

Book Review

Geraniums

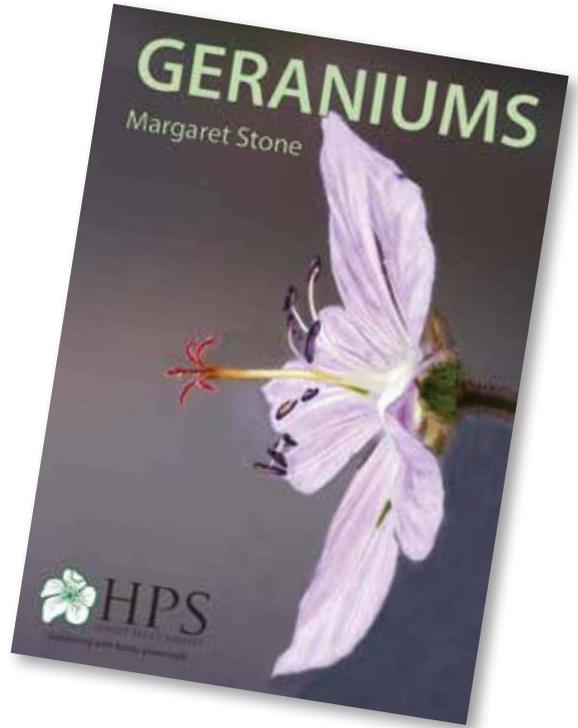
Margaret Stone

80pp
£5.50 to members,
£7.50 to non-members inc. p & p

My copy of the old HPS booklet, *Hardy Geraniums for the Garden*, is so well thumbed that it has become rather tattered around the edges. The third edition by Joy Jones, published in 2001, gave descriptions of over 200 species, varieties and hybrids including the then newly introduced hybrid Rozanne. The hardy geranium world has moved on a long way since then and this new booklet, published in May 2015, **Geraniums** by Margaret Stone, is a very welcome update to add to the library.

Joy Jones' original introduction is reprinted in this new edition, and Margaret pays tribute to Joy, who died in 2013. Joy made a colossal contribution through her massive knowledge of and enthusiasm for hardy geraniums, and through her writing.

Hardy geraniums were very popular back in the 70s and 80s, when Margery Fish is quoted as saying "When in doubt, plant a



geranium". They seemed to go out of fashion for a while but in recent years interest has been renewed with the introduction of many new varieties and hybrids.

It is a measure of the prolific programme of hybridisation that back in 1990 the *Plant Finder* listed about 250 hardy geraniums, while the 2015 edition lists about 800.



© John Dilks



© John Dilks

Geraniums includes comments on foliage. Here are two examples of what I think is spectacular early foliage. *G. phaeum* 'Springtime' and *G. x oxonianum* 'Walter's Gift' announce the imminent arrival of spring and light up a corner of my garden.

Rozanne was voted *Plant of the Centenary* at the Chelsea show in 2013 and I see it everywhere.

So *Geraniums* is much needed to catch up on all those new introductions. The booklet is an essential reference for those who already have a passion for and knowledge of this wonderful group of plants. However the unique value of the HPS and these publications is that they are equally valuable to those just starting out and looking to expand their knowledge. At first the many different types of geranium can be confusing, but the Directory, which is the main section of the booklet, gives a clear and concise listing of those plants known to be in cultivation. There is also advice on planting conditions, on cultivation, on propagation, and on pests and diseases.

I like the structure of the Directory. It is an alphabetical list of species, varieties and hybrids. Those with an interest can see the parentage and breeder of the hybrids, but if you simply want to find a garden plant that is out of the ordinary the Directory gives you plenty of information on flower size, plant habit, height, spread and other useful notes. There are colour photographs of many, if not all, the flowers, which is a huge improvement on previous editions, making for easier identification and better selection of that new plant to complement the border colour scheme.

Sometimes one particular plant becomes so well known and popular that

it eclipses others that are just as good, if not better, garden plants. As good as the 'new' hybrid Rozanne was in 2001, there are now many more *G. wallichianum* hybrids and I am constantly encouraging customers to be a bit more adventurous in their choices. The new booklet will help my crusade. The Directory includes several *G. wallichianum* and related hybrids that have very long flowering periods, mid-June through to first frosts, November in my garden last year.

The varieties are grouped by family which makes it easier to choose. For example, if you know you want a *G. macrorrhizum* for ground cover in a difficult position, then the Directory lists the many varieties, groups them by dominant flower colour, and has photographs of the flowers.

I am also particularly pleased to see photographs of and a commentary on foliage. The wide variations in form and the wonderful range of colours in foliage is a much underrated aspect of geraniums.

Finally the booklet lists specialist nurseries which can supply the more unusual plants, and a list of further reading to learn even more.

I have already recommended the booklet to many people, and I have no hesitation in saying it should be in your library of essential reading to widen your knowledge and assist your choice of these fabulous plants.

John Dilks runs Cranesbill Nursery, near Tewkesbury. He is a past Chairman of the Society.

Booklets can be ordered from:

The Administrator, Hardy Plant Society, 15 Basepoint Business Centre, Crab Apple Way, Evesham WR11 1GP Tel: 01386 710317

Order forms for members and non-members are on the HPS website – www.hardy-plant.org.uk