

**T**he joyful planting in the garden at Aston Pottery is totally unexpected, not least because visitors, destined for the pottery, may not anticipate a garden at all, let alone one of such delight with vivacious, sometimes exotic, planting that is untypical of a Cotswold garden. Incredibly, this garden is transient, sown and grown from 120 packets of seed, all annuals, in 65 selected varieties. The

garden is interwoven with plants of differing weights, heights and colours, and it feels very established. There are 20 different sunflower cultivars radiating from the back of the seven-metre-wide bed, including thickly feathered coppery *Amaranthus cruentus* 'Hot Biscuits' and dark-leaved, ruby *Amaranthus* 'Hopi Red Dye'. Upright *Cleome hassleriana* 'Violet Queen' jostles alongside golden *Tithonia rotundifolia* 'Fiesta del Sol' and *Rudbeckia hirta* 'Irish Eyes'. A vibrant inky heliotrope is paired with *Celosia argentea* var. *cristata* 'Golden Plume' in a kaleidoscope of colour.

Stephen Baughan and his wife Jane established Aston Pottery more than 30 years ago. They and their team now produce a wide portfolio of traditional, hand-decorated ceramics. Many of the designs are inspired by plants from the garden, including sunflowers and agapanthus. Imaginative, energetic, slightly impatient and with a passion for colour and design, Stephen sought to revolutionise the pottery's garden, and the immediacy of creating an almost instant, brilliant, annual border appealed.

"I love colour. There's no specific scheme, just no white," he says, explaining a precise planting plan where colours are skilfully juxtaposed to add intensity and contrast. The garden is divided into four parts, each comprising a series of interlocking triangles. Plants are allocated in descending height order, from back to front.

Stephen's sowing and growing regime is designed to deliver a mass of 4,000 flowering plants. Sunflowers are key, "sown last but planted first". It takes six hours to plant the sunflowers, and a further three days to plant the remaining seedlings. The pottery inevitably stalls at this time, all hands to the trowel. "The plants are small so you don't have to dig big holes, and planting is quick and efficient – loosen the soil, ease in the plants, cover, firm and water." Stephen has planning and planting down to a fine art, leaving the rest to nature. □

#### USEFUL INFORMATION

**Address** Aston Pottery, The Stables, Kingsway Farm, Aston, Oxfordshire OX18 2BT.

**Tel** 01993 852031. **Website** astonpottery.co.uk

**Open** Gardens, café and gift shop open Monday to Saturday and Bank Holidays, 9am-5pm, Sunday 10.30am-5pm. Garden tours, priced £5, available on request, June to October, Monday to Friday.

#### RECOMMENDED SEED SUPPLIERS

**Chiltern Seeds** chilternseeds.co.uk

**Mr Fothergill's** mr-fothergills.co.uk

**Great Dexter** greatdixtershop.co.uk

**Nicky's Nursery** nickys-nursery.co.uk

**Special Plants** specialplants.net

**Thompson & Morgan** thompson-morgan.com

**Unwins** unwins.co.uk

Turn the page for 32 key plants, and to page 63 for tips on growing from seed

**Right** A vibrant mix of flowering annuals, all sown from seed, create a seven-metre-deep hot bed of colour, which is intensified as it corners the border's end. This tumultuous tapestry is created by the series of interconnecting triangles, each planted mindful of colour juxtapositions, texture and height.

#### IN BRIEF

**Name** Aston Pottery.

**What** A carefully orchestrated, late-summer, kaleidoscope border made up entirely of annuals sown from seed.

**Where** Aston, Oxfordshire.

**Size** One and a half acres.

**Soil** Clay with rich loam topsoil.

**Climate** Exposed but low-lying site, in full sun.

**Hardiness zone** USDA 9a.

# FROM 120 PACKETS OF SEED

*Sown and grown each year from annuals this Cotswolds garden has colour and form*

WORDS JACKY HOBBS PHOTOGRAPHS CLIVE NICHOLS





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## 32 KEY PLANTS

### 1 *Zinnia elegans* 'State Fair'

An annual that produces large, double flowers in a multitude of colours, including red, orange, purple, yellow and pink. Flowers from June until the first frosts. Great for attracting butterflies. 75-90cm. USDA 2a-11†.

