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Fig. 3a *P. longifolia* subsp. *cevennensis*

# Pulmonarias

## Margaret Stone

**P**ulmonarias are typical of plants appreciated by HPS members: they are usually tough and long lived, they provide interest in most months of the year and they occur in many varieties to satisfy the collector instinct. Indeed, we have a Special Interest Group for them. However, garden centres stock very few cultivars and there is no Plant Heritage National Collection so the Society has now become important in their conservation. I obtained my first plant in the early 1980s; I do not remember if it was labelled but, if so, it would have been *Pulmonaria officinalis*, although it probably had some hybrid character. A few more followed but it was *P. 'Blue Ensign'* which really got me hooked. It was acquired at a snowdrop event and proved more successful than the snowdrops I bought! The original clump is still going strong, twenty years later.

Pulmonarias are native to Europe and in the wild favour

partially shaded sites, such as woodland margins, although some grow in open meadows which are sufficiently moist and cool. They are good additions to a shade garden, if it is not dry, but they can also thrive in the open, particularly when shaded by summer perennials. Any soil is suitable as long as it is not dry or waterlogged. The addition of humus at planting-time helps and an annual mulch is beneficial.

Propagation is by division and it is advisable to rejuvenate a clump in this way every few years, discarding old, woody rhizomes and replanting healthy stock. Autumn is the best time to divide pulmonarias but it can be done in early spring.

The flowers consist of a cylindrical tube which ends in a five-lobed corolla, the part that is visible, 0.5–1.5cm in diameter. At its centre is the style, which can be long (pin) or short (thrum). Species have both pin and thrum flowers on the same plant



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Fig. 1 *P. officinalis* Cambridge Blue Group



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Fig. 2 *P. longifolia*



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Fig. 3b *P. longifolia* subsp. *cevennensis*

Fig. 4 *P. rubra* 'Rachel Vernie'Fig. 5 *P. rubra* 'Redstart'Fig. 6 *P. saccharata* 'Dora Bielefeld'Fig. 7 *P. saccharata* 'Leopard'Fig. 8 *P.* 'Pink Haze'

but hybrids have one kind only and this is important in identification. Flowers open in succession over several weeks, each flower lasting 3 to 5 days. Species will hybridise freely and seedlings of named varieties should never be given the name of their parent.

Fifteen to twenty years ago, numerous new cultivars were being introduced, some of them very similar to existing plants and inevitably no longer available. For example, good varieties were bred by Dan Heims at Terra Nova Nurseries, Oregon, founded in 1992; by 2004 they had introduced 27 cultivars but now they sell only six.

The following pulmonarias can be recommended, although there are many other good plants; however, you may find it difficult to source some of them. Species and their cultivars are listed first, followed by hybrids.

***Pulmonaria officinalis*** buds are pink but the flowers may open blue, white or pink, the last changing to blue. Thus it is usual to have pink and blue flowers open simultaneously, giving the common-name 'Soldiers and Sailors' (after the colours of their uniforms). It has rounded leaves with distinct pale green or whitish spots. The flowering stems carry spotted leaves and are 15–25cm tall with clusters of pink and mid-blue flowers. *P. o.* 'Alba' has white thrum

flowers with a pale pink ring at the top of the tube but it is rarely grown now because 'Sissinghurst White' became more fashionable.

*P. o.* 'Blue Mist' (syn. 'Blue Moon') came from Amy Doncaster and has pale-blue pin flowers; it practically covers itself with bloom and was awarded an AGM in a 1998 RHS trial, although it no longer holds it. 'Cambridge Blue' (fig. 1) was also named by Mrs Doncaster but there are now many different plants circulating under that name, most inferior to the original. Mine came from Jaime Blake and had been growing at Bressingham Gardens for many years so should be correct.

***Pulmonaria longifolia*** (fig. 2), of which the most widely cultivated subspecies is *P. l.* subsp. *longifolia*, has narrow, bristly, brightly spotted leaves and clusters of small rich-blue flowers. The basal leaves are up to six times as long as they are wide, narrowing gradually to a fine tip; the base colour is dark green, on which the bright silvery-white spots and blotches show up well. *P. l.* 'Howard Eggins', a seedling in the garden of HPS member Linda Eggins at Clent, Worcestershire, is very similar. *P. l.* subsp. *cevennensis* (fig. 3a&b) has heavily spotted leaves, up to 55cm long, or leaves which are almost entirely covered in pale, silvery green with only a narrow, dark-green margin.

