

A Flavour of Geums

The name Geum comes from ancient Greek meaning to add flavour; and long after we've ceased to add them to food or drinks they are still invaluable for adding flavour to our spring and early summer borders.

Geums are members of the rose family and a look at the centres of flowers with all those stamens confirms this – just like a dog rose. Not that Geum grow like roses!



There are low growing ones they spread to form a mat of leaves and there are taller ones creating an arching leafed clump about 1ft / 30cm tall. And of course, as Geums are promiscuous there are crosses between the two resulting in plants somewhat between the two!



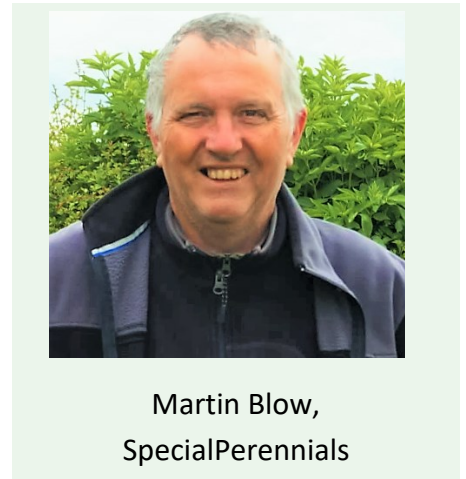
All prefer a moisture retentive soil and the low growing ones can stand quite wet soils. They will tolerate dry conditions but they will flag in the hot, dry conditions.

Geums will set seed and some wild types can become a nuisance in damp gardens. On the whole the cultivated varieties are less plentiful of seed and seedlings. Their ability to cross and set seed means there is always the chance of spotting a good new form in your garden if you grow plenty of different types but this also means that some won't come true from seed.

It seems there is a never ending supply of new types coming onto the market every year. Not every new variety in the catalogues is actual that different or that good so I have selected some of my favourite new and old varieties for you.

I'll start with the bushier types and these are also some of the oldest varieties around. They also have the bonus of coming true from seed. The best known and loved is the single or semi-double scarlet flowered "**Mrs. J. Bradshaw**" (1) who grows to about 1ft tall with longer arching flower stems. The apricot yellow "**Lady Stratheden**" is almost as famous, as is the orange "**Dolly North**" (2). Also worth trying is the semi- or fully double "**Blazing Sunset**" although the flowers are a little variable in fullness. This type flowers in late spring through to mid-summer and sometime beyond and the flowers are large and showy for a Geum.

The low growing varieties are mainly descendants of the native water



Martin Blow,
SpecialPerennials

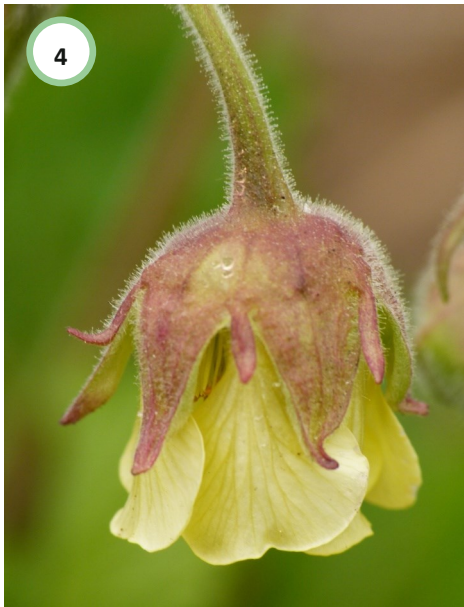
avens, Geum rivale and ideally these want a moist soil but they seem to do fine in my dry sandy soil provided I water from time to time in summer. These plants tend to have flowers that are small nodding bells on short stems in spring and sometimes again in autumn.

"**Barbra Lawton**" (3) is an improved form of the wild plant with far more of the peachy-pink nodding flowers.

"**Lemon Drops**" (4) is a very pale yellow which popped up as a chance seedling in Beth Chatto's famous



garden. "**Album**" is wild variation with greenish-white bells, but better still is "**Snowflake**" (5) with larger, pure white flowers. "**Farmer John Cross**" has larger, and sometimes



semi-double, primrose yellow flowers.

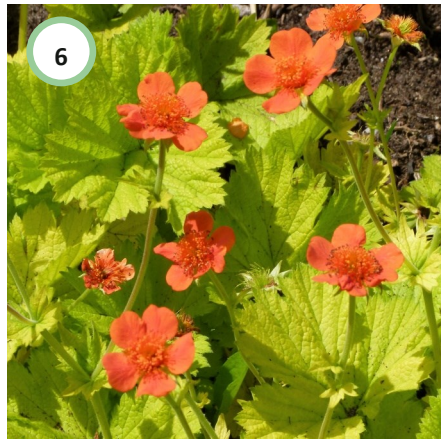
Geum coccineum has larger, upward-facing orange flowers and will stand drier soils. For the best show choose **"Eos" (6)** which has bright yellow leaves in spring to set off the flowers.

The best hybrids share this tendency for larger, upward or outward facing flowers creating a more dramatic



show, not to disparage the delicate beauty of the nodding types. **"Abendsonne"** has orange-yellow flowers, **"Hannays" (7)** is a bit taller and has soft orange flowers. The well known **"Bell Bank" (8)** is silky pink.

Of the new varieties coming along the Cocktail Series has some intoxicating colours. **"Mai Tai" (9)** is pale peach and large-flowered, **"Cosmopolitan" (10)** is a slightly



deeper shade, **"Tequila Sunrise"** is red and yellow and **"Banana Daquiri"** is a lovely pale yellow.

If promptly dead headed these Geums will bloom again later in the



season, provided they have not been left too dry through the summer.

Geums are pretty tough customers with very few problems, and none likely to be fatal. Mildew (white powder on the leaves) is possible if your soil is really dry. I just cut off all the old leaves and give them a feed and good watering. Occasionally tiny caterpillars of a saw fly may infest the new growth skeletonising the

leaves. If I spot this, it is easy enough to rub off the pests between finger



and thumb. In wet winter soils vine weevil may eat the roots. The outward sign of attack is a general lack of growth. I find that the plants are tough enough to survive and can be replanted once the grubs are removed from the soil.

I hope this has given you a flavour of the variety of geums available and a taste for these lovely flowering is your garden.

We will have a good selection at the earlier Plant Hunters' Fairs.