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Specialists in sourcing and supplying high quality plants
for garden designers, landscapers and architects

Plants for Purpose

Silver Plants for Sunny Places

Every season has its colour pallet. During Spring it's all things green and verdant but let's fast forward a little and just for a moment into deep summer, imagine the radiant heat of an August afternoon in the garden. All around us plants will be altering their behaviour to cope with the stress of the heat. Photosynthesis will be reduced and leaf stomata will be closing to reduce water loss from the leaves through transpiration. Many will just hold their breath and stop all their growth activity until the temperature drops to a more comfortable level in the evening.

Some plants, however, will be revelling in the heat, with no stop to growth and many of these will have Silver and Grey leaves. It's worth remembering that leaves that appear to be Silver and Grey do all still contain chlorophyll, the green pigment essential to the light absorbing, energy converting process of photosynthesis. Most of the silver comes from structural colour which increases reflection, tiny hairs called trichomes or waxy coatings, reducing transpiration and keeping the leaf cool enabling it to continue with its business when others have had to close up shop.

Silver Plants



Melianthus major, or more sweetly named the Honey Bush, boasts spectacular, almost exotic grey green leaves late in spring. Benefitting from a dry mulch over winter, it can reach a height of 3m in a sheltered position. It exudes a scent reminiscent of peanut butter and flowers from May to July.

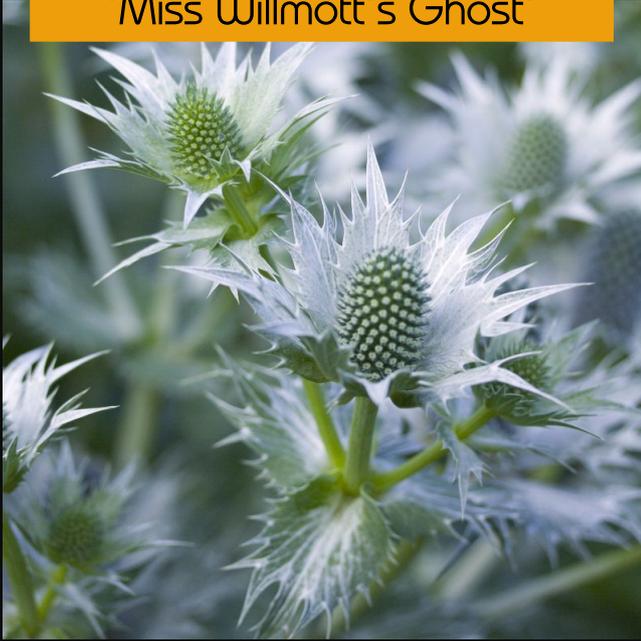
If you are looking for a silver leaved shrub for a sunny mixed border look no further than **Atriplex halimus**, commonly known as Tree Purslane. Typically growing 2-3m in height and spread, it can be lightly trimmed for neatness and is perfectly tolerable of windy, coastal sites. The leaves are a perfect foil for cottage garden shots of pinks like **Gladiolus communis subsp. Byzantinus** or **Salvia 'Wendy's Wish'**.

From a functional design perspective, it is common sense to utilise this evolutionary success and plant plants with Silver and Grey leaves in areas of the garden that will be prone to drought and also in those areas that will be in direct sunlight for the majority of the day.

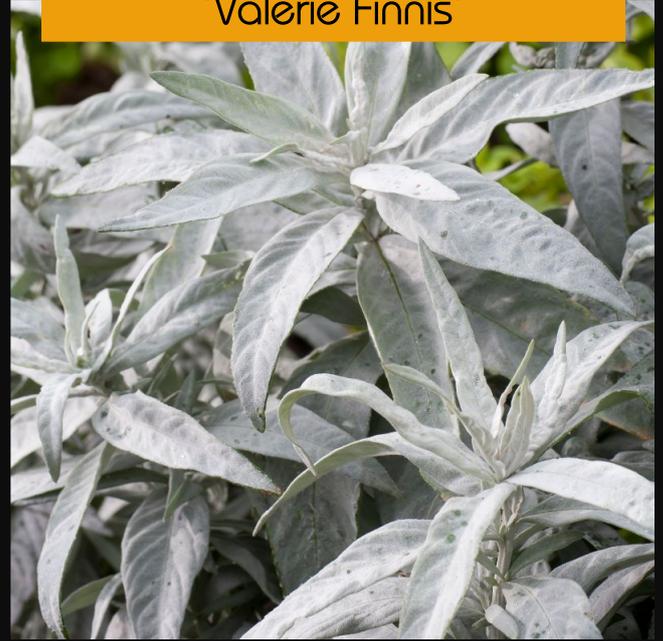
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Silver Plants for Sunny Places

Eryngium giganteum
'Miss Willmott's Ghost'



Artemisia ludoviciana
'Valerie Finnis'



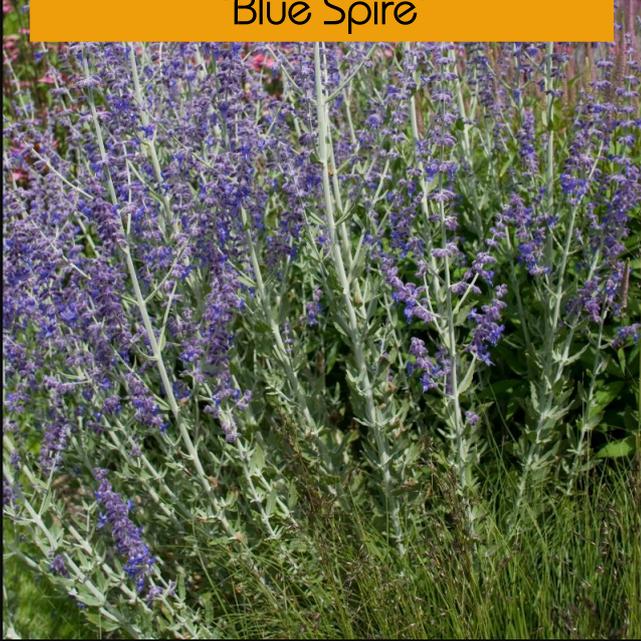
For the king of all silver thistles, nothing beats the statuesque drama of *Onopordum acanthium*, it's a biennial so you are going to have to put the work in and grow it from seed for the first year but if you are fortunate and have the space it will self-seed freely in subsequent years. The bees will roll around in the pale lilac thistle flowers and you will stare admiringly at its stiff, white felt stems and huge spiny leaves. If you don't have room for this particular thistle you can choose from an array of silver *Eryngiums* including *Eryngium giganteum*, *Eryngium yuccifolium* or whitest of all *Eryngium giganteum* 'Silver Ghost'. All will give winter interest, mix well with grasses and look great in gravel gardens. Just be careful not to lose sight of them behind larger border plants.

Leaving some of the drama behind it's good to quieten things down with the Wormwoods or Artemesias. Some are more shrubby like *Artemesia 'Powis Castle'* which is native to the cliffs and rocky slopes of the Mediterranean and smells amazing. The culinary herb Tarragon is also an Artemesia? *Artemesia dracunculus* to be exact. Another favourite, because of its startling white shoots appearing through the soil in March and April is *Artemesia ludoviciana 'Valerie Finnis'*. Ludoviciana is a latinisation of Louisiana which is the north American state that was the original home of this garden stalwart. This particular variety is a smaller plant and has broader leaves than the equally lovely *Artemesia ludoviciana 'Silver Queen'*. All these plants can bring a little peace and gentleness to a planting scheme and let you catch your breath for a moment.