It has slightly darker violet-blue flowers and is tolerant of drier and sunnier conditions than other pulmonarias.

*P. l.* 'Ankum' is a seedling selected by Coen Jansen of Holland; its leaves are almost entirely silvery green, spotted along the margins only, and its flowers bright blue.

*P. rubra* is usually the earliest to bloom, sometimes starting in November. The pinkish-red flowers are relatively large and do not turn violet or blue; their calyces are pale green, flushed with red. The large leaves, up to 33cm long, are a bright light green, unspotted and roughly hairy. *P. rubra* is particularly effective under deciduous shrubs where it has light in winter, which encourages early flowering, but is shaded in summer.

*P. r. var. albocorollata* (syn. 'Alba') has small, white thrum flowers in green calyces on shorter stems. *P. r.* 'Bowles's Red' has sparsely spotted leaves and the thrum flowers are a little more orange than *P. rubra* itself.

*P. r.* 'David Ward' is distinct because it has variegated leaves. It is named after the propagation manager at Beth Chatto's nursery, who found it as a sport in the garden there. The leaves are very light green overlaid with pale cream, giving a greyish effect, with irregular cream margins. The thrum flowers, in very pale green calyces flushed with pink, are pale coral. It is most attractive, lighting up shady places. It needs moist



Fig. 9 *P.* 'Blue Ensign'



Fig. 10 *P.* 'Lewis Palmer'



Fig. 11 *P.* 'Benediction'



Fig. 12 *P.* 'Trevi Fountain'



Fig. 13 *P.* 'Weetwood Blue'

soil in full shade, or at least a place where it gets summer sun in the early mornings or late evenings only, as the cream edges burn easily.

*P. r.* 'Rachel Vernie' (fig. 4) was a seedling found by Jennifer Hewitt in 1994 and named after her daughter.

The bright-green leaves are almost entirely overlain with grey-green and have splashes of cream but they do not burn easily; the pin flowers are redder than the species with greenish-cream calyces. It throws an occasional sport with large white patches on

Fig. 14 *P.* 'Little Star'Fig. 15 *P.* 'Darkling Thrush'Fig. 16 *P.* 'Diana Clare'Fig. 17 *P.* 'Blake's Silver'Fig. 18 *P.* 'Cotton Cool'

the leaves and can also revert to plain green. *P. r.* 'Redstart' (fig. 5) is usually vigorous and often earlier to flower; the stems tend to be more upright and the pin flowers are a little larger than in the species.

*P. saccharata* **Argentea Group**<sup>AGM</sup>, in the best forms, has leaves completely covered with a thick silvery-white layer except for a narrow green rim which may have small spots. Others have

a thinner layer so the whole leaf looks pale silvery-green. The flowers are red to dark violet. *P. s.* 'Dora Bielefeld' (fig. 6) is short (15–20cm) with clear-pink pin flowers which gradually change to violet. The leaves are light green with small pale-green spots. *P. s.* 'Leopard' (fig. 7), raised by Graham Stuart Thomas, has darker green leaves than other cultivars, so the bright whitish spots stand out boldly. The pin flowers are reddish-pink on upright stems. *P.* 'Pink Haze' (fig. 8) (thought to be a *saccharata* seedling) is distinctive with its large pink pin flowers.

*P.* 'Blue Ensign'<sup>AGM</sup> (fig. 9) was raised by Monksilver Nursery and first awarded an AGM at the RHS Trial in 1998. It is free flowering with rich blue-violet pin flowers on fairly upright stems, up to 30 cm tall. The narrow basal leaves are dark green, unspotted and not very bristly, and die back in winter. It was originally described as a form of *P. angustifolia* but may be a hybrid. *P.* 'Mawson's Blue'<sup>AGM</sup> has similar unspotted *angustifolia*-type growth but with royal-blue thrum flowers. This seedling was selected in the 1930s at Mawson Brothers' Nursery in Cumbria but there are now probably several plants in circulation with this name. It has naturalised in Surrey and central and southern Scotland.

*P.* 'Lewis Palmer'<sup>AGM</sup> (fig. 10) is justifiably popular,

making a bold clump; it first gained an AGM in 1993. The dark green leaves are long and fairly narrow, with conspicuous large spots. The 30cm upright stems carry clusters of royal-blue pin flowers. *P.* 'Benediction' (fig. 11) is similar but shorter, as are *P.* 'Trevi Fountain' (fig. 12) and *P.* 'Weetwood Blue' (fig. 13). *P.* 'Little Star' (fig. 14), from Dan Heims in 1993, flowers early, its large flowers a bright azure blue.

