

# We love May

**This is what we've been pining for** all through the long winter. Summer is nearly here: when the sun shines it is muscular and hot. The bees buzz ecstatically from flower to flower. When the rain falls, the showers are nourishing and brief and our gardens are unashamed in their flowering. The Anglo-Saxon name for this month was Tri-Milchi (because you could milk cows three times a day), which lacks the joyful simplicity of the word, May. Words by **James Alexander-Sinclair**

**STAR OF THE MONTH** *Allium hollandicum* 'Purple Sensation'  
Probably the best and easiest ornamental onion to grow. ● **Care** Plant bulbs in all but the wettest soils in autumn ● **Height x Spread** 60cm x 10cm

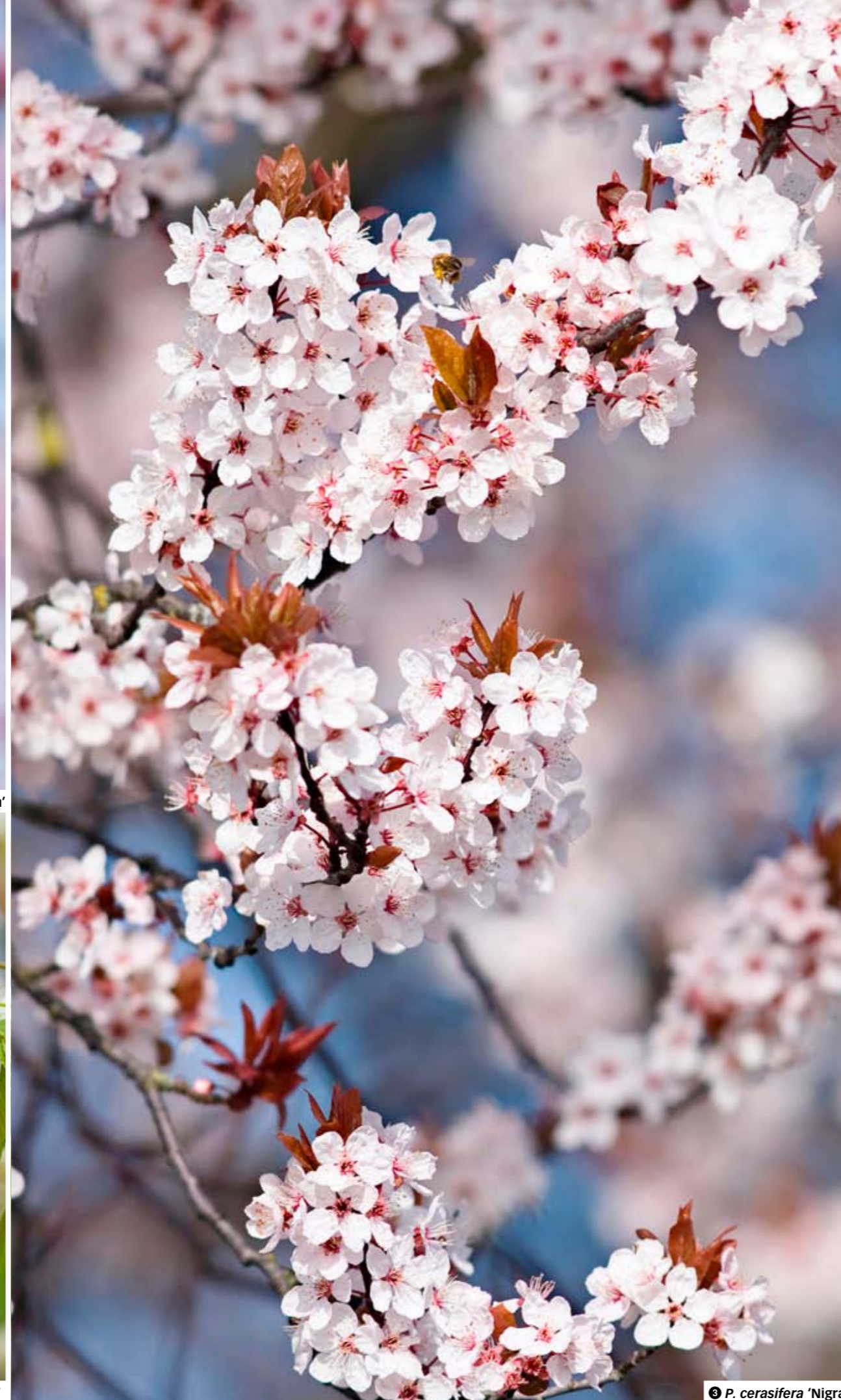
PHOTOS: RICHARD BLOOM



1 Prunus 'Kanzan'



2 P. 'Shogetsu'



3 P. cerasifera 'Nigra'



4 P. padus 'Colorata'



5 P. 'Matsumae-hana-miyako'

## Ephemeral as a cloud

**For centuries**, the Japanese have practised the delightful custom of 'Hanami'. The idea is to picnic beneath a blooming tree: ideally with a light breeze and petals falling romantically onto the heads (and sandwiches) of young lovers. It is more than just enjoying the undeniable loveliness of the blossom, it becomes a symbolic act. A lot of it is about mortality: the blossom looks like clouds skittering past, idealising the fleeting nature of life. It is also about good fortune, love and, of course, celebrating the passing of winter. In Japan it is a serious business, as thousands gather each year in parks to hold feasts under the trees.

