

Left to right:
lupin 'Noble Maiden';
Paeonia lactiflora
'Bowl of Beauty' lives
up to its name; garden
fragrance comes from
sweet rocket, *Hesperis*
matronalis 'Alba';
waves of fennel.



Plug plants in small quantities were ordered in January. Then, in mid-May, I will visit some local garden centres for inspiration and buy a selection of more mature plants.

This year's plug plants include a petunia species new to me, *Petunia axillaris*, with scented white flowers. Generally, petunias seem to do better in pots than in the ground in my heavyish soil.

I took lots of pelargonium cuttings last year, most of which rooted. My pots will include deep red 'Lord Roberts', sparking off more orangey red 'Gustav Emich', with a dash of shocking pink, trailing ivy-leaved pelargonium 'Surcouf'. Added to these

colour alongside eschscholzia 'Jelly Beans'. The nemesia did not quite have the staying power to make it into the autumn. It may have lasted longer in pots. A couple of years ago, I wrote disparagingly about the performance of 'Jelly Beans'. I had misremembered what I had sown. The disappointment was 'Mission Bells'. 'Jelly Beans' produces sumptuously ruffled, semi-double flowers in orange, cream and lilac shades.

Pale lilac-flowered verbena 'La France', from the Beth Chatto Nursery, proved a stalwart in my soil. Sizzling pink trailing verbena 'Sissinghurst' failed to get going, with coarser and taller-growing 'La France' engulfing it all around, flowering on and on. Deadheading keeps the flowers coming. Definitely a good 'do-er'. I am planting this verbena again, but not so much of it this time.

"Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves."

John Keats, 'Ode to a Nightingale'

will be scented deep purple heliotrope 'Midnight Sky', bought as plugs. Sadly, my own heirloom heliotrope cuttings did not take this autumn.

One of last summer's garden centre discoveries, planted in the sunnier, south-facing raised beds, was *Isotoma axillaris*, or *laurentia*, a lobelia relative. This Australian native formed 18in (45cm) high hummocks of thin-petalled, starry, light-blue flowers. It proved impressively long-lasting, only giving up in mid October, leaving behind a fine skeleton of interlaced stems. I will definitely be using this plant again.

Also in these sunnier raised beds, *Nemesia sunsatia* 'Papaya' provided a rich orange splash of

Summer borders

The white, yellow and blue themed border, splashed with the pink and deep violet of peony and aster respectively as an experiment, continues to vex me. It is still not gelling after nearly four years, although I did have some compliments last June. At that time the creamy lupins 'Noble Maiden' were gently giving way to the delphiniums, and the off-white oriental poppies were doing their brief blasé thing.

Once the lupins had gone over, big gaps were left, with nothing to pick up the middle section of the border. It was the same with the delphiniums at the back. Once they had flowered and been cut back, the weather was very dry and, despite watering, the foliage did not re-grow much. However, by late summer, cosmos 'Purity', planted as plug plants from Sarah Raven, had grown to giant proportions. These single, white annual cosmos, with soft feathery leaves, flowered for ages, swamping much around them. The border looked quite impressive from a distance though. I will try the smaller 'Sonata White' this year.

Last winter, a number of plants were hoicked out and re-located, including *Sanguisorba canadensis*. Having lusted after this plant, with upright, off-white