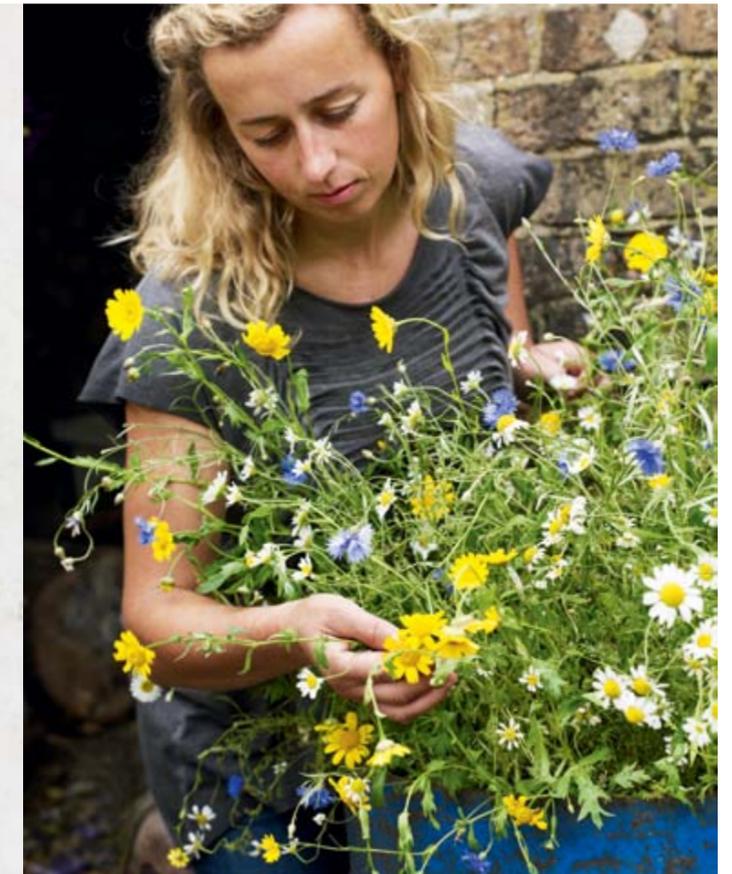


Pots for high summer

Julia Wylie continues her series on container planting, this issue focusing on pots that celebrate summer

WORDS JULIA WYLIE PHOTOGRAPHS ANDREW MONTGOMERY



Mini meadow

These annuals used to be abundant where soil was disturbed by ploughs – a requirement for germination and the reason why so many red poppies came up where soldiers were buried during the war, but they have become a rare sight since the 1960s as a result of changes in farming practices. These three colours contrast well with each other and the blue barrel, but for a longer display try one of the Pictorial Meadows Mixes (see Suppliers) seen at the Olympics last year – very attractive to pollinating insects because of the specially selected successional and long-flowering non-natives, such as *Ammi majus* and *Cosmos bipinnatus*.

How to achieve the look

Cultivation and care

Mix your seeds and sow them in early spring, preferably where they are to flower. Rake or cover the seed lightly with compost, firm down and protect from inquisitive wildlife with a cage of chicken wire or twiggly sticks of hazel, which will double as a support for them. Place in an open sunny site and water regularly. Turn the container occasionally, especially if placed against a wall, to avoid lopsidedness.

For more impatient gardeners and for those who would prefer a permanent pot, it is possible to buy plugs or pots of perennial wildflowers such as *Leucanthemum vulgare*, *Knautia arvensis*, *Daucus carota*

and *Centaurea scabiosa*, but it will be difficult to create the same density by planting mature plants. They are unlikely to flower for as long in pots, so be vigilant with watering. Use loam-based free-draining compost (John Innes or similar) and mix in some moisture-retaining gel to increase their chances. Fertilising is not necessary.

Container

This barrel was used to store powdered paint, so was easy to clean. Barrels or drums are sold at reclamation yards or sometimes outside commercial sites, but often require a metalworker to cut them in half in order to re-use.

Plants

1 *Anthemis arvensis*

Height 30cm.
Season June – September.
Amount 1 packet of seeds.

2 *Centaurea cyanus*

Height 60-75cm. **Season** June – August. **Amount** 1 packet of seeds. RHS H4†.

3 *Glebionis segetum*

Height 45cm. **Season** June – September. **Amount** 1 packet of seeds. RHS H4, USDA 4a-11.

Suppliers

British Wildflower Plants Tel 01603 716615, www.wildflowers.co.uk
Landlife Wildflower Shop Tel 0151 737 1819, www.wildflower.org.uk
Pictorial Meadows Tel 0114 267 7635, www.pictorialmeadows.co.uk

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



Endless summer

Texan native *Gaura lindheimeri* Karalee White (= 'Nugauwhite') provides an effortless display all summer long. Popular with pollinating insects and drought tolerant, it's light airy habit provides movement and combines well with other perennials. It requires very little deadheading, but still manages to out-flower most other perennials, lasting until the first frosts. Native to South Africa, *Eragrostis curvula* 'Totnes Burgundy' is also well suited to the dry conditions likely to be experienced in containers and its red-tinged leaves contrast perfectly with the pinkish red stems and buds of the *Gaura*. *Verbena bonariensis* would be an alternative partner, or an option for a colourful threesome.

How to achieve the look

Cultivation and care

Both *Gaura* and *Eragrostis* appreciate a sunny position and good drainage – mix in hydroleca pebbles or grit and use loam-based compost such as John Innes no 3. The *Gaura* is a short-lived borderline hardy perennial, so don't cut back its frosted stems until it starts into growth again in spring, to assist its survival chances for a second summer. The *Eragrostis* should also be cut down and divided, if more plants are required in spring, because it can't be propagated from seed as its seedlings will revert to the straight species.

