

MAY PLANTS

Early summer offers Fleur a cornucopia of floral favourites, with delicate flowers in shades of yellow, white and blue and foliage that has a golden glow

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DISPORUM LONGISTYLUM 'GREEN GIANT'

While species of *Polygonatum* have long been familiar garden plants their close relative *Disporum* from Asia is possibly less well known. This is a shame because disporums are a great foliage plants for shady areas, forming clumps of tall, branched stems, laden with large leaves. In spring these are topped with slender, bell-shaped, soft-yellow flowers. This cultivar, introduced by Dan Hinkley from Sichuan Province in China, has new shoots that emerge in shades of brownish red before maturing to green.

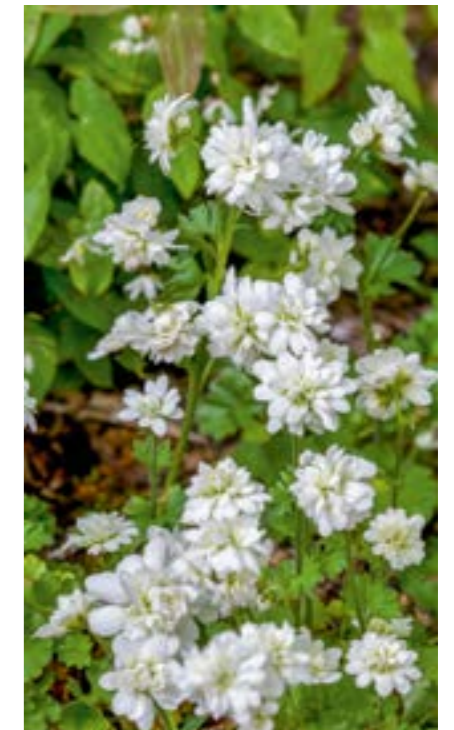
Height 1m.

Origin China to Korea.

Conditions Moist but well-drained soil; part shade.

Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 5a-9b.

Season Spring – summer.



SAXIFRAGA 'FLORE PLENO'

A lovely form of *S. granulata* that produces an abundance of delicate-looking, creamy-white, double flowers, each held above a crenated-leaved rosette atop a 20cm-tall stalk. The plant goes into summer dormancy and disappears below ground after flowering. It loves a fertile clay soil and works beautifully alongside late-flowering shade-loving plants, such as *Begonia grandis* subsp. *evansiana*, *Cyclamen hederifolium* or *Impatiens omeiana*. In the Netherlands it's known as bells of Haarlem as it once grew in large numbers around a monastery in the Dutch city of Haarlem.

Height 40cm.

Origin Europe.

Conditions Moist but well-drained soil; partial shade.

Hardiness RHS H7.

Season Spring.



THERMOPSIS LANCEOLATA

Sometimes known as lanced-leaved false-lupine, *Thermopsis lanceolata* has tall, lupine-like flowers that rise up through grey-green leaves and in May can reach up to a metre in height. It's also sometimes confused with a baptisia. In late summer upright, dark, seedpods point up looking like arrows between the felt-like leaves and remain attractive for several months. It will develop many beautiful seedlings, although its seeds barely germinate unless soaked in hot water for 24 hours, then sown in the spring when cold. Unlike its close relative *Thermopsis montana*, it is not invasive.

Height 1m.

Origin Asia, Siberia, Japan.

Conditions Well-drained soil; full sun.

Hardiness RHS H7.

Season Spring – summer.

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

GERANIUM MALVIFLORUM

The mallow-flowered cranesbill is a less common but more beautiful relative of *Geranium tuberosum*. Like this close relative, it is a tuberous-rooted perennial that is sometimes sold by bulb specialists. It makes an ideal groundcover and is easy even in dry shade, but it is summer dormant and disappears after flowering. Its red-veined, pale purple-blue flowers, held above deeply divided leaves, are both lovely and edible and add a fresh, slightly tart, accent when tossed in among lettuce and other salad leaves.

Height 30cm.

Origin North Africa, southern Spain.

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

Hardiness RHS H5†.

Season Spring.



CONVALLARIA MAJALIS 'FERNWOOD'S GOLDEN SLIPPERS'

A most aptly named lily of the valley, with lush, golden-yellow foliage that stays this beautiful sunny colour until autumn. I love lily of the valley, not only for its sweet scent and beautiful tiny bells, but also because it's imbued with so much symbolism. Despite the fact every part of the plant is poisonous one of its most common associations is with youth and pure love – one of the reasons it is so often found in wedding bouquets. I always encourage everyone to bring a vase of it into the house every year.

Height 25cm.

Origin Europe, Asia, North America.

Conditions Calcareous soils; dry, shady woodland.

Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 3a-8b.

Season May.



CORYDALIS ELATA

These bunches of blue flowers held on tall, waving stems are at their most beautiful when they are backlit by the sun, which then highlights the flower's beautiful, subtle veins. It's one of several blue *Corydalis* recently introduced from Sichuan Province in China. Perhaps the best known is the appropriately named *C. flexuosa* 'Blue Panda' from Sichuan's Wolong Panda Reserve, but this form performs well in both cool and hot summer climates, and flowers from spring into summer. Its fresh-green leaves make it a good companion for yellow-green flowering plants.

Height 50cm.

Origin China.

Conditions Well-drained soil; part shade.

Hardiness RHS H7.

Season Spring – summer.



