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No matter how many experts, editors and educators up and down the land try to seduce you into the idea of naturalistic plantings and perfecting the art of replicating wild colonies, there will always be an alternative... an uprising waiting to compete with what is in the spotlight.

If you find yourself as a frustrated gardener in one of Britain's cramped cities, then you can be forgiven for feeling slightly alienated by the media obsession to promote the 'Piet Oudolf' style of extensive perennial planting.

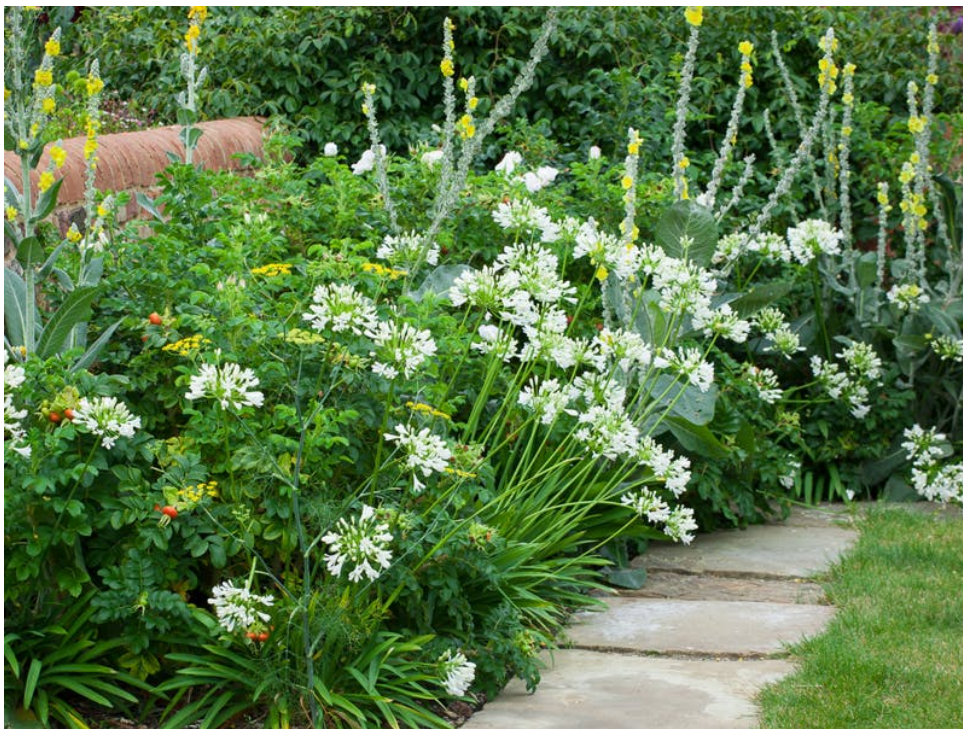


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So, while everyone's getting in a 'tizz' about perfecting their meadows and convincing themselves of the beauty of decaying perennials in winter, there has been a gentle rumble in the jungle that looks to grow and grow.

In the buzz of the city lights a quiet uprising of the much mourned urban jungle has begun to find its feet once again after its hay day in the mid-nineties. This revival is looking to gather pace over the next year with many people in the media beginning to take note and include features in their programmes and publications.



The hardy exotic, subtropical, jungle planting, call it what you will, has always found its place amongst the amateur gardener finding their feet in the world of horticulture. I was one of them and, so too, many others when they first step into the intimidating world of gardening.

The reason behind this, I believe, is down to the ease of creating successful combinations that fill spaces quickly with their high impact foliage and bold colour clashes. It is fun gardening at its best. There is no pressure, simply do what you feel works best. You make the decisions, you make the rules and you reap the rewards.



The foundations of this style is primarily based around foliage so there is no need to worry about flowering times and interest for each month as the structure of the garden has great stability. As soon as it's in the ground it grows, hey presto!

Once your foundations are established simply fill in the gaps each year with high performing annuals and tender perennials that flower for months on end. Of course, the ease and sense of a garden that doesn't take itself too seriously is not the only draw to this style. If you only have a 10x10 back yard in the middle of Islington then the idealistic swathes of prairie planting is simply not an option.



So space is a major contributor as well as the time these plants require. Being mainly foliage based they are relatively low maintenance and quick to establish, ideal for the "must have now" city culture looking for an instant installation that the neighbours will soon be swooning over.

Now, just because the urban jungle has a relaxed approach to gardening doesn't mean it can't be sophisticated. A green and white scheme works wonderfully surrounded by all the dramatic foliage. Think of using *Acanthus mollis* 'Rue Leden', *Agapanthus* 'White Heaven' and *Libertia grandiflora*, all of which have the bonus of being evergreen perennials.



The great freedom of this style is that it does not confine itself to one area of the world. So you can use anything from affordable bedding plants to house plants as summer fillers. I have even seen people growing orchids as 'one season wonders' to infill amongst the foliage foundations of plants like Melianthus, Fatsia, Astelia, Pseudopanax, Musa and Trachycarpus.

So there really are no boundaries, let your creative juices flow. Hardy exotic plantings are the work of true gorilla gardeners who don't need the rules and restrictions that come with so many other stylised approaches.

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