



FROM SEED TO BLOOM

A Year of Growing and Designing
With Seasonal Flowers

MILLI PROUST

BONUS
eBook



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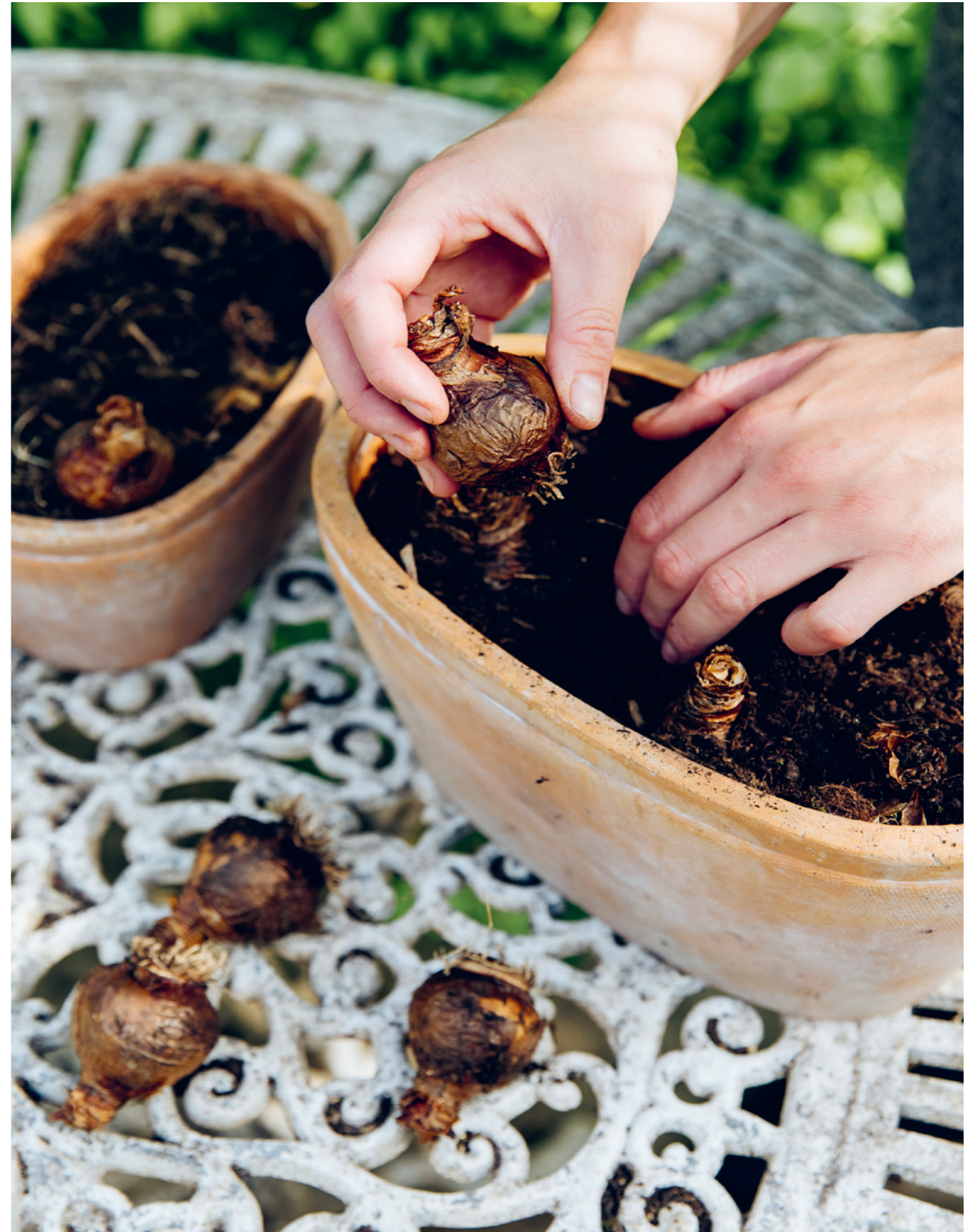
Introduction

A creative connection with the natural world is something, I think, that we all innately have. It's easy to lose sight that we aren't just able to connect to the natural world; we are a part of it. We are, simply put, nature- a cog in the wheel of life, part of the endless compost cycle. A place where our creative connection with the natural world can be nurtured most is in a garden. In growing flowers, working with them, or filling our lives with them, our connection with the earth is strengthened- our senses can be sharpened to the subtle shifts and changes each week brings, and our lives become more beautiful for it.



WINTER

There's a quiet gentleness that descends in winter, punctured sometimes by the rumbling of storm clouds and the rattling of winds. Then there are the weeks where the drumming of rain churns up the earth with cloying smacks. On the gentle winter days – those quiet, grey days where the mist and cloud lie thick like a blanket across our lives – in those moments, there is nothing as still-seeming as winter. It's a time of hibernation, a time of planning, organising and a time of bulbs. Whilst the evergreens, robust in their perpetual winter coats, bring smatterings of khaki colour to the landscape, the rest of the branches are laid bare and adorned only with pale, shivering catkins. We long for flowers to return – and when they do, the flowers of winter come in their humble droves, bowing in deference to the cold. First, the snowdrops in carpets of white, then the hellebores in silvers, pinks and purples, nodding shyly, their freckles and petals tantalisingly tucked away. Winter is full of beauty; it's a quiet beauty, a gentle beauty, neither showy nor abundant, but worthy of our appreciation nonetheless.



A SHIVER OF SNOWDROPS

VASE LIFE: 4-7 DAYS

MATERIALS:

- Small dish
- Small pin frog
- A handful of snowdrops and/or snowflakes
- Moss

The floral year here starts with the quiet arrival of the snowdrop. Soft drifts of their little white lanterns lighten up the verges, and shiver under trees. I love the snowdrop. I grow just a handful of varieties but there are over 2500 out there.

They may not be related, but some snowflake varieties (leucojum) arrive at the same time as the snowdrop and share many other similarities. For the purpose of cut flowers, the leucojum have much longer, sturdier stems, and a naturally longer vase life. I still can't resist the dainty nature of the snowdrop as an ingredient.

The smallest dish or bowl will work here – use an egg-cup or whatever you have to hand, for a bigger clump try a breakfast bowl.

HOW TO:

1. Secure a pin frog to the bottom of the vessel. Once the frog has set in place, add water, filling the vessel to the brim.
2. Snowdrops and snowflakes both grow in little clumps. Emulating that, I place the stems close together in the pin frog and allow the flowers to dance out at different angles, adding a sense of movement and line by making the flowers face different directions whilst standing at different heights, moving the viewer's eye up and down, some having conversations with each other, some reaching away from the chatter.
3. Make sure to add some facing away and angling out to the back too, to give the sense that the piece is fully dimensional in the space.
4. Once you're happy with the design, float and tuck a little moss around it to give it the feeling of truly growing as a clump on the table.

IDEA:

Place a number of these arrangements amongst flickering candles down a winter table for a simple, and perfectly seasonal winter design. Condition the flowers for a long few hours before working with them, and if you want the flowers to last well past the dinner, simply keep the little dish regularly topped up with water.



FLOATING HELLEBORES

VASE LIFE: 6 DAYS

MATERIALS:

A bowl of water

A handful of hellebore heads

Hellebores naturally nod, shyly tucking away their lovely faces against the cold. To really enjoy the myriad varieties and patterns in their petals, float them in a bowl facing up.

Prone to wilting, cut hellebores for the vase once they've got a matured seedpod for a more robust vase life. Floating the heads is a way to get around this habit of theirs and is a great way to enjoy the subtle freckles and colour variations that often fade a little once they go to seed pod.

