

HAVING A BLAST

Jilayne Rickards turns autumn into the dazzlingly colourful highlight of her gardening year



Sample preserves from plums at Chiswick's Abundance Fruit Day

SEE IT BUY IT

SEE IT: ABUNDANCE FRUIT DAY

Abundance London is a project to use the glut of local fruit that might otherwise go to waste. Volunteers harvest city fruit, distribute it or make jams and preserves, and sell the surplus to restaurants and shops, ploughing the money back into charity. Celebrate Chiswick's fruit harvest at the Abundance Fruit Day at St Michael and All Angels, Turnham Green, this Saturday, 11am-3pm. You can bring your apples for pressing, buy preserves from local harvests as well as Chiswick honey, sample bicycle-powered smoothies and try apple bobbing.

BUY IT: AUTUMN LEAF SACKS

To the organic gardener, leaf fall equals one thing: leaf mould, a valuable soil conditioner and mulch that can also be added to potting mixes.

All you do is rake up the fallen leaves in your garden – brown, dead leaves and not evergreens – gather them together and store for at least a year. Wetting them will help them rot more quickly. Wire cages and black bin liners have been the deposits of choice until now, but Burgon & Ball has produced loose-weave hessian sacks that look rather better and will themselves rot down eventually.

A pack of two leaf composting sacks costs £4.95; stainless steel lawn rake with ash wood handle, £24.95, add £4.95 p&p, from burgonandball.com

Hessian sacks are just the job for turning loose leaves into leaf mould



Pattie Barron



AUTUMN colour in Jilayne Rickards' north London garden starts in late summer and continues until the end of November, when her winter patch of silver birch, crimson dogwoods and hellebores takes up the lead.

Most small gardens can only manage a token blast of autumn colour from a vine here or a maple there, but Rickards (07801 946878; jilaynerickards.com) has managed to plant, in her 16m by 6m plot, a long-running show that begins with the pinky-bronze hues of pheasants' tail grass and finishes with a flourish from two smoke bushes, *Cotinus coggygria* Royal Purple, displaying their orange-red autumn finery. There are plenty of foliage fireworks in between, from both borders and containers.

"Even in a tiny space, successive planting through the seasons is achievable," says Rickards, a garden designer specialising in small urban spaces. "You need to make every last centimetre count." Thus even on the garden table there is a fine example of successive planting, in a black container: more pheasants' tail grass to link with the drift around the patio, a physalis plant with papery orange Chinese lanterns and – their pretty rounded leaves already putting in an appearance – scarlet cyclamen to smoothly take over from the physalis.

"Garden tables can be boring with nothing on them," she says. "Think of them as a planting opportunity."

The danger with successive planting in a small garden, however, is that you shoehorn in everything you need to add colour and excitement to every season – and end up with a real jumble.

She suggests starting, instead, with an foundation of evergreens. "If you stripped out all the colour in my garden, in any season, there would still be a strong structure of evergreens. My number one choice for urban gardens is *Choisya ternata*; it has white flowers, good fragrance, is clippable and will grow anywhere, in sun or shade. Repeating the same evergreens down the garden, whether box balls, bay, *choisya* or *Viburnum tinus*, gives a sense of rhythm." To boost her

If you stripped out all the colour in my garden, there would still be a strong structure of evergreens'

garden's quota of autumn colour, she chooses climbers that are more than a one-season wonder: evergreen jasmine with leaves that take on burnished red tints come September; a Virginia creeper that clothes a trellis on the back fence. "It's in shade, so it turns a rich orange rather than the deep red it



Above: a container of pheasants' tail grass and Chinese lanterns, to be followed by cyclamen, brightens the bare patio table

