

# The Archibald Archive – Genus Guides

## DELPHINIUM

At last we seem able to maintain a good range of Delphinium species. Since we first visited California in 1989, we hoped to be able to strike it lucky with seed but it was not until 1995 that we managed a wide variety. We now list cultivated seed from some of these supplemented by new 1998 collections. Collecting a wide range is more a matter of luck than planning or skill. Of course, there are many gaps here - less than half the Californians are listed - but the range this season is truly representative of the immense & unique variation of this genus in the American West. All here are more or less summer-dormant perennials, retiring underground to a variety of rootstocks when it is hot and dry. The wet-growers, *D. glaucum* and *D. trolliifolium*, are likely to remain growing longest in a UK summer but even the dry growers will remain active and in flower for much longer in cooler, moister climates than they do in the wild. The latter could be grown in bulb-frame conditions in summer-wet climates but because of their size the larger ones will have to be attempted in the open garden. Choose as well-drained and as sunny a site as possible for most. Though we have never experienced any difficulties personally, seed-germination has given problems to some in the past. We suggest that they require quite a long cool period. A few degrees above freezing for a couple of months or so should be enough for most. Those from colder areas may need longer. Putting the pots outside in the UK has worked for us. If they do not come up the first year, they come up the next, as with most summer-dormant species. Taxonomically, the genus is difficult with many hybrids. We have found Michael Warnock's account in the new 'Jepson' very workable and realistic so far and the nomenclature used here, for the Californians, follows his assessment of the genus.