HOW TO:

1. Choose your bowl or dish, any vessel that can hold water and give you a large surface area for placing the heads will do.
2. Gently place their heads on the surface of the water, trying out different tones and textures next to each other for contrast.
3. Find some other tiny offerings to fill in the smaller gaps. I love using the equally lovely and equally nodding double snowdrop amongst hellebore heads.

IDEA:

Use a long and low glass trough, or a number smaller glass dishes, enough to run along the length of a table, to float hellebores and tea-lights in for a show-stopping floating table runner with a difference.





SPRING

When it feels like we've been waiting in winter forever, one morning we wake, and there's that familiar sweet scent in the air, a wet photosynthesising taste on the tongue, and we know that spring is here. Time passes in the pushing up of shoots, the unfurling of leaves, and the opening of petals; these daily doses of hope while the light lingers longer and the layers of winter are peeled away is what gives spring its magic. Weekends are spent sowing seeds and counting each new narcissus that opens, and the long, dark nights begin to trickle away. Sometimes though, a spring can be put on pause. The nights drop too cold, the frost is left unthawed, and late spring snow comes to dust the daffodils with its ice; the flowers and leaves button themselves up, and winter threatens to return. But the warmth always comes, and spring swoops in with incredible generosity, putting on shows in boughs of blossom, the tulips are ripened in one warm day, and the bees are summoned from their long winter slumber. Gardens, parks, hedgerows and fields are humming with life again – this is an expansive, captivating time of year that is always gone too soon.

A TREE IN THE HOUSE

VASE LIFE: 7-10 DAYS

MATERIALS:

Large, heavy vase

Magnolia and wild cherry: 7 branches

Branches offer some of the most interesting shapes and lines to work with in designs. Simple and striking, their silhouettes are only made more beautiful by the flowers that burst from the buds – imagine you're creating a line drawing with the branches. Magnolias feel so miraculous, elegant and special. One of my kind neighbours allowed me to have a few branches from their tree, and I added some wild cherry branches in there too. The buds were still closed against the cold, but the arrangement continued to open all week, the magnolias expanding, opening and filling the bedroom with the most exquisite, heady scent, before slowly dropping their petals one by one.

HOW TO:

1. Choose a vase that is narrower at the neck than the base. A narrower neck will help to support the branches and a wider, heavy base will help it from toppling over.
2. When choosing ingredients to use, focus on the shapes the branches offer and the beautiful lines they can create – there's no need to over-stuff the vase for it to look impactful.
3. Think about proportions – find a branch or two that will be at least one and half times as tall or wide as the vessel. This will make it easier to achieve design balance.
4. Imagine a dancer whose legs and arms are reaching out to express the dance. Allow your branches to do the same.
5. Make sure the design is sufficiently balanced weight wise to prevent the vase toppling over.

IDEA:

Flowering branches can look especially lovely as a suspended cloud arrangement. Use test tubes or lightweight vessels nestled in the chicken wire to give them a water source.



FOX, GRAPE & EGGS

VASE LIFE: 5-7 DAYS

MATERIALS:

Small shallow bowl (I used one from Rob Sollis Ceramics)

Miniature pin frog

Young Horse Chestnut leaves:

3 short branches

Fritillaria: 7 stems

Spirea japonica 'Firelight':

3 short stems

Primula: 2 stems

Fritillaria have certain characteristics that sometimes feel more animal than plant, and some of their names reflect that too- like 'Snakeheads' and 'Fox's Grape'. I love their rich colours, and their aesthetic that seems at odds with Spring, looking as though they would be more suited to Autumn. But Spring does have its Autumn borrowed moments too, found in the rich red leaves of newly emerging buds on the Horse Chestnut and on fiery coloured shrubs.

It's easy to find contrast to the smooth, leathery texture of the Uva Vulpis (Fox's Grape) in the crinkled new leaves of spring, and between the delicate branches of new growth and the twisting forms of the fritillaries, it's fun to find moments of balance and suspension between them all even when working on a very small scale.

Embrace the unusual and ethereal quality of fritillaria to create spring displays with a difference. Some being an almost black flower, some with a menacing or mystical character, they can offer a stark contrast to the soft, billowing sweetness of blossom.