### 1 Prunus 'Kanzan'

Very upright, goblet shaped tree when young, spreading as it ages. I know the feeling! ● **Care** All these cherries are best grown in full sun for maximum performance. Any decent soil will do ● **Height x Spread** 10m x 10m

### 2 P. 'Shogetsu'

A short, plump tree – a bit like a blossomy version of Danny de Vito. Flowers like a frilly wedding dress.

● **Care** Take root cuttings in early summer (after flowering) or in July ● **H x S** 5m x 8m

### 3 P. cerasifera 'Nigra'

The darkest leaved tree. Can get a bit messy as it ages. Good as part of a mixed hedge. Produces red fruit (cherry plums) in autumn. Excellent for bees.

● **H x S** 10m x 10m

### 4 P. padus 'Colorata'

A pinker version of the bird cherry native to the UK. Purple foliage fades to green in summer. Black fruit is popular with birds – hence the name. ● **H x S** 9m x 8m

### 5 P. 'Matsumae-hana-miyako'

Medium sized tree: good for a front garden or shrub border. ● **Care** Light prune only ● **H x S** 4m x 3m

PHOTOS: GARY CHRISTINA BOLLEN; ALAMY; RICHARD BLOOM; MARIANNE MAERUS



1 Tulipa 'Black Hero'

## Late but well worth the wait

**Gosh, I do love tulips** – they seem so simple but, probe a little deeper, and they are so sophisticated. No other flower has such depth of colour and shape.

### 1 Tulipa 'Black Hero'

All of these are late flowering – to keep you in tulips for longer. This one is related to the old classic *T. 'Queen of the Night'*. ● **Height x Spread** 60 cm x 10cm

### 2 T. 'Carnaval de Nice'

Unusual in that the foliage is almost as good as the flower: bluish with a pale edge. The streaked flowers are also scented. ● **H x S** 40cm x 10cm

### 3 T. 'Orange Princess'

Not just orange but, if you look closely, pink and purple as well. ● **Care** Plant as bulbs in autumn. Performs best in full sun ● **H x S** 35cm x 10 cm

### 4 T. 'Angélique'

This is about the last tulip to bloom. ● **Care** Almost all bulbs live longer in free draining soil. Avoid windy sites with all these varieties ● **H x S** 40cm x 10cm

### 5 T. 'Blue Diamond'

Though lovely, this is not very blue: like roses, there are no true blue tulips. Plant plenty as they make great cut flowers. ● **H x S** 40cm x 10cm



2 T. 'Carnaval de Nice'



3 T. 'Orange Princess'



4 T. 'Angélique'



5 T. 'Blue Diamond'

PHOTOS: THE GARDEN COLLECTION, ALAMY; RICHARD BLOOM; MARIANNE MAIERUS



1 *Paeonia delavayi*



2 *P. mlokosewitschii*

## Take a punt on a peony

**Peonies are the perfect** plant for a gambler. If the early summer is dry, then nothing will make you happier than a peony flower: as plump and fluffy as a broody hen. But if it rains, then you end up with flowers as sad as soggy Kleenex. Far be it from me to encourage gambling. But I beg you, please, please take the risk.

### 1 *Paeonia delavayi*

In my opinion the best colour of any tree peony: beautiful enough to make a Visigoth weep. Each flower is 10cm across. ● **Care** Take semi-ripe cuttings in summer ● **Height x Spread** 2.5m x 150cm

### 2 *P. mlokosewitschii*

Affectionately known as Molly the Witch. Gorgeous bluey green leaves with red margins. ● **Care** One of the more resilient varieties ● **H x S** 65cm x 90cm

### 3 *P. lactiflora* 'White Wings'

Scented. ● **Care** Divide in autumn or early spring. Resents too much root disturbance and will sulk. Watch out for grey mould ● **H x S** 75cm x 65cm

### 4 *P. rockii*

Slow growing. ● **Care** Shelter from cold, desiccating winds. Grow in good soil, in full sun or partial shade. Sow seed in early winter ● **H x S** 2m x 2m



3 *P. lactiflora* 'White Wings'



4 *P. rockii*

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