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## Generation Rent Needs Grown-Up Housing Guidelines Now

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# Up the workers

In a narrow, dry urban border, go for hardworking mainly upright plants for a long summer display

I'm continually in search of uncomplaining and hard-working summer plants for my front garden. My patch is like a lot of urban ones: the soil is poor and comparatively dry and the borders, at 150cm wide, are not very accommodating. Although that may seem a generous width, it's a bit narrow to easily layer plants two and three deep, which is what you need if you are keen on a proper flowery confection look.

So, if your border is narrower than 3 metres, you need to search for plants that are upright and slim, those that are happy to interweave with others and those with a compact habit. The danger with compact plants, however, is that they often look like blobs. That's fine, I suppose, if you're going for a scatter of cupcake look, but not if you're trying for a wild-ish and convivial mood, which is what I'm after.

So, use compact plants at the front of the border, but not in a uniform row: intersperse them with taller ones, for a more natural appearance.

Also, I'm not willing to wage battle with slugs, snails or other pests, unless it's to protect something I want to eat. Therefore, everything ornamental here has to be critter-proof. It also has to be disease-proof, long-flowering and to require minimal staking.

A word on preventing plants from toppling: I don't want to be tying myself in knots with bits of string or poking my eye out with bamboo canes. So, half-moon supports (made from steel rods) are almost the only reinforcing devices that I use. It takes only a minute to lift up the foliage, shove the legs of the support into the ground and gently arrange the plant so that it is invisibly held in place. The trick with all supports is to prop your plants up before they flop.

Much better, though, is a tall plant that

## JANE POWERS GARDENS



requires no staking, and there are many that are perfect for urban gardens with limited space. One of my favourites is purple toadflax (*Linaria purpurea*), an Italian wildflower that grows to between 60cm and 1m and bears thin and lithe spikes of tiny purple snapdragon flowers.

It usually arrives uninvited in gardens, so is often considered a weed. I love it, though, as it flowers for five or six months, and is a great hit with bumblebees. The cultivar, 'Canon Went', has shell-pink flowers, wine-toned stems and greyish leaves.

The purple woodland sages (*Salvia nemorosa* and its relatives) also bear upright spikes of flowers, shorter, denser and more static than those of toadflax. There are loads of different varieties, including 'Ostfriesland', 'Caradonna' (both about 50cm) and 'Mainacht' (up to a metre).

Cut back the first lot of flowers when they finish (within the next few weeks), water the plants well, give a liquid feed, and you'll get another lesser flush later. This regime goes for all perennials that

finish blooming around now. Feeding and watering is essential after cutting back: the act of flowering is exhausting, and the soil at the base of plants in this crowded season is often bone dry, especially in urban gardens.

Foxgloves and verbasiums, both perennials and biennials (which I mentioned two weeks ago), work well in narrow borders. *Verbascum chaixii* 'Album' has no established common name, but its cumbersome handle is worth trying to remember. It bears multiple, metre-tall spires of white flowers with curious, velvety, papal purple stamens.

As with all the plants I've recommended so far (and those to come) it is brilliant for bees. Also in the tall and thin category is the purple-topped, square-stemmed *Verbena bonariensis*, which I mentioned last week and on many other occasions, as it is so versatile.

*Knautia macedonica* is a plant that weaves companionably among its

neighbours, slinging its wiry stems and claret-coloured pin cushions here and there so that they seem to bob in the air. Thistle relative *Cirsium rivulare* 'Atropurpureum' bears flowers the same colour.

The stiff stems don't allow them to bounce, but they are held a metre or more high, so they do a good job of floating above the rest of the fray.

Other such floaters include opium poppies and cornflowers, both annuals. With the latter, be sure to get tall varieties such as 'Blue Boy', 'Blue Ball', 'Black Ball', 'Red Ball', 'Pinkie' and 'Snowman'. Tall cornflowers may need staking with canes, as half-moon hoops can be too heavy for them. It's too late to sow opium poppies or cornflowers for this year, but you can start them in August or September for next year.

The poppies will reliably self-seed year after year, while the cornflowers may or may not, depending on your garden's conditions.

Hardy geraniums are grand, serviceable

The purple-flowered *Verbena bonariensis* is a great addition to a narrow border, along with, from top right, *Linaria purpurea*, *Knautia macedonica* and *Verbascum chaixii*

plants for an urban garden. 'Rozanne', with pale-eyed, violet-mauve flowers, is one of the best, blooming all summer. It's 30 cm to 60 cm tall and can spread to cover a metre over the season, so give it space. If it gets too sprawly, don't be afraid to give all or part of it an unceremonious haircut.

I've been doing this for years, and it recovers in a week or two. 'Anne

Thomson', with its mad, shocking pink flowers, is another candidate.

