

## ***Gillenia trifoliata* AGM**

### **A Delicate Beauty I'd Like to Keep**

**Helen Lamb**

A classic Hardy Planter's plant originating from North America, *Gillenia* has starry white flowers which seem to dance like small, dainty butterflies on a haze of reddish, branching, wiry stems. (I know that this sounds like *Gaura lindheimeri* but it is altogether more delicate!) Flowering from May to August at around 60cm tall it is not showy but has a gentle charm. In autumn the distinctive three-lobed leaves turn bright red.

Graham Stuart Thomas in *Perennial Garden Plants* says "almost any position and soil seem to suit it" and describes it as "dainty and refined", so I was hopeful that it might be happy in our patch. However I've also noticed that others describe it as needing that impossible trinity for me.... moisture, shade and acid. Certainly in gardens where I have seen it thriving it has been planted in a shady, moist position. We garden on slightly improved neutralish sand and gravel but being a hardy planter that hasn't stopped me trying and failing to grow *Gillenia* several times!

It looks delightful towards the front of a shady woodland border and I have much enjoyed it at a fellow Hardy Planter's garden in drifts around a gnarled old apple tree underplanted with ferns, bulbs and hellebores. It looks best where it can float above ground cover which emphasises its grace.

I have finally found a place where it seems happy in our garden (a slightly shady spot by a small (artificial) stream) but it bulks up very slowly and that's the one spot where I would like to grow lots of other special lovelies...



Whilst visiting a wonderful garden on an open day I was fortunate to chat to the owner and we got onto *Gillenia*. He said they had never managed to keep it – and I felt I was not alone in failing... until he explained he couldn't keep it because it was regularly stolen..... A desirable plant then!!!