



### SOLDANELLA VILLOSA

Many alpine plants have the reputation of being picky and difficult to grow, but that couldn't be further from the truth for this Pyrenean snowbell. Like most mountainous plants – we once saw it growing at an altitude of 2,000m in the Alps – it prefers good drainage, but grows well in our clay soil. Its rounded, evergreen leaves resemble coins – hence its name, which comes from the Italian *soldi*, meaning money. The flowers look like brush heads standing perkily on thin stalks above the round leaves. It's an excellent plant for the rock garden. AGM\*.

**Height** 20cm.  
**Origin** Pyrenees.  
**Conditions** Moist but well-drained soil; full sun and part shade.  
**Hardiness** RHS H6†.  
**Season** Spring.



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## APRIL PLANTS

As the days lengthen and the soil warms, Fleur finds pleasure in delicate shade lovers as well as a surprisingly zingy cowslip and a broccoli that looks as good as it tastes

WORDS FLEUR VAN ZONNEVELD PHOTOGRAPHS MAAYKE DE RIDDER



### BRASSICA OLERACEA ITALICA GROUP

Sometimes sold as Friarielli or Spigariello broccoli, this rapini or broccolini is highly prized in Italy for its flavour. But it's such a beautiful plant it deserves to find a home beyond the vegetable garden. In the spring its creamy flowers rise above silver-grey leaves that are deeply cut and twisted into a spiral shape. Both flowers and leaves are delicious when lightly fried or eaten raw in a salad, and you can eat the leaves and the flower buds at the same time. Just as hardy as a Cavolo Nero, it can be harvested in winter. It's also a great plant for insects.

**Height** 60cm.  
**Origin** Italy.  
**Conditions** Moist but well-drained soil; full sun.  
**Hardiness** RHS H4, USDA 2a-11.  
**Season of interest** Spring – winter.

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

### SARUMA HENRYI

What a miraculous plant. The first flowers appear almost at the same time as the bronze-purple leaves push their way above ground. The plant grows steadily to about 70cm, with new flowers – like little yellow flags on grey, mice-like ears – appearing as it grows. It flowers April to June and again sporadically throughout summer, when the velvety leaves become a bit dull. A perfect plant not only for shade, but also for pots, it works well next to more pronounced plants, such as *Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola' or *Actaea simplex* 'Brunette'. The name *Saruma* is an anagram of its close relative *Asarum*.

**Height** 70cm.  
**Origin** China.  
**Conditions** Moist but well-drained soil; part to full shade.  
**Hardiness** RHS H6, USDA 5a-8b.  
**Season** April to autumn.



### PRIMULA 'FRANCESCA'

This lovely form of *Primula x polyantha* was discovered on a roundabout in the US state of Oregon. It starts flowering in April and lasts up until July, bearing ruffled, apple-green flowers with a pale-yellow eye that, unlike most bi-coloured primulas, suit a natural planting scheme. Its slightly backward-bending petals look a little odd, but are interesting nonetheless. It's also disease resistant, requires little maintenance and is attractive to bees and butterflies. Beautiful when planted in combination with a blue *Corydalis elata*. AGM.

**Height** 30cm.  
**Origin** USA.  
**Conditions** Moist but well-drained soil; full sun to part shade.  
**Hardiness** RHS H7.  
**Season** April – June.

*DICENTRA CUCULLARIA*

This North American plant has several common names, but perhaps the best known is Dutchman's breeches, which alludes to its white flowers that look like the puff pants once worn by fishermen in the Dutch village of Volendam. Like *Dicentra canadensis*, which it also resembles, it is summer dormant and its fern-like, grey-green leaves disappear after flowering. But it blooms earlier than *D. canadensis* and has bulblets that look like pink shrimps, while those of *D. canadensis* look like kernels of corn, giving that plant its common name of squirrel corn.

**Height** 20cm.

**Origin** North America.

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

**Hardiness** RHS H5, USDA 3a-7b.

**Season** Spring.

*PRIMULA VERIS*  
'SUNSET SHADES'

This hybrid strain of cowslip is always a welcome sight in spring when it lights up a shady corner. It's so unexpectedly vibrant that it creates a real frisson of excitement when it appears. Its flowers, which smell like heaven, are in shades of red, orange and yellow and they last for ages. The species is native to parts of Europe (although not the Netherlands), so it naturalises well. The flower stem is covered in a white powder that says: don't touch me! So we just leave the plant alone and admire its beauty. Sometimes it gives a short, second flowering in autumn.

**Height** 20cm.

**Origin** Europe, Asia.

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

**Hardiness** RHS H6.

**Season** Spring.

*POLYGONATUM X*  
*HYBRIDUM* 'BETBERG'

There are several species and cultivars of *Polygonatum* – all suitable for natural plantings in shady conditions – but this is our favourite. It has spectacular purple, almost-black, shiny new shoots that rise in spring with amazing power and virility, although it doesn't grow as fast as the straight species. The flowers hang from the stem in long lines – giving it its Dutch common name of sow with piglets – and in autumn these turn to poisonous, purple-black berries. Unfortunately, like all polygonatums it is loved by snails and sawfly larva.