LUNARIA REDIVIVA

In the Netherlands this perennial honesty is known as *Judaspenning*, as it's said its large, flat and silver-coloured seedlings, which look like coins, first grew where Judas threw his 30 pieces of silver. The flowers open a soft-lilac colour gradually fading to white and eventually forming beautiful silvery seedheads that hang down like earrings – not as round as *Lunaria annua*, but equally spectacular. It self-seeds easily, and works well in shaded woodland areas where soil is not too dry. It also combines well with other plants in naturalised planting schemes. AGM*.

Height 90cm.

Origin Europe.

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

Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 5a-8b.

Season Spring – summer

PLACES TO VISIT

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

The lovely Dutch garden owned by John and Joyce Ramsbotham is a great place for discovering shade-loving plants. Their garden, **Op De Haar** in Hoevelaken, on the border between Gelderland and Utrecht, is made up of several different areas each with its own distinct character, but it is probably best known for its woodland area filled with shade-

tolerant plants such as epimediums, dysosmas and disporums. John and Joyce are both very knowledgeable and enjoy showing visitors around, but are open by appointment only. Tel +31 (0)65 375 3221, opentuinoopdehaar.nl

For many years the beautiful garden **Theetuin Van Weesp** was hidden from view behind the 17th-century fortification

walls of the northern Dutch city of Weesp. The garden is now owned by the Dutch bulb expert Jacqueline van der Kloet who has created wonderful layered planting designs using the newest bulb cultivars among perennials. As you'd expect, the garden is at its best in late spring and early summer when the tulips are in full flower but this well-structured garden,

centred around a tranquil pond, and surrounded by a huge *Thuja* hedge, offers plenty of inspiration throughout the year. It's name, which translates as Tea Garden, is a little misleading as the tea hut generally opens only when the garden hosts special events, but the gardens themselves are free to visitors most days from April to October. ▷

*CHLORANTHUS
SESSILIFOLIUS* 'DOMINO'

An unusual and slightly mysterious plant that is wrongly sold by some nurseries as *Chloranthus fortunei*. It opens in late April/early May with black foliage that gradually fades to a dark green by June, although the scented, fluffy white flowers are held on stalks that remain black. The shiny, young, black shoots look very striking, but they can quickly disappear once slugs and snails discover them. We've made several cuttings of the plant with varying results, and it doesn't always come true from seed. Just to add to its mystery it is pollinated by thrips.

Height 50cm.

Origin Asia.

Conditions Moist but well-drained soil; part shade.

Hardiness RHS H6.

Season Spring.



*LAMPROCAPNOS
SPECTABILIS* 'VALENTINE'

I've loved this brick-red bleeding heart since I first encountered it, back when it was still a *Dicentra*. The muted colours of its dull-red flowers and bronze-tinted leaves make it a quiet addition to the spring garden amid the vibrancy of most spring flowers. It prefers a slightly damp spot in part shade, otherwise the leaf can dry out in summer making the interesting leaf colour disappear. Its flowers are hermaphrodite, meaning they have both male and female organs. In warm areas the plant goes into summer dormancy. AGM.

Height 60cm.

Origin China, Korea, Japan, Siberia.

Conditions Moist but well-drained soil; part shade.

Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 3a-8b.

Season Spring – early summer.



CAREX ELATA 'AUREA'

It was the well-known botanist and author EA Bowles who discovered this cultivar of the perennial, evergreen grass growing in East Anglia and so gave it the common name of Bowles's golden sedge. It forms elegant, hanging clumps of such bright yellow it looks as though the sun is shining through it even in winter as in mild years the grass holds on to its yellow colour until late in the year. It needs a moisture-retentive soil as its leaves will burn if the grass gets too dry or too hot. However, in the right conditions its glorious golden colour creates an unbeatable effect. AGM.

Height 60cm.

Origin Europe, UK.

Conditions Moisture-retentive soil; full sun to part shade.

Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 5a-9b.

Season Year round.



▷ Open Monday – Saturday, 10am-5pm, closed public holidays. Ossenmarkt 34, 1381 LX Weesp, the Netherlands. Tel + 31 (0)63 741 0027, theetuin.nl

Created by the garden designer and writer Marylyn Abbott, **West Green House Garden** in Hampshire offers a mix of neo-classical style with contemporary design. Close to the Georgian manor

house a formal walled garden has been faithfully restored to its original lines, and features an elaborate potager alongside exuberantly planted perennial borders. Beyond the walls are more relaxed gardens, featuring an eclectic collection of garden follies and the contemporary Garden of the Five Bridges with its serpentine ribbon of *Iris sibirica*. West Green

House Gardens, Thackham's Lane, nr Hartley Wintney, Hook, Hampshire RG27 8JB. Tel 01252 844611, westgreenhouse.co.uk
Heading northwest across the North Wessex Downs is one England's loveliest Arts and Crafts gardens at **Rodmarton Manor**. Laid out by Claud and Margaret Biddulph, between 1909 and 1929, the eight-acre Cotswold garden

has changed very little over the years with fabulous planting and quirky topiary. It opens from 1 May, 2-5pm. Rodmarton Manor, Cirencester, Gloucestershire GL7 6PF. Tel 01285 841442, rodmarton-manor.co.uk
Even further west are the gloriously romantic **Trematon Castle Gardens**. The Cornish castle is home to the design duo Julian and Isabel Bannerman and they

have created a stunning garden with lush planting around the castle's ruined battlements. In early summer, the riot of wildflowers that carpet the walk up the Motte, includes bluebells, campion and purple orchids. Remember to bring cash as the entry fee of £8 is made via an honesty box. Saltash, Cornwall PL12 4QW. trematoncastle.com