

# Secrets of the seed list

## Border Campanulas *Margaret Mason*

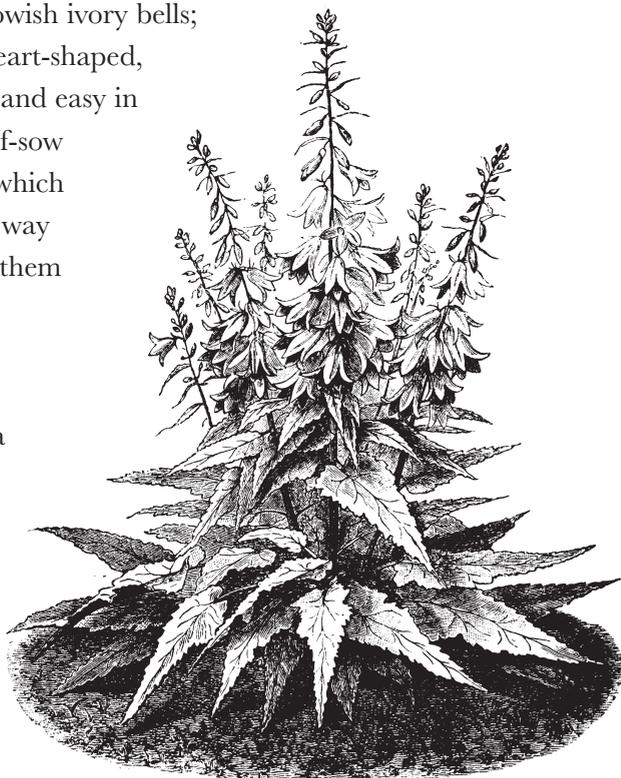
Afficionados of the seed list will doubtless have noticed that we regularly have a number of different Campanulas listed, some with confusingly similar names. While not all of these are uncommon plants, I thought it might be helpful to point up the differences between them for those who are not on intimate terms with the genus.

### *Campanula alliariifolia*

I'm never sure why this is not more common, as it's neat and well-behaved, pretty and easy to grow - and it produces plenty of seed! Not enough of a challenge, perhaps. It's rarely more than 45 cm high, with arching stems dripping narrowish ivory bells; the basal leaves are stalked and heart-shaped, forming a smallish clump. Hardy and easy in a well-drained soil, but doesn't self-sow much. There is also *C. ochroleuca*, which does not seem to me to be in any way different, but I have never grown them together.

### *Campanula* x 'Burghaltii'

This is a bit of a mystery, as it is a hybrid campanula which is supposed to be sterile, but seed purporting to be from it regularly appears, from more than one source. It's possible there is something else in circulation under this name. The true plant is a spreader,



with long, wandering stolons (but not a real thug), and thin, light green leaves; the bells are largish, pendent and in a pleasant lavender-mauve shade, opening from pinkish buds.

### *Campanula lactiflora*

This is a tall campanula with clusters of smallish, flared bells at the tops of stems a metre or more high. The colours are usually soft, including some near greys and mauvy-pinks. It is subtle but solid, hardy and persistent, easy to grow. There are named varieties, including 'Loddon Anna' (pink) and 'Pritchard's Variety' (deep purplish-blue), but although we may have seed of these, the offspring will not resemble the parent exactly and should not be passed on under its name. However, seed from 'Loddon Anna' will usually produce more pinks and pinky-mauves than normal, and offspring of 'Pritchard's Variety' are often deeper in colour.

### *Campanula latiloba*

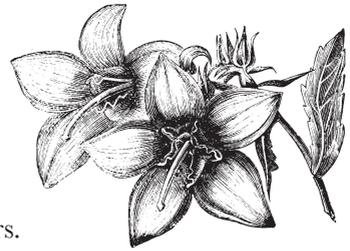
Slightly less tall than *C. lactiflora*, this has glossy leaves and rather stiff stems, clothed with large, open bells which are stemless and thus face outwards. The type is mid-blue, but there is a white form and named varieties, including 'Hidcote Amethyst' (mauve) and 'Percy Piper' (deep blue). The white often comes true from seed. The habit is gently spreading and the plant is hardy, but sometimes will die out for no obvious reason; it's best to divide and replant occasionally.

