

## DESIGN IDEAS

### 1. Windswept

The tousled flower heads of *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Silberfeder' catch the light and add movement and drama to a late border; their bulk helps prop up the stems of weaker-flowering perennials as they fade.



### 2 Good mixers

Smaller-flowered Michaelmas daisies such as *Aster novae-angliae* 'Harrington's Pink' are not showy plants, but they mix well, add colour to the border right into October and have the great virtue of staying upright to the end.

### 3 Light and dark

Penstemons flower long and hard and are invaluable additions to late summer borders, bringing in bees. Dusky purple *Penstemon* 'Raven' contrasts beautifully with airy *Stipa calamagrostis* and soft mauve *Aster pyrenaicus* 'Lutetia'.

### 4 Focal points

The flowers of late-summer perennials are often small and abundant, making them ideal for planting in masses. Add impact with concentrations of intense colour such as the rich purple and gold of *Aster novae-angliae* 'Violetta'.

### 5 Good companions

A member of the teasel family, *Succisella inflexa* 'Frosted Pearls' has small, soft, silver-grey scabious-like flowerheads that lend themselves naturally to informal planting among other small-flowered perennials.



Arne Maynard is a leading garden designer based in London and Monmouthshire

# Late-summer borders

How to make a grand finale to the season with a celebratory display of rich and earthy colours

WORDS ARNE MAYNARD



## DESIGN IDEAS

### 6 En masse

This lovely Michaelmas daisy, *Aster lateriflorus* 'Lady in Black' will flower continuously from midsummer to mid-autumn, producing a mass of tiny white daisies with pink centres over dark, purple-green leaves.



### 7 Rose hips

Don't underestimate the value of fruit and seedheads in late summer borders. Rose hips are part of the cycle, bringing wildlife into the garden adding late colour and looking particularly glorious when underplanted with asters.



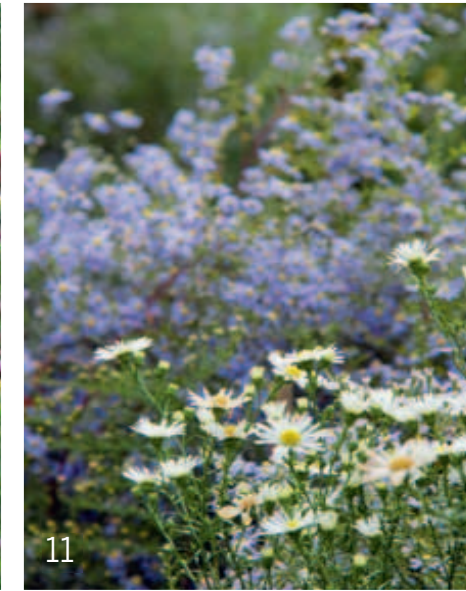
### 8 Late-season leaves

The transition from summer into autumn is marked by many subtle and atmospheric changes. Low winter light catches the leaves of *Cercis canadensis* 'Forest Pansy' as they change colour from purple to red and yellow before falling.



### 9 Flame throwers

The burnt-orange petals of *Helenium* 'Flammenspiel' are streaked with yellow. This is one of the latest heleniums to flower, and is still blooming in October. These prairie meadow perennials look equally good in mixed or grass borders.



### 10 Natural partners

At the cooler end of the colour spectrum, pale pinks and mauves can be combined to create a soft, ethereal effect that seems to glow. Here *Verbena bonariensis* makes a stand, intertwined with airy, pale pink *Althaea cannabina*.

### 11 Blue and white

Michaelmas daisies are inclined to spread, but then that is part of their charm. Pure-white flowered *Aster x salignus* 'Caledonia' will run, but it is worth it if you have the space. It's seen here with *Aster turbinellus* in the background.

### 12 Rich colour

A ravishing mixed border at Old Court Nursery, the aster specialist. This wonderful display of goldenrod (*Solidago*) with clouds of mauve and purple Michaelmas daisies captures all that's most magical about the late-summer garden.



Late summer is one of my favourite times, when the low sun casts shadows, and catches the dew drops on grasses and spiders' webs. The quality of light is fabulous and there's still a warmth to it. Flower-wise, it's the culmination of the gardening year, a wonderful harvest festival of earthy, organic colours, oranges and mauves. As the season progresses there's something appealing about the gradual decay and the way, at a stroke, frost finally reduces everything to black, wet rags.

I like to plant late-summer borders in a matrix of cultivated grasses, to make what I describe as a contemporary meadow. Prairie meadow plants such

as asters, echinaceas, rudbeckias, heleniums and eupatoriums are all beautifully suited to this naturalistic style of planting, and the grasses that I use, molinias and panicums, act as a foil to the flowers.

Michaelmas daisies are one of the loveliest plants for this time of year and I always include them in my late-summer borders. They have a way of catching the light, and beautiful seedheads that bring in the wildlife. I remember as a child reading Gertrude Jekyll's description of an aster garden she had made, and the impression it made on me. Michaelmas daisies are native meadow plants and so they fit well into the long-grass environment, especially the

small-flowered forms. At the end of the season you get that wonderful last flush of flower combined with the bleached and fading grasses.

I use large-flowered asters too, but in a more formalised way, planting them up in big, sumptuous cottage-garden style borders that celebrate this final burst of colour. Asters are wonderful for adding longevity to rose gardens, small and relatively inconspicuous when the roses are in flower in June, then coming into their own, with the rose hips, at the end of the summer. This is a good association in practical terms too, since both asters and roses tend to get mildew, and you can co-ordinate the spraying programme. Another

much simpler and wilder way to grow asters is in long meadow grass, just as you often see them growing on road verges or railway embankments.

Then there are the late-summer flowers grown for cutting, such as chrysanthemums, dahlias and penstemons. Plant them in borders among other plants or alone in special cutting beds, either in selected shades or grown together in a last brilliant celebration of clashing colours. These late flowers are rich in nectar and bring insects and wonderful displays of butterflies into the garden. I love it when the house is filled with great jugfuls of flowers, cut before they finish. □  
NEXT MONTH Bulbs.

## Stockists

### Old Court Nurseries

Aster specialists – see them growing in the Picton Garden on the same site. Colwall, Malvern, Worcestershire WR13 6QE. Tel 01684 540416, www.autumnasters.co.uk

### Phoenix Perennial Plants

For an amazing selection of late-summer perennials visit Marina Christopher's nursery at Paice Lane, Medstead, Alton, Hampshire GU34 5PR. Tel 01420 560695. (No website.)

### Rare plant fairs and specialist nurseries

These are excellent places to shop for unusual grasses and other perennials. For details see: <http://rareplantfair.co.uk/>