatic contrast when placed in groups with other pots that vary in shape and size. They can also host temporary installations with seasonal plants in containers that fit snugly in the top – trailing plants and grasses look especially good tumbling over the edges of tall narrow pots – but these require more water and care when cramped into the small space.

The deep-rooting nature of the rose will appreciate all the fresh soil to explore before finally reaching the ground below. The roots will be more vulnerable to frost so be sure to choose a similarly tough plant for a perennial display and drive a stake into the ground

inside the chimney pot to prevent it being blown or knocked over.

For best foliage colour and brightest stems, remove one third of the rose's oldest wood in late winter, encouraging fresh shoots from the base.

#### Container

A friend found these two unusual chimney pots discarded on the pavement at the end of her road, but they are often for sale at reclamation yards. The striking black sooty markings on the pot in the foreground look as though they have been created by an artist for dramatic effect, but they are actually just the remnants of its former use.

### Plants

The single pink flowers of the rose are attractive to bees and the red hips are very popular with birds.

#### 1 *Rosa glauca*

**Height** 1.5-2m.

**Season** April – October.

**Amount** 1 per container. AGM. RHS H7, USDA 2a-9b.

### Suppliers

#### Hill Park Roses

Woodstock Lane North, Surbiton, Surrey KT6 5HN. Tel 020 8398 0022, [www.hillparkroses.co.uk](http://www.hillparkroses.co.uk)

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



## Aster explosion

This smart rusty pot would look equally striking if it were simply filled with the fluffy-flowered *Pennisetum* grasses, but I added asters for autumn colour and, more importantly, to provide late nectar for bees and butterflies. Aster seedheads also attract goldfinches in winter and look stunning when frosty. For earlier flowers and a longer season of colour, *Verbena bonariensis* is an option. Reed-like restios are an excellent alternative to grasses, providing movement as a contrast to any architectural pot in a sunny position, and creating dramatic shadows when placed against rendered walls. The delicate-leaved shrub creating the magical background is New Zealand native *Muehlenbeckia astonii*, which also does well in pots and on windy roof terraces.

### How to achieve the look

#### Cultivation and care

Asters can be susceptible to mildew, but this cultivar is highly resistant; regular division in spring and an airy aspect will help to prevent problems. Water regularly to stop roots drying out. It makes an excellent cut flower and deadheading regularly will prolong flowering.

*Pennisetum macrourum's* striking, white bushy flowers last well into winter. Its drought-tolerant, grey-green, mound-forming leaves turn yellow in autumn. Propagate by division in spring: it is variable when grown from seed.

Both plants require a sunny site with a loam-based free-draining soil – use John Innes No.3 or similar with added grit – and

water regularly. Cut down spent foliage and flowers in spring.

There are lots of other pennisetums that could be substituted if you are unable to source *P. macrourum*. Virtually all grasses do well in pots, but some are especially suitable. Try *Calamagrostis* and *Molinia*, which combine well with late-flowering perennials.

#### Container

I bought this smart hand-engineered, rusted-effect metal container from Knoll Grasses in Dorset – they can organise various shapes and sizes to be made to order. The sharp lines emphasise the soft billowing habit of grasses.

### Plants

These are both very attractive to bees and butterflies and will flower profusely from spring to late summer (see above left).

#### 1 *Pennisetum macrourum*

**Height** 1-1.8m depending on growing conditions.

**Season** September – November.

**Amount** 5-7 depending on container size. RHS H3, USDA 9a-10b.

#### 2 Aster 'Little Carlow'

**Height** 80cm.

**Season** September – October.

**Amount** 3-5 depending on container size. AGM. RHS H7, USDA 5a-8b.

### Suppliers

**Knoll Grasses** Tel 01202 873931, [www.knollgardens.co.uk](http://www.knollgardens.co.uk)

**Marchants Hardy Plants** Tel 01323 811737, [www.marchantshardyplants.co.uk](http://www.marchantshardyplants.co.uk)