### *Campanula latifolia*

A native plant, this is around 60cm tall and has a leafy appearance, with large pendent bells, longer and narrower than either *C. lactiflora* or *C. latiloba* towards the tops of the stems. These are most commonly mid blue, but can also be pink or white, all coming true from seed unless they have hybridised with another colour. *C. latifolia* var. *macrantha* is hardly different to the naked eye but has flowers often deeper in colour, and there is a white form of this too. Both should come true. Named forms such as 'Gloaming' (soft light blue), however, do not. Hardy, clump-forming and easy to grow, competing well in wild gardens.

### *Campanula medium*

Good old-fashioned Canterbury bells, these can be pink, blue, white or purple, and either single or semi-doubled in various ways. They are up to about half a metre tall and branched. Being biennial they are always grown from seed, usually in a mixture of colours.



### *Campanula persicifolia*

A very traditional cottage-garden favourite, this is like a slenderer form of *C. latiloba*, with large silver-blue open bells. They have short stems so face out and slightly down. The main stems are less rigid than *C. latiloba*, but the growth habit is similar, and this too benefits from regular division and replanting. There is a white form which comes true from seed and several named forms (including ‘Chettle Charm’, white with a blue edge) which do not. There are also double forms in both blue and white, which generally do not produce seed.

### *Campanula primulifolia*

This is easily grown from seed, but rarely appears on the seed list. It is a good plant, though, with primula-shaped leaves, but hairier, and open, lightish-blue bells with dark centres, facing outwards on stems up to half a metre tall. It is hardy, especially in a light soil, but not terribly persistent, and rarely self-sows. Snap it up if you see it! (And send me the seed...)

### *Campanula pyramidalis*

We haven’t often had this on the seed list, which suggests it’s probably not as widely grown as it should be. The tallest campanula listed here, it can easily reach 1.5 m high, and possibly more. I have seen big specimens in full flower in pots for sale for upwards of £30, which is robbery as it’s a biennial! It has a tap root and glossy leaves, and usually a single stout stem topped by a huge head of lightish blue or white flowers; it resembles a much larger *C. rapunculus*. The white comes true from seed if not hybridised, and is perhaps the more striking colour. The Victorians used to bring it indoors for decoration, under which conditions it lasted for weeks, but outside the flowers fade as soon as fertilised so each one is short-lived, but there are so many it’s still a great display.

### *Campanula rapunculoides*

This is an attractive plant, up to 50 cm high with tapering spires of deep purple, flared bells and most of the leaf at the base, but it is a thug and should be treated with care. It is a spreader with rapidly-growing underground runners, and if it gets somewhere you don't want it, it can be impossible to eradicate. It competes well with grasses in wild gardens and this is a good way to control it, but don't forget it will freely seed around. Hardy and all too easy.

### *Campanula rapunculus*

A much rarer biennial, with an edible root, this has large clusters of harebell-like bells at the top of the stems and, though it freely seeds around, is no trouble because of its biennial life-cycle. Up to 50 cm tall, it prefers a well-drained soil.

### *Campanula rotundifolia*

The native harebell, this is small and dainty and does best in very well-drained conditions; it can't compete with large, vigorous neighbours. Though it will grow in a sunny border or gravel garden, it's also ideal for rockeries and walls. It has wire-thin stems with pendent mid-blue bells and is around 20-30 cm tall. There is a white variety which will produce white offspring if it hasn't hybridised.

### *Campanula trachelium*

Another native, this is one of the easiest to grow and an inveterate self-sower, but it's not difficult to pull out if you must! Around 60 cm tall, it has stiff, branched, hairy stems carrying long, pendent, deepish blue-purple bells, and the leaves resemble those of stinging nettles, giving it its common name of nettle-leaved bellflower (it also rejoices in the soubriquet 'Bats in the Belfry' - I have no idea why!). it doesn't actually sting, of course. Neatly clump-forming and hardy, it competes well with grass and thus is good for a wild garden. There is a white form which will produce white offspring, and doubles of both colours which sometimes make seed but rarely produce anything better than half-heartedly semi-double offspring. 'Faichem Lilac', while not deemed by the RHS to be a form of *C. trachelium* due to unknown parentage, is clearly closely related, having very pale, near-white bells with a purple eye - it's stunning, and comes true from seed.