

## *Geum*

Sue Martin

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Sue Martin, an HPS member, holds the National Collection of *Geum*, of which there are over a hundred different cultivars, hybrids, varieties and species. A very inviting front cover shows the beautiful flower of 'Diana', and inside are descriptions of a representative selection of species and the majority of cultivars available to gardeners today, each shown in excellent colour photographs.



*Geum* is one of the hundred genera in the *Rosaceae* family. Linnaeus mentioned five species: *montanum*, *reptans*, *rivale*, *virginianum* and *urbanum*. *Rivale* and *urbanum* are native to the British Isles and have crossed to form *intermedium*. Sadly many of the old cultivars have been lost, but two that have stood the test of time are two of the most popular plants grown in this country – 'Lady Stratheden' and 'Mrs J Bradshaw'.

The word geum comes from the Greek and means 'to give flavour or relish'. Since Roman times it has been used for flavouring food and drink. For nearly 500 years, Benedictine monks in France have made a liqueur from the powdered roots, which must be dug up on Lady Day, March 25<sup>th</sup>, if the soil is dry.

The roots have healing qualities and were used to cure diarrhoea and sore throat, reduce fever and aid digestion. *Geum* was also used to make disinfectant, fly and moth repellent, and as a tonic and astringent. It was once thought to be an antidote against evil and linked with Christianity, the flowers depicted in stone in some old churches.

An excellent reason for growing geums in your garden is that they flower for a good few weeks and make fine companion plants in a mixed border. They are evergreen or semi-evergreen, so with their attractive leaves they provide very useful, year-round ground cover.

Most geums are happiest in shade or semi-shade, except for the *chiloense* variety which will take sun or semi-shade. Vine weevil and sawfly can be a problem, especially in pots, but can be controlled by Provado. Regular division every 3–4 years will increase vigour and flowering. They like their roots in damp but free-draining soil – our clay soil in Essex suits them very well.

This attractive and informative booklet will no doubt prompt more of us to grow these useful plants.

**Celia Roger**