*P.* 'Darkling Thrush' (fig. 15) was a chance seedling selected by Sarah and Julian Sutton for its brown-tinted spring foliage. The long dark leaves have round white spots and the flowers are the usual deep violet-blue *longifolia*-type.

*P.* 'Diana Clare'<sup>AGM</sup> (fig. 16) comes from Bob Brown and is named after his wife. It has heavily silvered apple-green basal leaves but the leaves on the stems are spotted; the flowers are violet-blue. It is an excellent plant. Vigorous *P.* 'Blake's Silver' (fig. 17), from June Blake, has uniform grey-silver foliage and large pink pin flowers. *P.* 'Cotton Cool' (fig. 18), from Diana Grenfell, also has silvered leaves. Pink buds open to blue thrum flowers which fade to mauve.

*P.* 'Majesté' has pink pin flowers which age to blue; the leaves are silvered, with narrow, green, undulating margins. Like all those with silvered leaves, the plant does best in shade.

*P.* 'Margery Fish' (fig. 19)

originated with the famous gardener but currently several different plants are incorrectly labelled with her name. The true plant has the soft leaves and sticky glands of *P. vallarsae*; vigorous but compact, it has bright-green basal leaves covered with a near-white overlay except for the midribs and the margins, which have small spots. The pin flowers are coral to red-violet and become violet at maturity.

*P.* 'Elworthy Rubies' (fig. 20), introduced by Jenny Spiller in 1998, is both early- and long-flowering. A robust plant with mid-green leaves spotted in lighter green, it has deep-pink pin flowers which fade slightly mauve, on upright 25cm stems. It appears to have genes from *P. longifolia* and *P. rubra*.

*P.* 'Cleeton Red' (fig. 21) is Jennifer Hewitt's seedling from *P. rubra* 'Bowles's Red' crossed with *P. longifolia*. The leaves can be 50cm long and it is vigorous so needs space. The pin flowers are bright coral to pinkish-red with brown calyces.

*P.* 'Raspberry Splash' (fig. 22),



Fig. 19 *P.* 'Margery Fish'

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Fig. 20 *P.* 'Elworthy Rubies'

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Fig. 21 *P.* 'Cleeton Red'

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Fig. 22 *P.* 'Raspberry Splash'

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Fig. 23 *P.* 'Opal'Fig. 25 *P.* 'Vera May'Fig. 24 *P.* 'Mrs. Kittle'Fig. 26 *P.* 'Sissinghurst White'

bred by Dan Heims, is a vigorous cross between *P. longifolia* 'Bertram Anderson' and *P. saccharata* 'Leopard'. The 1 cm-wide, raspberry-coral pin flowers, tinged purple on maturity, are borne in tight clusters on 30cm stems.

***P. Opal*** ('Ocupol') (fig. 23) was a seedling in Sue Cupitt's Worcestershire garden. It makes a tight clump with quite tall, upright flower stems. While the stem leaves have silvery white spots and blotches, the basal leaves are mostly entirely silvery white, except for green midribs and irregular, spotted margins. (They are fairly long and narrow but appear slightly broader than those of *P. longifolia*, which may be one parent.) The freely produced pale-pink buds open to white pin flowers which become very pale pink, then blue, thus inspiring the name.

***P. 'Mrs Kittle'*** (fig. 24) was found in a nursery at Kittle on the Gower Peninsula in South

Wales. A neat, rather upright plant, it is one of the older pale-flowered cultivars: pink buds open to very pale pink pin flowers which become pale lavender. Its narrow leaves have whitish spots and blotches. ***P. 'Vera May'***<sup>AGM</sup> (fig. 25) was a seedling entered in the 1998 trial; it has soft-pink flowers, without any blue, and mid-green spotted leaves.

***P. 'Sissinghurst White'***<sup>AGM</sup> (fig. 26) was not named at Sissinghurst although it probably originated there: Amy Doncaster gave plants to Elizabeth Strangman of Washfield Nursery, who introduced it. It was given an AGM in 1993. It is vigorous with well-spotted officinalis-type leaves. The 30 cm stems bear white thrum flowers opening from pale-pink buds. ***P. 'Ice Ballet'*** is similar to *P. 'Sissinghurst White'* but with larger flowers.

Pulmonarias, in general, are useful and garden-worthy; having suffered a slump in popularity, they are due for a revival. 🌸

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