Photographs: Marianne Majerus

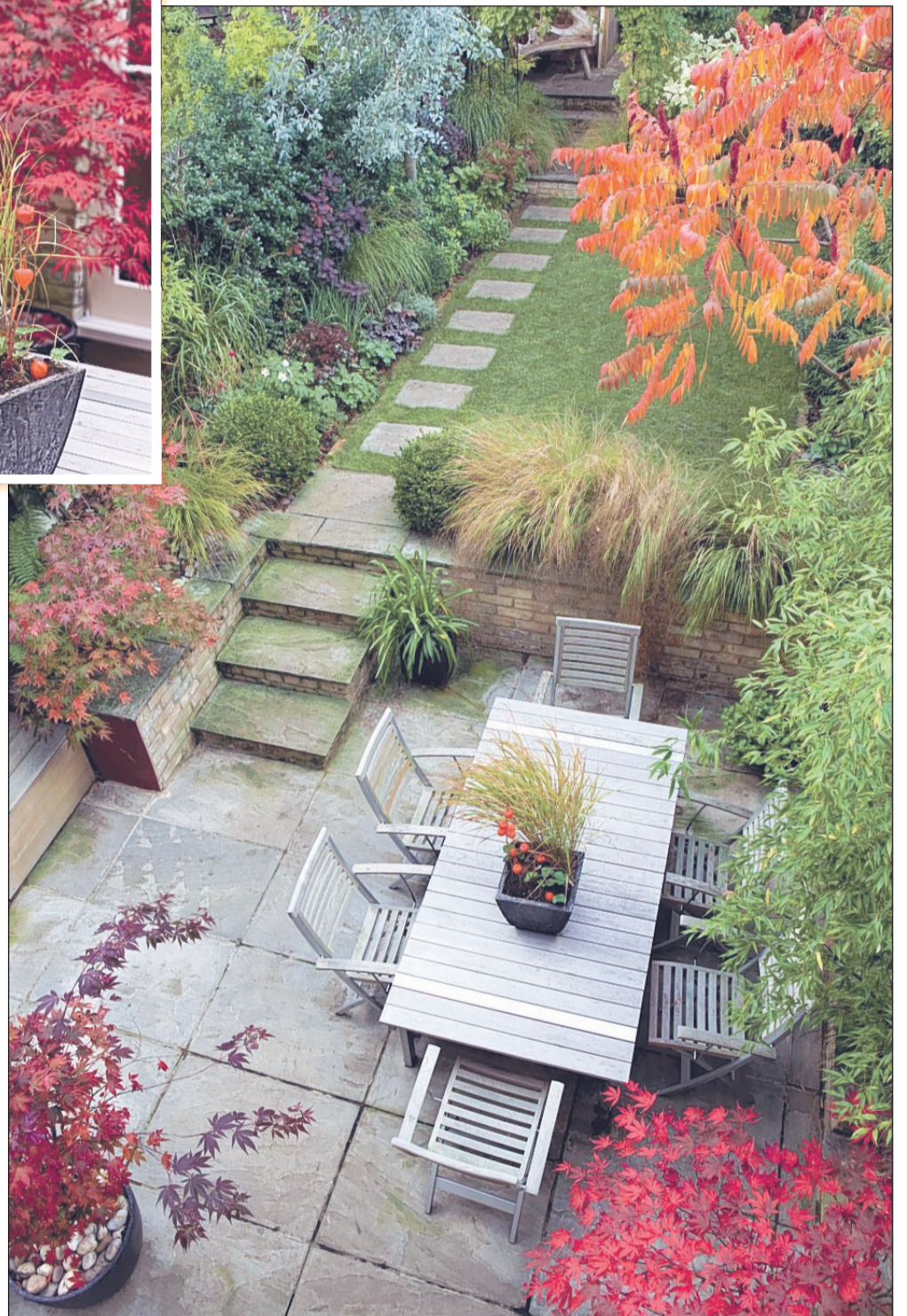
DON'T MISS

Keep up-to-date with the latest gardening news by following Pattie Barron's blog at homesandproperty.co.uk/blogs



Gardening problems?

Email our RHS expert at: gardenproblems@standard.co.uk



In her north London garden, Jilayne Rickards has planted shrubs and trees that offer a long show of autumn colour

would go if it had more sun, but it still lifts my spirits every time I see it."

Rickards planted a sumach tree, *Rhus typhina*, to block out the neighbours on the right-hand side; it is clearly visible from the house and, she says, gives her enormous pleasure because of the long, steady build of colour that she can observe daily.

"I know it suckers, but pulling out a few roots from the border is fair trade for the beauty it gives me: elegant leaves that are currently the colour of marmalade, followed by clusters of fat, red fruit on shapely bare branches."

Right now, too, the acers – Japanese maples – add vibrant colour: crimson from the purple foliage of *Sumi-nagashi* and *Bloodgood*, in pots against the patio wall; fiery orange from *Osakazuki*, planted in a raised bed.

Rickards confesses, not surprisingly, that autumn is her favourite season, as there is so much happening, she says; such an abundance of rich colour.

"At this time of year I don't even mind the shadow cast by my neighbour's

'The Virginia creeper turns orange, not the deep red it would go with more sun – but it still lifts my spirits'

horse chestnut tree at the back of the garden, because the colour of the conkers is superb.

"And there is a vicarious thrill in sitting on the bench at the end of the garden when the wind's blowing, because you never know if a falling conker is going to hit you or not."



A sumach tree acts as a screen and provides vibrant foliage and fruits