

# URBAN FLOWERS

Creating abundance in a small city garden



**Carolyn  
Dunster**

Photographs by  
**Jason Ingram**



# Plant Palette

Suggestions for a pink-burgundy planting scheme of early to mid-summer flowers

## 1 *Origanum vulgare* Wild Marjoram

Known mainly for its culinary uses as a herb the small bushy flowers of the marjoram plant are fantastic fillers and will add volume and scent to any posy.



## 2 *Astrantia major*

## 3 *Astrantia Ruby Cloud* Masterwort

The tonal colours of these Astrantias work so beautifully together that it is worth growing them both. They bring an ethereal delicacy to any arrangement but in reality the plants are as tough as old boots and will thrive anywhere.

## 4 *Digitalis pupurea* Foxglove

Foxgloves are statement flowers and a favourite for bees. Grow them in a large separate container to harvest as stand-alone individual blooms in tall vases or bottles.



5 *Centaurea cyanus* 'Black Ball' Cornflower A cut and come again annual crop. Cornflowers are incredibly easy and rewarding to grow from seed. Just pick and mix with other wildflowers to arrange in jam jars.

6 *Pimpinella major* 'Rosea' Burnet Saxifrage Peonies do need a bit of space but as total show-stealers they

are top of my cut flower list. Arrange them like roses in a hand-tied bunch with any other foraged or home-grown flowers.

7 *Dacus carota* 'Black Knight' Carrot Flower

8 *Saliva pratensis* 'Lapis Lazuli' Meadow Clary Hugely valuable as a cut flower it can be harvested twice in a season and lasts for ages in a vase. Its tall thin form contrasts well with the round-headed scabious.

9 *Aquilegia vulgaris* var. *Stellata* 'Black Barlow' Granny's Bonnets

Grow this intensely dark and moody variety alongside 'Ruby Port' and 'Nora Barlow' to create the most exquisite jewel-like bouquets.

10 *Scabiosa atropurpurea* 'Black Cat' Pincushion Flower

Its tight rounded form contrasts well with the taller spikier flowers here.

11 *Lysimachia* 'Beaujolais' Crimson Loosestrife

The plumes of the Lysimachia can be cut short for a round posy but it is also striking as an individual bloom displayed in a tall thin vase or bottle

12 *Sanguisorbia tenuifolia* 'Pink Elephant' Great Burnet

I grow sanguisorbia for its heads which retain their deep claret colour when dried. Its lack of petals sets it apart and it will punctuate any mixed arrangement with its interesting textural qualities.



# Arranging your flowers

Create a hand-tied scented posy with flowers that look as if they have been plucked directly from an English country hedgerow in mid-summer.

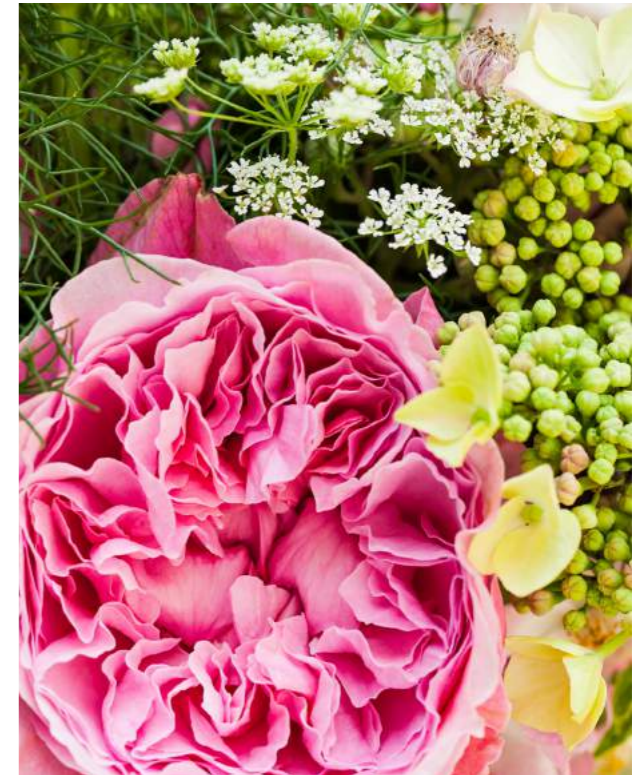


The roses provided the starting point for my pink colour scheme: two stems of Rosa Constance Spry to which I added three stems of the paler pink Rosa New Dawn. In total this gave me five 'star performers' and is the perfect number on the eye for a large round-shaped posy. (For a smaller bouquet you can use just three.)

