

GARDEN SPOT

Phlox plants attract flocks of



MARTY FIGLEY

Many of us grow phlox in our gardens and enjoy the wonderful variety that is available in these versatile plants.

From early spring we can enjoy creeping phlox *P. stolonifera*, in bright purple or violet clusters, or *P. subulata*, varying in color from pinkish white or purple

as they make a carpet of color in the landscape. These are especially suitable in rock gardens as their informal, spreading habit softens the scene.

For the rest of the season we can enjoy the tall forms, sometimes referred to as "border phlox" (now called garden phlox), as they are often used in formal and informal border plantings. One of the more common varieties is the summer perennial phlox, *P. paniculata*, which grows to four feet high. Originally the flowers were purple, but now there are many colors and shades available, thanks to hybridizers. The large clusters of flowers bloom in summer and early autumn.

There are several other perennials species of phlox and a few annuals.

Many of the perennials are hardy in our zone and add a nice touch of color when some of the other plants have "had their day in the sun." A good way to learn about what is available is to search through mail-order catalogs and visit nurseries in the early spring.

It is surprising, but phlox will do well in rather heavy soils and can be neglected, especially established ones, but as with any plant, a loamy, humusy soil will result in a better show. A top mulch, especially during dry weather, will help hold moisture in the ground and keep the roots protected. They will benefit from an all-purpose fertilizer applied two or three times a season, and an application of water, when necessary.

By removing spent blooms, additional flowering will reward; and (for next season) in mid-June if the stems at the front of each plant are pinched back on early blooming ones and rebloomers, the season can be extended.

To ensure that your stand of phlox is sturdy and for larger flowers, thin young shoots when they are about one-third of their final height. Remove the weaker shoots, by pinching or cutting them at the base, at a ratio of about one shoot in three.



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Phantastic: The beautiful, easy-to-grow phlox is suitable for many gardens.

To prevent powdery mildew, divide phlox every third or fourth year in the spring by splitting the plants into several pieces. Good air circulation will also help with mildew problems.

This unsightly condition can often be prevented with these good cultural practices and spacing the plants properly and growing them in a sunny place. Another disease that can affect phlox is called leaf spot, and shows up as brown spots, first on the lower leaves and continuing up the stem. In the fall destroy the plant tops and fallen leaves to further reduce disease problems.

If you wish to propagate phlox, keep in mind that the dwarf species are best propagated by cuttings or root division and put in a shaded cold frame during

the summer for spring transplant. Taller species can be propagated by cuttings of young stems, shoots or roots. If you save the seed, choose only those that are extra-special. Self-sown seedlings often revert back to their original lavender color, so if you don't want that color, clear them out.

These plants' most fearsome pest enemies are the red spider mite, which infests the undersides of leaves and turns them light yellow, giving them an unhealthy look, and a nematode or eelworm that causes root galls.

Mites can be checked with a spray to control mildew or a stream of water from the hose, while plants with the latter pest problem need to be destroyed along with the surrounding soil. Deformed flower buds are an indication of the phlox bug. An insecticidal soap spray can be used, if the infestation is heavy.

To control nematodes "obtain nematode-free phlox from root cuttings," the American Horticultural Society Encyclopedia of Gardening said. So be sure to ask your nursery about this potential problem.

Turn to page G3 for information about our sunflower contest.

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