

# Aquilegia For All



Chris Eyke of Lyneal Mill Nursery  
on the many faces of the familiar  
columbine

Aquilegia "Black Barlow" was bred for  
cut flower production and will last for  
up to two weeks in a vase

The most frequent remark from customers when we bring our Aquilegia to Plant Hunters Fairs is 'I didn't know there were so many'. But they are available in just about every flower colour you can think of, with heights ranging from around 3 inches to over 3 feet and single, double, pompom, pleated, spurless, short spurred and long spurred flower forms, the variety of Aquilegia is almost endless.

Aquilegia are Northern hemisphere plants and have a wide geographical spread growing in diverse habitats. They can't all be treated in the same way.



Aquilegia chrysantha will tolerate quite dry conditions

The alpine types such as *A. laramiense* (Wyoming USA), *A. pyrenaica* (Pyrenees) and *A. flabellata* (Japanese mountains) need a gritty well drained, quite low nutrient compost. In rich soils the leaves can become too lush and may obscure the flowers. They are best grown in containers and plunged into a border or scree bed from April-October or stood in a sunny spot on the patio. Move them into an unheated greenhouse for the winter. They can take any amount of cold but dislike winter wet.

Most other Aquilegia broadly speaking prefer a moist well drained soil that doesn't become overly wet in winter. Full sun or dappled shade, though species originating in open woodland

such as *A. canadensis* (Eastern N. America) will tolerate more shade than others. Most flower from May-June. However some species such as *A. flabellata* flower from late April, while *A. chrysantha* 'Denver Gold' flowers up to mid September. Dead heading and mulching are advisable but apart from that Aquilegia are pretty much maintenance free.



'Bordeaux Barlow' was particularly popular at Chelsea in 2015

At about 10 inches *A. canadensis* 'Little Lanterns' with deep red and yellow nodding flowers was my favourite Aquilegia in 2015. It looked great in the dappled shade of our birch trees and I'll be using it more extensively in 2016.

Around 18 inches and suitable for the front/middle of a sunny or lightly shaded border are *A. caerulea* (Rocky Mountains) and its varieties. Of these 'Sunshine' with a mass of double, lemon yellow, long spurred flowers over a compact mound of delicate foliage in my opinion is one of the best.

The Winky series (*A. vulgaris*) at about 15 inches produce a profusion of upward facing flowers held above a mound of lacy leaves. Good in containers or front of border. It makes an excellent cut flower. The flowers are bicoloured, the most popular being red and white, also available in other colours and double flowered varieties.

Always popular, *A. chrysantha*



'Sunshine' has a mass of flowers and some of best foliage

'Yellow Queen' from New Mexico, USA, at about 2 foot 9 inches is more suitable for mid to back of border. Huge long spurred yellow flowers, almost 3 inches across. A late season plant flowering well into August in our garden. Yellow Queen will tolerate quite dry conditions.

Aquilegia were used extensively at Chelsea in 2015, particularly *A. vulgaris* 'Black Barlow' and *A. vulgaris* 'Bordeaux Barlow' a lovely rich red wine colour. Double spurless flowers, they were bred for cut flower production and will last for up to two weeks in a vase. Caution required when cutting though as Aquilegia sap can irritate the skin. These two plants look good when used en-masse at the back of borders or in association with grasses.



'Little Lanterns' looks great dappled shade under birch trees

Other tall Aquilegia that proved very popular at Plant Hunters Fairs in 2015 were the pompom and double pleated forms. Pink Petticoat at almost 3 feet and large blooms was amongst





The "Winky Series" have upward facing flowers

the most impressive of our pleated Aquilegia but for the number of pleats in the flowers Double Pleat Blackberry reigned supreme.

Here at Lyneal Mill we grow a large range of Aquilegia, far too many to bring to Plant Hunters Fairs. With that in mind for the enthusiast and curious alike we will be holding Aquilegia days in May and June 2016, all of our varieties will be on display. Please see our website for

details, [www.british-wildflowers.com](http://www.british-wildflowers.com)

You can meet Lyneal Mill at lots of Plant Hunters' Fairs in 2016. Please see our website for details