

# SIX GERANIUMS IN MY GARDEN

*Jenny Spence*

I have nearly 150 different geraniums in my garden, although some are still in pots waiting for me to find a space in a border...and I think I've lost some in this summer's drought [2018], so choosing just six was quite a challenge. These are not necessarily the showiest, or the longest flowering, but they are my favourites.

## 1) *Geranium aristatum*

This is my joint all-time favourite geranium. The flowers are on the small side, but they are exquisite. They appear quite early in the year, held out on long stems like little upside down parasols. Lilac-rose in colour, the petals are sharply reflexed; the tone is darkest in the centre, with strong veins sweeping outwards - you will often find them described as 'regency-striped'.

My plant is growing in a small bed (about one square metre, surrounded by paving and a wall) that used to be a 'mini-bog garden' in that it had butyl liner in it that was supposed to keep the moisture in. I think it probably was just not large or deep enough, because every summer it would dry out, liner notwithstanding. So I've taken the liner out and replanted with (mostly) geraniums, and *G. aristatum* loves it there.



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*G. aristatum*

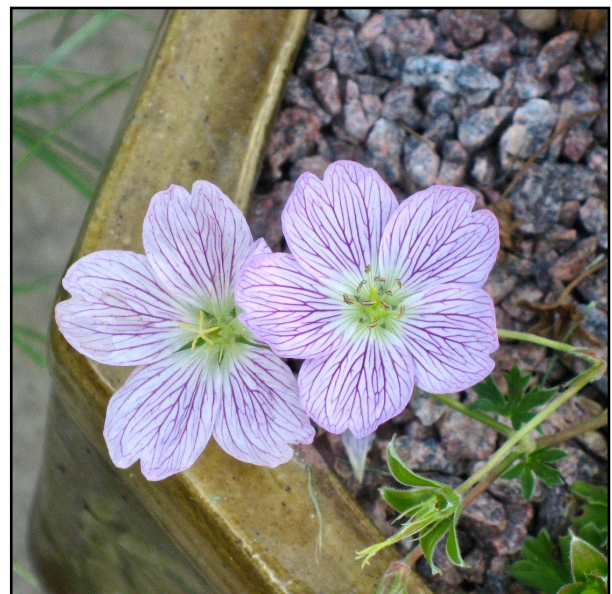
It is prolific in flowering and produces lots of seed, although to date I haven't been very successful in getting it to germinate, and those that did died as seedlings. If you've had seed through the Seed Exchange and have been successful, then please let me know how you did it! The seed is very similar to *Erodium* in that the awn (tail) curls (although not as corkscrew as, for example, *E. manescavii*) and launches itself off with the seed attached, rather than catapulting out just the seed. I'd like to be able to propagate it by seed as the plant itself seems quite slow to spread for division.

## 2) *Geranium* (Cinereum Group)

OK, I'm cheating here as I'm going to include four different ones under the one heading. I garden on heavy clay on a very high water table - it's very fertile and rarely dries out, but it does mean I cannot grow anything in the least bit difficult directly in the soil as they just rot away in the winter. So all my *cinereum* types have to grow in pots, which thankfully they do quite happily.

The first one is *G. 'Lizabeth'*, which I love because it's different from others in that it doesn't have a dark centre. The petals are palest pink with darker pink veining; the centre is white with pale green style and ovaries. The overall effect is very pale, almost white.

The next is *G. 'Purple Pillow'*, almost the complete opposite of 'Lizabeth'. The petals are dark pink with darker veining which feeds into the almost-black centre. Often described as 'reddish', it's really sumptuous dark pink-purple.



*G. cinereum* 'Lizabeth'



*G. cinereum*  
'ROTHBURY GEM'



*G. cinereum*  
'Purple Pillow'



*G. cinereum*  
'Thumbling Hearts'

I grow these two in their dark grey pots in a group with the third, *G. ROTHBURY GEM* = ['Gerfos'], which complements them beautifully. *ROTHBURY GEM* really is a gem of a plant, with a deep pink centre sending out streaks of dark pink contrasting with the pale pink petals. As the contrast is in the form of thin stripes rather than veining, the overall effect is two-tone.

The last one is probably my favourite of these. Similar to *G. ROTHBURY GEM*, *G. 'Thumbling Hearts'* has a much larger dark centre and correspondingly shorter streaks. I think the overall colour is slightly more purple too. I actually bought this as 'Thumping Heart' but the Registrar has 'Thumbling Hearts' as the accepted name and I do remember reading somewhere that it was supposed to be called 'Thumping Hearts' but when it was registered there was a typo. I don't really care what it's called, it's still gorgeous.