Water regularly, because plants in pots dry out more quickly. To extend the season add

spring and summer bulbs such as tulips and alliums in autumn.

Container

I found this corrugated iron trough discarded in my friend's field in Cornwall – it used to be used for feeding animals. If you are unable to source sheets of corrugated iron then a similar sized container could be made out of pieces of reclaimed wood or an old bath/water tank. Smaller containers would allow for easy handling and transportation into a greenhouse or protected porch for the winter.

Plants

Both these perennials make long-lasting cut flowers and are attractive to pollinators.

1 *Gaura lindheimeri* Karalee White (= 'Nugauwhite')

Height 60cm. **Season** May – November. **Amount** 25. USDA 5a-11.

2 *Eragrostis curvula*

'Totnes Burgundy'

Height 90cm. **Season** July – September. **Amount** 15.

Suppliers

The Beth Chatto Gardens Tel 01206

822007, www.bethchatto.co.uk

Knoll Gardens Tel 01202 873931,

www.knollgardens.co.uk

Sarah Raven Tel 0845 092 0283,

www.sarahraven.com

NOTE: Quantities and plant sizes may vary according to container size and growing conditions.



Scented doorway

Placing scented pots beside a doorway can help to slow you down on your way in from a busy day. I often plant *Lilium regale* and the tall white tobacco plant *Nicotiana glauca* with bronze fennel and chocolate cosmos, but for this container I couldn't resist the striking contrast of the clear red flowers and almost black bracts and flower stems of the tough, long-flowering *Salvia 'Royal Bumble'*. Bright pink and lime green tobacco plants would work too, if you prefer something more muted, or are not quite ready for red.

How to achieve the look

Cultivation and care

The bronze fennel seeds can be dried and used in cooking, while the leaves are a great foil for the other plants and they smell of aniseed when crushed or picked. They are especially good with fish, so a similar pot could be positioned next to the barbecue or kitchen door. The cosmos flowers smell of vanilla but sadly are inedible. The salvia is cultivated in Mexico as a medicinal plant and is sometimes used to make tea.

All three plants prefer full sun and free-draining soil, so use a loam-based compost with extra grit. Bronze fennel self-seeds readily and the salvia can be propagated

easily from cuttings. The cosmos can only be propagated by vegetative cuttings – ideally they should be moved to a frost-free greenhouse to over-winter. Deadheading the cosmos and salvia will help to prolong the flowers. The fennel seedheads will stand all winter and look wonderful when frosty. They all make great cut flowers and attract a wide range of pollinating insects.

Container

The grey vintage dolly washtubs are available at reclamation or antique dealers. They blend beautifully with the stone of this house, allowing the colours to stand out.

Plants

- 1 ***Foeniculum vulgare 'Purpureum'***
Height 1.5m–2.5m when growing in the ground. Size will depend on how well it is watered and fed in its pot.
Season Flowers July – August, seedheads last all winter.
Amount 3-4 per container.
RHS H4, USDA 4a-9b.
- 2 ***Cosmos atrosanguineus***
Height 50-90cm. Season June – October. Amount 3-5 per container.
RHS H3, USDA 8a-10b.
- 3 ***Salvia 'Royal Bumble'***
Height 60cm. Season July – October. Amount 3-5 per container.
USDA 8b-11.

Suppliers

RHS online plant shop Tel 0844 557 2623, www.rhsplants.co.uk

Pearls of light

It's hard not to be captivated by the heart-shaped nodding flowers of the graceful grass *Briza maxima*; they catch the slightest breeze and shaft of light. Best grown in groups for maximum impact. It makes a wonderful window box or a table centrepiece to admire at eye level – evoking memories of cornfields, sunny meadows and roadside verges. The seedheads last well as cut flowers and can be dried for winter arrangements. I filled this rusty classic cast iron feeding bowl with plants I grew from seed and placed it beside self-seeding *Plantago major 'Rubrifolia'*, so that they can seed freely together.

How to achieve the look

Cultivation and care

Briza is a genus of annual and perennial grasses in the family *Poaceae*. It is native to north temperate regions. The most common, *Briza media*, is widespread in grasslands and meadows in Britain, except for northern Scotland. *Briza maxima* is called 'greater quaking grass' in reference to the size of its seedheads. In the UK it is much less common in the wild than *Briza media*.

I was surprised by how easy this annual was to grow from seed and by how quickly the unusual flowers formed – it took just less than 12 weeks from spring sowing. In fact I had forgotten them among some other seedlings, and so had neglected to pot them on soon

enough, which is probably why they haven't reached more than 25cm in height.

Ideally they should be sown in late August, but for a longer flowering season it's safest to sow some in autumn and then more in spring, in cell units or directly where they are to flower, to avoid disturbing their roots. This annual *Briza* prefers richer soil than most grasses and will tolerate semi-shade well. Other annual grasses to try are *Hordeum jubatum* and *Lagurus ovatus*.

Container

Briza can survive drought, so is well suited to being in a container, but ensure that the vessel you choose has drainage holes.

Plants

- 1 ***Briza maxima***
Height 45 cm. Season July – September. Amount 1 packet of seeds or 9 plants. RHS H4, USDA 5b-10b.

Suppliers

Chiltern Seeds Tel 01491 824675, www.chilternseeds.co.uk
Emorsgate Seeds Tel 01553 829028, www.wildseed.co.uk
Sarah Raven Tel 0845 092 0283, www.sarahraven.com
Seedaholic www.seedaholic.com

Contact details

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

