

# We love **April** for ....

putting a 'spirit of youth in everything', to steal from Shakespeare. Yet again, the Bard (who knew a thing or two about words) has hit the nail on the head, for this is the month when everything springs to life bright-eyed, bushy tailed and brimming with the joys of spring. **Words by James Alexander-Sinclair**



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## Apple of my eye

Apples are not just for autumn: in fact, the actual fruit can sometimes be a sour and woolly disappointment.

**Malus 'James Grieve'** is not one of those – it has great apples in late summer, fresh Granny Smith-coloured leaves and a spring full of sugar-coated blossom.

**DETAILS** A good eating apple that stores well • Fruit tree sizes are governed by their rootstock and range from 1.5m to 5m tall • Needs a pollinator

PHOTOS: GAP PHOTOS/FHF GREENMEDIA



*Erythronium 'Pagoda'*

## Good tooth fairy

One of the most beautiful of bulbous plants is the dog's-tooth violet (so called because of the shape of the bulb, which looks remarkably like a canine's canine). Its delicate stems bend like fishing rods, but instead of some snarling marlin, they only need to support the feather weight of perfect hanging flowers. The petals stretch backwards into a sort of yoga position and the centres have fabulous kaleidoscopes of detail – the only snag is that to fully appreciate them you need to lie on the ground, so take warm clothes.

### *Erythronium 'Pagoda'*

**DETAILS** A very vigorous variety • Divide established groups in springtime • Native to North America, where they grow on the margins of forests • Height 30cm

### *Erythronium 'Joanna'*

**DETAILS** Grows well in a shady rock garden • Watch out for slugs • Up to eight flowers on each stem • Plant bulbs in autumn • Height 25cm

### *Erythronium dens-canis*

**DETAILS** European native • Can be naturalised in turf provided it's not too dense, so good close to hedges • Probably the easiest to grow • Flowers can also be white or lilac • Height 15cm

### *Erythronium californicum 'White Beauty'*

**DETAILS** Like most, this has fabulous spotted foliage from which the stems erupt • Increases well from offsets (little bulbs that develop on the side of the main bulb) • Height 20cm



*Erythronium dens-canis*



*Erythronium 'Joanna'*



*Erythronium californicum 'White Beauty'*



*Salix hookeriana* catkins

## Count your catkins

*Salix hookeriana* has some of the best catkins of any willow: they look like a strange cross between caterpillar, pipe cleaner and corn cob.

**DETAILS** Originally cultivated for basket weaving • Can be cut back every year in small gardens • Cuttings strike easily in early summer • Height 4m



*Rhododendron 'Hinomayo'*

## To be, or not to be

*Rhododendron 'Hinomayo'* is an azalea. The simple rule is that all azaleas are rhododendrons, but not all rhododendrons are azaleas. Confused? Don't worry, just enjoy their splendour.

**DETAILS** Dwarf, evergreen and tolerant of full sun • Needs acid soil • Propagate from cuttings in late summer or layer in autumn • Height 60cm

PHOTOS: CLIVE NICHOLS; GAP PHOTOS/JO WHITWORTH; DAVE ZUBRASKI; PAUL DEBOIS; RICHARD BLOOM



*Orchis mascula*

## Ode to an orchid

We tend to think of orchids as awkward houseplants or weird things growing on trees in the densest forests of Shangri-La. ***Orchis mascula***, however, is a pretty native European orchid that is found in fields and woods.

**DETAILS** Smells first of honey then cat pee (probably as a sign that pollination has occurred)

- Best in neutral or acid soil • Plant tubers in autumn and divide in spring • Height 30cm



*Akebia quinata 'Alba'*

## You sexy thing, you

***Akebia quinata 'Alba'*** smells of chocolate – a warm, melty scent with just a hint of spiciness. The sort of plant that would cover the walls of an upmarket Balkan bordello.

- DETAILS** Also available with wine-coloured flowers • Semi-evergreen climber • Take cuttings in summer • Height 10m

## Mini-me marvels

While we are waiting for next month's onslaught of blowsiness and colour – otherwise known as tulip time – here are a few relations to whet your appetite. These are the species tulips, which are much smaller and generally tougher, too, coming from wild hillsides and windswept ridges.

### ***Tulipa 'Little Princess'***

**DETAILS** Much more likely to last in heavy soil than showier hybrids • Plant with grit for drainage • Height 10-15cm

### ***Tulipa tarda***

**DETAILS** Produces a cluster of about five flowers • Best in peaty soils • Sow seed of species in autumn. May take five years to flower • Height 15cm

### ***Tulipa praestans 'Fusilier'***

**DETAILS** Looks wonderful around the feet of *Magnolia stellata* (as grown by my mother) • Height 30cm



*Tulipa 'Little Princess'*



*Tulipa tarda*



*Tulipa praestans 'Fusilier'*

PHOTOS: CLIVE NICHOLS; GAP PHOTOS/SARAH CUTTLE; TORIE CHUGG/THE GARDEN COLLECTION