

# MARCH PLANTS

Come March, Fleur is seeking colour to banish the grey days of winter, and chooses ten plants that help brighten the lengthening days of early spring

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## FRITILLARIA RADDEANA

Fritillaries feel like an unstoppable force of nature. You turn away for a couple of days and then suddenly there are numerous new stems with shiny green foliage. This fritillary's flowers have a beautifully subtle, lime-green colour, which fits perfectly into spring's colour palette. They're also large, making this a very striking plant. It is one of the first fritillaries to flower and prefers well-drained soil and hot dry summers. After flowering, it evolves into large, angular seedpods that look wonderful when used in flower arrangements.

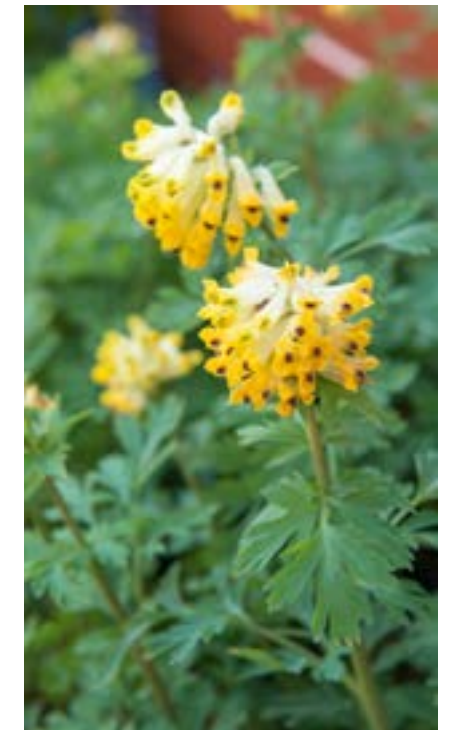
**Height** 70cm.

**Origin** Central Asia.

**Conditions** Well-drained, humus-rich soil; full sun or part shade.

**Hardiness** RHS H7, USDA 5a-8b.

**Season** Spring.



## CORYDALIS NOBILIS

In his book *Garden Myths*, Robert Pavlis describes how the botanist Carl Linnaeus received some incorrectly labelled seeds that he planted out in his garden. They turned out to be *Corydalis nobilis*, and from his garden in Sweden the plant has now naturalised all over much of northern Europe. I find this a beautiful story for a beautiful plant. It's one of the largest corydalis with striking yellow-brown flowers. Most plants need some heat to see a real spurt of growth, but this plant benefits from cold to form up a solid plant. If spring is too warm it slows and collapses.

**Height** 50cm.

**Origin** Altai Mountains and central Asia.

**Conditions** Dry to moderately moist soil; full sun.

**Hardiness** RHS H7, USDA 3b-8b.

**Season** Spring.



## ANEMONE NEMOROSA 'KENTISH PINK'

I'm always amazed that *Anemone nemorosa* doesn't generate the same levels of excitement as snowdrops. These wood anemone offer far more variation – the Austrian breeder Christian Kress has a collection of 140 types – and naturalise well. This cultivar is almost white but the backs of the petal-like sepals are pink, so in full sun it looks like a typical, white wood anemone, but when light is low, and the flowers start to close, its appearance changes completely. In some lights the flowers can appear dark pink.

**Height** 20cm.

**Origin** Western Europe

**Conditions** Well-drained, humus-rich soil; part shade.

**Hardiness** RHS H6, USDA 5a-8b.

**Season** Spring.

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

## SALIX GRACILISTYLA 'MOUNT ASO'

This early blooming pussy willow has exquisitely beautiful, red-purple catkins that over time fade to a silky pink. Once flowering has finished the shrub has attractive leaves that have a slight blue shine. It was selected by a Japanese cut flower grower and the cut branches retain their catkins for ages – even without water. It's relatively easy to grow and is little troubled by disease, although the flowers are sterile, so you can't grow it from seed. It flourishes best on young wood, so prune it firmly each year.

