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I started my gardening life as a florist, and so for me, tulips have got to be really wonderful for picking, and the epitome of that is this one which is called 'Ballerina', and I just love it. It's scented, it's architectural, it's pointy, it's elegant, it's got a great vase life, so, you know, you can't beat it. In the same family, which is the lily-flowered family which is the same pointy shape is this one called 'Sarah Raven', and I love this because it's got a really good vase life and it's sort of deep, dark, ceiling wax red, or even darker, it's so, it's beautiful and classy, very perennial and lasts for ages in a vase, so that's another real winner.

This one is called 'La Belle Epoque', and this is unbelievably fashionable at the moment, it's just everyone loves it, they love the sort of mix (so do I) of the kind of lilac with the sort of taupey/mushroomy, café au lait colour, and so that's a beauty and that's lovely in a vase and so unusual.

And then these two final ones I really love, increasingly actually because they look so like peonies, they actually called the peony-flowered group and they're double-lates. This one is a new one called 'Pink Star', and this one is a really traditional one called 'Angelique' which people have loved for ages and they just are kind of romantically lovely and beautiful, almost like a rose in a bowl. So those are the best for picking.

And then, if you love containers as we do, we have loads and loads of tulips in pots all round Perch Hill, these are my three frontrunners currently, and you can see they're all quite petite, they're all quite short which is good in a window box, you don't want them too tall because it sort of tips the whole thing both aesthetically and physically, it gets the balance wrong, and I've got one parrot in here, which is called 'Rococo' and it flowers really long, and it starts sort of mid-April and goes right the way through into May, and it looks good at all stages, it looks good in bud and it looks good even as it's dropping its petals. All of these again are the doubles, now the thing about doubles is that they are actually sterile and so their nectaries have been bred to be secondary petaloides, now what that means – sorry my dogs are barking – what that means is that they can't get pollinated and they've got nothing for the pollinators so you need to grow them with things like cerinthe (honeywort) which is fantastic for pollinators, but what's great as a gardener is that they flower for almost twice as long and they last for almost twice as long in a vase, so in a container that's obviously really fantastic. Oh, I didn't give you their names, this one is called 'Palmyra', which is quite new, this one is called 'Antraciet', which won our dark tulip trial about fifteen years ago now, and then this is another new one called 'Brownie', so they're all wonderful.

Now if you don't want to do picking or pots, but you just want them in your borders, tulips, then you want to go for perennialising varieties, and what I've got here, these have all been in the garden for about ten years. The viridiflora group, the green-flowered group, which has the green flash down the petal. This one's called 'Spring Green', this one's called 'China Town', now those are both incredibly perennial, they've been coming up in the same place for at least ten years. 'China Town's' rather nice because it's got this variegated foliage which makes it quite unusual, and then another pairing that I think of sort of together are these because they flower in March, they flower really early, it's now late April and you can see how long they've flowered. This is 'Purissima', this is 'Exotic Emperor', they've been in the same spot for fifteen years in the garden here so they're really good for perennialising. And then this crazy, lovely flamboyant one is called 'Green Wave', again it's got a green flash, and if you actually look at the green flash on any of these varieties, you can see it's much, a sort of thicker texture petal and that I think is what makes them, well anyway those seem to be more perennial, but also they last well in bad weather, but this is a new discovery for me, which is called 'Mistress Mystic', and there's a very similar one called 'Mistress Grey', and I hadn't realised this was perennial at all, planted it under our apple tree, and what's happened over the years, I think I put it in about five years ago is you've got a mother bulb, but then around it you've got lots of little sisters, and that is a sure sign that something is perennialising because the main bulb has formed bulbils which have then got to flowering size so they're really settling in and becoming just completely perennial plants, so those are all those – ooh and I forgot this one, which is an absolute classic for perennialising called 'Negrita'. Some would say it's on the boring side, but it's been in the garden here for twenty years.

And then similarly for perennialising in grass, naturalising, the best of all without doubt in our trials is 'Purple Dream', that's just been incredible, but if you like more delicate things to go with your narcissus, there's one that has already gone over here which is called 'Turkestanica', but this one I love that follows on called 'Honky Tonk', we've got it in the grass here with grape hyacinths and it looks so nice and so sort of delicate.

Final group are the new and interesting ones that are just emerging from breeding programmes at the moment, and the first that I want to show you is a variety called 'Ridgedale', and I've picked it with two well known tulips, so this is the one I'm talking about called 'Ridgedale' and this is a classic sort of port wine red called 'Jan Reus', J A N Reus, and then this is 'Queen of Night' which I'm sure lots of you know, but can you see what a sophisticated and unusual colour that 'Ridgedale' is, so again it's a semi-double or double and it's quite short, quite late and it's got this beautiful unusual colouring, and that's an absolute new favourite of mine I completely love it. And then sort of with a hint of similarity to that I think is this one which is called 'Slawa', and when I first saw this in a trial field I wasn't absolutely convinced but I've totally come round to it because you can put it either with paler apricot colours or you can put it with the dark rich colours because it's got both in its flower. So that's 'Slawa' and then finally, this one is called 'Copper Touch', really lovely scent, and I didn't know that until this year, picked a bunch of it, put it by my bed, whole place full of delicious fragrance.

So for me, those have been my favourites of this year.

useful kit...

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|--|---|---|---|
|  Tulip 'Angelique' |  Tulip 'Antraciet' |  Tulip 'Ballerina' |  Tulip 'Green Wave' |
|  Tulip 'Jan Reus' |  Tulip 'Purissima' |  Tulip 'Rococo' |  Tulip 'Spring Green' |
|  Tulip 'White Valley' |  Tulip 'Mistress Mystic' |  Tulip 'La Belle Epoque' |  Tulip 'China Town' |
|  Tulip 'Sarah Raven' |  Tulip 'Queen Of Night' |  Tulip 'Pink Star' |  Tulip 'Slawa' |
|  Tulip 'Purple Dream' |  Tulip 'Ridgedale' |  Tulip 'Palmyra' |  Cerithe major 'Purpurascens' |

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