

50 Shades of Grey at Sophie's Patch

I love shades of grey at Sophie's Patch, not the movies, but the plants. Grey (or silver) foliage not only looks great and makes a great contrast with all flower colours and other plants, it indicates a hardy plant, able to withstand the onslaught of our tough summers. Grey, silver and white foliage plants have adapted and evolved to cope with extreme conditions of heat and drought, with the silver colour reflecting sunlight so the leaf does not get as hot. Many grey foliage plants are also hairy and these hairs act as an insulation layer for the leaf, like a windbreak, reducing water loss from the leaf. Most grey foliated plants are sun lovers, thrive in full sun, and once established grow with minimal or no supplementary watering.

So, here is a list of some of the grey (or silver) foliated plants grown here at Sophie's Patch. I have ordered them in height, down from trees, tall and medium shrubs, dwarf shrubs, perennials and groundcovers, and then added in a few annuals at the end.

TREES

1. ***Elaeagnus angustifolia* - Russian olive**

This stunning deciduous tree has bright silver foliage which hangs gracefully off its branches. It produces an insignificant small lemon coloured flower in spring with a delicious sweet scent.

2. ***Pyrus nivalis* – Snow Pear**

This deciduous ornamental pear has attractive silvery-grey leaves and smothers itself with single white flowers in early spring. The leaves turn shades of orange and gold before dropping in autumn.

3. ***Eucalyptus caesia* 'Silver Princess'**

This beautiful architectural tree has weeping branches which have a greyish white coating on them finished with large grey-green leaves. The large gumnuts open to reveal showy cerise flowers from spring to autumn.

4. ***Acacia saligna* – Weeping myall**

Graceful wattle 6-10m high with pendulous branches. Pale cream flowers in spring.

5. ***Acacia salicina* – Broughton willow, willow wattle**

Spreading tree to 10m with handsome foliage and yellow flowers.

TALL & MEDIUM SHRUBS (roughly 1.5 metres or higher)

6. ***Atriplex nummularia* 'Eyre's Green' – old man saltbush**

Tall shrub 3-4m and hedges well. Attracts beneficial insects. Dreaming of slow cooked, saltbush fed, dorper lamb curry at the Standpipe Hotel in Pt. Augusta! ☺

7. ***Artemisia arborescens* - tree wormwood**

Traditionally grown by the chook yard it forms a great hedge 1.5-2m high. Prunings put in nesting boxes to deter mites.

8. ***Buddleja crispa* – Himalayan butterfly**

Partially deciduous shrub to 4m with stunning large silver leaves and pale pink flowers in spring.

9. ***Melianthus major* – Giant honey flower**

This 2-3m high shrub had bold architectural grey-green foliage and tall flower spikes of dark red flowers which the nectar feeding birds adore! Be warned of its weed potential in some parts of Australia.

10. ***Buddleja* 'Buzz' Purple – butterfly bush**

These medium shrubs to 1.5 m flower for many months in late spring and summer with a sweet honey scent that attracts butterflies and honey eating birds.

11. ***Phlomis playstegia* – Jerusalem sage**

A lovely Jerusalem sage to 1.2m with whorls of deep yellow flowers above silver grey foliage.

12. ***Teucrium fruticans* – germander**

The silver spiky growth of this hardy shrub to 1.5 m with lavender blue flowers tames and trims really well and this plant makes a great hedges or large ball.

13. *Teucrium heterophyllum* - germander

This germander has larger silver foliage and salmon-orange flowers and grows 1.5m high and trims or hedges well.

DWARF SHRUBS (roughly 1m or less)

14. *Artemisia absinthum* – absinthe

Attractive member of wormwood family with grey hairy foliage forms a low mound to 60cm high. Leaves and flowers used to make Absinthe, the alcoholic spirit, once believed to have hallucinogenic effects.

