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Elena Konstantinova (second left) and Youry Repryov (right) at the Moscow phlox exhibition, July 2014.

# Honour of Russia

## Sergey Kalyakin

Since the 1930s Russia has made a great contribution to the range of *Phlox paniculata* varieties worldwide, many the best in their colour group. Every year at the end of July or beginning of August, exhibitions in Moscow and St Petersburg show about 200 varieties and 80 new Russian cultivars. At the moment about 1000 Russian varieties are known, 500 of them in wide cultivation in parks and private gardens. Here I am going to write about the

five most successful Russian breeders, although there are many more.

Varieties selected by **Pavel G. Gaganov** (1904–1972) are the basic treasures of Russian phloxes. From 1935 to 1967, only interrupted by WWII, Gaganov bred and introduced hundreds of varieties, most of them still available. His book *Perennial Phloxes* is still an essential guide for Russian breeders.

In brackets I'll give a translation of the transliterated Russian

names unless they are untranslatable proper nouns, the year of introduction, the size of a flower, the height of the plant and the period of bloom.

I 'Uralskie Skazy' ('Ural Tales', 1953, 3.8cm, 90–100 cm, middle) Deep-pink variety. Flowers have a dark red eye and smoky petals with curved inside margins. Flowers do not fade in the sun. Rounded inflorescences are large and dense; stems might need staking.



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2 'Drakon' ('Dragon', 1958, 4cm, 70–80cm, middle) Deep-purple variety, and one of the most famous smoky phlox. A broad smoky ring consisting of narrow silvery lines is located at the petals' margin. It is a compact phlox with strong stems. It clumps up slowly.

'Timur' (1956, 3.8cm, 80–90cm, middle/late) Flowers a rich coral pink with a hint of orange. Inflorescences are very large and tight, the bright colour noticeable in any surroundings. A vigorous plant.



'Taina' ('Enigma', 1963, 3.5cm, 110cm, middle) A dark-violet variety with an inky-purple hue and velvety petals which do not fade in the sun and withstand rain. Small, rounded inflorescences.

3 'Uspekh' ('Success', 1937, 4cm, 70–80cm, middle) One of Gaganov's most famous varieties. Violet flowers with a large white centre may fade a bit in the sun but are not sensitive to rain. Common in catalogues throughout Europe, along with 4 'Olenka'



(1938, 3.7cm, 80cm, middle). Light warm-pink flowers with large white centres and bright-crimson eyes; flowers withstand direct sunlight without fading.

**Maria F. Sharonova** (1885–1987) introduced many new varieties of *Clematis*, *Dahlia* and *Phlox paniculata* from the 1940s. 5 'Margri' (1952, 4.2cm, 70–80cm, middle) is her most famous and very distinctive cultivar because of its tricolour marking.





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Elena Konstantinova's trial field.

White petals are decorated by bright-violet shades and a crimson ring in the centre.

'Ametistovyi' ('Amethyst', 1965, 3.8cm, 80cm, middle) is purple with a purple eye. In cool weather the flower centres might get lighter. Blooms continuously for almost two months.

6 'Samantha Smith' (1965, 3.8cm, 70cm, middle) has bright crimson-red flowers with lighter centres. It does not fade in the sun unlike a lot of red varieties.

A very reliable and low-maintenance cultivar. The phlox was renamed in 1980s after an American girl who wrote to Soviet General Secretary Andropov and was invited to visit the USSR in 1983.

**Yuri A. Repryov** has a PhD in Technical Sciences. He has patented 27 inventions for the aviation industry and has over a hundred spectacular cultivars of *Phlox paniculata* to his name. His focus for breeding is the beauty

of each separate flower. Repryov has been selecting *Phlox* since he met Gaganov.

'Vrubel' (1987, 4.2cm, 80cm, middle) is a lilac-purple cultivar with a dense, ashy-silvery haze and tight, large inflorescences. Named after a Russian Art Nouveau painter.

7 'Sekret' ('Secret', 1985, 3.8cm, 90cm, middle). Flowers are pink with a large white centre and pink ring. The margin of the petals is decked with ashy smoke.



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8 & 9 'Gordost Rossii' ('Honour of Russia', 2010, 4.5cm, 100cm, middle) is an outstanding variety with a distinct flower form: petals are divided from each other and curved. This lilac cultivar looks a vibrant pure blue at twilight. Stems are strong, inflorescences large and dense.

10 'Russkaya Krasavitsa' ('Russian Beauty', 1995, 3.7cm, 80cm, middle/late). Flowers have a complicated coloration with hues of saturated pink, light pink and crimson. They can fade in the sun, but still look beautiful.

**Elena A. Konstantinova** has a PhD in Economics and is a garden designer. She came to phlox selection with help of Y. Repryov, and now she is the most successful and fruitful Russian breeder and a leader of the Russian Phlox Society. She looks for varieties which will be reliable and need little attention in the border (fig. 11). As well as many outstanding large-flowered cultivars she introduced several series of small-flowered varieties. Now E. Konstantinova is concentrating

on breeding tall phloxes for the back of mixed borders.

'Vladimir' (1997, 5 cm, 70–80cm, middle/late) The giant, milky-pink flowers have lighter margins and a small ring in the centre. The variety won a gold medal at the 'Flowers – 2000' international exhibition.

12 'Gzhel' (2003, 4cm, 90–100cm, middle/early) has an unusual coloration: half of each petal is white, the other blue. Buds are bright blue too. It flowers well even in semi-shade. Named after the traditional Russian ceramics and porcelain craft.

