

# Shepherding Your Phlox

## Martin Blow of SpecialPerennials give us his top tips for getting started with border Phlox

Border Phlox are old fashioned plants with a bright new future as gardeners switch to perennials with great scent, hardy disposition and minimal care requirements.

Phlox hate being in pots so buy in spring and plant out before they become root-bound. They also hate being in greenhouses so avoid “pumped-up” plants forced on in heat.

The first key to success is as always planning. We’re all guilty of impulse buys at plant fairs (how else have I ended up with over 40 varieties of Phlox in the garden) but once you’ve got the plants home, stop and think. Phlox are very long-lived plants and although easy to move they will always leave behind roots that will send up new plants –so plan where you want them to grow first. The ideal site is sunny, with rich, well-dug soil with perhaps a little late afternoon shade to protect them from the extremes of summer heat. In practice they get some sun or a little light shade in my garden and do pretty well in either.

Enriching the soil with compost dug into the top 1ft of soil will do wonders for the plants. I find the chalk in mushroom compost helps to reduce mildew problems. Also give the plants some space if possible to improve air circulation.

If you can bear it you can reduce the number of stems on established plants to 5-7, this gives larger trusses of flowers and improves air circulation.

Water the ground not the plant and try and use water at air temperature (say from a water butt, or a can filled a few hours before) rather than an icy blast from a hosepipe.

Dead head as trusses go over and usually side shoots will come on to give you more flower.

At the end of the season cut down the stems to ground level and put them in the council green waste bin rather than the compost heap to avoid carrying any pests or diseases from season to season.

There are 100’s of varieties to choose from and often it’s the old, heritage varieties that are new to our nursery range as they are “rediscovered” growing in happy neglect in an old garden. This year we are reintroducing the old German varieties Sternhimmel (Starry Sky) and Lavendelwolke (Lavender Cloud) to go with Monte Cristallo and Kirchenfürst.

The recent RHS trial of Phlox is bound to create some new superstars and the inside track is that Flamingo was the star of the show at Wisley and we are adding her to our list for 2014.



Sternhimmel (Starry Sky)



Monte Cristallo



Flamingo