15. *Artemisia* ‘Powis Castle’ – wormwood

This dwarf shrub gets 1m high with stunning silver foliage but needs a hard haircut each year to stay compact. Prunings also good in chook nesting boxes.

16. *Convulvulus cneorum* – Silver Bush

This plant forms a neat mound of silvery white foliage and smothers itself with white flowers in autumn winter.

17. *Cotyledon orbiculata* – Pig ears

Stunning succulent with bright silvery-white foliage and vibrant spikes of apricot-pink flowers. Frost hardy!

18. *Cotyledon orbiculata* ‘Blue Waves’

Stunning succulent with silvery-white foliage with a twist..... and apricot-pink flowers.

19. *Helichrysum italicum ssp. italicum* – curry plant

This dwarf shrub has fine silver foliage which has a mouthwatering aroma of curry. It also produces attractive bright yellow flowers.

20. *Helichrysum petiolare* – liquorice plant

Sprawling low shrub with silver leaves covered in soft down and tiny heads of everlasting flowers.

21. *Lavender dentata* – French Lavender

My favourite of all lavenders, it flowers from autumn to spring, with soft grey foliage and heavenly lavender-coloured flowers.

22. *Lavandula* ‘Sidonie’

Handsome silver ferny foliage with slender spikes of vibrant violet blue flowers however it needs protection from harsh frosts. Mine burns but recovers.

23. *Rhagodia spinescens* – creeping saltbush

Hardy native with small silver foliage and a sprawling habit, though it can be trimmed to form a low hedge.

24. *Veronica perfoliata* (syn. *Derwentia perfoliata*) – Diggers speedwell

Grey foliage resembling juvenile gum tipped by spikes of delicate blue-mauve flowers in spring and summer.

PERENNIALS (plant which have a period when they die back or need to be pruned hard)

25. *Artemisia frigida* – fringed sagebrush

One of many wormwoods we grow, with soft downy silvery white foliage.

26. *Artemisia absinthum* ‘Lambrook Silver’

This perennial wormwood has fine ferny silvery foliage and is lower growing than the parent, reaching 40-50cm.

27. *Artemisia ludoviciana* ‘Valerie Finnis’

This hardy plant is one of the best silver foliaged perennials, spreading by underground rhizomes to form a dense thicket of large, jagged silver foliage to 30cm high. Like most Artemesias, its flowers are insignificant and are often removed so that they do not detract from its beautiful foliage.

28. *Ballotta pseudodictamnus* ‘Nanus’

This is a dense sub-shrub makes a rounded evergreen plant with dense silver-grey foliage, heavily felted with hairs. Although it does produce mauve flowers in spring, they are rather insignificant, and the plant is grown primarily for its foliage. 50cm.

29. *Cynara scolymus* – globe artichoke

This vegetable is a star performer at Sophie’s Patch and I never even get around to eating it!? Its striking, large dissected foliage is a brilliant silver and it produces thick upright stems to support the flower buds, which if harvested at the right time can be prepared into mouth-watering taste sensations. It’s on my ‘to do’ list for when I have more time, but for the moment I just enjoy the look of their foliage and seeing the buds open into massive purple thistle-like flowers.

30. *Euphorbia rigida* – spurge

This spurge has rigid architectural stems to 45cm clothed in blue-grey leaves, and they tend to arch with the weight of lime coloured flower bracts as they age. This variety should be pruned in early autumn to encourage new growth and spring flowers.

31. *Euphorbia* ‘Hedgehog’ – spurge

This fine foliated spurge has silver blue foliage and attractive lime-green flowers in spring. 20-30cm

32. *Euphorbia wulfenii* – Wulfen spurge

This spurge grows 1-1.2m high and is shrubby in habit. Its foliage has blue-green along its upright stems which are topped by large heads of lime green or yellow flowers in winter and spring.

