

Odds On Favourites

Hardy Geranium specialist Linda Scott picks us a couple of winners from the pack



I have been growing and selling plants for the past 15 years and this year am delighted to have been invited by Janet and Martin to join their Plant Hunters' Fairs.

My speciality is Hardy Geraniums and my favourites are not the modern hybrids (though I do like these too) but the species *Geranium versicolor* and *Geranium palmatum*.

Versicolor is a versatile, clump



Geranium versicolor is versatile, clump-forming, growing in sun or part shade

forming European species that will grow in full sun or part shade. The funnel shaped flowers are not huge but appear profusely all summer and are white with intricate purple veining. It is quite a vigorous

plant providing good ground cover and doesn't mind being cut back if it starts to look untidy. It will hybridise readily, in fact all the *Geranium oxonianum* hybrids have *versicolor* as one of their parents, the other being *endressii*. So if you have room to let the seedlings grow you may end up with a brand new, original plant.

In contrast, *Geranium palmatum* is a large evergreen, up to 4ft./120cm. when in flower, and will likely die if cut back. It is said to need full sun and well drained soil but grows happily on my clay in dappled shade under trees. Many large pink blooms are produced during summer attracting hummingbird hawkmoth, though I would grow it for the large exotic foliage alone. A lot of people confuse *palmatum* with the tender *Geranium maderense* and think it isn't hardy. They are in good company as the R.H.S. thought this too until a few years ago. Both plants are from Madeira and look similar, *maderense* growing in low lying areas and *palmatum* in the hills, though when mature *maderense* has a tall main stem and looks like a miniature palm tree, whereas *palmatum* stays as a basal rosette.



The giant *Geranium palmatum* has survived -15c with Linda

In 2002 the R.H.S. asked us to send some geraniums for the Wisley trials but didn't include *palmatum* as they thought it wasn't hardy. After explaining that it had survived -15 C in pots here they agreed to trial it, and on completion of the trial gave it an Award of Garden Merit.

Anyway, that's just a couple of the many hundreds of Hardy Geraniums available to grow in our gardens. Whatever conditions you have in your garden (with the exception of bogs and ponds) there is a Geranium that will grow there.

I look forward to meeting many of you at the fairs.