



Acanthus Mollis

# Stars of the Late-Summer Garden

*From dramatic foliage to pollinator-friendly blooms, Geoff Stonebanks shares some of his favourite plants for extending the season along the Sussex coast*

**L**ate summer through to early autumn is one of the most rewarding times in the garden. Here on the Sussex coast, many gardens are still bursting with colour, texture and wildlife, proving that the gardening year is far from over.

## Structural stars

One of the secrets to maintaining interest at this time of year is to think beyond flowers alone and introduce plants that provide structure and drama. Acanthus mollis is a perfect example. Its enormous, deeply lobed leaves can grow up

to a metre long, forming impressive clumps from which tall flower spikes emerge in late summer. The white flowers, each topped with a hood-like purple bract, create a striking two-tone effect.

Another standout is the relatively new Fatsia japonica 'Camouflage'. Sporting bold, almost tropical foliage splashed with shades of green and gold, it brings year-round interest to the garden. In autumn, clusters of white flowers are followed by black berries. It is equally at home brightening a dry, shady corner or making a statement in a container, particularly when paired with the finer textures of ferns.



Solidago



Hydrangea section

## Colour and pollinators

For gardeners looking to attract pollinators, few plants work harder than Verbena bonariensis and Solidago. Verbena's delicate purple flower heads seem to float above the border on tall, slender stems, creating an effortless, naturalistic look. Solidago, meanwhile, produces masses of golden-yellow flowers that provide a valuable source of late-season nectar while retaining their colour well into autumn.

Colour can be enhanced further with reliable favourites such as Hydrangea 'Annabelle', Hydrangea paniculata 'Limelight', Rudbeckia, Helenium, Persicaria 'Purple Fantasy' and Buddleia, which remains a magnet for butterflies.



Succulents



Fascicularia bicolor

## Coastal champion

Coastal gardeners should also consider Fascicularia bicolor. This evergreen bromeliad is perfectly suited to sunny, exposed conditions. As it prepares to flower, the centre of its rosette turns a vivid scarlet, contrasting beautifully with the metallic blue flowers nestled at its heart.

## Containers and creative displays

Finally, don't overlook the possibilities of containers and creative displays. Succulents offer an extraordinary range of colours and forms while coping admirably with dry conditions. Try planting them in reclaimed or vintage containers – an old colander, for example – and add a colourful ornament or decorative feature for a touch of personality.

As summer gently gives way to autumn, these plants ensure the garden remains every bit as engaging as it was at the height of the season.

Geoff Stonebanks writes monthly for various publications, is a full member of the Gardening Media Guild and has a weekly gardening column in the Brighton Argus. He is regularly heard on the radio and his own garden, Driftwood, has appeared on BBC's Gardeners' World and won multiple awards. [www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk](http://www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk)