

GERANIUM PHAEUM 'JOSEPH GREEN'

Lynne Edwards

My father, Joseph Green, a keen horticulturist, began his studies at Sutton Bonington School of Agriculture in Nottinghamshire in 1937. His specialism was botany. He obtained the Certificate in Horticulture and an RHS Silver Medal. I have so much for which to thank him; he taught me much about botany as I was growing up, encouraging me to learn both the common and the botanical names of plants. As a teenager in the 1960s, right through to my father's death in 2012, I gardened and exchanged notes about flora with him.

On his retirement, my father helped out at a friend's plant nursery and, on one occasion, brought me a single-flowered, purple *Geranium phaeum* plant to fill an empty space in my garden. He warned me that if I allowed it to seed, there could be many new plants popping up all over the garden, adding that there might be the remote chance of a seedling producing a flower of an unusual colour and 'how interesting that would be!' This turned out to be prophetic.



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Geranium phaeum 'Joseph Green'



Close inspection reveals the flower's unusual structure

Some years later, in early June 2013, I could not believe my eyes when I spotted a most unusual flowering plant in my garden, one I knew I had not planted. It was almost hidden between an old *Rosa mutabilis* and rampant brambles, and I could see from its leaves that it was a hardy geranium, yet its flowers of purple and chartreuse green were fascinating. It was growing in well-drained, light soil, amongst other *G. phaeum* plants, in generally dappled light. It had three main stems, each one bearing flowers without stamens. In fact, the stamen of each flower seemed to have been modified into a sterile, petal-like organ. The flowers were held on upright, slender stems, approximately one metre (40") high - the same growing habit as my mauve, white, and purple single-flowered phaeums. I should have been so proud to have been able to show it to my dear father but, sadly, he had passed away six months earlier.

By late June, many of the flowers had withered and died. However, I was keen to learn more about it so I sent a pressed specimen to James Armitage, Senior Botanist at RHS Wisley. He was very supportive, advising me to keep the

plant growing in its environment, and hoping, as I was, that it would prove, over time, to be genetically stable. He asked me to inform him when a name for the new cultivar was published.

A year later, on 7th May 2014, the plant had five main stems with flowers at bud stage, and it appeared that each one would bear identical flowers to those of the previous year. By the 15th May, many short-tongued bees were visiting the flowers, though not lingering for long since, of course, the flowers produced no stamens; instead, the bees were visiting the nearby single-flowered phaeums, with anthers. I even doubt that the bees could find nectar from the new plant. I assume that each bee was initially drawn to the bright chartreuse green of the modified stamens, in their search for pollen and nectar.

The following year, 2015, I was in communication with Helen Mount, Coordinator of The HPS National Conservation Scheme, who was also very supportive. Then David Victor (Registrar for Geraniaceae) suggested that I contact geranium breeder and enthusiast Robin Moss, who kindly offered to be involved in further propagation in 2016. I hope, in time, to name this *G. phaeum* 'Joseph Green', after my father. It is ideal for a cottage garden, and looks lovely amongst the roses in the sunshine.

❧ *First published in the Hardy Geranium Group Newsletter* ❧
Spring 2017