HOW TO:

1. I chose a small vessel to celebrate the daintiness of the fritillaria. A large vessel may swamp them and you'll find them easily lost in the design.
2. Place a pin frog in your vessel and allow it to set. Add water.
3. Using my largest ingredient, the horse chestnut branches, I placed a frame for the design in a leaning 'L' shape.
4. Allow some of the ingredients to spill over the lip of the vessel. This helps to create a more natural feeling relationship between the vessel and the flowers.
5. Within this 'L' shaped form, I placed the fritillaria. I wanted the design to highlight the arching stems of the fritillaries, some bending this way, and some bending that- all drawing the viewer's eye in curves.
6. Where I could see gaps between the forms and shapes created by the horse chestnut and fritillaries, I wanted to fill them with a little, gentle colour. I used the spirea and primula to play this supporting role, their soft buttery pinks and yellows softening the rich purple, gold and terracottas of the other ingredients.





COPPERS AND CORALS

VASE LIFE: 10-14 DAYS

MATERIALS:

Copper beech: 10 stems

Salad burnet: 5 stems

Peony 'Coral Charm': 7 stems

Sweet pea 'Candy Floss' and 'Juliet':
20 stems

Weigela 'Nain Rouge': 3 stems

Honeysuckle vines: 6 stems

Ranunculus 'Salmone', 'Elegance

Rosa, 'Cioccolato' and 'Striato Giallo':
25 stems

Peonies can turn any arrangement into something extravagant. Their blooms are so large and so many of them are ridiculously ruffled that it's hard not to stare at them. Everything else in the arrangement will be delegated to a supporting role. Even in the garden they steal the show, and when they're around for such a short window of time, it feels right to bask in the glory of them. It's no wonder they are so many people's favourite flower.

HOW TO:

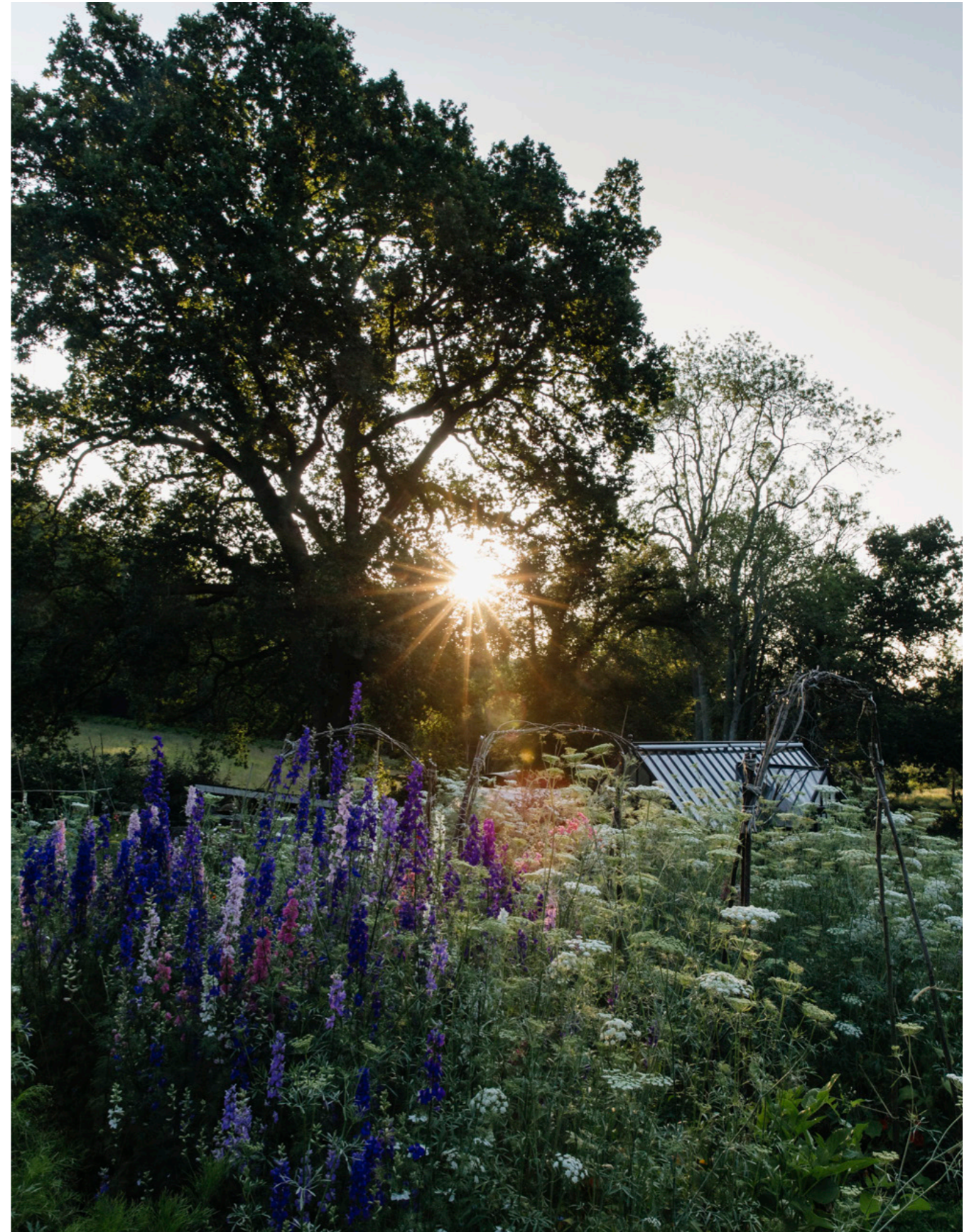
1. Peonies have heavy heads, so may require a little extra support in the vase to get them to stay where you want. I added a criss cross of tape across the top of the vase.
2. I began by adding both the copper beech and weigela branches working from the outside, leaving all the room in the centre of the arrangement for the flowers. The stems of the branches act as further support within the vase, and the branches themselves act as a framework of support for the flower heads too.
3. Once happy with the shapes created with the branches (I love one side to have the branches reaching up and the opposite side to have the branches reaching out), I begin to add flowers.
4. Peony 'Coral Charm' is my focal flower of choice in this arrangement, and I added them next, weaving them amongst the branches in cascades of colour diagonally across the vase. Placing them all at different heights gives depth to the arrangement.
5. Working with the purple, red and pink side of the colour wheel, layering up the colours, I tucked in the sweet peas and ranunculus as the bridesmaids to the peony brides, mirroring their colours and forms in a smaller, slightly less ostentatious way. I wanted the same ruffly shaped forms repeated through to create a sense of rhythm.
6. For a final flourish of movement, I added the honeysuckle vines, their snake-like lines a contrast to the ruffles and orbs of the floral ingredients.

IDEA:

Go extra-large. The large heads of the peony are ideal for extra-large, statement piece arrangements. Find your biggest urn and fill it with foliage and peonies, use chicken wire and lightweight vessels with water nestle within it to help you build it as big as you dare.

SUMMER

The grasses have been pulled up past our knees, the crickets harmonise their songs with the birds, and the sun is high and hot once more. Summer is here, and we live under blue skies scattered with clouds that meander leisurely across. The dawns rise early, drenched in dew and sweet, syrupy sunshine. The plants have scrambled their way into a tangle of maturity, and by the time we reach high summer, the hedgerows, fields, gardens and alleyways are bursting at the seams: even the cracks in the pavement are filling with dandelions. Some days, the ripe summer rains fall quickly, warmly and steadily, making the flowers bend heavy in their plump and soaked opulence. On other days, the light is scorching – taut by midday and pricking pearls of sweat on our shoulders and brows. Parched, longing for shade, and already missing the rain, the days of working with flowers start early to end early. It's the time of abundance and time to soak it all in before the slow unravel commences.



