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A helianthus by any other name – full circle

Helen Mount
takes another look at
Helianthus

Readers may remember in the spring issue I described the problems in identifying a *Helianthus* called *H.* 'Happy Days', *H. x multiflorus anemoneflorus* 'Flore Plena', *H.* 'Shall we Dance', *H.* Capenoch Star' and *H.* 'Capenoch Supreme' among others. There have been developments!

Too late to add anything before publication, I was fortunate to attend a workshop at RHS Lindley Library. Attendees had been asked in advance about any particular interest they wished to pursue, and I asked for 'Anemone-centred *Helianthus* cultivars'.

On the day the librarians apologised that their search hadn't thrown up many references related to my request, but I was able to start looking at a little of the information. Unfortunately that didn't throw up any more leads to the identity of the plant, but I took away my list.

Some days later when perusing the list again I noticed that one reference was an article in a past HPS journal, *The Hardy Plant*. Did I still have it? No I didn't, so I asked around and a few weeks later I had been loaned two copies.

The article in question had appeared in the Autumn 1999 edition [Vol. 21 No. 2] entitled *Some Perennial Sunflowers* (fig. 1), and I wasn't very hopeful that it would help. But to my delight it gave a very thorough investigation of the various cultivars resulting from the authors' frustration in obtaining many wrongly-

named plants. The article was written by Rolf Offenthal and Klaus Kaiser, and it was Mr. Offenthal whom I had originally contacted, via the RHS, and who had informed me that the Conservation Scheme plant was *H. x multiflorus* 'Meteor'.



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Helianthus x multiflorus cultivars (see pages 39-43)
Top row, left to right: *H. x multiflorus*; *H.* 'Capenoch Star'; *H.* 'Meteor'.
Second row: *H.* 'Triomphe de Gand'; *H.* 'Anemoneflorus Flore Pleno' (twice).
Third row: *H.* 'John Davies'; *H.* 'Lodlon Gold'; *H.* 'Maximus Plenus'.
Bottom row: *H.* 'Soleil d'Or'; *H.* 'Duplex'; *H.* 'Corona Dorica'.

Fig. 1 *Helianthus x multiflorus* 'Meteor' illustrated in the 1999 article.



Fig. 2 *Helianthus* with mostly notched petals.

In the article 'Meteor' is described thus: 'The well-known German nurseryman George Arends from Ronsdorf-Wuppertal discovered an anemone-flowered sport on 'Soleil d'Or' in about 1894–5 which he named 'Meteor'... This cultivar too, later received another name, 'Supreme', which is invalid. 'Meteor' is still among the best *Helianthus* cultivars.'

It was fascinating reading and well illustrated, showing the differences between the many cultivars and confirming the identity of our Conservation Scheme plant. It was also interesting to read the comments about *H. 'Capenoch Star'*, described as originating in England in about 1938, having single flowers but a tendency 'to revert to 'Meteor'-like type.' That may explain the possibility of two different clones circulating in the Scheme.

But there is a final twist in the tale. I went into the garden yesterday (6th August, not 1st April) to look at my clump of *Helianthus* as it had just started to flower, and you'll probably find this next piece of information as difficult to believe as I did.

Of the dozen or so flowers open on the plant, I found no less than four distinctly



Fig. 3 *Helianthus* flower without the notched petals. (A couple of petals top right have been nibbled; they are not notched.)

different forms! At the beginning of my quest for the true identity I was assured that the Conservation plant had flowers with notches at the end of the petals. Sure enough I found a few flowers with notches at the end of the petals – see Fig. 2.

Looking a little closer I found flowers without notches on the petals as in Fig. 3.

Then I observed a completely different flower altogether which was a slightly smaller diameter than the other two, but with finely divided rays of petals surrounding the 'anemone centre' – see Fig. 4.

I looked a little further round the plant and discovered an even greater difference in a flower that was completely double and nothing like the others apart from the colour – see Fig. 5.

I tried to delve into the clump in order to establish whether it was all part of the same plant or whether these flowering stems could have belonged to different plants, but the growth is so thick it's impossible to tell. The different flowers (I know they should be called inflorescences) could be sports, or they could be the result of seeds dropping into



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Fig. 4 Getting harder to believe – a completely different flower form which looks like it even has a contrasting centre to Figs 1 & 2.



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Fig. 5 No, I haven't stuck a yellow dahlia in the middle of *Helianthus* foliage! This is the fourth flower form on what I believe to be the same plant.

the existing clump, but whatever they are, I await with a certain amount of incredulity what will appear next when another bud opens.

So there's the story so far. I am grateful to the RHS Lindley Library staff for putting me on the right trail and also to Joan Cooper and Cliff Powlesland for the loan of the Journals, not to mention Rolf Offenthal and Klaus Kaiser.

From my limited quest I have discovered:

- *Helianthus* cultivar names are extremely complex, made more challenging by their tendency to throw up sports
- Labelling of many *Helianthus* is inaccurate and the 1999 article should shed some light in identification
- The internet confuses the issue further
- Never throw away past HPS Journals!

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