

Now.....temptation time!

What to grow? The choice is enormous and growing all the time, my current breeding lines include coloured leaf forms, scented types and red-and-yellow doubles. Here's some favourites:

Introduced by Touchwood *stellata* forms star forms, or as 'clematis-flowered'. Strange: the flower is flat. Delicate but it is decidedly different! 'Blue Fountain' is marbled blue-purple;

'Touchwood Dreamtime' pink with cream & green tips, and 'Sweet Dreams' is the same flower with variegated leaves.

'Flamboyant' Incredible, large double pink & white scented flowers!

'Elegance' gold leaf leaf, with elegantly held 'black' flowers; & its close relations, all with golden leaves: 'Elegant Ruby'; 'Elegant Moonstone' (marbled blue) & 'Elegant Opal' (white).

Touchwood Treasures No cultivars yet, but you can buy seeds from my golden doubles, including red & yellow, purple& yellow and black & yellow, all wonderful, extremely rare, desirable & perennial.

Other recommendations: White flowers, single. Simply lovely.

'William Guinness' (syn 'Magpie') 'black'-and-white single.

'Strawberry Icecream' Exceedingly neat, pleated pink-&-white double, the colour changing halfway up the petals.

'Nora Barlow'. An 'ancient' form, a spiky pompom shape. Each sepal shades from green through cream to rose-pink. Also "Barlow relatives"

Vervaneana group Are ones with variegated (eg 'Woodside') or golden foliage. Look for 'Golden Guinness', gold leaf, black and white flowers: fantastic! 'Sunburst Ruby', Gold leaf, ruby double 'Roman Bronze', gold leaf, indigo pleated double, 'Burnished Rose' gold leaf, pink pleated double, 'Mellow Yellow', gold leaf, white double.

Pom-pom forms Beautiful very full double flowers.

Aquilegia chrysantha Large long spurred yellow flowers, perennial.

Long-spurred ones I find difficult in my conditions, many not surviving the first year. Do try them though as they are dramatic in size and colours. I'm growing more myself and selecting those that do well.

Don't forget that the lighter ones show up better in the garden.

Carrie's Contact Information: Please see bottom of page 3.

Aquilegias

(Granny's Bonnets, Columbines)

Information by Carrie Thomas, www.touchwoodplants.co.uk

National Plant Collection Holder of *Aquilegia vulgaris* cultivars & of *Aquilegia* hybrids

Featured: 'Gardens Illustrated' May 2013, 'Garden News' May 2012

Introduction

Aquilegias have been popular garden plants for many centuries. Unusual forms of our native granny's bonnet were not just collected here in the British cottager's garden, but across Europe. It has always been the unusual colours and the double forms that are always most sought after. There are very many species available indeed, but my collections are made more manageable by just including the cultivars our British native: *Aquilegia vulgaris* in the first one. The second collection recognises the work I am doing in breeding golden doubles, mainly bicoloured ones.

Variability!

Aquilegias both self-pollinate, and interbreed, even between different species. Therefore the naming of cultivars is difficult as many wrongly named plants and synonyms (same name for what appears to be the identical plant) exist. Particular trouble stems from Aquilegias needing to be raised from seed (rather than being vegetatively propagated like most Plant Heritage collections). Seedlings always show natural variability but it is compounded in two ways with *Aquilegia* hybrids. Firstly, the plants are able to easily cross-pollinate between the species (and cultivars), and so, as seed production is invariably by open pollination, bumble bees are busy cross-pollinating and ensure liberal mixing of genes in the next generation. Offspring are thus unlikely to resemble the seed parent in all aspects. Secondly, cultivars are complex

hybrids, and may contain many recessive ('hidden') genes. This means that even if a plant was 'selfed' (that is, its own pollen used to fertilise itself), not all progeny would look the same. This is because offspring will show 'throwbacks' where recessive genes are exerting their effect, in the same way that two brown-eyed parents can (legitimately!) have a blue-eyed child. **Thus, never label an Aquilegia plant with a name until it has flowered and you are sure that it appears true to type.** Thank you.

Touchwood Treasures

The large American long-spurred aquilegias come in brighter colours than our native granny's bonnet, and also introduce the yellow into the flowering spectrum. But I find them difficult to get through the first winter here, and many will flower and die. However, I am breeding these sorts with doubles to give a range of easy and long-lived plants. Some show hybrid vigour in reaching about 5'5" (160cms) tall, a real bonus in the garden! Over the years of my breeding I have a range of golden doubles, mostly bicolours of yellow teamed with pink, red, purple or "black". Another advantage of these is that most flower a little later than the usual types, so extending the season.

Unlike most breeders I am willing to share the seeds even before I have stable cultivars (which may take my lifetime). So you may buy seeds from specific parents and have as much excitement as I do seeing what comes up! Expect (on average) 20% or more to be coloured similarly to the parent plant, so eg a red & yellow double, although the shades and type of doubling, height, etc, may differ.

Useful References

There is a monograph, dealing primarily with the species: 'Columbines: aquilegias, paraquilegia and semiaquilegia' by Robert Nold, Timber Press ISBN 0-88192-588-8 £20.00 or my DVD 'A Guide to Aquilegias: sowing, growing and breeding' 90 mins, RRP £14.99. Touchwood aquilegias are usually featured in a UK gardening magazine, each year and were on Gardeners' World TV in 2007, & S4C in 2012.

For e-mail special interest group, join at:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/aquilegiachatlist/>

Propagation

If you are already getting decent results sowing Aquilegia seed, keep on doing what you're doing! I sow in winter, starting whenever I receive seeds, anytime after Christmas. I keep the 3" pots in an unheated greenhouse. Then I wait. They'll come up in their own good time.

Here in the UK, if you sow in January they will take 2-3 months to germinate as temperatures rise. They won't mind if they get frozen, just ensure the top of the compost doesn't dry out around germination time. Alternatively, sowing in May expect germination in about a month.

Thin out seedlings to a reasonable number, certainly not more than twice the number you will 'need'. You can discard the green-leafed forms from coloured-leaf cultivars at this time (and for *A. vulgaris* white flowered cultivars (or marbled blue or marbled red), select seedlings with no purple in their leaf stems). Prick out when large enough to handle (don't leave too long as root growth is rapid). First soak the pot with water, then tip out the contents and tease seedlings apart from the edge of the compost ball, planting into long holes to accommodate their tap-roots. I even prick out at the seedling-leaf (cotyledon) stage sometimes. I place them directly where they are to grow on: either in nursery rows in the garden or in grow-bags. This means I need to 'harden off' seedlings for a couple of weeks beforehand in a relatively protected area.

Planting into flowering positions may be done at any time from autumn to spring before the flowering shoot appears (though plants can be forgiving even when moved in first-flower stage, if treated understandingly). I have to pot each one up and keep until it flowers in May so that I know they are 'true-to-type' and can be correctly named and put into the collection.

NB Other growers advocate sowing seed immediately when ripe, otherwise a considerable drop in viability occurs. This may well be more important for other species.

Carrie's Contact Information

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