**Height** 2m.

**Origin** China, Japan, Korea.

**Conditions** Well-drained soil; full sun or part shade.

**Hardiness** RHS H7, USDA 4b-8b†.

**Season** Late winter to early spring.





### CORNUS MAS 'JOLICO'

After the greyness of winter, we often crave a little colour. But spring colour is much more welcome if it appears gradually, which is why the subtle beauty of this yellow *Cornus mas* is so much more appealing than the bright yellow of the ubiquitous forsythias. *Cornus mas* 'Jolico' is an older selection from Vienna and has only recently been rediscovered. Its bloom is richer and more intense than the usual *Cornus mas* and its dark-red fruits are much bigger – and delicious when turned into a jam. It also has fine autumn colour. AGM\*.

**Height** 4m.

**Origin** Europe, western Asia.

**Conditions** Medium moisture, well-drained soil; full sun or part shade.

**Hardiness** RHS H7, USDA 4a-8b.

**Season** Flowers spring.



### PHYSOCHLAINA ORIENTALIS

An unusual plant that can be quite hard to source. Its large, triangular leaves held on long stems look a little like those of the American pokeweed, but this comes from the same family as the potato (*Solanaceae*). It has deep roots so can tolerate quite dry conditions. The plant is also very strong and likes nutritious soil in part shade. Its smoky purple flowers look a little out of place among the fresh colours of most spring plants, and most unusually once the plant has finished blooming, and the bees have taken their fill, the plant disappears. Don't worry it's not dead; it is just dormant from summer to spring.

**Height** 40cm.

**Origin** Caucasus, Turkey, Iran.

**Conditions** Well-drained soil; part shade.

**Hardiness** RHS H7, USDA 3b-11.

**Season** Spring.



### CARDAMINE TRIFOLIA

Most cuckoo flowers are deciduous plants; this is the evergreen exception. It forms whole mats of three-lobed, dark-green leaves, but as leaves age their underside fades to purple due to the presence of water-soluble pigments known as anthocyanins. It is a lovely plant that can be used to mask the transition between a path and a border. It is also happy in full shade and completely at home under trees especially forming a carpet with a few ferns, such as *Osmunda regalis* 'Purpurascens', in between, or under a group of polygonatum and disporums.

**Height** 20cm.

**Origin** Southern and central Europe.

**Conditions** Moist, humus-rich soil; full or part shade.

**Hardiness** RHS H5, USDA 7b-9b.

**Season** Spring.

## PLACES TO VISIT

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

One of the most famous parks for native plants in the Netherlands is **Thijssepark** near Amsterdam. It's what in the Netherlands we call a *heemtuin*, a semi-wild landscape intended to show off indigenous wild flora and fauna at their best. It's a concept that was first introduced in the 1920s by the famous Dutch biologist and conservationist Jac P

Thijsse, after whom this park is named. Thijsse did much to popularise nature and conservation in the Netherlands and one of the ideas behind the parks was to encourage visitors, especially school children, to enjoy nature and learn to appreciate the richness of the country's natural flora.

When we started our nursery in the early 1980s, we had initially planned to

create a nursery that specialised in what are known in the Netherlands as *stinzenplanten* – plants that were introduced to the Netherlands from around the 16th century onwards that we now think of as native. These are combined with native flora to great effect in the Thijssepark. Hein Koningen, who for many years was the park's administrator, supplied us

with such plants that we're still using to propagate from.

A lot of research work is undertaken at Thijssepark with different biotopes and closed plant communities. But it is also a lovely park to wander around, with an undulating landscape combining woodland, small lakes and meadows. It also has the largest collection of native plants and *stinzenplanten*, including ▷

*ASARUM DELAVAYI* GIANT

A mysterious-looking plant with beautiful, shiny foliage that is slightly marbled. Look beneath these, evergreen leaves and you'll find velvety, brown-black flowers with a large white centre looking back at you. No surprise then its common name is panda face wild ginger. The rootstocks are used in Chinese medicine (even though they're toxic and also carcinogenic). Although slow growing, it makes a beautiful groundcover. Placing it in a pot on an outdoor table is a good way to discourage slugs and the best way to enjoy its incredible flowers.

