

episode 77 show notes and advice

Episode Description

In this week's episode Sarah and Arthur discuss making the best of your garden produce for party planning and entertaining. From simple cut flower arrangements to living table centre pieces, the best scents, environmentally friendly lighting, and simple summer salads.

In this episode, discover...

- How to make quick and easy table centres in 5 minutes
- The best plants for living table centres
- Innovative ways of using flowers to decorate your table
- How to make decorative and party-ready ice cubes
- Ideas for warm summer salads

episode 77 advice sheet

Table centres

Avoid huge or very tall flower arrangements that can crowd the table leaving little room for the food. Sarah recommends using a living pot that you already have in a corner of the garden or creating a very simple cut flower arrangement for your table centre.

Sarah's flower grid method for a quick and effective cut flower arrangement

Use a salad bowl as your vase or something even shallower, like a low fruit bowl

To create the grid:

- Find some straight branches from the garden, i.e. dogwood, hazel, or cut some side branches off silver birch – stripping off any leaves.
- Lay the branches in a noughts and crosses-style grid, leaving 1½ inch square gaps for the grid holes, with an overlay so that you go beyond the edge of the bowl.
- Using **Flexi-tie*** and a figure of 8 knot, tie where the bottom layer of wood crosses the top – at every junction. Make sure you tie all the knots in the same direction (i.e. left to right), so that you can later concertina it away like a wine rack and store it for future cut flower arrangements.

Add water and your chosen flowers:

- Fill the bowl with water and pick whatever looks best in the garden that day. Sarah recommends beautiful highly scented roses (which often don't last well in water on long

stems) mixed with great strands of honeysuckle or the cup and saucer vine (cobaea).

The longer and more trailing the better.

- For a rectangular table – trail the flowers all the way down the middle of the table.
- For a round table – trail the tresses out in a cartwheel effect all the way around the arrangement.
- Keep the grid for re-use over the same sized bowl.

**Sarah recommends using Flexi-Tie as it is slightly elastic so it pings back as the wood shrinks, meaning that even a grid you made years ago will still be perfectly intact. Using a natural material like twine will become loose as the wood shrinks over time.*

Arthur on cut flower table centres

Use jam jars to create an effective table centre, with silver birch or willow crunched up into the jar, and lovely tendrils like honeysuckle or roses trailing out. Arthur recommends putting a little crumple of the branches into the jar to hold your added cut flower stems in place, (like natural oasis) and then allowing the honeysuckle to trail out over the top.

Living table centres

Treat your table like a versatile stage and move different pots from your garden onto the table. Scented pelargoniums look lovely in corners of the garden and are very happy in small pots over the summer and remarkably drought tolerant.

Sarah's top tips for drought-tolerant and scented plants as living table centres

All of these require very little time and effort:

- Pelargoniums
- Arctotis
- Venidiums
- Osteospermums
- Calendulas
- Gazanias - some of these prefer the sun
- Anything scented like Nemesias

On Sarah's doorstep, and table right now

- Lady Lisa – a stunning indigo blue and purple colour with a delicate sweet honey fragrance – perfect to move to the table for a supper party outside.

Arthur's tips for living table centres

- Use little pots as runners down the table
- Have different pots in summer and winter, i.e. Scented pelargoniums in summer and the visually beautiful Mustard 'Red Frills' with Viola 'Tiger Eye' in winter – they are also cut and come again.

Decoration

Arthur's tips for decorating the table

- Have heliotropes in pots – nice for guests who aren't gardeners
- Dry rose petals after deadheading to then scatter over party tables – it's environmentally friendly and more economical than confetti. 'Fellowship' and 'Lady Emma Hamilton' seem to be keeping their orange tones when dried.
- For a special occasion press flowers for the table name placemats – also lovely for your guests to keep. Sweet peas press nicely, particularly the marbled types like 'Earl Grey', as they keep their purple veining.

Sarah's decorative drinks

How to use edible flowers in ice cubes

- Use an ice cube tray with a good-sized cube, so you don't have to cram in the flowers
- Use borage for its lovely starry shape - blue or white borage
- Pull the petals off the calyx at the back and plop them into each cube
- Quick to do and makes a gin and tonic party-ready
- Sow borage now (hardy annual) and you'll be picking flowers right through September and October for all your autumn parties

Sarah's outdoor lighting ideas and tips

- Scatter the delicate Solar Light Chains along and through the edge of paths – they resemble phosphorescence or fireflies on warm summer evenings.
- If you want any solar lighting to come on earlier, put a little piece of card over the light sensitive panel. Just remember to remove the card to allow them to charge up the following day.
- Use tealights in wax globes for a warm and radiant glow. Make sure you put lots of dry rice or grit, in the bottom of the globe (or in a brown paper bag in the globe) with the tealight on top. This prevents the wax globe from melting. Also, if it's very hot outside, remember to bring the wax globes indoors.

Arthur recommends solar alliums to add more of a party feel to an outdoor space, and moves his around the garden, placing them in different pots. They come on all year, even through the winter, and at this time, they come on every night like clockwork, going on and on, while in the daytime they disappear.

Drinking and dining

- Arthur enjoys being in the garden on a cooler autumn evening with a cup of homemade verbena tea and has bought some verbena plants to overwinter so they'll be mature enough to start making the tea from.
- Sarah recommends drying lemon verbena leaves to make Verveine, the classic French tea. It's easy to do - just hang up a branch somewhere warm and well-aerated, and then store in a jam jar with a lid on.

Sowing for salad dining

As we move from summer into autumn, Sarah loves cooking warm salads. August is a great time to start sowing your salads, which will take you through to October and then in September, sow again to take you right through the winter. Sarah's been sowing Mustard 'Red Frills' and 'Red Giant' and then for a gentler taste, Mizuna 'Red Knight' and the usual green with a base of lettuce and rocket.

Sarah's Quick and Simple Warm Summer Salad

- Create a base of baby leaf salad - ready for picking now
- For the meat-eaters: griddle one sirloin steak, and let it rest (room temperature) for 5 minutes. Then cut it finely to scatter over a large flat plate of leaves.
- For the vegetarians - steam 1-2cm slices of sweet potato in a steamer for 5 mins, then preheat (for 2-3 minutes) and oil a griddle (with sunflower oil). Cook the sweet potato slices on this hot griddle pan for 2 - 3 minutes either side, so they get those nice stripes.
- Over both meat and veggie plates, top with a ginger, soy and toasted sesame seed dressing
- For the dressing: using a food processor, place a good amount of peeled ginger*, some fresh coriander (just germinating at the moment), plenty of tamari or soy sauce and a little dash of toasted sesame oil
- Add more fresh coriander over the top
- For the meat version, serve with some just lifted 'Pink Fir Apple' potatoes

*Sarah's tip: peeling ginger with a teaspoon gets into all the nooks and crannies and wastes much less than peeling with a knife

Coriander – a good herb to sow now

- Coriander is a herb you want to sow on the shoulders of the year. Like spinach, it doesn't like extreme temperatures, not too hot or too cold.
- An ideal time is between March and early May and between mid-August and mid-October.
- Coriander has big seed, so Sarah sows it in a gutter pipe and pushes out the seedlings, but you can also sprinkle the seed straight into a pot.
- The key is not to cut it too close to the ground, so best to pick the individual stems by hand, leaving the heart intact. That way you should get a really good harvest.
- If you've got a greenhouse, cold frame or polytunnel, dig it up, bring it in and you'll be able to go on picking lightly right the way through winter.