Fillers and foliage provide both the backdrop and the body here and their texture and shape is as important as their colour. You will always need more fillers than you think for this type of arrangement and this is where your home-grown flowers really earn their keep.

To achieve the blowsy, overgrown effect I was looking for I mixed in clusters of cow parsley (Anthriscus) with lots of pinky dots of flowering herb Robert (Geranium robertium) and its seed heads that I love for their thin, pointy silhouette and dark ruby hue. It grows like a weed and is incredibly promiscuous so you need only start with one plant and it will self-seed before your eyes

I also foraged for some stems of wild pink campion (Silene) that sprout up in the pavement cracks of my local streets. Finally, my neighbour kindly allowed me to pick some tiny, tight heads bearing the occasional floret, of his hydrangea (Hydrangea macrophylla) before its full flowering. My foliage is made up from the bright emerald fronds of early love-in-a mist (Nigella). I have so much of it that I can easily afford to use it as foliage and I have combined it with the flat grey/green bushier leaves of a sage plant (Salvia) that grows in a pot on my back doorstep.



- 1 zinc jug – the hard quality of the zinc contrasts well with the soft pink flowers
- 2 stems Rosa Constance Spry or similar
- 3 stems Rosa New Dawn or similar
- 3 Hydrangea heads before full flowering
- 9 stems herb Robert (Geranium robertium)
- 12 stems wild pink campion (Silene)
- 7 stems Cow Parsley (Anthriscus)
- 5 stems sage leaves (Salvia)
- 7 stems of love-in-a mist fronds



# Using Space

Whatever the size of your space, it is possible to grow cut flowers. If you have a small urban garden or backyard then getting rid of a tiny lawn is an obvious way of gaining more space for growing flowers, but integrating areas for cutting into established beds is the easiest first step.



## Tip

A hedge of rambling Rosa Iceberg grows with such abundance that I can pick from it throughout the summer without leaving any holes. I deliberately resist dead-heading in order to enjoy some rosehips which I preserve in the autumn.

My front garden in central London is effectively two small symmetrical spaces either side of a path. Although it is an urban garden, the planting is reminiscent of a cottage garden and I am able to fill my house with home-grown blooms more or less all year round.

I have planted lots of self-seeding herbaceous perennials including many varieties of granny's bonnets (Acquilegias) and foxgloves (Digitalis). These have multiplied in the gravel ground cover which provides an excellent nursery bed for young seedlings that can

then be uprooted and moved to another part of the garden or planted in a pot. Every nook and cranny is filled with Mexican daisies (Erigeron karvinskianus) which is a wonderful filler for any floral arrangement and in high summer my lavenders are so prolific that I can pick large bundles for drying and displaying over the winter.

If you live in a flat or an apartment you may have a roof terrace or a balcony, a tiny courtyard or an unloved side return, an outdoor staircase or fire escape and the solution here is to grow your cut flowers in containers. You may not have any outdoor space at all other than a window sill where it is still possible to cultivate a window box.



- Measure the dimensions carefully before you buy or renovate any containers.
- Think about the weight of these containers once they are filled with soil especially on balconies and roof terraces.
- Is there access to water? Containers require watering at least once a day during the growing season.
- Check the aspect and work out how much sun your space gets on a daily basis during the growing season before choosing which flowers to grow.
- Can you make use of any vertical space by growing climbers and tall leggy plants?
- Maximise a tiny space by installing shelving for grow bags and boxes.