A SUMMER'S EVE

VASE LIFE: 5-8 DAYS

MATERIALS:

- Small ceramic bowl (I used one from Andy Van Vilet)
- Dahlias 'Wizard of Oz': 3 stems
- Scabious 'Snowmaiden' and 'Salmon Queen': 9 stems
- Snapdragons 'Madame Butterfly Ivory', 'Chantilly Bronze' and 'Chantilly Light Pink': 9 stems
- Astilbe: 6 stems
- Achillea 'Colorado' and 'Pastel Shades': 9 stems
- Oregano: 9 stems
- Pink Meadowsweet: 3 stems



Snapdragons are one of the highlights of summer.

A generous bloomer that I don't think I could be without. They smell lovely, sweet and fruity, and gathering armfuls from a handful of plants, to be rewarded with second and third flushes make them one of my top cut flowers. I love nothing more than the curve of a snapdragon head that has bent ever so slightly in the wind and learning with longing towards the sun – these are the snapdragons that offer the most lovely, gentle gestures to work with. Being such a pointed flower, I find snapdragons pair nicely with softer contrasts in fluffs and umbels.

HOW TO:

1. I started with the focal flowers in this arrangement. Usually I start with layering up the base of design with filler flowers and leave the focals until later, but I wanted to create a design with more air, and I find starting with the focals can help with this.
2. I had three of each focal – three dahlias, six scabious in two different varieties, and nine snapdragons in three different varieties. I placed the focals variety by variety, three at a time. The power of three is great to rely on in floral design – and asymmetry is pleasing to the eye. I love drawing isosceles triangles with colours and forms within the design, I find them to give a dynamic element, moving the viewer's eye around, asking them to make the connection too.
3. Then within the spaces left, and allowing for some negative space to remain, I built up a base of softer froth and colour, allowing the elegant lines of the star snapdragons to curve and explode their way up and out.

IDEA:

The first snapdragons of the season have lovely long stems. Embrace this and try using snapdragons in a giant-sized mini meadow-style design; the upright nature of them looks fantastic standing at full height and swaying. Perhaps use them along a hallway or aisle for a real show-stopping walkway.



A JUG OF COSMOS

VASE LIFE: 5 DAYS

MATERIALS:

Jug (I used one from Francesca Anfossi)
Cosmos 'Rose Bonbon': 3 stems
Cosmos 'Double Click Bicolour Rose': 2 stems
Cosmos 'Purity': 1 stem
Cosmos 'Popsocks': 1 stem
Cosmos 'Versailles Tetra': 10 stems
Cosmos 'Rosetta': 3 stems
Cosmos 'Cupcakes': 3 stems
Phlox 'Alba': 3 stems
Phlox 'Blushing Bride': 3 stems
Red campion: 3 stems
Red sedum: 6 stems
Astrantia 'Roma': 3 stems
Corncockle 'Ocean Pearl': 3 stems
Gaura: 3 stems
Pink clary sage: 5 stems
Bolted parsley: 10 stems



Cosmos have that beautiful, airy foliage that lends an easy, wafty, garden-gathered feel to any design. Even on their own they're lovely – striking but relaxed. Even just a couple of cosmos plants will give you stem after stem after stem. They are one of the most generous cut flowers and I grow them en masse to make the most of their abundance every summer. The more you cut, the more will come for you, so embrace their giving nature.

HOW TO:

1. Gather up whatever else you can find, such as bolted herbs and a few stems of wildflowers will lend that carefree, easy summer feeling.
2. A pitcher or jug is a perfect vessel for a low-key arrangement.
3. To keep a relaxed, effortless feeling, when placing stems don't worry too much about the lines of the stems crossing each other- let them move and bend where they naturally want to go.
4. To create a harmonious arrangement that has the feeling of being unarranged but still has a wow factor, work at creating a loose shape. I find that a building height on each side in a soft heart shape that makes the most of a bit of negative space in the centre lends itself to giving a relaxed but thoughtful air in an arrangement.
5. Place the explosions of umbels and delicate wildflowers between the scene stealing cosmos. Tweak, but don't over fuss. Keep breathing and allow it to be relaxed, letting the cosmos dance about.

