



SINGULAR BEAUTY
Rosa mulliganii climbs
over the metal arbour in
Sissinghurst's famous
White Garden



WHITE MAGIC

Planting with one colour can create real impact and choosing white as your theme will guarantee a dazzling display, says House Beautiful gardener Ann-Marie Powell



Tranquil, calming and reminiscent of the British countryside in spring, white borders are undoubtedly a garden classic. Understandably popular in rural gardens, white plantings are most successful, to my mind, in urban gardens where the dramatic contrast from street to serenity is soothing, particularly at dusk. If you're considering embarking on a wholly white border or entire garden, be assured that there are more plant varieties in white than anything else on the colour wheel.

VARIATIONS ON A THEME

When making your initial plant selection list, remember that very few flowers are pure white – most have touches of pink, yellow or ivory, so take this into account to ensure your shades are complementary. Texture is also key. For example, the fragile haze of *Gypsophila paniculata* 'Bristol Fairy' or, in shadier spots, *Astrantia major* 'Large White' will resemble clouds threaded through a border with striking *Echinacea purpurea* 'White Swan' and *Lupinus* 'Noble Maiden'.

The success of a white garden also relies on the foliage that supports the blooms. I feel that at least a third of any white border should be foliage; leaves provide the frames that make white blooms appear abundant and ethereal. Ferns such as *Polystichum setiferum* 'Herrenhausen' are ideal in a shady border, while, in sun, grasses such as *Melica altissima* 'Alba' offer movement as they catch the breeze.

Silver foliage gives a more contemporary look for a sunny border. The white daisies of *Anthemis punctata* subsp. *cupaniana* rising above its finely cut silver leaves would work in harmony with the aromatic grey-green foliage of *Lavandula angustifolia* 'Arctic Snow'. Thread through the elegant heads of 'White Triumphator' tulips, which flower earlier in the season than the lavender. This combination is perfect for dry or gravel gardens, especially anchored here and there with clumps of large, downy leaved *Verbascum chaixii* 'Album'.

SELECT FOR SCENT

It's in shady spots that white blooms shine, particularly in the gloaming where other colours simply fade into the shadows. And an added bonus is that many of them also send out bursts of fragrance in lowering light. This is because white flowers are often pollinated by night-flying insects such as moths, which use the flowers' night-time glow and their aroma to help navigate.

For scent, make sure you add the biennial *Matthiola perennis* 'Alba' (night-scented stock), *Nicotiana sylvestris* (flowering tobacco) and white lilies – the waxy flowers on tall stems are simply exquisite at dusk.

CREATE A BACKDROP

February is the ideal time to plant those backbone shrubs to provide structure, height and backdrop for your new white blooms. Evergreens offer interest in a garden year round, and the compact and informal *Myrtus communis* subsp. *tarentina* is the perfect base shrub, together with *Osmanthus delavayi*, with its masses of scented, white, jasmine-like flowers from mid-spring, as well as the more ►

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Tall spires of foxglove-like white *Eremurus* 'Joanna' grow from a bed of *Hesperis matronalis* 'Alba'; a pretty arrangement of spring flowers, featuring daffodils, daisies and variegated ivy

OPPOSITE

A rich green lawn looks beautiful surrounded by

a romantic mix of plants, including white roses, such as *Rosa* 'Madame Alfred Carrière', *R* 'Claire Austin' and *R* 'Susan Williams-Ellis'. When planting, aim to ensure that foliage will make up at least one-third of the display to offset the flowers



A lush garden path with white roses and various green plants. The path is a narrow, winding strip of green grass, bordered on both sides by dense foliage. On the right side, large white roses with green leaves are prominent. On the left side, there are various green plants, including ferns and small white flowers. The overall scene is a vibrant, green garden with a path leading through it.

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compact *Sarcococca hookeriana* var *digyna*. Its clusters of small, creamy white, vanilla-scented flowers provide the headiest of all winter perfumes, so plant it close to a window, entrance or path.

Deciduous shrubs pack more of a visual punch in the summer months to add height and drama to a border. The huge, blowsy globes of *Hydrangea arborescens* 'Annabelle' are ideal as a centrepiece; the dramatic plumes of scented, yellow-eyed buddleja are a magnet for butterflies and other beneficial insects, while *Philadelphus* 'Belle Etoile' with its cup-shaped flowers reminiscent of orange blossom, is an ideal low-maintenance shrub.

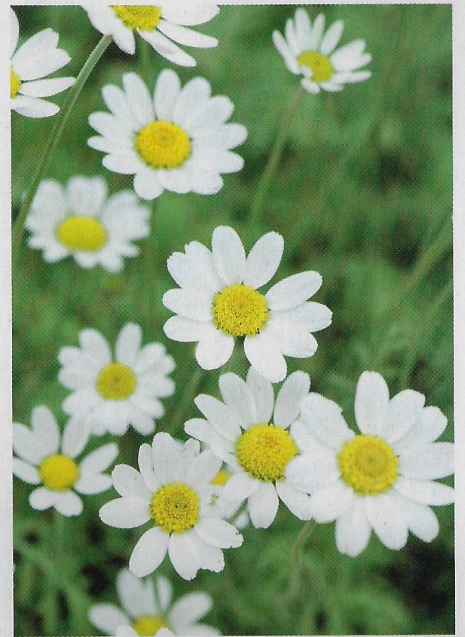
LIGHT UP SMALL SPACES

If you want to trial the effect of white or bring it to a terrace, balcony or windowsill, then containers of white blooms can dazzle. I favour a reclaimed, battered metal planter with a patina of age for contrast. Consider agapanthus on their own, white peppermint-scented *pelargonium tomentosum*, marguerites (*Argyranthemum frutescens*), and, of course, white petunia. For crisp modernity, climber *Muehlenbeckia axillaris*, with its wiry, scrambling foliage and diminutive white flowers, looks contemporary in a brushed-chrome pot.

Finally, no white garden would be complete without romantic roses. *Rosa* 'Madame Alfred Carrière' is one of the best climbing roses for a north-facing fence, wall or rose arch. And, for the terrace, follow master rose-breeder David Austin's selections of *Rosa* 'Claire Austin' and *R* 'Susan Williams-Ellis'. Surround with *Dianthus* 'Mrs Sinkins' and a scattering of pure-white foxgloves to create a traditional scene with plenty of impact. White cosmos, white snapdragons and white hellebores will extend your display from autumn to winter. 🌱

ABOVE A gravel path winds between beds of stunning *Echinacea purpurea* 'White Swan' and *Persicaria amplexicaulis* 'Alba' OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT *Lavandula angustifolia* 'Arctic Snow', which works particularly well when planted alongside white daisies; *Astrantia major* 'Super Star', a long-living perennial with rounded leaves; *Anthemis punctata* subsp *cupaniana* with gorgeous, yellow-centred white daisies from a bed of silvery foliage; *Philadelphus* 'Belle Etoile', known for its highly scented white flowers, which are tinged purple towards the centre;

Rosa 'Susan Williams-Ellis', a fragrant rose that flowers in small clusters from early summer to late autumn; *Antirrhinum majus*, which produces small white flowers from an upright, foxglove-like stem; *Hydrangea arborescens* 'Annabelle', a small, bushy deciduous shrub with oval leaves and large spherical heads; *Lilium regale*, known for its fragrant, trumpet-like flowers; *Nicotiana sylvestris*, better known as the tobacco plant



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