



—The—  
**500**  
BEST  
*Garden*  
PLANTS  
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Patrick Taylor



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Timber Press  
Portland, Oregon

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# INTRODUCTION

## & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have chosen the plants described in this book because I like them and I have tried to explain why I think them good. In my visits to literally hundreds of gardens, doing research for books or just for fun, and in countless conversations with gardeners, I began to notice that certain excellent plants appeared again and again in gardens that I especially liked. This is a personal selection but certain rules have governed it. As far as possible the plants have qualities in addition to merely dazzling flowers. In a small or modestly sized garden, space cannot be given to some substantial shrub whose only virtue is to produce wonderful flowers for a couple of weeks in the year. So I have paid attention to the merits of foliage, habit, bark, berries, buds and scent – to all those attributes which contribute to the garden-worthiness of a distinguished plant. I have also where possible chosen species or old cultivars that have proved their worth. Each year new cultivars pour out from the nurseries but only rarely do they add to the essential repertory of garden plants. This does not mean, however, that I include examples of all the older groups of plants. I cannot, for example, find a species of forsythia that I would regard as a top garden plant. Some plants, such as heathers, while admirable for clothing remote highland landscapes, seem to me extremely difficult to use harmoniously in conjunction with other garden plants.



On the whole I have selected plants that have no especially elaborate cultivation needs. However, it is a myth that any good garden can be 'maintenance free', and in the same way plants that are 'cultivation free' are very often weeds. Gardening is not an occupation for lazy people and all the best gardens are, without exception, the product of hard work and much careful thought. In such gardens it is not merely planting and cultivation skills that are evident but also expert pruning and training.

In the case of especially large genera – for example rhododendrons and roses – I have only hinted at the possibilities. There are few gardens which have the climate and space to do justice to the finest rhododendrons. If you *do* have the perfect site for these marvellous plants you will need something much more elaborate than this book. Among the roses – a vast genus in terms of species and cultivars – I have picked a few which seem to me to illustrate their best virtues. But any gardener who becomes intensely interested in a particular group of plants will want to know more than I have room for and I include a list of specialist books on different groups of plants on pages 307–9.

The gardens that are most admired reveal a harmonious design in which a good range of beautiful plants are attractively disposed. Whereas larger gardens can afford to deploy seasonal plantings in different areas, smaller gardens, especially those overlooked by the windows of one's house, require a range of individual plants to show something of interest all year round. My own garden, in the middle of a town, is an eccentrically irregular rectangle 180ft/54m long by 45ft/12m wide. A large area is devoted to lawn which has been much used by my children for playing games. I am all too conscious that in a desire to have some attention-worthy plant always performing, and as a result of a fatal inability to resist a good plant, I have packed in too much heterogenous material at the expense of harmony. That is the perpetual dilemma of all keen gardeners with small gardens.

A hardiness rating is given for each plant, indicated by the letter Z and a numeral. Maps showing these zones in Europe and the USA are given on pages 310–11. The time of flowering I have indicated is applicable to the south of England, that is to say, roughly Zone 8. Readers living in milder or cooler areas will be able to adjust it according to their knowledge of local conditions. The maximum size given for each plant is what could be expected in a fairly protected garden in southern England.

Many nurseries and owners of private gardens have been generous with their help. I should especially like to thank the following: Avon Bulbs (particularly Joyce Hodgson, Chris Ireland-Jones and Alan Street); Bicton College; The Botanic Gardens, Bath; Broadleigh Gardens (Lady Skelmersdale); East Lambrook Manor (Andrew Norton); Hannays of Bath; Kingston Maurward College; Patricia Marrow (who has been endlessly kind); The National Trust for England and Wales (especially Diana Badham); The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (Jenny Evans); Westonbirt Arboretum.

The photographs were all taken by myself except for that on page 276 of *Catalpa bignonioides* which is by Andrew Lawson to whom I am most grateful.

My wife Caroline has edited my text with skill and patience; I would be more effusive but she is very strict about too many adjectives. Andrew Barron has designed the book and taken a valuable interest in it. My publishers, Pavilion Books, are a constant pleasure to deal with and I am in particular grateful to Helen Sudell and Colin Webb for their encouragement. In the USA Robert Conklin and Dale Johnson of Timber Press have given much friendly advice. Penelope Hobhouse has been a perpetual source of inspiration and deep knowledge; as was her late husband, John Malins, a marvellous gardener and the nicest of men, to whose memory I affectionately dedicate this book.