IDEA:

For a more refined use of cosmos use just a stem of two in a centrepiece arrangement, strip the foliage back and embrace their slim and elegant stems and pretty flowers to dance above the rest of a design.





ZINNIA CENTREPIECE

VASE LIFE: 7–10 DAYS

*Keep refreshing the water.
Zinnia stems can make water
go murky relatively quickly.*

MATERIALS:

Low ceramic vase with
a wide opening
Zinnia ‘Zinderella Peach’ and
‘Queen Red Lime’: 15 stems
Bronze fennel: 5 stems
Sedum: 9 stems
Phlox ‘Crème Brûlée’: 12 stems
Rose ‘Roald Dahl’: 5 stems
Love in a Puff vine: 1 stem

IDEA:

For a fun, impactful late summer design, have big handfuls of single varieties of zinnias in jugs.

Flowers with petals that offer plenty of variation in different hues and tones within a single flower, are, in my opinion, the loveliest way to build a nuanced colour palette. Zinnias often offer lots of subtle shades of colour in each and every flower and are an easy-to-grow, long lasting cut flower to work with. They have strong and bold faces too and a centre that’s often much darker than the petals, which lends excellently to playing with rhythm in designs. All in all, they’re a wonderful ingredient to use.

HOW TO:

1. When creating a nuanced colour palette, choose a single flower as a reference point and harvest or choose the rest of the ingredients in relation to it. The varieties of zinnia I chose had hints of green, gold, rust and creamy coffee, so the rest of the flowers were picked to be a backdrop for these. The billowing bronze fennel heads that are abundant in late summer were the perfect green and gold that offered a softness with their umbels and fronds – a contrast to the much denser feel of the zinnias.
2. Starting with placing the fennel, I used it to build the form of the arrangement. I placed some taller bits high and wide – I wanted the design to feel abundant and as though it was spilling from the vase, just like how the garden feels at this time of year. I placed some more shorter pieces of fennel umbels at different heights lower in the centre and used the sedum and the phlox to build up different textures and varieties in the colours amongst the fennel. Try placing these fumbles in cloud like waves, creating a soft backdrop for the more focal flowers to sit on. These backdrops will peek through the rest of the flowers giving the colour palette a backdrop and offering depth.
3. I then turned to the roses and zinnias. The roses give moments of softness and light compared to the zinnia stems which are stiff and straight. I like to find ingredients to pair with stiffer stems that will offer gentle, soft movement and elegant lines, allowing me to hide the rigid stems with other flower heads with ease.
4. Focusing on the placement of the zinnias, I used their dark centres to syncopate a rhythm through the design.
5. As a final flourish and to create a relationship with the arrangement and the table, I allowed a Love in a Puff vine to spill out.





AUTUMN

The buds and fruits have ripened and swelled, weighing down the branches on the trees and shrubs. With a weary but joyful richness, Autumn is here. The weather is leaving its mark on the petals and plants now – it's all mottled leaves and wind-whipped stems. The light is warm, the air is cold, and the leaves turn to precious metal in copper, bronze and gold. Then, the light begins to fade in an amber glow, blurring at the edges when the mists come folding in. The drizzle starts before it comes down in puddle-forming droves, lashing the landscape until it begins to fray at the edges. The canopy is slowly unpicked, its threads loosening one by one until the first signs of Autumn lay strewn on the ground. If I had a favourite time, it would be now – the moment we can indulge in the sweet, melancholic romance that Autumn brings.

