



Evaluation Notes

Appraisal of Hardy Bellflowers

Blue is a much coveted flower color in the gardening world, and campanulas, or bellflowers, offer a wonderful palette of blue to fulfill a gardener's desire. Their distinctive blossoms come in hues of blue and violet, from the deepest purple to softest gray blue. Furthermore, an array of plant habits, adaptable to a variety of cultural conditions, ensures there is a bellflower for a range of garden uses.

Campanula is a large, multifarious genus in the bellflower family (Campanulaceae), with approximately 300 annual, biennial, and perennial species native to high mountains, meadows, or woodlands in temperate regions of the Northern Hemisphere. *Campanula* species are most commonly called bellflowers, although some are known as harebells or bluebells.

Their flowers are predominately bell-shaped, or campanulate, but can be cup-, bowl-, tubular-bell-, or star-shaped. The vertical lobes may be shallow to deeply cut, thus enhancing the cupped, bell, or starry appearance. Flowers are borne singly or in many-flowered inflorescences, and may be upward-facing or nodding in habit.

Pink and white extend the range of flower colors beyond blue. Bellflowers commonly bloom in late spring and summer and sometimes into autumn.

Bellflowers have characteristically different basal and stem leaves. Basal leaves may be oval, round, lanceolate, or heart-shaped, and are usually larger, long-petioled, and often toothed. Basal leaves of some species, such as *Campanula trachelium*, *C. medium*, and *C. rotundifolia*, wither during the flowering period. Stem leaves are usually simple, smaller in size, and either short-stalked or sessile. Foliar color ranges from light to dark green with several yellow-leaved forms available. Bellflowers offer a rich diversity of plant habits, too—from small, tufted alpine species to statuesque border plants, and from clump-formers to rambling spreaders.

Whether grown in full sun or light shade, bellflowers are generally easy to grow and trouble-free in well-drained, alkaline soils. Bellflowers do not tolerate soggy soils, although some species such as *Campanula trachelium*, *C. medium*, and *C. rotundifolia* prefer moist soils. Sodden soils,

especially in winter months, will cause root rot. Fertile soils may encourage too much growth for fast-spreading species such as *C. medium*, *C. trachelium*, and *C. rotundifolia*. Deadheading is recommended to encourage rebloom, improve plant health, and reduce or eliminate self-sowing. Slugs, rabbits, and foliar rust can cause health or cosmetic problems for some species.

There are a variety of garden-worthy bellflowers for borders, meadows, and rock gardens. Tall bellflowers such as *Campanula trachelium* and 'Kent Belle' are ideal in the middle to back of the border, whether grouped in drifts or paired with other perennials. *Campanula trachelium* and other small-sized bellflowers are great choices for the front of the bed, in rockeries, or as annualized plants in containers. Low-growing creepers such as *C. rotundifolia* and *C. medium* make good edging plants along walks or beds, and are especially striking on craggy rock walls. The spreading habits of *C. medium*, *C. trachelium*, and *C. rotundifolia* are appropriate as ground covers or for naturalizing but are not well-suited to small or formal gardens. *Campanula trachelium*, *C. medium*, and *C. rotundifolia* thrive in light shade, making them perfect choices for transition zones between sun and shade.

The Evaluation Study

Between 1998 and 2006, the Chicago Botanic Garden (USDA HSDAR-178(i)2006) has recommended outstanding *Campanula* for northern gardens. Sixty-four taxa completed a minimum four-year trial, with more than half of the taxa being evaluated for six years. Wherever possible, nomenclature follows the recommendations of the Royal Horticultural Society.

Eight plants of each taxon were grown in side-by-side plots for easy comparison of ornamental traits and landscape performance. The evaluation site received approximately 10 hours of full sun daily during the growing season and was open-



Jen Van Wagener

ly exposed to wind in all directions. The clay-loam soil was amended with composted leaves and had a pH of 7.4 throughout the evaluation term. The site was normally well drained, but at times the soil retained excessive moisture for short periods in summer and winter.

Maintenance practices were kept to a minimum to simulate home garden culture, thereby allowing plants to thrive or fail under natural conditions. Water was provided as needed and mulch consisting

