

# The Archibald Archive – Genus Guides

## GERANIUM

The cranesbills

This is the core genus of its family Geraniaceae with around 400 species. One must assume that the genus as a whole is of very ancient origin indeed, as species occur in the cool-temperate areas of every continent. We plan to gradually increase the modest range we list from all areas and we are particularly interested in expanding the range of the higher altitude representatives of the genus from the Drakensberg of South Africa. It is only since we started growing and collecting our own cultivated seeds in Wales that we have been able to list a few of this popular and adaptable genus. Collecting wild seed in sufficient quantity to list is exceptionally difficult, as only one or two seed-heads ever seem to be ripe at a time. In cultivation, the same problem exists but can be solved by regular visits, every day or so, over a period of weeks. The existence of a large number of (often very similar) cultivars and their wide availability in the nursery-trade in the UK testifies both to the current popularity of the genus and to its capacity for hybridization. We are only concerned with a few of the wild species of garden value. All of the seeds we list are open-pollinated and some seedlings may show variation through hybridization but these are likely to be exceptions rather than a general rule.

Seed sown in winter or spring usually germinates easily as the temperature rises, though some species can be slower or more irregular in coming up. The majority of the hardy, perennial, herbaceous ones are easily grown, long-flowering garden-plants in the UK and most of the ones we list fall into this category. If any species is more difficult or temperamental in our experience, this is mentioned in the individual descriptions.

Nomenclature and further information: The essential book for the more knowledgeable gardener interested in the wild species is 'Hardy Geraniums' by Peter F. Yeo. It originally appeared in 1985 and a second, revised edition has been published more recently. All the information most of us might need is contained in this. 'The Gardener's Guide to Growing Hardy Geraniums' by Trevor Bath and Joy Jones is a more popular account of the genus. It uses Peter Yeo's nomenclature. 'Perennials' by Roger Phillips and Martyn Rix includes reliable information and some good photographs. All the Geranium species are in Volume 1.