

We love March...

for the promise of growth to come

March is full of mixed messages – bitterly cold one day and positively balmy the next. We bounce between excitement at the coming season and disgruntlement that winter is still dragging on. At the start of the month nothing seems to be growing, but by the end there are all sorts of things going on in our gardens. You can almost hear the creaks and wriggles of leaves, shoots and buds just sitting there waiting to burst out and trumpet the beginning of spring.

Words by **James Alexander-Sinclair**

STAR OF THE MONTH *Magnolia campbellii*

Imagine walking through the Himalayas. Above you are the snow-capped peaks and a clear azure sky, if you're lucky there may be an eagle floating high on a thermal. Suddenly, the track you are following crests a ridge and the wind drops as you walk down into a plant-filled fertile valley. Still with me? This is the sort of place where you will find *Magnolia campbellii* growing wild. A magnificent spreading tree almost completely covered with big, beautiful flowers in a delicious shade of sugary pink. The best thing is that you can have it in your garden as well. ● **Care** Ideally this plant needs a good deep soil which is a bit acidic. It will need shelter from the colder winds but is happy on a north wall. Each flower is about 20cm in diameter. ● **Height x Spread** 5m x 5m



1 *Narcissus* 'Barrett Browning' underplanted with polyanthus



2 *Crocus tommasinianus* and *Cyclamen coum*



3 *Stachyurus praecox* and *camellia*

Plant partners

Tickled pink

Bright and beautiful is the order of the day with these sparkling spring duos

1 *Narcissus* 'Barrett Browning' and polyanthus

This charming little daffodil was named after Elizabeth Barrett Browning, a prolific Victorian poet who was a friend of Wordsworth and Tennyson. I am uncertain whether she would have been happy with a host of pink polyanthus gambolling around her heels, but I hope that she would see the joy in the combination.

Narcissus 'Barrett Browning'

● **Care** Plant bulbs in September in borders, pots or naturalised in grass. Propagate by division.
● **Height x Spread** 30cm x 10cm

Polyanthus

● **Care** There are many different hybrids of this cousin of the wild primrose. If propagated from seed they are unlikely to match the parent plant.
● **H x S** 10cm x 20cm

2 *Crocus tommasinianus* and *Cyclamen coum*

This is a lovely combination. The bouncy pink cyclamen and the slightly washed-denim colour of the crocus are as zingy as a sherbet fountain. Perfect for waking up a border or woodland garden before the serious business of summer.

Crocus tommasinianus

● **Care** Crocus are one of the great joys of early spring. They are very easy to grow (plant in autumn) in almost every situation, except wet ground.
● **H x S** 10cm x 10cm

Cyclamen coum

● **Care** A glorious woodland plant with marbled leaves and exotically shaped flowers. Comes in white or shades of pink. Plant in the autumn in good moist soil and it will spread.
● **H x S** 10cm x 12cm

3 *Stachyurus praecox* and *camellia*

I first met this shrub in a client's garden where its elegant racemes of flower overhung a bank of primroses: it was a glorious moment and I have been smitten ever since. Here, it mingles with a good classically deep pink camellia. Different mood, equally ravishing.

Stachyurus praecox

● **Care** Best in full sun or partial shade and with a bit of acid in the soil. Profit from semi-hardwood cuttings in summer.
● **H x S** 4m x 3m

Camellia

● **Care** Perfect spring shrub for borders or large containers. Make sure that it never dries out and is protected from the worst winds. Lovely glossy evergreen foliage. Take cuttings in the autumn.
● **H x S** 4m x 2m