

OCTOBER PLANTS

A rich palette comes to the fore in Fleur's recommendations for early autumn, including a perennial sunflower and a bi-coloured bidens

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VERNONIA ARKANSANA

Ironweed takes its Latin name from the 17th-century English botanist William Vernon who collected many plants in what is now the US state of Maryland. It's a large plant for the back of a border that blooms exuberantly until late autumn with fluffy purple tassels combined in large umbels. It grows best on a rich, slightly moist soil with lots of sun. It is beautiful as a cut flower, very attractive to butterflies and makes a nice successor to *Eupatorium* in autumn borders.

Height 2m.
Origin North America.
Growing conditions Moist but well-drained soil; full sun.
Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 5a-8b†.
Season of interest Summer to autumn.



ASTER RUGULOSUS 'ASRUGO'

A beautiful and hassle-free aster that flowers abundantly and for several months. It doesn't proliferate and doesn't suffer from mildew. Over time it changes colour from white to dusty pink, making it perfect to combine with other perennials in the pink and burgundy colour spectrum, such as *Lobelia x speciosa* 'Fan Scharlach', *Persicaria amplexicaulis* 'Blackfield' or *Sanguisorba officinalis* 'Tanna'. Its somewhat looser inflorescences make it ideal for more naturalistic planting schemes.

Height 70cm.
Origin Garden origin (species Japan, eastern Asia).
Growing conditions Moist but well-drained soil; full sun.
Hardiness RHS H7.
Season of interest Summer to autumn.

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

SILPHIUM PERFOLIATUM

Commonly known as the cup plant, for its cup-shaped leaves, this tall plant is often used in meadow plantings and among tall prairie grasses, but can also look striking at the back of a border. Some find its height, spread and large leaves a little intrusive, but this seems insignificant compared to the radiant, yellow daisies – sometimes with up to 20 flowers on one four-angled stem – that are held high above the leaves. There are 12 known species of *Silphium*, including a very beautiful, shorter plant we once saw at Great Dixter with greyish leaves.

Height 2.5m.
Origin Central and eastern North America.
Growing conditions Moist but well-drained soil; full sun to part shade.
Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 3a-9b.
Season of interest Autumn.



BIDENS CAMPFIRE 'FIRE WHEEL'

In recent years there have been several new developments in the orange, red colour range of *Bidens*, including the Campfire series, which make an excellent addition to any richly hued border. This one blooms – in abundance – until late in autumn and has beautiful reddish-brown flowers with a striking golden ring in the middle. As the plants fan out broadly and have such a long flowering period, they make excellent fillers and are also ideal for weaving in among other plants at the front edge of the border or in pots. Not hardy.

Height 40cm.
Origin Garden origin (species Mexico).
Growing conditions Well-drained soil; full sun and part shade.
Hardiness RHS H2, USDA 9a-11.
Season of interest Summer to autumn.



IMPATIENS PSEUDOVIOLA

This small impatiens is a big favourite. Although not hardy, provided winter temperatures remain above freezing it will continuously bloom from summer through to winter, and in warmer climates can bloom all year, producing an abundance of white-pink, violet-like flowers, hence the name *pseudoviola*. An excellent plant for pots, it also works well as a bedding plant in moist and shady places. In our northern garden it is quite difficult to get this balsam through the winter, so we always take cuttings in the autumn, which, as with most impatiens species, is quite easy. AGM*.

Height 40cm.

Origin Kenya, Tanzania.

Growing conditions Moist but well-drained soil; part shade to full shade.

Hardiness RHS H2, USDA 10a-11.

Season of interest Summer to winter.

*HELIANTHUS 'TRIOMPHE DE GAND'*

In the Netherlands annual sunflowers are very much in vogue at the moment. However, there are also several perennial helianthus worth looking at, including this lovely cultivar developed in Gent in Belgium. Its large, lemon-yellow flowers are around 15cm in diameter and have a heart of dark, slightly ochre-coloured, disc-shaped florets. If you regularly remove the spent flowers, it will continue to bring a sunny, golden glow to the garden until late in the autumn.

Height 1.8m.

Origin Garden origin (species North America).

Growing conditions Well-drained soil; full sun.

Hardiness RHS H6.

Season of interest Late summer to autumn.

*ARALIA CACHEMIRICA*

Also known as the Kashmir spikenard, this giant of a plant makes a wonderful architectural statement. In summer it produces large clusters of cream-green rounded umbels that can illuminate the shadiest of spots. Then in autumn its brown-black berries give it a slight air of mystery. Most bizarrely it dies completely above the ground and rises in full glory the following season. Other species in the genus – *Aralia californica* and *Aralia continentalis* – are also voluminous while *Aralia racemosa* and *Aralia cordata* remain much smaller. All are very special.

Height 2.5m.

Origin Asia, from Kashmir to Nepal.

Growing conditions Moist but well-drained soil; full sun to full shade.

Hardiness RHS H5.

Season of interest Summer to autumn.



