NIC GAR ISSUE 31, 2008

Nation Notes

Appraisal of Hardy Bell owers

lue is a much coveted ower color in the gardening world, and campanulas, or bell owers, offer a wonderful palette of blue to ful ll 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 bell ower for a range of garden uses.

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

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

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

Bell owers have characteristically different basal and stem leaves. Basal leaves may be oval, round, lanceolate, or heartshaped, and are usually larger, long petioled, and often toothed. Basal leaves of some species, such as Ca, a sa ca a ca, e a a, and C. a, wither during the owering 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. Bell owers 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, bell owers are generally easy to grow and trouble free in well-drained, alkaline soils. Bell owers do not tolerate soggy soils, although some species such as Ca, a a a ac a, C. a a, and C. a a prefer moist soils. Sodden soils,

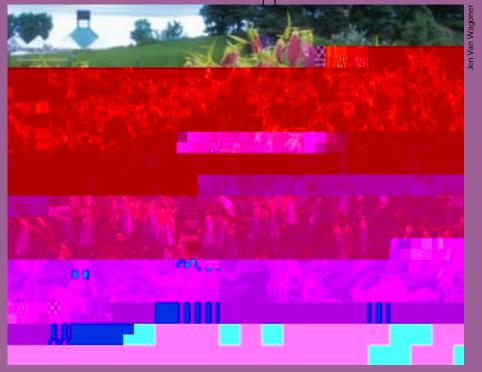
especially in winter months, will cause root rot. Fertile soils may encourage too much growth for fast-spreading species such as C. e a a, C. c a a, and C. a de . Deadheading is recommended to encourage rebloom, improve plant health, and reduce or eliminate self sowing. Slugs, rabbits, and foliar rust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

There are a variety of garden-worthy bell owers for borders, meadows, and rock gardens. Tall bell owers such as Ca, a a and 'Kent Belle' are ideal in the middle to back of the border, whether grouped in drifts or paired with other perennia B. Ca, a sa ca a ca and other small-sized bell owers are great choices for the front of the bed, in rockeries, or as annualized plants in containers. Lowgrowing creepers such as C. calaaa and C. e c a a a make good edging plants along walks or beds, and are especially striking on crannied rock walls. The spreading habits of C. eaa, C.m. ca a, and C. a e a a are appropriate as ground covers or for naturalizing but are not well-suited to small or formal gardens. Ca, a Ta ac |a, C.|a a, and C. a e, a a 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(i2006,)hzsmend outstanding Ca. a rata 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-



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