

# Biennials

Biennials hold a very special place in the cutting garden. Like the kitchen garden, you are always running a risk of the 'May gap'. This is the tricky time where the tulips and bulbs are starting to go over, but the big flush of annuals is still in bud. The flowers that fill this gap will be the ones you sowed last summer - not last autumn - and are biennials.

## My favourite biennials

- / Foxgloves
- / Honesty
- / Hesperis (Sweet rocket)
- / Aquilegia
- / Stocks
- / Wallflowers
- / *Anthriscus sylvestris*
- 'Ravenswing' (Black cow parsley)
- / Teasels
- / Icelandic poppies

## When to sow

Biennial plants have a two-year life cycle. During the first year, they grow only the roots, stems and leaves. In the second year they come into flower, produce seeds and die. It is worth carving out a bit of time in the glorious sunshine of June and July to get them started. A gift to your future self.

## Where to sow

If you have warm soil and lots of space, direct sowing is quick and easy. My one top tip on this would be to make sure you have hoed the soil; seeds will really struggle in lumpy, rough textured soil.

However, the chances are that your beds, borders and pots are full to bursting already. The good news is that biennials are more than happy to get started in pots.

## How to sow under cover

You will need:

- / Peat-free seed compost
- / Small pots or module trays
- / Labels
- / Seed

Fill a tray or your pots with compost. Shake and pat to level a bit but do not compact the soil. Aim for the texture of a Victoria sponge.

For larger seeds, poke two seeds half a centimetre below the surface of the compost. For tiny seeds, just scatter a pinch in each cell. Foxglove seeds are like dust.

Cover with vermiculite or a thin layer of seed compost and then put the pot or tray in water for half an hour to water from below.

Place in a warm spot but out of direct sunlight. An east- or west-facing windowsill is perfect.

Keep the compost moist but not wet. Let the surface of the compost dry out between waterings, it shouldn't always be dark.

Once seeds have sprouted, wait until two pairs of leaves form. Carefully pot up each seedling into a pot filled with sieved compost.

Plant out in September as the summer annuals come out.

## *Cutting your gorgeous flowers*

Harvest little and often. Enjoy.