**Height** 20cm.

**Origin** China.

**Conditions** Moist but well-drained soil; full sun to part shade.

**Hardiness** RHS H6, USDA 8a-9b.

**Season** Spring.



*TRACHYSTEMON ORIENTALIS*

The blue flowers have curled endings on the petals that look like little propellers with a sharp point. Flowers appear before the hairy, heart-shaped, rough leaves that will quickly cover large surfaces making it an excellent groundcover plant and extremely valuable for naturalistic schemes. It needs a moist soil and in drier periods the leaf will quickly hang down. However, it does well in the shade of trees, and can easily be combined with tall plants, such as *Polygonatum biflorum* and *Aralia continentalis*. All parts of the plant are edible and often eaten in its native Turkey.

**Height** 30cm.

**Origin** Eastern Europe, Turkey.

**Conditions** Fresh to moist soil; part to full shade.

**Hardiness** RHS H7, USDA 6a-9b.

**Season** Spring.



*PUSCHKINIA SCILLOIDES*  
VAR. *LIBANOTICA*

The watery, pale-blue colour of this tiny little plant looks remarkable when massed plantings are viewed from a distance in early spring. Even when the weather is overcast flowers are wide open. It naturalises easily and doesn't get in the way of later emerging plants. It's best grown in drifts under deciduous trees or in a border. Plant en masse alongside fellow *stinzenplanten* [see page 25] *Chionodoxa forbesii* and *Primula vulgaris* and you will have an eye-catching, colourful spring display.

**Height** 10cm.

**Origin** Caucasus, Turkey, Iran, Lebanon.

**Conditions** Well-drained soil; full sun or part shade.

**Hardiness** RHS H7, USDA 4a-8b.

**Season** Spring.



▷ scilla, erythroniums, *Corydalis cava* and *Corydalis solida*, Prins Bernhardlaan 8 1182 BE Amstelveen, the Netherlands. Tel +31 (0)20 5404911, [thijssepark.nl](http://thijssepark.nl)

Another Dutch garden, and one not far from our own in Groningen, is **Tuinfleur**. This private garden on the shores of the Oldambt Lake is made up of 12 areas. It's famous for its snowdrops collection, but in

spring there are thousands of bulbs in bloom and the garden also has a large collection of rare shade-loving plants, including more than 600 kinds of hosta. Well worth a visit. Nieuweweg 34, 9682 RM Oostwold, Gem Oldambt, the Netherlands. Tel +31 (0)597 551383, [tuinfleur.nl](http://tuinfleur.nl)

In the UK I'd recommend **Hergest Croft Gardens**, which is close to the Welsh

border in Herefordshire. The gardens are lovely and offer fabulous views over the Black Mountains. In March and April the blue scillas and snowdrops give way to a host of white, yellow and trumpet daffodils. Ridgebourne Road, Kington, Herefordshire HR5 3EG. Tel 01544 230160, [hergest.co.uk](http://hergest.co.uk)

One of our favourite UK nurseries in **Marchants**

**Hardy Plants** on the South Downs. It's an invaluable nursery, and we've known its owner, the very knowledgeable Graham Gough, since he was Elizabeth Strangman's right-hand man at the famous Washfield Nursery in the early 1980s. We still grow and propagate some of the plants we received from him at that time. The nursery is a treasure trove

offering a superb range of healthy, well-grown perennials. The nursery is open from March and from May to October you can also visit Graham's garden, which though not large is well designed and diversely planted. We love it. 2 Marchants Cottages, Mill Lane, Laughton, Lewes, East Sussex BN8 6AJ. Tel 01323 811737, [marchantshardyplants.co.uk](http://marchantshardyplants.co.uk)