**Height** 70cm.

**Origin** Northern hemisphere.

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

**Hardiness** RHS H7.

**Season** Spring – autumn.

PLACES  
TO VISIT

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

For many, the name **Keukenhof** is synonymous with tulip displays. But the name of this large park outside Amsterdam actually means kitchen garden, and dates back to the 15th century, when Countess Jacoba van Beieren [Jacqueline of Bavaria] used the grounds as a source of fruit and vegetables for her nearby hunting lodge. Today,

Keukenhof is the international showcase for the Dutch floricultural sector, with a special emphasis on flower bulbs, including, of course, tulips. For eight weeks each spring the park opens to the public with an impressive display of around seven million bulbs. At one time these displays could be a little pedestrian with large blocks of tulips,

but since the park employed the bulb expert Jacqueline van der Kloet in 2005 to design planting schemes that combined bulbs with perennials and annuals, such as violets and forget-me-nots, the displays have been transformed, and her influence is still much in evidence. 22 March – 13 May 2018, 8am-7.30pm. Stationsweg 166a, 2161AM

Lisse, the Netherlands. [keukenhof.nl/en/](http://keukenhof.nl/en/)

**Freilichtmuseum am Kiekeberg** is an open-air, agricultural museum near Hamburg in Germany. Every April it hosts a large plant market that attracts specialist plant growers, such as Gärtnerei Teske, Michael Camphausen and [Epimedium.info](http://Epimedium.info), from all over Europe. There's a lot of interest in shade- ▷



*ANEMONE  
RANUNCULOIDES  
'CRAZY VIENNA'*

An anemone discovered in a castle park in Vienna that has been cultivated by the Austrian anemone specialist Christian Kress. Kress along with the Estonian Taavi Tuulik is introducing some exciting new cultivars. This one has bright-yellow, double flowers that look like buttercups and last until late in the season. It makes an excellent groundcover plant that works especially well when used between higher and later-flowering, shade-loving plants, such as *Maianthemum racemosum* or *Polygonatum x hybridum*.

**Height** 20cm.  
**Origin** Vienna.  
**Conditions** Moist but well-drained soil; part shade.  
**Hardiness** RHS H7.  
**Season** Spring.



*WULFENIA X SCHWARZII*

The most striking feature of this plant is its young rosettes that develop at the base of the old flower spikes and look almost as though the plant is presenting its new plants to you on a plate. It's a good evergreen plant for well-drained soil, with leathery leaves and dense, curved spikes of small, tubular, blue flowers that face in the same direction. It was discovered by the East German botanist Wilhelm Schacht and first cultivated in the East German town of Jena by a Professor Schwarz, after whom it is named. I find it the best wulfenia for the garden, but it needs protection from severe frost.

**Height** 30cm.  
**Origin** Southeast Europe.  
**Conditions** Moist but well-drained soil; full sun and part shade.  
**Hardiness** RHS H4.  
**Season** Spring – summer.

*PACHYPHRAGMA  
MACROPHYLLUM*

Insects and butterflies adore this plant, as seemingly do many gardeners, because suddenly everybody is asking us about it. Its popularity is in part down to the rave reviews it's received from growers and gardening magazines. Praise that, in our opinion, is entirely justified. Its long-flowering, toothwort-like, white flowers, held above rounded, fresh-green foliage, are a beautiful sight, and it forms highly attractive almost-evergreen groundcover for shady areas. And if that wasn't enough it also has a delightful scent. We adore it too.

**Height** 40cm.  
**Origin** Caucasus, Turkey.  
**Conditions** Moist but well-drained soil; part to full shade.  
**Hardiness** RHS H7.  
**Season** Spring – summer.



▷ loving perennials in Germany at the moment, so expect to find exciting new *Anemone nemerosa* cultivars, as well as hepaticas, podophyllums and disporums. The range of plants on offer is always impressive and the setting among the museum's old, half-timbered buildings is romantically beautiful. 14-15 April 2018, Am Kiekeberg 1, 21224

Rosengarten-Ehestorf, Germany. Tel +49 (0)40 7901760, kiekeberg-museum.de

You don't need to travel to the Netherlands to see brilliant tulip displays. **Pashley Manor Gardens** on the Sussex-Kent borders puts on a spectacular display in April of more than 40,000 tulips in an array of colours from classic creams to red-hot

oranges and lipstick pinks. The gardens themselves are lovely, and in late April you can also enjoy the very beautiful bluebell walk.

24 April – 8 May, 10am-5pm. Pashley Manor Gardens, Ticehurst, nr Wadhurst, East Sussex TN5 7HE. Tel 01580 200888, pashleymanorgardens.com

Many gardens in Europe and the UK come into their own in spring, but this is

especially true of **Belsay Hall** in Northumberland with its Quarry Garden. Created by Sir Charles Monck in the early 19th century, the Quarry garden has a distinctive microclimate that makes it a haven for rare, exotic plants you wouldn't normally expect to find in a garden this far north. Elsewhere in the gardens you'll find deep-blue

*Chionodoxa sardensis*, pale-blue *Puschkinia scilloides* and buttery-yellow daffodils. The meadow garden, surrounded by magnolias, is also worth exploring with its collection of unusual bulbs, oxlips, cowslips, wild orchids, camassias and several species of lily. Belsay, nr Morpeth, Northumberland NE20 0DX. Tel 0370 333 1181, english-heritage.org.uk