PLACES TO VISIT

Recommended places to see seasonal plants at their best both in Europe and the UK

If you love maples then you'll love **Plantentuin Esveld**. The Dutch nursery has its own Aceretum devoted to an extensive collection of more than 1,000 different maples, consisting of almost all hardy species and a wide range of cultivars. I always enjoy visiting in May and June, when the young leaves develop, but the trees are spectacular in

autumn when the flaming colours give a wonderful display. Alongside the acers the nursery also has collections of *Buxus*, *Pieris* and *Lonicera*. Rijnveld 72, 2771XS Boskoop, the Netherlands. Tel +31 (0)172 213289, esveld.nl

Dutch designer Lianne Pot has created a colourful and vibrant prairie garden that is far more than just a show garden for the many

grasses she sells at **Lianne's Siergrassen**. The 3,500 square metre-garden has been laid out in the shape of an oak leaf, with many different North American grasses and perennials, including *Echinacea purpurea*, *Monarda fistulosa* and *Liatris spicata*, grouped by height and structure as much as colour. A delight to explore in early autumn.

Jan Gosseswijk 31, 9367 TE, De Wilp, Groningen, the Netherlands. Tel +31 (0)594 644263, siergras.nl

Of the many lovely gardens we visited on our most recent trip to the UK, we were probably most impressed by the gardens at **Gravetye Manor**, originally designed by the renowned gardener and botanist William Robinson. The house is now a hotel ▷



BORAGO OFFICINALIS

Borage is one of what are known as pioneer plants, those hardy species that are the first to colonise previously damaged ecosystems. It's an annual plant found in many parts of Europe often growing along grass verges and below bushes, with leaves and stems that are covered with a woolly layer. It sows easily, naturalises well, is beloved by bees and quite simply makes the heart soar just to look at it. In spring we often make a delicious, dark-green borage soup, garnished with its blue flowers as festive decoration. It is also used as a herbal remedy for several disorders.

Height 70cm.
Origin Europe.
Growing conditions Well-drained soil; full sun to part shade.
Hardiness RHS H5, USDA 2a-11.
Season of interest Summer to autumn.



COLOCASIA ESCULENTA 'BLUE HAWAII'

Non-hardy colocasias have become extremely popular as architectural garden plants, possibly because there are so many beautiful examples to be found in exotic gardens. *Colocasia* is an extensive tropical genus with both valuable ornamental garden plants and edible plants. The cultivar 'Blue Hawaii' has beautiful dark reddish-brown veins in the leaves. It is especially spectacular with backlighting. The arrow-shaped leaves can grow up to 60cm. It is also a very useful plant for the edge of container displays.

Height 80cm.
Origin Garden origin (species southern India southeast Asia).
Growing conditions Moist soil; full sun to full shade.
Hardiness RHS H3.
Season of interest Summer to autumn.



SAXIFRAGA 'SILVER VELVET'

With its velvet red leaves decorated with a silver stripe, this saxifraga is one of the most beautiful, looking at first sight very similar to a *Begonia rex*. Its leaves look so soft and beautiful you may feel tempted to lay your head down on this attractive pillow, but if you did you would only destroy the exuberant fairy-like white pinkish blooms that rise above the foliage. It is a slow grower that seems happy in our clay soil, but prefers a soil that is slightly more acidic. Try it in a pot on a shaded table.

Height 40cm.
Origin Hybrid of garden origin (species Asia).
Growing conditions Moist but well-drained soil; part shade to full shade.
Hardiness RHS H4.
Season of interest Spring to autumn.

▷ and restaurant and the gardens, under the care of head gardener Tom Coward, who spent three years working with Fergus Garrett at Great Dixter, are a model of considered planting with a fine touch in colour combinations. It's a garden of tranquillity and aesthetics. The completely walled kitchen garden, which furnishes the hotel's restaurant, is especially

impressive in October with fruit espaliers, glorious veg and fully flowering annuals. Vowels Lane, West Hoathly, Sussex RH19 4LJ. Tel 01342 810567, gravetyemanor.co.uk
The Salutation in Kent is another hotel and restaurant with an impressive garden pedigree. Designed in 1912 by architect Sir Edwin Lutyens, the gardens are a plant

lover's paradise, divided into different areas arranged around a unifying theme. We visited in October 2017 and found the gardens both surprising and inspiring, and were impressed by the Exotic Garden with plants that are not at all hardy in the Netherlands, but here grow into a jungle. October also offers the chance to see its dahlia collection. Knight rider Street,

Sandwich, Kent CT13 9EW. Tel 01304 619919, the-salutation.com
 If asters rather than dahlias are your October plants of choice, there is no better place in the UK to see them at their best than the **Picton Garden** near Malvern. The garden, named in memory of the late Percy Picton, is attached to Old Court Nurseries, which Percy ran for many years and holds

the National Plant Collection of Michaelmas daisies. Over the past few years, the garden has been reworked to offer spring and summer interest but is still best seen in autumn. It is open on selected dates throughout the year and every day from 1 September to 20 October. Walwyn Road, Colwall, Malvern, Worcestershire WR13 6QE. Tel 01684 540416, autumnasters.co.uk