33. *Nepeta faasennii* ‘Walker’s Blue’ – catmint

Catmint is the classic species for underplanting roses and it makes a first-class edging plant in sunny gardens. This is my favourite form which flowers from spring to autumn, longer than other varieties. Its dark lavender-blue flowers are also more striking than other varieties of catmint, and they look great against its silver-green foliage. Growing to 45cm high, when used as a continuous edging, ‘Walker’s Blue’ prevents birds from scratching mulch onto paths. A mid season haircut will tidy up the plants and an annual hard prune to just above ground level is required.

34. *Romneya coulteri* – Californian tree poppy

This giant perennial to 2m high produces stunning large, white poppy-like flowers above grey-blue foliage in late spring and summer. Although not easy to establish, they are worthwhile persevering with. They need perfect drainage and resent transplanting.

35. *Salvia canariensis* var. *candidissima* – Canary Island sage

This tall sage to at least 1.5 metres high has very hairy, silver-grey foliage and a mass of large purple and pink flowers for many months in spring and summer.

36. *Salvia officinalis* – common sage

This edible culinary sage is quite ornamental in its own right, with silver-grey foliage and blue, white or pale pink flowers in spring.

37. *Senecio vira-vira*

This plant forms a rounded evergreen mound of silver-white dissected foliage to 80cm topped by soft lemon flowers which are loved by bees and butterflies.

38. *Senecio cineraria* ‘Silver Dust’

This plant is primarily grown for its striking silvery-white foliage, even though it does produce small yellow, daisy-like flowers.

GROUNDCOVERS

39. *Stachys byzantina* ‘Big Ears’ – lamb’s ears

Lamb’s ears is a mat forming perennial with soft furry leaves, just like lambs’ ears, and it make a beautiful silver carpet. The heads of mauve-pink flowers held above the foliage are an added bonus in summer. There are several newer forms of this old-fashioned plant including ‘Big Ears’ which has larger leaves, each up to 20cm long, making a bolder effect, and also a miniature form called *S. thirkei*, only grows 10cm x 30cm, requiring less ongoing maintenance than the common form.

40. *Anthemis tinctoria* ‘Suzannah Mitchell’ - Dyer’s Chamomile

Dense matting ground cover with aromatic silver-green foliage and lemon daisy flowers over a long period in spring and summer.

41. *Arctotis x hybrida* – Veldt daisy

Flowering from autumn to spring, the new compact forms of these hardy groundcovers are brilliant. They produce large daisy like flowers in shades of red, orange, yellow, pink and cream and flower for many months from autumn to spring.

42. *Artemisia schmidtiana* ‘Nana’ – Satin wormwood

This wormwood forms a dense carpeting, weed suppressing mat of soft silver white foliage that just calls to be touched.

43. *Artemisia canescens* – wormwood, mugwort

The fine silver foliage of this wormwood appears like scrunched up chicken wire.

44. *Carpobrotus rossii* – native pig face

This native ground cover has blue-grey succulent foliage and stunning cerise pink flowers in spring.

45. *Eumorphia prostrata* ‘Silver Cloud’

This plant forms a low mound of fine silver foliage with delicate daisy-like flowers in spring and summer.

46. *Echeveria x imbricate* - ‘Hen & Chicks’

This old fashioned succulent produces large rosettes of grey-blue foliage, with older leaves tinged pink, and it smothers itself in pinky-red flowers in spring and summer.

47. *Senecio serpens* – chalk sticks

This striking succulent has blue-grey foliage however it doesn’t like my frost, so I grow it in containers in protected positions.

48. *Kalanchoe* ‘Quicksilver’

This succulent has silver grey foliage and heads of pretty mid pink flowers in spring.

ANNUALS

49. *Cerinthe major* – Honeywort

This stunning annual has grey-blue foliage and striking purple-blue flowers, making a great contrast. I let it self-seed around Sophie’s Patch.

50. *Escholtzia* - Californian poppy

I have drifts of this delightful annual with greyish foliage and orange flowers up my driveway and I let it self-seed where it wants in this area. It is also available in other colours however orange seems to naturally work best here.