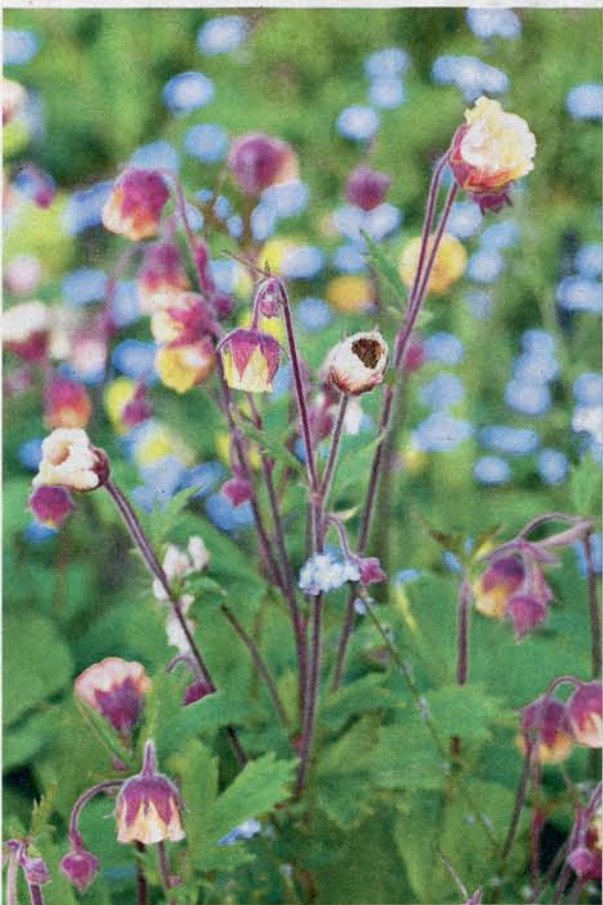


## LIFE GARDENING



## EXPERIMENT WITH ENTICING COLOURS

I had always considered geums to be bit-part actors in the garden, rather than the megastars, but I am now having a change of heart. New plants are coming in all the time, and a recent one introduced by Rosie Hardy of Hardy's (hardys-plants.co.uk) at Chelsea 2010, *Geum* 'Totally Tangerine', has such presence that I am revising my ideas. It is relatively tall, 90cm (35in) high, and produces tangerine-coloured flowers from April to September – an impressive 22 weeks. It is both sensational and useful.

With their neat habit and evergreen foliage (disease-free and hated by slugs and snails), these are ideal, hard-working plants to fill the lower layers.

Hard-working and useful could imply boring, but with their palette of white, pink, red, orange and yellow, these easy-to-use plants can really spike up your colour credentials and "lift" the garden. There are fiery oranges (such as *G. 'Princes Juliana'* which is 60cm/24in tall) to jostle among the juicy greens of euphorbias, or perhaps a sea of *G. 'Mai Tai'* (the pale pink flushed apricot flowers 45cm/18in high) with the purples of alliums poking up through them. Or the coppery orange of *Geum 'Mandarin'* (60cm/24in) coming above a cloud of forget-me-nots.

Sue Martin started growing geums about 12 years ago at her garden, Brickwall Cottage. When she suggested that a gardening friend should come and see her geums

## BUNNY GUINNESS

Perennial wisdom

Vivacious, promiscuous and hard-working, geums will live up any planting arrangement



she got a blank look. Today we have switched on to them, but not many realise that there are hundreds of different ones, enabling you to flex your colour schemes accordingly.

The rivale types, such as *Geum rivale* 'Album' (white) and *G. rivale* 'Leonard's Variety' (rose coloured) spread by rhizomes, are lower growing (to 30cm/12in) and like shade or semi-shade. They are perfect for lightening a bosky area but need a fairly moisture-retentive soil.

The other geums (broadly the *coccineum* and *chiloense* cultivars) are clump formers. The *chiloense* hybrids (the species *chiloense* comes from an island off Chile) tolerate sun or semi-shade; they have tall, strong stems with large, mainly double flowers and a long flowering time.

The well known, orange-



red 'Mrs J Bradshaw' and less well known but excellent, copper-orange 'Rijnstroom' are examples.

The *coccineum* hybrids are similar to the *chiloense* hybrids but are slightly shorter. *Geum* 'Borisii' with its single orange flowers just 30cm (12in) high is a classic, and *G. 'Mango Lassi'* (a similar height) with its striking mango/apricot/buff apparel twins well with blues.

Sue's garden at Frittenden in Kent is on heavy clay. It is a romantic cottage garden full of jostling plants that hang together well. Although it is stuffed full of different plants in the quarter-acre plot, it has the feel and look of a garden to enjoy rather than a collection of plants.

Geums are satisfying plants to garden because of their robust

nature. They do need some care though, in that they definitely benefit from division, otherwise they become short-lived. Deciding when you should divide is easy: it is when they become "doughnut-like" (as Rosie Hardy puts it). That is, the ring doughnut – bare in the centre with the growth limited to the outside. This may occur within a couple of years, then lifting the clump and taking the vigorously growing plants on the outside and replanting is necessary. If you are wanting to increase your population, basal cuttings taken in early spring is the best way, the majority root easily.

