

## Plant Stars 2018, from -12°C to 30°C+ Mandie Potter

From 28<sup>th</sup> May until 28<sup>th</sup> July we have only had 2.5mm of rain and it shows, the grass is straw coloured, Geraniums burnt off, Crocosmias suffering from red spider mite, Hostas withering with boiled leaves and even drought tolerant ferns have passed out. However, there are a few plants that have really surpassed themselves, not only did they have three early dumps of snow and a few -12°C frosts, but they are still looking wonderful with no rain, no watering and temperatures reaching over 30°C for several weeks.

My biggest surprise was *Verbena* 'Diamond Merci'. I always take cuttings as it can be a bit tender. It is in very well drained soil and after winter did look awful, so in late April I gave it a severe haircut and it had two chances. Well now it covers an area over 2½ feet square and is covered in beautiful Burgundy red blooms - it's looking lovely with *Plectranthus argustus* (not hardy).

Another superstar which has not flinched at all is *Tulbaghia* 'Purple Eye' - what an amazing plant. I have grown *Tulbaghia violacea* 'John May' for many years now, which is lovely, but in the winter it can look like a soggy mess, stinks of onions and the harder it's hit the later it flowers. *Tulbaghia* 'Purple Eye' has none of these flaws; its first flowers were in late April and it will go on until the frosts, FAB-U-LOUS!

I know it is said that *Alstroemerias* don't like the heat, but *Alstroemeria* 'Indian Summer' is doing really well. This is the first year that it lost all its growth during the winter and I did think maybe I'd lost it. However, by April it started to pop its foliage up and by mid-May it was in flower and hasn't stopped and will only stop when we get frosts. OK, it might cost over £10 but its flower power is well worth it. Being a combination of yellow, burnt orange and vermilion it's not everyone's cup of tea, but somehow with its grey-purple foliage it is calmed and makes it easier on the eye.

A plant that I know some people can't stand, but which I really enjoy growing, is *Dahlia* 'David Howard'. This is in the same bed as my *Alstroemeria* (I call it my bonfire bed). Again its flowers of apricot to orange to vermilion are set off by its dark purpley brown foliage. I always leave my Dahlias in the garden and let them take their chances and although this bed is heavy clay they have now been in for four years and just improve every year – flowering from late June to the first frost.

And finally, a bulb sometimes sold as tender but is actually very hardy - *Eucomis autumnalis*. Emerging very late, sometimes as late as July, it only gets to about eight inches high with its creamy green pineapple shaped flower head and green top knot. It never seems to care about how hot, dry or even wet it is, it just comes up and does its thing every year; the only thing that will endanger it is me with a spade trying to plant something – OOPS!

I must admit that after a day's gardening I really don't want to spend hours watering and when it's been so hot it does make you wonder why you have things in pots that need watering every day, so the garden just has to get on with it, it might look sad in places, but it's not going to die.