# Choosing Containers

You can use almost anything as a container for flowers, provided there is some drainage. Drill holes in the bottom and mix some grit into the compost. Old earthenware flowerpots can be broken into bits and used as crocks at the bottom of the container.



1 I used some vintage fruit crates that already have plenty of natural drainage provided by the gaps between the slats of wood. They have been cleaned and dried and lightly sanded to remove any splinters.

2 As the gaps in the bottom of the crate are quite wide I lined it with hessian. This stops the compost from falling through but still allows for water drainage. (You could use plastic as an alternative liner but be sure to puncture some drainage holes.)



3 Fill the crate with a mix of multi-purpose compost up to the top and then neatly trim the hessian so that it is at level height with the compost and can barely be seen.



4 For this project I am using six young ranunculus plants for some instant colour. Each plant will provide enough flowers for cutting over a period of several weeks displayed as single stems in a vase. Water the crate well and check regularly to make sure it doesn't dry out.



## Tools

- A clean vintage crate
- Hessian to line the crate
- Sharp scissors
- Multi-purpose compost
- Horticultural grit
- Six young ranunculus plants



# Drying and Preserving

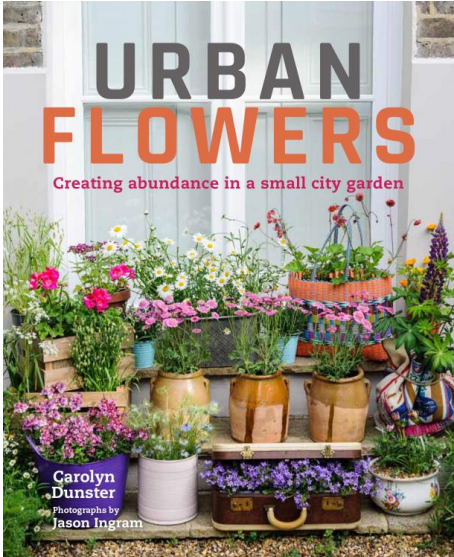






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**URBAN FLOWERS**

**CULTIVATE AND COLOUR A TINY SPACE**

**By Carolyn Dunster**

Creating colour and interest in a small urban garden by growing a range of flowers and other decorative plants brings with it many rewards. Carolyn Dunster shows you what to grow and how to use your own blooms, leaves and berries in a range of indoor displays and hand-tied bouquets. Locally-grown flowers in season is a significant and welcome trend in floristry, and just as eating a tasteless strawberry in December pricks our consciences, so too does purchasing a bouquet of tulips in September, however stunning they may be to look at. The most local, seasonal flowers, which are the most satisfying to give and to display, are the ones you have grown yourself. Carolyn Dunster shows you how to do this in the smallest of spaces.

**Key Points:**

- Essential advice on growing flowers in borders and containers, both for visual effects in situ in the garden and for indoor cut-flower displays.
- Step-by- step seasonal planting projects with five different colour palettes, provide you with homegrown flowers throughout the year.
- Advice on sowing from seed to produce flowers for the garden and vase.
- Selecting colours that work together, using flowers in a subtle blend of shades, and a range of different textures and shapes, to produce pleasing balanced arrangements for the garden and home.
- Choosing the best containers (vintage fruit crates, shallow zinc containers, vertical planting) and plant varieties for floriferous blooms.
- Suggestions on how to preserve homegrown flowers and seed heads for winter arrangements, and tips on how to collect and store seed for resowing.

**Author Information**

Carolyn Dunster trained in floristry with Jane Packer and now works as a florist and planting designer, running her business, Simply Roses, from her home in north London. She has written for several magazines including House & Garden and Country Homes & Interiors. She exhibits regularly at garden shows and flower festivals in the UK, and recently co-designed a small cutting garden at the RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show behalf of Katie's Lymphoedema Fund, which won the People's Choice Award. She designs planting schemes for small urban plots and grows as many flowers as possible in her own city garden to use in her floristry work.

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