A final plant for an urban patch (and any dry-ish garden) is one with a common name that is as unlovely as its botanical one: Mexican fleabane or *Erigeron karvinskianus*. It sends out a continual froth of tiny daisies that are just perfect for softening the edge of a bed or growing in pots.

## Grow for it

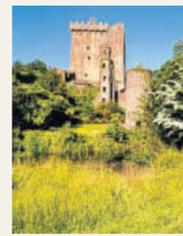
### Prop before they drop

Half-hoop plant supports are available from many garden suppliers, including [johnstowngardencentre.ie](http://johnstowngardencentre.ie), [mulhallybelisks.com](http://mulhallybelisks.com) and [thegardenshop.ie](http://thegardenshop.ie). Spirals for taller plants such as delphiniums are available from [howbertandmays.ie](http://howbertandmays.ie). Ornate domed and flared supports can be found at [quickcrop.ie](http://quickcrop.ie).



### Blarney in Bloom

Next Sunday sees Blarney Castle Gardens' annual summer fair in aid of Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind. There will be garden stalls, a dog show and talks by Susan Turner, of Ballymaloe, Hester Forde, of Coosheen Garden, Madeline McKeever, of Brown Envelope Seeds. Admission: €5 [blarneycastle.ie](http://blarneycastle.ie)



### Jane digs...

The South African *Diascia personata*: one of the best plants for a summer border, but hard to find. Write down the name and if you see the plant for sale, grab it. The small salmon-coloured blooms are held on rigid stems, about 90cm tall.

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# Generation rent needs grown-up housing guidelines now

Big strides have been made in regulating the booming private rented sector, but there's still plenty of work to do

The private rented sector in Ireland accommodates 705,000 people in 324,000 tenancies – in properties owned by 172,000 registered landlords. In the past 18 months alone there has been an increase of 12,000 registered landlords.

Although still regarded as a second-class tenure, the private rented sector is a significant part of the housing system. It is set to become not merely a stopgap for students, immigrants and the unemployed, but also a mainstream tenure for large numbers of highly educated and well-paid but employment-uncertain people. Regulation and maturation of this sector is therefore critical.

Deasy's Act of 1860 put the relationship between a landlord and tenant on a contractual basis, but it wasn't until 2004 that any significant regulation of the sector emerged in the form of the Residential Tenancies Act. Before the 2004 act landlords could terminate tenancies without reason, or with short notice

periods, and demand whatever rent they wanted. The act defined what rent was to be charged ("market rent") and it gave tenants certain rights over lease length and notice periods. It still gave landlords the upper hand when it came to reasons for eviction – use by a family member, and so on.

Around the same time the Private Residential Tenancies Board

— now the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) — was established to act as a register for tenancies and landlords, and also as a dispute resolution mechanism. Previously, landlords and tenants had to go to court to resolve their differences.

Over the years, an increasing number of landlords have registered with the board, as they are legally obliged to do, and it has

resolved thousands of disputes. About 1%–2% of all tenancies end up in dispute, and it takes about two to three months to resolve them using the RTB, or half that if the free mediation service is used.

Until 2015, the largest cause of dispute was the withholding of deposits — it is now rent arrears. Disputes involving deposits could have been resolved by introducing a deposit protection scheme, where tenants' deposits are held by an independent body and returned when both parties agree. Ireland is now belatedly implementing such a scheme, years behind other countries, and it should be operational later year. Credit here should go to former minister Alan Kelly in legislating for it.

The Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2015 has moved things on again. Approved housing bodies have come under the remit of the RTB. There is a new 24-month period between rent reviews with a commensurate 90 days' notice period for serving such notices. This gives an effective period of 27 months between rent changes but it will revert to 12-month reviews after four years.

The notice of rent review is now more specific. It must state the new rent and the date it comes into effect; be signed by the landlord or their agent; include a statement to say disputes over this new rent must be referred to the RTB before



As renting a home becomes more than a stopgap measure, new rules are needed to protect tenants

it comes into effect or within 28 days after; and include proof of the market rent.

Notice periods for terminations of leases have also been extended to a maximum of 224 days from a landlord, or 112 days from a tenant. On the day a tenant has to leave they have the full 24 hours of that day. Again, this is all positive as it provides more certainty for both

landlords and tenants, although we are not sure what will happen after the rent-freeze period expires. Legislators still have not come to terms with proper security of tenure, such as removing use by a family member as a reason for eviction, for example.

Given the rise of the private rented sector, security of tenure and rent certainty will no longer be

something that can be put off. Maturing the sector will mean fundamental change and disagreement along the way, but it is vital that the sector becomes more akin to the commercial property investment market where occupied properties are worth more than vacant ones, and the longer the lease, the more valuable the asset.

## LORCAN SIRR ON THE HOME FRONT