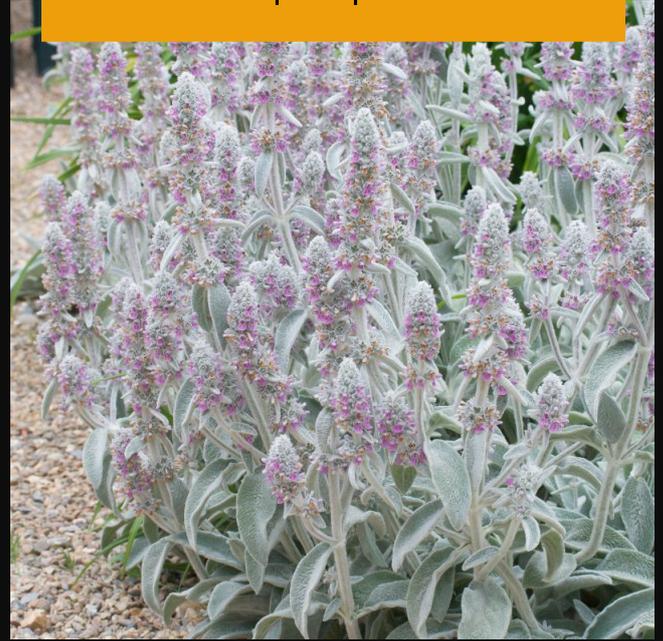
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Perovskia atriplicifolia
'Blue Spire'



Stachys byzantina



Perovskia atriplicifolia is similar in this respect but also has the benefit of spires of lavender blue flowers in late summer which are beloved by bees. 'Blue Spire' will grow to 1.2 m and should be cut back to a framework each spring. It is one of the later emerging plants of the spring but it's worth curbing your impatience for. If 'Blue Spire' is a little tall for your space, *Perovskia* 'Little Spire' is the little brother reaching about half the size of his sibling. *Perovskia* superficially resembles Lavender and can be used in areas too cold to grow lavender reliably. It is also useful as a filler plant or for separating stronger colours and combines well with grasses. Choose a position near a path so you can give it a rub as you pass by and inhale the volatiles.

One cannot talk about silver plants for sunny places without mentioning *Stachys byzantina*. Yes, it's ubiquitous but it is probably one of the most well-loved plants found within our gardens and it is very, very silver. Low growing, soft and drought tolerant, perfect for the edge of borders and mixes well with everyone. *S. byzantina* has flower stems to 40cm of whorled pink flowers. These are attractive to bees and lovely in their own right but some might prefer the tidier, rarely flowering *Stachys byzantina* 'Silver Carpet'. Slightly more clump forming, with larger leaves *Stachys byzantina* 'Big Ears' has a less silvery appearance and taller flowers. This variety is particularly suitable as a carpeting plant in sunny, poor conditions. All of these are easily propagated plants and benefit from being regularly divided to prevent woody centres.

All of these silver leaved plants are not only perfectly adapted to hot and sunny places, but provide a soothing and neutral link between other colours within the garden. They are often elegant; some might even say sophisticated and as the evening light fades on your outdoor terrace they can become almost luminescent. Now doesn't that sound like perfect August day.

Silver Plants for Sunny Places

Viridis can supply a broad range of quality, cost-effective planting options.

The below list is an outline of plant recommendations for silver plants that are well suited to sunny places. More are available on request. Please send us your enquiry for further details and pricing.

Trees
Eucalyptus pauciflora subsp. Niphophila
Pyrus salicifolia
Shrubs and sub-shrubs
Lotus hirsutus
Melianthus major
Salix exigua
Santolina chamaecyparissus
Salix Helvetica
Atriplex halimus
Helichrysum petiolare
Santolina chamaecyparissus
Helichrysum italicum
Buddleja 'Silver Anniversary'
Convolvulus cneorum
Herbaceous Perennials
Senecio candicans
Tulbaghia violacea 'Silver Lace'
Cynara cardunculus
Artemisia 'Lambrook Silver'
Lychnis coronaria
Salvia argentea
Grasses
Miscanthus sinensis 'Morning Light'
Festuca 'Elijah Blue'
Helictotrichon sempervirens
Miscanthus sinensis 'Morning Light'
Festuca 'Elijah Blue'