13 'Vals' ('Waltz', 1986, 4cm, 60–70cm, middle/early) Deep-pink flowers of very warm hue have lighter centres, petals are wavy. This sturdy and reliable variety blooms profusely for a very long period.

14 'Konstantin Melnikov' (1986, 4cm, 70–80cm, middle) was named after a famous Russian architect. Flowers soft lilac, a bit lighter in the centre and at the margins of the flower. Large dense inflorescences, long season, stable stems.





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**15 'Alexey Lenskyi'** (2010, 3.8cm, 60–70cm, middle) is a very showy, spectacular, dramatic variety. It is difficult to describe its coloration but I shall try. Mainly it's a mix of white and lilac: the dark-violet centre spreads irregularly to the margins. White stamens add more contrast. It's impossible to mix up this distinctive phlox with any other. Named after the brother of Elena Konstantinova, who took part

in clearing up the aftermath after the Chernobyl (Ukraine) accident, got radiation sickness and died young.

**16 'Igor Talkov'** (1987, 4.5cm, 70cm, middle/early) Violet phlox, the inner half of each petal is lighter than the outer. Twilight changes its colour to bluish violet. It doesn't fade in the sun and withstands rain without problems although the flowers are large. It flowers

for a very long time and has vigorous stems. Named after a Russian singer.

**17 & 18 'Nezabudka'** ('Forget-Me-Not', 2005, 4.3cm, 70cm, early) Pure lilac during the day and bright azure at twilight – a real forget-me-not flower. Petals have noticeable rhombic form. Inflorescences are very large but withstand rain well. Bloom lasts a long time. Stems do not need staking.



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25. Oksana Koudryavtseva with 'Archangel'.

19 'Morskaya Pena' ('Sea Foam', 2007, 4.2cm, 70–80cm, middle). Flowers are an unusual star form. Petals are curved, white with a light-blue hint, and buds soft blue. Very large inflorescences give an impression of lace owing to the shape of flowers. Russians see it as another of Elena Konstantinova's masterpieces.

20 'Mister X' (2006, 2.5cm, 60–70cm, middle). Small-flowered purple phlox with an all-over steely haze and dark-purple eye. Flowers are solid colour almost immediately they open which is rare for smoky varieties. A good and lasting component for a midsummer bunch of flowers.

21 'Vual Pozdnyaya' ('Late Veil', 2008, 2.5cm, 65–70cm, middle/late) has crimson petals, lighter on the back. The shape of the small flowers remains a star, petals are curved inside as

in all other phloxes from the Vual (Veil) series. Flowers for 2½ months.

22 'Volshebnaya Fleita' ('The Magic Flute', 2010, 2.7cm, 70cm, middle). Small, white, cup-formed flowers have soft-pink spreading centres. A very compact, stable, reliable and vivid variety.

Last summer Elena Konstantinova invited me to look at her breeding fields located to the north of Moscow. I was lucky to see her promising new seedlings which she had just named: 23 small-flowered, pure white 'Lebedinoye Ozero' ('Swan Lake') and 24 beautiful smoky-painted 'Zhostovskiy Suvenir' ("Zhostovo Souvenir"). These varieties will definitely get their gold in the next exhibitions.

**Oksana K. Koudryavtseva** is the most successful breeder from St Petersburg. For the last 15 years many of her varieties have won prizes at Phlox exhibitions.

25 'Archangel' (2008, 4cm, 120cm, middle) is a snow-white phlox with extremely large inflorescences. Stems are vigorous and thick, no need for staking. Unlike many other white varieties it isn't spoilt by rain. Very useful for flower arrangements.

26 'Ptitsa Sirin' ('Sirin Bird', 2006, 2.5cm, 80cm, middle) Rich violet during the day and blue at dusk. Inflorescences are large and well branched. The plant has a rounded form and is blue top to bottom when in flower.

27 'Reverans' ('Curtsy', 2010, 2.8cm, 140–150cm, middle). Star-like soft-pink flowers change to light lilac at twilight. Inflorescences are very large; stems are thick and vigorous – no need for staking. Flowering period is unbelievably long.

28 'Kurazh' ('Courage', 2006, 5.5cm, 100cm, middle). Flamboyant phlox with giant purple flowers with large

white centres and crimson eyes. An eye-catching variety anywhere in the garden.

Finally, a very unusual phlox, 29 'Boutonik' (60–70cm, middle), has an interesting story. In 1992 **Loubov F. Goloubitskaya** found it in an old garden. The garden owner insisted that she had brought it from the island of Valaam in Lake Ladoga, north of St Petersburg. Every inflorescence consists of large, tight, cold-pink buds which never open.

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You can get more information about these and many other Russian varieties at the Russian Phlox Society website <http://phloxes.ru> (only in Russian, I regret to say, but Google will translate it). I would be happy to answer your questions: you can contact me on my email: [sergey.kalyakin@mail.ru](mailto:sergey.kalyakin@mail.ru)

You can get all information about Russian phlox exhibitions from Svetlana Voronina, the organiser of Mir Floxov (The World of Phloxes) exhibition in St Petersburg. Her email: [mirfloksov@gmail.com](mailto:mirfloksov@gmail.com)

You can buy Russian phloxes directly at the exhibition in St Petersburg. There is a great choice. Around 50 Russian varieties are available at the Austrian nursery Sarastro Stauden. [www.sarastro-stauden.com](http://www.sarastro-stauden.com) 🌱



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