### 2 *Celosia argentea* var. *cristata* 'Scarlet Plume'

Produces dramatic, long-lasting scarlet feathers above bi-coloured dark-red and green foliage. Suitable for full sun or part shade. 45cm.

### 3 *Nicotiana glauca* 'Sensation'

A half-hardy, fragrant mix of mauve and pink cut-and-come-again flowers from June to late summer. Attractive to bees. 75cm. USDA 10a-11.

### 4 *Tagetes patula* x *erecta* 'Chameleon'

An unusual and intriguing cultivar that bears single, double and crested flowers of different colours all on the same plant. No two plants are ever the same. 45cm.

### 5 *Salpiglossis sinuata* 'Little Friends'

A compact and bushy plant that bears sprays of velvety flowers from June through to September in rich tones of reds, purples and mahogany. 60cm.

### 6 *Callistephus chinensis* 'Giant Princess Aster'

A really long-flowering aster, that bears pretty flowers, in a wide selection of antique colours, from June until October. Prefers full sun and a well-drained soil. 75cm.

### 7 *Amaranthus tricolor* 'Splendens Perfecta'

A superb tri-coloured foliage plant with eye-catching whorls of traffic-light red, yellow and green foliage. Requires shelter and full sun. 60cm.

### 8 *Salvia viridis* var. *comata* 'Pink Sundae'

An easy-to-grow, pink-hued clary sage that is decorated with saturated rose-pink and carmine-veined bracts from May to August. Needs to be planted in full sun. 50cm.



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Formerly known as *Chrysanthemum carinatum* 'Flame Shades', this brilliant tiger's-eye summer blooms in smouldering warm tones of gold, copper and maroon. Sun-loving and very easy to grow. 60cm.

### 10 *Helianthus annuus* 'Sonja'

A shorter, more compact sunflower that has been bred for the cutting garden. Looks great when planted in groups. Its branching stems yield large, yolk-yellow flowers with a brown eye. 1.1m.

### 11 *Rudbeckia hirta* 'Toto'

This dwarf, golden black-eyed Susan is a compact, well-branched plant ideal for the front of summer borders. 40cm. RHS H3, USDA 3a-7b.

### 12 *Tagetes erecta* 'Crackerjack'

An early flowering pom-pom marigold. Long stemmed and vigorous, it produces large, tonal gold flowers from May to September. 90cm.

### 13 *Nicotiana glauca* 'Lime Green'

Popular for its profusion of scented, star-like, lime-green flowers that attract pollinators. 75cm. AGM\*. RHS H2, USDA 10a-11.

### 14 *Tagetes tenuifolia* 'Tangerine Gem'

A hardy, dwarf cultivar that is ideal for edging and for filling gaps at the front of a border. Throughout summer, from May until August it is smothered in small, pert tangerine flowers. 30cm.

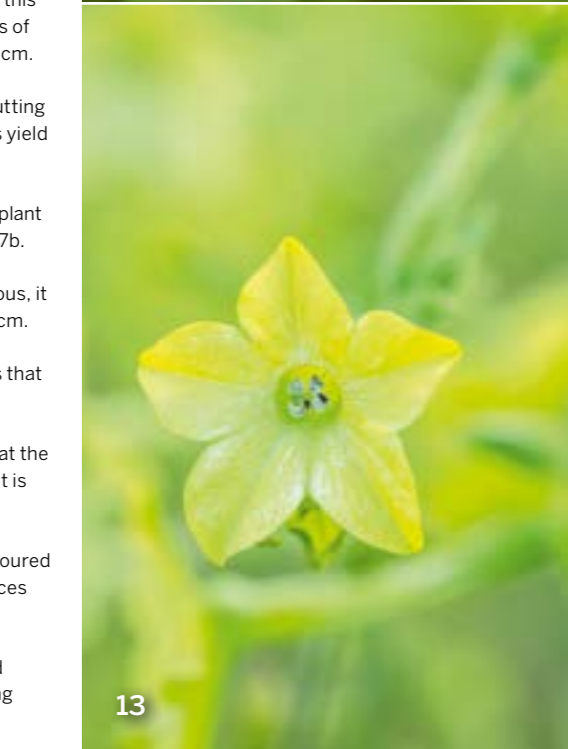
### 15 *Cosmos bipinnatus* 'Xanthos'