AUTUMN TASSELS

VASE LIFE: 7 DAYS

MATERIALS:

Vase (I used one from Robin Walden Ceramics)

Amaranthus 'Coral Fountain', 'Green Tails' and 'Hot Biscuits': 9 stems

Ammi visnaga: 5 stems

Wild carrot/Queen Anne's lace, white: 5 stems

Rose 'Chandos Beauty': 1 stem

Cosmos 'Purity', 'Double Click Bi Coloured Rose' and 'Cupcakes': 15 stems

Snapdragon 'Costa Silver': 9 stems

Achillea: 7 stems

Malope 'Alba': 5 stems

For dainty tendrils, perhaps for small bouquets and posies, it's possible to harvest amaranthus when the stems are smaller. Alternatively, just embrace the expanse and size that amaranthus can reach, allowing them to clamber and spill from the borders and beds, and harvest them for large-scale arrangements. Have them tumble out of urns, or use your biggest vase. Pair with the more refined stems in the garden, like delicate, frondy cosmos, as a soft contrast against gargantuan amaranthus tassels.

HOW TO:

1. A large scale vase arrangement is one of my favourite things to make in times of abundance. A vase with a narrower mouth is helpful in supporting the stems and can make arranging a little easier.
2. Embracing the naturalising selling nature of the 'Coral Fountain' and 'Green Tails' amaranthus I started with them, tumbling over the lip of the vase. Then using the more upright nature of 'Hot Biscuits' I created a counter-lever type of visual balance on the opposite side.
3. With these forms in place, I started to weave in the umbels of ammi, wild carrot and the sphere of the rose.
4. Finally the more delicate, dancing stems of cosmos were added to give lightness and movement to the arrangement.

IDEA:

One show-stopping way to use amaranthus is to embrace their size and resilience out of water and use the everlasting cloud technique. Have the tassels hanging from above, like the far-reaching tentacles of a great sea creature.



SHADES OF PINK

VASE LIFE: 10 DAYS

MATERIALS:

Tall glass vase

Chrysanthemum 'Gompie Rose':

12 stems

Spindle: 5 branches

Ninebark 'Diablo': 2 stems

Viburnum tinus: 5 stems

Aster lateriflorus 'Prince': 2 stems

Weigela foliage: 6 stems

Pink snowberry: 7 stems

There are so many special chrysanthemums to grow and design with, especially the ones that masquerade as pieces of coral and sea anemones, spiders and balloons. They can be fun and elegant at the same time. They provide such wonderful shapes and vibrant colours, some almost metallic and shimmering. There are smaller spray chrysanthemums, too, but the large-headed ones are scene stealers and great for playing with emphasis.

Another way is to create large scale vase arrangements – I love working with simple glass vases in autumn, leaving the vivid colours and textures of the season's ingredients to do all the hard work.

HOW TO:

1. The Virginia creeper that clammers over a number of trees on the edge of the woods, with all its colours from deep burgundy and pink to bright orange, was the autumn inspiration for this colour palette.
2. To have placement control in a wider necked vase with no mechanics requires a little thoughtful placement of the first few stems. Choose stems that are thick and sturdy for the job – the idea is to create a supportive framework of stems.
3. Place the first three stems – I chose spindle and ninebark to start – and cross each other in the same direction to create a triangular space in the centre of them. That space in the centre of the three crossed stems is almost like a vase within the vase.
4. Add the next few sturdy stems into that central triangle space, the first stems acting as the supportive framework. The more stems you add, the greater the control you'll have over placement.
5. Once all the foliage elements with their stiff stems were in place, I began to add the snowberry and chrysanthemums, whose slightly bendier stems appreciated the framework of sturdy stems already in place.
6. I wanted the bright pink colour to flow through the whole arrangement from back left to front right. Placing the chrysanthemum stems at slightly different heights across this angle, I then placed the snowberries to explode out from the more formal line.

IDEA:

Place glass vases like this one next to each other all along the length of a mantelpiece for a simple, spectacular installation that is light on mechanics.



A must for those aspiring to grow cut flowers.

— THE ENGLISH GARDEN



Thank you for ordering FROM SEED TO BLOOM by Milli Proust.

With 26 projects, this book is a modern and practical guide to growing and styling your own floral arrangements.

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Hardie Grant

QUADRILLE