

## **A Plant I Cannot be Without – *Linum narbonense* ‘Heavenly Blue’ Vanessa Doyle**

I grew this plant in great swathes where I used to live before and it was an arresting site for six glorious weeks of pure joy as flowers of clear caerulean blue greet you in any hint of sunshine. It does close its heads whenever there is rain about but I can't criticise it for that.

It requires very well drained, quite poor soil and is happy in limey soils. I could give it all those conditions in my previous garden in abundance. However, could I find a place to grow it in my new border? Unlike many other gardens nearby I do suffer from very dry soil, in summer and is not what *Linum* would like. I set about choosing a site and found a narrow bed near a patio in full sun which I thought might do the trick with some adjustment. I dug in a mixture of horticultural grit/ sand and planted the one precious plant I had brought with me, along with an *Olearia phlogopappa* - which I also wouldn't be without. I have been thrilled to see both steadily grow over the last three years.

I always grew the *Linum* from certified *narbonense* seed. The germination rate was always quite poor - even for gold nugget seed. The plant is notoriously slow to bulk up in pots and I used to have a waiting list of a couple of years at my old nursery. Customers were always thrilled to be told the plants were ready - but less so when they were presented with a very small plant! I always assured them that if planted in the right soil conditions it would romp away in the garden. They always looked at me quizzically but I was always thrilled to receive calls telling me how well it was doing!

It hates being transplanted so when you prick out the seedlings you will get casualties. It hates root disturbance so when planting in the garden you must try to carefully retain the rootball. I know it can be propagated by cuttings but we didn't have huge success with this. It is tricky. At one time there was only myself and a nursery in Scotland offering plants for sale because it takes so long to bulk up in a pot. Beth Chatto raved about this plant but she was never silly enough to grow it in her nursery!

In my experience it is very perennial - given the right conditions. You are often told that just *Linum perenne* is a much better plant to grow because it is more perennial, but I strongly dispute this as I do not find it to be as reliable as *narbonense* and it is a wishy washy blue in comparison.