An unusual cosmos that is notable for its soft, buttery, lemon-coloured flowers. Compact, well-branched and long-flowering, it produces hosts of blooms throughout the summer. 60cm.

### 16 *Amaranthus* 'Hopi Red Dye'

A towering, statuesque plant with brilliant maroon-coloured flowers and show-stopping dark foliage. A sun-loving stunning stalwart for the back of border. 1.8m.

Turn to page 64 for more key plants



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# I LOVE COLOUR. THERE'S NO SCHEME, JUST NO WHITE

The annuals border contains up to 20 sunflower cultivars. These create a strong, tall backbone to the *Celosia argentea* var. *cristata* 'Golden Plume' and 'Scarlet Plume', and *Tithonia rotundifolia* 'Fiesta del Sol', underplanted with *Tagetes tenuifolia* 'Tangerine Gem' and *Rudbeckia hirta* 'Irish Eyes'.

## Growing a late-summer border from seed

### PLANNING

- **Draw a plan of the border and sub-divide widthways** into a minimum of three tiers to accommodate tall, medium-sized and smaller plants.
- **Divide each subsection into triangles** that are alternately inverted so that they interconnect.
- **Select seed suitable for the soil**, site and colour theme, considering height, flowering time and duration.
- **Order your seeds from a reliable source** (see page 58 for suggestions; Stephen mainly uses Chiltern Seeds), allowing approximately one packet of 30 seeds per square metre, but follow the advice on the seed packet.

### PLANTING

- **In mid-April sow all the smaller seeds**, such as nicotiana and rudbeckias, in trays of John Innes No. 2 mixed with 25 per cent horticultural grit. Water and leave to germinate. Prick out and transplant into individual cells after 30 days and grow on under cover.
- **In mid-May sow larger seeds**, such as sunflowers, tithonias and salvias, into individual plugs. Place under cover in a greenhouse, or on a windowsill, for three weeks, allowing ten days to germinate and one to two weeks to grow on.
- **Prepare the soil** in your border, raking a fine tilth.
- **Plant out, according to your plan, in the second week of June**. Label plants if you want to remember which is which. Water in and then water each individual plant daily by hand for the first three weeks only. Keep any surplus plants to fill later gaps.
- **Deadhead to encourage repeat blooms**, allowing the final flush to go to seed and feed birds and late-season foraging insects.



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### 32 KEY PLANTS CONTINUED

#### 17 *Helianthus annuus* 'Summer Breeze'

Tall, erect, hardy single-stem sunflower with bright-lemon petals and a lime-green centre. Enjoys full sun but tolerates partial shade. 1.5m.

#### 18 *Helianthus annuus* 'Magic Roundabout'

A new sunflower that offers an array of attractive, multi-coloured flowers in tones of pastel lemon to café-au-lait – each with a dark centre. 1.8m.

#### 19 *Helianthus annuus* 'Ikarus'

A shorter, pale lemon-coloured sunflower of branching habit that assures a multitude of flowers. Each flower is around 10-15cm across and is buttoned with a chocolate centre. 1.2m.

#### 20 *Helianthus annuus* 'Velvet Queen'

A velvety, dark cinnamon-coloured sunflower with a chocolate-coloured centre. It produces lots of flowerheads from multiple branching stems. Good for cut flowers. 1.5m.

#### 21 *Rudbeckia hirta* 'Irish Eyes'

Half-hardy, annual or perennial that needs full sun or part sun to produce its large, daisy-like, golden-yellow blooms. Each flower has a pale-green eye at its centre. 60cm. RHS H3, USDA 3a-7b.

