



Figure 1: Cover Photo. Helium Vicky

My Favourite Plant

This article first appeared in “Plant Heritage” Volume 17 No. 2 Autumn 2010.

Christopher Lloyd, when asked what his favourite flower was, replied: “the one I’m looking at now”. It’s that way with me with Heleniums; all are beautiful in they’re own right, all are equally easy to grow and all do a great job in the border, be it a 15 inch (38cm) edger to a 6 footer (180cm)at the back. With more than 100 varieties of Helenium in bloom in our South Cheshire garden at the moment (23rd August), picking My Favourite Plant is no easy task. So to fudge the issue I’ve selected a handful of Heleniums worthy of any garden setting.

Figure 2 Helonium Vicky



My cover girl (figure 1) is a new comer to the garden: “Vicky” with her shimmering red and gold flowers each with a unique red picotee edge. Vicky is no shrinking violet at 5 – 6 ft tall (150 – 180cm) but she departs herself well, rarely needing any staking. Like all Heleniums, even the tallest, she will attain her full height and flower even from a spring division.. Vicky was raised by Peter and Barbel Zur Linden, whom we have to thank for some of the best Heleniums of the last 30 years.

Heleniums come in all shades and variations of Yellow, Orange and Red. Not all are as showy as “Vicky” but often the self-coloured ones are easier to place in a colour scheme. The only thing to remember is that Heleniums need good sunlight to obtain the best colours. Yellow varieties will perform in some shade, but the reds need 3 or 4 hours of good sunlight to colour up properly. Left in the shade they will be pale orange and yellow.

The common name, “Sneezeweed”, comes from the use of dried and powdered leaves as medicinal snuff to cure colds and bronchitis. Don’t try this at home! Heleniums are toxic and harmful if ingested. In Germany they are called “Sonnenbraut” – “Sun Brides”; far more romantic!

Gardeners often think of Heleniums as late-flowering, adding colour to the August and September garden, but with careful selection of varieties and regular dead heading and watering, you can have Heleniums in bloom from mid June until the beginning of November without having to resort to forcing plants in a greenhouse.

Figure 3 Helonium Pipsqueak



One of the earliest is also one of the shortest. At 12 – 15 inches (30 -38cm) “Pipsqueak” (figure 3) is a great little doer for the front of the border, blooming in bursts from mid June well into October. “Pipsqueak” differs from most Heleniums in being capable of producing new growth from buds on roots. The normal way to propagate plants is to divide them into single or clumps of rosettes in spring. You can propagate from seed but the resulting plants will be very varied. Tip cuttings are possible in spring but need some skill.

Figure 4 Helenium Luc



Hybridisers are always seeking to improve on what is available. Take “Luc” for example. This is a great improvement on “Sahin’s Early Flower”, the Number 1 best selling Helenium. Luc has bigger, brighter, longer lasting flowers; starts flowering earlier and doesn’t need staking. So far it has failed to make an impact on garden centre stock lists, but it is a crowd pleaser in our garden.

Our collection is planted throughout our small rural garden in Hankelow Cheshire in free-draining sandy silt enriched with compost where possible. The other UK National Collection (Martin Hughes-Jones, Holbrook Garden, Devon) grows on heavy clay, so between the two of us we can say Heleniums grow on most types of soil. Cold hardiness isn’t a problem for established plants. If planting after late summer it may help to cut the flowering stems to the ground to promote dormant buds on the rootstock to burst producing new shoots and with them new roots. Otherwise keep in a pot in cold frame until spring.

Our collection is normally open for a weekend in August plus we open on several weekends between June and September for the National Garden Scheme. Groups (15+) are welcome to visit at other times by appointment. Full information about the collection can be found on our website www.specialperennials.com where you can also select plants to buy by mail order, collected from us or delivered to a plant fair. Martin gives fully illustrated talks on the collection and on a range of perennial plant topics.

Figure 5 National Collection in August



Just to show we are truly gluttons for punishment we have just applied for National Collection status for Centaurea. Martin is also Collections Coordinator for Cheshire.

Please note the current directory has our contact details incorrect:

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