

Bursting with Anticipation

Martin Blow of SpecialPerennials finds time to enjoy the beauty before the buds burst

We love to fill our garden with the colour and scent of flowers. For me that passion is concentrated on hardy herbaceous perennials and the appearance of buds signal the new season of flower is about to burst forth.



It's easy to fall in love with the silver buds of Cupid's Dart (*Catananche caerulea*)



Cephalaria gigantea has a pure symmetry of pattern

Just about every *Centaurea* is worthy of mention but if I had to pick just one then *C. phrygia* would get my vote. We've dubbed her the Ena Sharples plants for her "hair-net" buds.

Sometimes it's the pure symmetry of a bud that attracts me. The giant yellow scabious (*Cephalaria gigantea*) has a geometric, beauty before the loose, feathery flowers open.

That other scabious cousin, *Knautia* has wonderful pin-cushion buds that gradually unfold into a feathery feast of burgundy red.

Some flowers are as restrained, quiet and understated in bud as they are exuberant, showy and attention-seeking in flower. The coneflowers (*Echinacea* and



Awaiting a fuchsia-pink explosion from the silver buds of *Stemmaacantha*

But buds aren't just the heralds of beauty to come: many are a delight in themselves and greatly add to the season of interest.

Here are some my favourites. All are hardy and easy grow.

Centaurea and their close cousins, *Stemmaacantha* have some of the most beautiful,

jewel-like buds in the perennial garden.

Stemmaacantha centauroides (syn. *Centaurea pulchra major*) eventually has large, pink, thistle-flowers on 2ft 3in tall stems but for weeks leading up to the eruption of fuchsia-pink, the silver-scaled buds are even more thrilling.



Centaurea phrygia with "Ena Sharples" buds!



Knautia has pin-cushion buds



Coneflower, *Rudbeckia subtomentosa* transforms from delicate to big and blousy between bud-burst and flower

Rudbeckia are prime examples of this transformation as the petals open: from achingly delicate to big, bold and blousy.

Poppies are a brief, but dazzling display in the garden but the Orientale Poppy (*Papaver orientale*) has just tactile, silken buds for so long prior to flowering. And of course the flowers are followed by those pepper-pot seed heads.



Hydrangea Annabel has a delightful contrast between bud and flower



Silk Thistle (*Onopordum*) is a giant biennial

Sometimes the contrast between bud and flower on the same plant lifts a planting to new levels. Hydrangea Annabel is perhaps the best example of this, with lime-green buds and apple-white flowers together through the summer.

Members of the Cynara (Thistle) tribe have impressive buds too—often more striking than the flowers. Choose with care as some thistles are very invasive and some are biennial.

Onopordum (Silk Thistle) is one of the biennials but does self seed. This is 6-8ft giant for a sunny spot. The buds spiny and very architectural.

The cardoon was grown as a leaf vegetable to produce long succulent leaf stems. He is a cousin of the globe artichoke as can be seen from the buds.

The joy of buds is in purity of form, dramatic contrast and expectation of flowering beauty to come.

You can almost see the bees queuing up in anticipation of the feast to come as the buds of *Cirsium rivulare Atropurpureum* begin to burst.

I'm trying to learn to be patient and not want everything to rush into flower. Stopping to appreciate the beauty of buds, new stems emerging, an



Oriental poppies (*Papaver orientale*)

unfurling leaf, all add to my love of our garden and perhaps helps me "chill out" a bit in the busy seasonal cycle of garden and nursery.

Just sit back and enjoy the growing anticipation!

Visit our website at specialperennials.com



Cardoon is a cousin of the globe artichoke



Cirsium rivulare waits in anticipation of the show to come