

## Episode 126 show notes and advice

### Episode description

There's never been a better time to host a sensational summer dinner party, and this episode's guests are prolific entertainers, floral decorators, and growers that truly know how to host an event. Dorset-based Con and Jessie Booth, the founders of JRASIC, share their 12 best flowers and vegetables for breathing colour, texture, and creativity into special occasions.

### In this episode, discover:

- Stunning flowers for quirky arrangements
- Delicious vegetables that family and friends will love
- Display ideas to make your event one to remember

## episode 126 advice sheet

Studying under New York-based florist, Sarah Ryhanen, Jessie learnt the craft by working on huge American weddings that had a large emphasis on floral arrangements.

Whereas, Con, at aged 18, interned at Perch Hill, shadowing the garden team, learning all about sowing and growing.

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### JRASIC: An overview (3:52)

Jessie explains that JRASIC grows plants you can't really buy from the market, cultivated for their beauty and rarity.

There's also something really organic about the process, as the flowers are all sorts of different shapes and sizes, and not manicured like standard shop-bought flowers.

These flowers are usually the ones that would get weeded out on large-scale production, and it's these stems that make the cut for JRASIC. And, ultimately, it's the wonky and wiggly stems, bolted veg, and curly sweet peas that do all the arranging for Jessie, and have become the JRASIC signature style.

## **Jessie and Con's 12 favourite plants to grow for events and parties (4:25)**

### **Bearded Iris (5:05)**

One of Jessie's absolute favourite plants, although Jess recalls Sarah telling her that they are a bit of a nightmare as they only flower for two weeks, and then look terrible for the remainder of the year. Although, in recent years, Jessie and Con have become massive fans, planting up tonnes of them from a specific grower in France that are over a metre tall.

These plants have performed very well and look super luxurious. The pair recently harvested all the stems for a wedding in Oxford, and they looked splendid and theatrical. Sarah adds that they also offer amazing scent.

Jessie is a particular fan of the variegated varieties, most notably 'Grape Snakez' which is a bicour beauty with rich aubergine on the bottom petals with toffee above, and a saffron yellow centre. Sarah adds that these are the absolute plant of the moment and where everywhere at Chelsea Flower Show 2023.

The irises tend to like the poor, sandy soil, although the majority of the other flowers that JRASIC grows are cultivated elsewhere. Jessie and Con simply clear the dead leaves from the bottom of the plants as they seem to take care of themselves

### **Peas (9:10)**

If they are entertaining, Con likes to grow edibles that she can grow in glut, like a large bowl of peas or beans, as supposed to going to the supermarket and buying them in fiddly plastic packets.

They recently held a collaborative drinks event for roughly 100 tailors in London and transported huge amounts of mange tout which were absolutely delicious. Really sweet, crunchy, and delicious, they simply put them on ice as canapes and functioned almost like sweets for people to enjoy. Sarah loves Pea Nairobi!

### **Sweet Peas (11:12)**

A great filler for table arrangements. Plus, they are also excellent for filling a whole table with incredible scent. The colours are also so varied, in particular, Jessie loves to grow cool-toned sweet peas – lots of lilacs, cool pinks, and blues – which work really well in

arrangements. If you grow your own, you can also cut trailing bits that look gorgeous and super architectural in vases.

### **Beans (11:58)**

Conn loves growing beans as she can pick loads of them, which makes them great value for money. With a quick blanch in a pan, you can also add delicious dressings that really make them taste wonderful.

Con tends to grow yellow, green, and blue beans which all pack excellent flavour. JRASIC have also been known to add beans to arrangements, choosing some really striking black beans, Climbing Bean 'Trionfo Violetto,' for an event last summer. They also look really good with sweet peas.

They also love Chinese python snake beans which are incredibly long and windy and look incredible draped over a table.

### **Macleaya cordata (Plume poppy) (13:11)**

The theatrical length of the poppy is really what makes this a stand-out choice. The leaves are also a gorgeous matte, dusty green that holds really well in water after it's been cut. The colour of the poppy is spectacular too and works well with yellows and other bright colours or is perfect for a wedding ceremony complemented by white flowers in a simple urn.

Papaver orientale 'Raspberry Queen' is also another stand out choice for arrangements. Top tip - sear there ends in boiling water, and they will go on for ages.

### **Courgettes and squash (14:44)**

A great choice for their weird and wonderful shapes, which looks fantastic on the table. Bumpy, rugosa squashes always make a striking statement, along with Squash Marina di Chioggia and Tromboncino. For a different look, Jessie likes to hollow a pumpkin and fill it with dahlias for extra wow.

Although they do take up lots of space in the kitchen garden, they are superb for arrangements and for eating too. You can also pick them squeaky and small, which is delicious.

### **Sunflowers (17:19)**

Another theatrical choice, bright and brilliant sunflowers always look wonderful in arrangements. At the end of last summer, the duo grew and picked lots of sunflowers and maize, which worked very well together. They are very easy to grow, and a great alternative to dahlias that offer the same pop of bright colour.

Jessie loves *Helianthus annuus* 'ProCut Plum' F1 and Sunflowers 'Italian White' and 'Vanilla Ice' as she says it's nice to show people that their alternatives to the classic vibrant yellow.

### **Salads (18:26)**

Con loves to grow simple salads in the garden which she can pick all year long. Loads of Lettuce 'Salad Bowl' and a Tom Thumb type salad that is hugely prolific and great for the summertime. Compact, *Lactuca sativa* 'Maureen' is a great choice. JRASIC have also been known to pick bolted lettuces for very alternative arrangements.

### **Tomatoes (21:30)**

Different coloured tomatoes are a must-have for Con, and Tomato 'Chocolate Cherry' is a total favourite. For arrangements, tomatoes, nasturtiums, and roses make an excellent trio. In particular, Con adores Costoluto Fiorentino tomatoes, with their incredible ridges and taste, that look like a Shakespearean purse.

For culinary purposes, they are absolutely delicious in salads. Try Tomato 'Noire de Crimée' with black basil and buffalo mozzarella for something that's striking on the plate as well as terrifically tasty.

### **Species tulips (23:00)**

Jessie loves to find historic varieties for their excellent, wiggly shapes and bold look. The older varieties are a lot more compact and can be very elegant. *Tulipa acuminata* (Horned Tulip) is a variety that Jessie has been using a lot recently and is an instant showstopper with their flame-like beauty.

*Tulip sylvestris*, in vibrant yellow, is another worthwhile choice. Jessie likes to pick them a week before an event, as letting them grow and twist towards the light creates that signature wild look.

### **Leeks (24:40)**

Incredibly majestic and versatile, a leek is super grounding for Con. Great for eating and picking, they also produce gorgeous flowers which look really pretty amongst the other vegetables in the kitchen garden.

Allium porrum 'Musselburgh' is a good option and super chunky. Con loves their look, feel, and taste, particularly in soup. Sarah recommends Allium porrum 'Saint Victor' in glorious purple.