Patrick Taylor  
Wells, Somerset







# B U L B S

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Bulbs provide trouble-free ornamental planting over a very long season – indeed there is barely a month in the year without bulbs flowering in the garden. They give a dazzling display in late winter or spring when little else is in flower, and in that awkward season after the first burst of summer flowering in June, when interest can seem to flag, bulbs will produce some of the most splendid effects. Magnificent lilies in July, filling gaps left by earlier herbaceous plants, are followed by crinums, crocosmias and nerines. As summer turns into autumn small corners are enlivened by vivid little cyclamen and they in turn are followed by sternbergias which give way to snowdrops, aconites and crocuses and once again the whole explosion of spring bulbs.

Bulbs contribute much to the garden's most beautiful detail throughout the year. They also live harmoniously with other plants, occupying little space in the herbaceous border or among shrubs of whatever size. Many spring-flowering bulbs, for example, relish a moist position at flowering time under deciduous shrubs not yet in leaf, then enjoy the dry conditions that follow, as shrubs and herbaceous plants leaf up, before retreating underground until the following year.

Many bulbs – snowdrops, crocus, daffodils, for example – are easy to establish in self-perpetuating colonies, naturalizing happily without becoming excessively invasive. Others, like lilies and some tulips, are less easy to keep going, but immensely repay the trouble. Invaluable for smaller gardens, where they may

be tucked into odd corners unsuitable for larger plants, bulbs provide brilliant fleeting ornament to the permanent, structural planting of gardens of any size.

I have included in this section, in addition to bulbs, corms, rhizomes and tubers which many gardeners and nurserymen commonly think of as bulbs.

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## Allium

A genus of over 700 species of the family Liliaceae/Alliaceae, widely distributed in the northern hemisphere. Like the culinary onion and garlic, all have a distinct onion-like scent when the leaves are crushed. The genus includes valuable and versatile garden plants but beware those that are dangerously invasive and may prove an embarrassment in the smaller garden.

*Allium christophii*  
(*A. albopilosum*)  
Origin: C. Asia, Iran,  
Turkey  
Height: 30in/75cm  
Z: 7

☛ This ornamental onion has one of the largest flower heads of any of its tribe. Between 6–10in/15–25cm across, it is smothered in June with an immense number of elegant star-shaped flowers, each  $1\frac{1}{2}$ in/4cm across, its very narrow silvery violet petals set off by much darker anthers. In a densely planted border it will be supported by other plantings and the spherical flower heads will lie among other foliage like celestial footballs, looking especially beautiful among pale grey *Artemisia ludoviciana latiloba*. It will seed itself benignly and is equally at home in sun or part shade.



*Allium karataviense*  
Origin: C. Asia  
Height: 6in/15cm  
Z: 8

🌱 The leaves, which emerge in April, are the first sign of distinction in this allium. They are 6in/15cm long and generously wide, up to 4in/10cm, handsomely ribbed and curved and an attractive glaucous-green. The flower heads appear in May at the centre of the leaves and open into great spheres up to 4in/10cm across, of countless stars, very pale grey-violet in colour. The seed pods that follow are strikingly decorative, becoming a golden colour in the autumn. It needs a sunny site in light soil and may be propagated from the prolific seeds. It has a ghostly presence in the border. I have seen it very successfully planted among spreading *Geranium renardii*.

*Allium moly*  
Origin: S.W. Europe  
Height: 9in/22.5cm  
Z: 7

🌱 The foliage of this golden onion is grey-green, pointed and strap-like. The flowers in May or June are unlike any other onion: rich, dazzling yellow stars in upward-facing umbels. The colour is especially intense in semi-shade although it grows equally well in full sun. It likes a dry site and is excellent to grow massed at the feet of shrubs where it will relish the dry conditions.

*Allium triquetrum*



*Allium triquetrum*  
Origin: S. Europe  
Height: 6in/15cm  
Z: 8

🌱 In a shady corner in the garden this little allium has terrific character. It flowers in May, bearing several flowers on each fresh green stem, which is triangular in section. The flowers hang gracefully downwards, little white trumpets 1/2in/1.25cm long, striped inside and out with thin green lines. It likes moist soil and flourishes in the shade. Grow it to follow hellebores and spring bulbs in a place of woodland character. It will seed itself with almost embarrassing abandon.