Every year these four flower their socks off, giving me a second flush when, or if, I get around to removing the spent stems. Every year they die off looking brown and shrivelled and I think I've killed them, and every year they sprout out again and surprise me!

### 3) *Geranium* DRAGON HEART = ['Bremdra']

This one ties with *G. aristatum* to be my all-time favourite hardy geranium. It's almost completely opposite to it; the flowers are large and luminously bright magenta with dark centres and the plant sprawls lusciously.

*G. DRAGON HEART* is a *psilostemon/procurrens* hybrid and I've chosen it over *G. 'Red Admiral'* (which I also adore) because of the intensity of colour and the hugeness of the flowers. It hasn't done so well in my border the last couple of years because it's been rather overrun by other things. I bought it because I loved it and popped it in a much-too-small space to stop it dying in its pot, but it really deserves a bit more room. I should have waited until I had a suitable position for it but my husband periodically forbids me to buy any more plants until I've planted the ones I've already bought. I have circumvented this for now by keeping them at the bottom of the garden where he



*G. DRAGON HEART*

doesn't really go, instead of by the back door where he falls over them.

But I digress - in my mother's garden (about a mile away on similar clay soil but not quite as wet), *G. DRAGON HEART* has been absolutely stunning this year [2018]; a mass of intense colour throughout the dryness of the summer.

#### 4) *Geranium himalayense* 'Derrick Cook'

This is just beautiful in flower. Again the flowers are huge, but this time white with prominent streaks of purple from the centre.

I find the foliage is rather sparse, but this might be due to its position. I have a 'shade' border planted with a blue and white theme. It's not as shady as I had planned, with only the very centre being shaded for most of the day, so I thought *himalayense* types should do well. *G. himalayense* 'Gravetye', which is next to it, is prolific in foliage and flower, but Derrick isn't. It might have something to do with the fact that I'm too impatient to let it bulk up before trying to propagate it! On the other hand, Derrick doesn't suffer from flea beetle as much (maybe because there's less of it for them to eat?).



*G. 'Derrick Cook'*

#### 5) *Geranium yoshinoi*

This is a favourite not because of its looks, but because of its story. Many years ago, my mother obtained seed from RHS Wisley which was listed as *Geranium yesoense*. It turned out not to be *yesoense* and my mother queried it with the RHS. They had it identified by Peter Yeo in 1997 and he found it to be *yoshinoi*. The plant in question has very pale pink flowers.

I have talked about *yoshinoi* to a number of other Hardy Geranium Group members and they all think of it as a rather weedy plant with magenta pink flowers. This confusion has probably arisen from the Wisley seedlist, as they had 'yoshinoi' listed from a magenta-pink flowered plant sent to them from Hiroshima Botanic Garden, which Yeo identified in 1997 as a small-flowered *G. thunbergii* instead. A quick search on the internet shows hardly any sellers and they all seem to be the magenta-pink flowered plant, so the mistake has clearly proliferated.



*G. yoshinoi*

My mother and I both have plants in our gardens, and I have one seedling potted up that is now in flower. I sent mine off last year to the RHS to be identified and it has been confirmed that it is indeed still the true *yoshinoi*.

Unfortunately it seems to be very shy to set seed - lots of flower, but hardly any seedheads. It's an attractive little plant; the sturdy stems appear crooked as they change direction at each pair of leaves. The flowers are delicately pretty, although only about 1cm across, and it's wider than it is tall.

As I write this, my main plant has started to flower and is covered with buds (it's a relatively late flowerer, going from July to the frosts) and I am attempting to hand-pollinate - rather inexpertly! - in order to try to encourage more seedheads. If I get enough I will put them into the Seed Exchange for people to grow, as I suspect this particular plant will be quite scarce in cultivation and it would be a shame for it to disappear.

## 6) *Geranium phaeum* 'Mulberry Rose'

My last choice is a self-indulgence. I took a piece of a plant from my mother's garden which was labelled *G. phaeum* 'Rose Air'. Well, it wasn't 'Rose Air' at all! The flowers were sufficiently pretty and different for me to want to name it, so that's what I have done.

'Mulberry Rose' is named after my house (the Mulberry bit) and my grandmother (the Rose bit, which is also the colour of the flower).

The leaves are a mid green, with no markings. The flowers are a clear rose-pink, shading to white in the centre. There is a wide dark violet halo around the centre part of the flower, which bleeds along the veins onto the white part of the petal. It is superficially similar to *G. 'Majus'* but the flowers are rose-pink and the violet halo much darker.

I know there are many, many named *phaeums*, but I thought this was sufficiently different to be worth it!



***G. 'Mulberry Rose'***