

episode 79 show notes and advice

Episode Description

With summer bedding starting to look a bit tired in places and September just around the corner, we are now beginning to think about our autumn garden. This week, Sarah and Arthur share some cheap, easy and low-maintenance ideas to give your pots a quick refresh, ensuring they'll be full of colour and carry you through autumn and winter - all the way to the tulips in spring. Whether you're looking for bright or calm colours, it's not too late to sow seeds and plant out seedlings, and it can be a great way to introduce simple and easy gardening to children.

In this episode, discover...

- What to sow now in pots and containers to see you through the autumn
- Arthur's "zero effort gardening", and how it can be fruitful
- Sowing in small pots and window boxes for the city gardener
- Hardy annuals to sow now for autumn and spring colour
- Sowing perennials from seed to last forever in the garden
- Plants that thrive almost anywhere, like the classic *Erigeron karvinskianus*, *Centaurea Cyanus* (cornflowers), *linarias* and hollyhocks

episode 79 advice sheet

Arthur on sowing seeds now

Sometimes, doing less in the garden is more. Tipping out whole pots of flowers to plant again can be hard work and considerable effort, so Arthur recommends an occasional "zero effort" approach to gardening. At this time of year, one of the simplest things to do is check what you already have in your seed tins. Choose what you love and sprinkle the seeds like salt and pepper over disturbed (poor) soil. Seeds seem to like having the freedom to land where they want and get going. These will then flower over the following months and give you colour right through the autumn. Arthur found *Linaria maroccana* 'Sweeties' mix in his collection, which brings back fond memories of having seen it for years at Perch Hill. It reminds him of marzipan and hundreds and thousands - a real childhood birthday cake delight of colours.

Arthur says, "Have a party chucking seeds around. As long as the compost is disturbed and you're willing to water it to get it established, it's very easy gardening. ... (For) someone who's never gardened before, it will get you into gardening."

Arthur's tricks and tips for a natural-looking garden

- Scattergun opium poppies – they'll self-sow year after year
- It's less about treating the garden like Chelsea Flower Show as soon as the tulips are gone and more about letting things die back a bit to keep those bulbs going
- Take more of a holistic approach, and enjoy the garden, so don't chuck out pots as soon as the petals have fallen. Let things die down a bit for the sake of the insects.
- Ensure the seeds you're sprinkling are those that will flower before it gets cold or will flower next spring (biennials and hardy annuals).

Sarah on hardy annuals

Cerithe is top of Sarah's list for a lovely looking pot-topper and great for the cooler months. Traditionally Sarah planted Cerithe for February, March and April, bringing some much-needed light into the garden after a long winter. However due to the hardiness of Cerithe, Sarah has recently started to plant it for the cooler months at the other end of year. Cerithe will survive a spring frost as well as those in October, November and even into December.

How to sow Cerithe now:

- Sow direct straight into the pot
- If your pots are all full (as is the case with Sarah), sow it in a polytunnel
- For city gardeners or those with limited space, sow one seed in a 9cm pot on a window ledge. Take it out once it has one or two pairs of true leaves (the big silvery round leaves that look like elephant ears) and put it out around the first week of September. This will cheer you right up until a hard frost around Christmas.

Sarah's recommended hardy annuals to sow now

- Californian poppies (as well as Arthur's recommendation of opium poppies)
- Eschscholzia
- Linaria maroccana 'Sweeties' mix
- Cerithe

All record holders in Perch Hill trials for going from seed to flower and most quickly

- Also, calendulas in bright or calm colours. Sarah recommends the soft apricot 'Sunset Buff', the deep orange 'Indian Prince', or Arthur's favourite 'Neon' – with many petals.
- As hardy annuals, all of these will take the autumn cold as well as spring cold.

Arthur on perennials to last forever

- Big-seeded perennials, like Lupins, love to be direct sown, and if you sprinkle the seeds into a pot, there's less chance of the slugs getting at them. They will happily germinate especially with the damp mornings of autumn on the way and grow well to flower next spring.
- In contrast the Oriental poppies have a tiny seed. While Arthur has never had success germinating these in seed trays, those in his grandmother's garden have self-seeded and cross-pollinated – without the need for root cuttings.
- Echinops - good to grow from seed.

Biennials are a better group for quick growth as they'll flower next year like the perennials, but you'll get much more bang for your buck

- Foxgloves and honesty adore being scattered - anywhere they land, up they'll come, similar to the Verbascum Mullein.

Sarah on the classic *Erigeron karvinskianus* (perennial)

- Look at what thrives in harsh environments, i.e., on paths and walls. If plants can thrive with little or no soil, they're going to be excellent in pots. *Erigeron karvinskianus* is a classic example of this, having come up in carpets of daisies in quiet patches of the garden – all from seedlings from just one packet of *Erigeron*, sown around five years ago.
- *Erigeron* is also perfect for scattering in the top of a pot. Sarah advises to “think of your seed like gold dust” and be really stingy with it.
- If planting *Erigeron* into a 20cm pot, (zinc or terracotta), you only need five or six seedlings. Leave it, water it occasionally and within six to eight weeks you'll see the first little seedlings and then a mass of daisy flowers, often until November. Neaten it up again over winter and up it will come again in spring.

Cornflowers

Arthur loves seeing all the cornflowers out at this time, even on roadsides and motorway verges. *Centaurea cyanus* 'Blue Boy' is the classic blue, but there is also the dark crimson 'Black Ball'. Sown now, this may even flower before it gets cold, overwinter itself and then become a huge plant. Cornflowers are good for cut flowers, good for pollinators, have good drought-tolerance and are happy in small pots and window boxes.

Linarias

Arthur: Besides his favourite *Linaria* 'Sweeties' Mix, Sarah managed to find a mix in more Venetian colours, so Arthur has sown a mix of the red and lilac *linarias* together.

Sarah loves the linarias and started experimenting with them having seen the yellow toadflax doing so well along the side of the road, right up until late autumn. The two perennials (not new) they're trialling at Perch Hill this year are:

- *Linaria purpurea* which has a purple spire growing up to 2m
- *Linaria purpurea* 'Canon Went' – a pink

Both of these will be good to collect seed from this year and sow again straight away.

Derry Watkins of Special Plants Nursery just outside Bath, calls *Linaria* 'Canon Went', 'Came and Went' - a great way to remember it, as it's one of those perennials you can grow from seed, to pop up in one place this year and then somewhere completely different the following year.

Hollyhocks

- Now coming into flower and far happier scattered along a driveway than nurtured and mulched.
- Each huge spire will produce little walnut-type seedheads, with at least 100 flat seeds in each.
- Scatter the seed in summer onto disturbed soil. Some will flower the following year, and they'll get bigger and better in years to come.
- The meaner the ground, the better, even a building site!
- A classic for lining paths in churchyards but a temperamental cut flower - if you sear them, sometimes they last, sometimes they don't.