

Feb 2016

Document 1

Delphinium Society Trials for Award of Garden Merit (AGM) assessment

The AGM awards by the Royal Horticultural Society have been confined to the results of trials at Wisley until they ended in 2013. The Delphinium Society has decided to put in place a scheme for the assessment of promising seedlings and named cultivars. When the general committee has approved a plant for an AGM, the recommendation will be passed to the Herbaceous Plant Committee of the Royal Horticultural Society for ratification. At present delphinium seed strains cannot be accommodated in this scheme.

This process is possible by discussion alone between experienced growers who have knowledge of the plant in question. No trial is obligatory but from previous discussions it is clear that some form of assessment of delphinium plants by experienced delphinium growers needs to be done in all cases.

Current Proposals.

Firstly a plant will need to be accepted into the process. The member of the society submitting a plant (the owner) will need to produce written evidence, preferably including a photograph, to persuade the review group (**RG**) that it is of sufficient merit. The review group is a small number of experienced growers who will consider the results of those plants under assessment each year.

To start with the **Review Group** will be members who have solid experience of one or more of the following :- professional growers, previous members of the RHS delphinium trials panel which was disbanded in 2013, experienced judges at the national delphinium society shows or established delphinium breeders. This group is responsible to the general committee and all must be members of the general committee. The current members are:

Graham Austin, Roger Beauchamp, Terry Blissett, Keith Boxall, Leslie Cooper, Mark Lyman, Clive Rowe, Terry Woolley and Gordon West.

The scheme organiser is Clive Rowe.

Selection of a plant for the process will be made by the recommendation of a review group member or a group of judges at a delphinium show recognised by the delphinium society. This recommendation will be sent to the review group for them to look at the information and accept or reject the plant for the scheme.

The owner of a plant accepted for the trials will provide rooted cuttings. If the trial is to proceed as quickly as possible about 10 rooted cuttings are requested from the owner. If only one or a few are provided, the trial process will take **much longer** while more plants are propagated from cuttings by the triallists (growers). It may also be more difficult to find a sufficient number of triallists to take part if some propagation is needed initially. The Delphinium Society wants to facilitate the trialling of very good seedlings from members hence this flexibility.

The review group will build up a list of known reliable triallists who are interested in joining the process. Each one in this scheme will send their records taken during flowering time to the scheme organiser by the end of August that year. These triallists will have the privilege of growing this unique plant material and in return they must keep this plant material to themselves. It **must** not be given to a third party. It may only be used for breeding purposes **with the owner's permission**.

It is desirable that these plants will be cultivated for several years but a triallist can withdraw from the scheme at any time. Ideally 2 or 3 plants should be grown at a time and the grower may need to propagate a test plant for this purpose. A test plant should be grown alongside one or more AGM cultivars and it would be helpful to have some record of the performance of one or two of those AGM cultivars as well.

The plants will be grown as a hardy perennial for ordinary garden display with only a generous dose of balanced fertiliser in the spring. Supplementary feeding as in growing show blooms is not required. A reasonable supply of water is essential to achieve good growth. Mulching is optional.

Thinning of trial plants should be as follows:

1st plant - thin to not more than 4 shoots.

2nd plant - thin to not more than 7 shoots.

3rd plant - unthinned.

Effective slug and snail control is needed.

The triallist's annual record should include:

Height of plant

Length and number of spikes

Diameter of basal florets

Comments about floret form, including any splashing on any florets.

Early, mid or late season flowering

Status of laterals

Comments about foliage, degree of mildew resistance, use of anti-mildew measures

Photos will be very helpful

Some measurements of at least one named cultivar, preferably well-known

These records need to be sent to the scheme organiser by the end of August for collating in time for the October committee meeting.

A spike from a plant under trial could be brought to the Delphinium Society's summer show and it would be assessed by the RG. This should help to shorten the period needed to assess the plant for an AGM prior to a final decision by the RG and the general committee.

Comments from the plant's owner about this year's performance will be very useful in the annual review process.

Annual review of the results received by the scheme organiser will be done by the RG prior to the October general committee meeting. The results will be circulated beforehand. The review group will be asked to vote on that year's information on each plant under trial. At present voting will be done in person at the review meeting but comments from those unable to attend will be kept on file as background information for that meeting and the future. Currently there are 9 members on the review group and a quorum will be 5. If a review group meeting is inquorate, voting will still take place and the votes will be added to the next year's votes.

Each member will complete a slip with four options:

- YES for an AGM
- NO for an AGM
- Unable to form an opinion for an AGM
- The plant should be removed from the trial

For a plant to be successful in this assessment the number of YES votes to recommend an AGM in one year will need at least 2:1 in favour and at least 50% of the votes cast must be YES votes.

This YES annual result will need to be repeated twice in three successive years for an AGM recommendation to the Herbaceous Plant Committee of the RHS. If a review group meeting is inquorate it will not count in the three successive years needed to get 2 yes annual results.

50% or more votes to remove a plant from the trial will activate the option after confirmation by the general committee.

The voting slips will not be named. The results of the voting on each plant under trial will be included in the minutes after the item has been discussed at that general committee meeting.

The issue of availability to the general public will be considered after a plant has received two YES results in three years and is ready for referral to the herbaceous plant committee.

This is a new scheme and it is liable to change in the light of experience. Significant changes will only be made by the general committee on the advice of the review group.

Documents in this Trial Scheme

Document 1 - General

Document 2 – This gives details which should help to assess the suitability of a delphinium for these Trials

Document 3 – Application form to submit a delphinium for these trials

Document 4 – The responsibilities of becoming a triallist

Document 5 – A form for a triallist to give the annual results of a trial plant to the review group

Document 6 – List of delphinium cultivars with an Award of Garden Merit in 2014