

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 7-23-03 What's Up and Bremerton Patriot) , ©2005

Satisfy your hankering for blue flowers in your garden with easy care Campanula. Most Campanula blooms start out as bell shaped flowers, hence the name; but some are balloon shaped and star shaped. Every shade of blue from palest blue-white to deepest black purple can be found in Campanula varieties. Names like Tussock Bellflower, Fairy Thimbles, Italian Bellflower and Star of Bethlehem hint at the variety of the blooms.

These easy to grow and nearly constant blooming plants are usually perennials, but a few biennials and annuals exist too. The 2001 edition of "Sunset Western Garden Book" has a two page chart for a good overview of all the varieties of Campanula available at most nurseries. I found a whole table full of tempting Campanula in every hue of blue at Savage Plants in Kingston, but I know nearly all our local nurseries carry them and they're all in bloom now so you can decide which plant will suit well in your own gardens.

Campanula 'Samantha' is an intense blue in a star shape with tiny fringed leaves. The leaves are no larger than my smallest fingernail. Each star shaped flower has a nearly black ring in the center set off by white pistils. 'Samantha' will carpet a bed with jewel-like leaves and delight with starry flowers held aloft on four to six inch stems. This Campanula is scented making it a luscious all around plant.

Campanula 'Sarastro' has long stems (twelve to eighteen inches tall) with eight drooping bells on each stem. The blooms are the color of darkest purple eggplants. Campanula 'Hotlips' isn't even blue but will complement blue varieties. Hotlips has tiny fringed leaves too and grows in mounding clusters. The bellflowers are frosty white with a slight hint of pink. Each bell is lined with burgundy speckles.

Another star shaped Campanula in the Carpathian Bellflower category is Campanula Carpatica 'Blue Clips.' This plant should be called "Carpetica" because it literally carpets the ground and would be lovely filling up and spilling out of a container. Campanula Cochlearifolia 'Bavaria Blue' has extremely tiny blue bells and it too is a great candidate for a container planting.

On a website called Botanical.com I discovered that Campanula rapunculus grows wild all over England. This flower (herb) is commonly called Rampion from its Latin name Rapunculus (from the word rapa which means turnip). The roots of this Campanula are said to taste like turnips so the plant is considered an herb. Writings on this plant go back to Shakespeare's time and Falstaff spoke of it. You might not want to plant this variety in your garden if you have children because it's said to incite quarrels in children. In one of Grimm's fairy tales Rapunzel's name is derived from the rampion.

Campanula will survive in just about any growing condition here. The common Campanula most of us receive from the bounty of our friends when they're dividing them frequently will often bloom in shades of white, blue and pink. It's always a surprise to see

what color the buds will show. You might start out with all blue Campanula and then in one or two years you'll find some pinks and whites mixed in. These flowers are wonderful in cut bouquets and last for at least a week.

Platycodon grandiflorus (Balloon Flower) Campanulaceae (Lobeliaceae) – what a long name – is a much desired plant in the Campanula family of plants. The buds look like blue balloons aloft on their green stems. The balloon blooms open up to star shaped blossoms. This plant too will morph into shades of pink and white with time.

Campanula will bloom from June through August and some varieties begin blooming in May. If you cut back the blossoms for bouquets and keep the spent blossoms deadheaded most Campanula will bloom nearly all summer long. All of the plants mentioned today will grow happily in partial shade and can stand quite a bit of sun too. They'll appreciate regular watering until established in your garden but after the first year will do just fine in our Northwest summers. Varieties in a container will need to be watered more often. If you don't already enjoy Campanula in your garden I hope you'll explore the possibilities.

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