Many gardeners like to cover every square inch of soil and geums are excellent weed suppressors. Ideally if your soil



Tantalising effects: clockwise from top left, *Geum* 'Dawn'; geums mixed with aquilegias; *Geum* 'Bell Bank'; *Geum* 'Totally Tangerine'; *Geum* 'Karlskaer'; *Geum* 'Red Wings' among *Aquilegia vulgaris* and irises

is thin, like mine, a good annual mulch of local authority green waste or spent mushroom compost spread in late winter/spring will boost its moisture-retaining properties. Sue Martin was a little concerned that the recent cold winters might affect them, but they have responded well, really flourishing in our recent cooler summers. Geums are good for cutting too, but Sue tends not to as each stem produces lots of buds which come in succession.

And there are many new geums coming in all the time – in the United States they have bred the Cocktail Series of which *G. 'Mai Tai'* is one and is available from Claire Austin Hardy Plants (claireaustinhardyplants.co.uk); *G. 'Alabama*

ONLINE Advice on planting for ponds at [telegraph.co.uk/gardening](http://telegraph.co.uk/gardening)

## LIFE GARDENING

## OLIVER PRITCHETT

It just occurred to me...



When it comes to watching Wimbledon, seeing the ball in play is not the point

I love the month of June and all its summer delights, such as Ascot and Trooping the Colour. In our house, the traditional June event takes place in the week of The Queen's Club tennis tournament. It is our Great TV Set Discussion.

My wife declares it open with a short speech, saying: "Wimbledon is coming up soon; we ought to get a new TV set."

"This set is fine," I say. "It's part of the family." It was handed down to us by our daughter 15 years ago.

"We've been watching Wimbledon all these years and we've never actually seen the ball," my wife replies.

"You mean to say they play tennis with balls?" I say. "I thought Wimbledon was all about pictures of the spectators and the Royal box and long psychobabble interviews with players saying they are 'in a good place right now' and 'happy on

grass'. The ball isn't the point."

I am very happy with our set. It goes back a long way in every sense – none of that newfangled flat-screen plasma nonsense. It's also an Extra Low Definition model, and, as I tell my wife, if we get a new set the picture will be too good and we'll be distracted by the pores and blemishes of the presenters.

I like to think we are ahead of the trend. Our programmes were in semidarkness long before all those Scandinavian and French "noir" thrillers came along. (And not being able to read subtitles is educational.)

The secret reason I don't want to get rid of our TV is the terrifying tangle of cables behind it. I'm intimidated by Scart leads. I believe if I unplug one lead it will never be



possible to find the right socket again and the world will end.

Our annual Great TV Set Discussion is reaching its climax. I must go and fetch the strawberries and cream.

## PET TALES

Telegraph readers share their stories

## OSCAR AND EBONY, FELINE SIBLINGS

This photo was taken by my son, eight weeks after these kittens came to live with us. Oscar is the black and white kitten and the startled little one is his sister, Ebony.

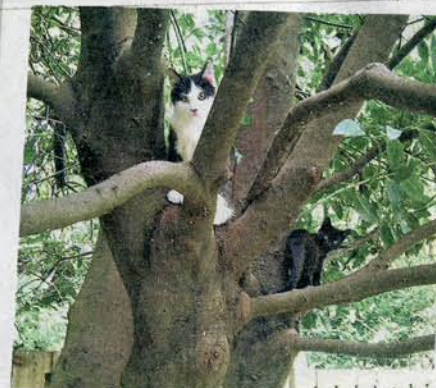
I got the kittens from our vet whom we have known for many years. She wanted them to be horned together as she had rescued them from their owner who had wanted to drown them.

It was unbelievable how Oscar looked after his sister. They always did everything together – they ate, played and slept together. He settled in well with us but each time I tried to stroke Ebony, she recoiled as if she expected me to hit her.

Both are very clever cats. I taught Oscar how to fetch and carry back a plastic garden plant tie that I would throw to him. He loved this game. Ebony looked on with no participation.

One morning when I woke up, I found Ebony in my bedroom. I thought that she must have been in there when I went to bed and didn't think any more of the incident. When this occurred frequently, I thought I must be losing my mind, as I was sure that she had been out when I went to bed.

I found out, purely by accident, how Ebony entered my bedroom. We live in a town house with a garage. What Ebony does is jump from the garden wall on to the garage,



Oscar &amp; Ebony

SEND YOUR PET TALES (with a picture) and comments to [pettales@telegraph.co.uk](mailto:pettales@telegraph.co.uk). Best entries published

from the garage on to the roof of the house. As I always have a window open in the bedroom, she jumps from the roof on to the top ledge of the window and from there to the window sill inside the house.

Both the cats have lived with us for three years. Oscar and Ebony have grown into beautiful cats. Ebony is not dependent on Oscar any longer. She now allows me to stroke and pet her but she is still very nervous around other people.

LIKES Being together. Ebony: sneaking into our bedroom at night. Oscar: fetch-and-carry games and looking after his little sister. DISLIKES Strangers. FINEST HOUR Being placed by the vet in a home where they would be looked after.

Brenda Carden, Dublin