#### 22 *Tithonia rotundifolia* 'Fiesta del Sol'

The most compact of Mexican sunflowers. It flowers early and for several months, producing intense, bright-orange flowers, which are attractive to butterflies, from June to October. 75cm.

#### 23 *Cleome hassleriana* 'Violet Queen'

A justifiably popular half-hardy, plant with spidery blooms that begin a vivid violet and fade to pink. Needs full sun but in the right conditions will produce flowers from June to September. 1.5m. RHS H2.

#### 24 *Helianthus annuus* 'Red Sun'

A distinctive and unusual sunflower with large maroon-red flowerheads that mature to ruddy brown. Very good for cutting. 1.5m.



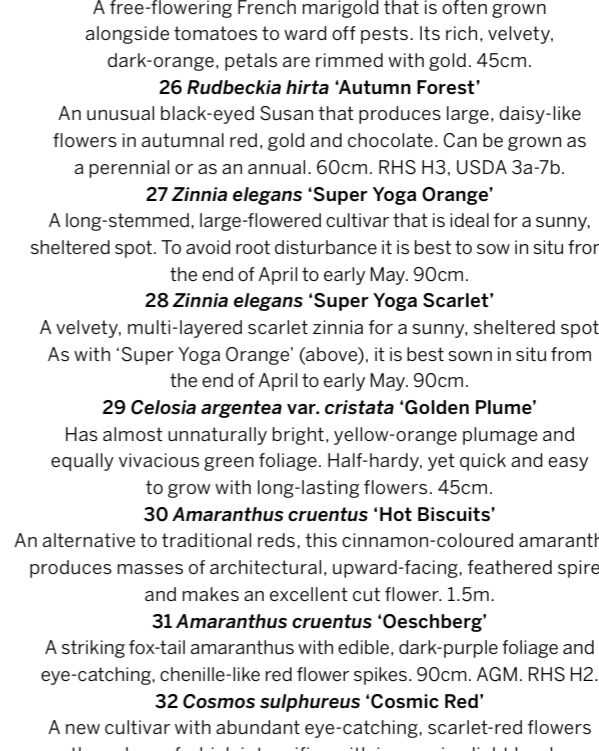
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#### 25 *Tagetes patula* 'Burning Embers'

A free-flowering French marigold that is often grown alongside tomatoes to ward off pests. Its rich, velvety, dark-orange, petals are rimmed with gold. 45cm.

#### 26 *Rudbeckia hirta* 'Autumn Forest'

An unusual black-eyed Susan that produces large, daisy-like flowers in autumnal red, gold and chocolate. Can be grown as a perennial or as an annual. 60cm. RHS H3, USDA 3a-7b.

#### 27 *Zinnia elegans* 'Super Yoga Orange'

A long-stemmed, large-flowered cultivar that is ideal for a sunny, sheltered spot. To avoid root disturbance it is best to sow in situ from the end of April to early May. 90cm.

#### 28 *Zinnia elegans* 'Super Yoga Scarlet'

A velvety, multi-layered scarlet zinnia for a sunny, sheltered spot. As with 'Super Yoga Orange' (above), it is best sown in situ from the end of April to early May. 90cm.

#### 29 *Celosia argentea* var. *cristata* 'Golden Plume'

Has almost unnaturally bright, yellow-orange plumage and equally vivacious green foliage. Half-hardy, yet quick and easy to grow with long-lasting flowers. 45cm.

#### 30 *Amaranthus cruentus* 'Hot Biscuits'

An alternative to traditional reds, this cinnamon-coloured amaranthus produces masses of architectural, upward-facing, feathered spires and makes an excellent cut flower. 1.5m.

#### 31 *Amaranthus cruentus* 'Oeschberg'

A striking fox-tail amaranthus with edible, dark-purple foliage and eye-catching, chenille-like red flower spikes. 90cm. AGM. RHS H2.

#### 32 *Cosmos sulphureus* 'Cosmic Red'

A new cultivar with abundant eye-catching, scarlet-red flowers the colour of which intensifies with increasing light levels. A dazzling compact plant. 30cm.



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