

UNUSUAL AND WONDERFUL HEBES

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INTRODUCTION

The genus *Hebe* belongs to the family Scrophulariaceae, and was once part of the genus *Veronica* which still contains the deciduous plants. The difference is that seed capsules of *veronica* split vertically and those of *hebe* horizontally. *Hebes* also have a larger number of chromosomes than *veronicas*. *Parahebe*, the other closely allied genus, is semi-woody in character. Most *hebes* come from New Zealand, although members of the genus also come from Australia, Tasmania, New Guinea, South America, and the Falkland Islands.

There are about a 100 species but they are a promiscuous lot and hybridise readily so there are as many as 200 cultivars.

As shrubs they are of great garden merit being outstanding flowering plants, most of which produce axillary or terminal racemes of either white, pink, red, violet or blue flowers. The main flowering periods are May, June, July to September.

There is great diversity of foliage—many produce deep glossy green elliptical leaves, others produce tiny scale-like leaves such as the “whipcord” types. The foliage can also be green, golden, purple, grey and, of course, variegated. They are all evergreen. *Hebes* vary greatly in height some, suited to the rock garden, are as little as 7cm, others are up to a height of 2.5m.

Hebes grow best in an open sunny site, although some will tolerate a little shade. The soil needs to be well drained, moderately acid to moderately alkaline. They will withstand drought well and grow well in sites subject to exposure from the sea. One problem which needs more research is a specific replant disease. On some sites at Cannington it has been difficult to re-establish *hebes* where they have been killed during very cold winters. A number of species are quite hardy, particularly those with grey foliage, the “whipcord” types, and those with small leaves. Those which come from the North Island, New Zealand, are less hardy so they should be planted in a sheltered position. To ensure regeneration of growth after a hard winter, tender *hebes* should be planted more deeply and mulched to protect the basal buds from frost and cold winds.

Pruning is only required when the plants either become leggy or are damaged by frost. The pruning technique for either problem should be in two stages, cutting back half the growth in the spring and waiting for regrowth before completing the job. In my experience where the plants have been damaged in a very cold winter they

will not regenerate satisfactorily and will need replacing.

Propagation can be done by tip cuttings taken from the current season's growth in September.

Hebes can be used in the garden in a great number of ways—as ground cover and mass planting, hedges in milder locations, in formal bedding schemes, and as pot plants.

As well as taking into account size and shape, colour and texture of the foliage of the plants, the overriding factor in my opinion, is hardiness. Indication of hardiness and use can be dealt with by looking at their botanical groups.

BOTANICAL CLASSIFICATION

Hebes can be divided into roughly 11 groups, 10 of which are used by Dr. H. H. Allan's "Flora of New Zealand" for classifying the species and naturally occurring hybrids. The eleventh group is used for the hybrids of unknown or garden origin, which I am sure with a bit of botanical work could be fitted into the previous 10 groups.

These groups are as follows:

1. Subdistichae Most of these have relatively small to medium sized leaves; they are fairly hardy and vary in height from 30cm to 2m tall. Three best known species/cultivars are: *H. brachysiphon*, *H. colensoi*, and *H. 'White Gem'*.

2. Apertae Most are medium to large-sized shrubs and are generally not very hardy. There are a number of coloured-leaved cultivars. *H. ×fransicana* cultivars include 'Variegata'; hybrids with *H. speciosa* parentage include 'Amy'; hybrids with *H. salicifolia* parentage include *H. × andersonii* 'Variegata' and 'Midsummer Beauty'.

3. Occlusae Inflorescences in lateral racemes, mixed hardiness, height range from 30cm to 80cm. Most common species and cultivars: *H. parviflora*, with a number of hybrids including 'Bowles' Hybrid' and 'Mrs. Winder', both fairly hardy; *H. glaucophylla* and cultivar 'Variegata', also hardy.

4. Subcarnosae Many are small-leaved, grey in colour, very hardy and tolerant of dry conditions so can be used on rock gardens and for ground cover. Examples include *H. albicans*, *H. pinguifolia* 'Pagei', *H. carnosula*, and *H. pimeleoides*.

5. Buxifoliatae Leaves are small and stiff and the plants are hardy. Most are short, up to 50cm. The most common species is *H. odora*—known in Britain as *H. buxifolia*.

6. Flagriformes These are the whipcord hebes—all are hardy. The most well known species and cultivars are: *H. hectori*, *H. lycopodioides*, *H. armstrongii*, *H. ochracea*, *H. 'James Stirling'* and *H. cupressoides* 'Boughton Dome'.

7. Connatae These have overlapping leaves, the leaf bases are joined; they are compact plants that are hardy. None are particularly well known; an example species is *H. haastii*.

8. Paniculatae Flowers are carried in terminal panicles and the leaves have petioles. They are moderately hardy. The most well known species is *H. hulkeana*.

9. Grandiflorae Leaves have petioles and are toothed. The plants have large flowers and are hardy. The best known example is *H. macrantha*.

10. Semiflagriformes These are small whipcord or semi-whipcord plants and are not very common. They are fairly hardy. *H. ciliolata* is an example.

FOLIAGE EFFECTS

Purple. *H. 'Amy'*, *H. 'Eversley Seedling'*, *H. 'Mrs. Winder'*, *H. 'Purple Glory'*, *H. 'Sapphire'*, and *H. 'Simon Delaux'*.

Grey. *H. albicans*, *H. carnosula*, *H. colensoi* var. *glauca*, *H. pinguifolia 'Pagei'*, *H. 'Pewter Dome'*, *H. pimeleoides*, and *H. 'Wingletye'*.

Variegated

Cream and green. *H. 'Amanda Cook'*, *H. × andersonii 'Variegata'* and *'Aurea'*, *H. darwiniana 'Variegata'*, *H. × fransicana 'Variegata'*, *H. glaucophylla 'Variegata'*,

Cream, green and plum. *H. speciosa 'Tricolor'*

Whipcord "conifer-like"

Green. *H. cupressoides*, *H. 'Edinensis'*, *H. hectori*

Yellow/bronze. *H. armstrongii*, *H. 'James Stirling'*, *H. ochracea*

Glaucous. *H. cupressoides 'Glauca'*

Yellow green or yellow tipped. *H. buxifolia*, *H. brachysiphon 'White Gem'*, *H. rakaiensis*, *H. rakaiensis 'Golden Dome'*

LANDSCAPE USE

Small rock garden and troughs

<i>H. cupressoides 'Boughton Dome'</i>	<i>H. macrantha</i>
<i>H. buchananii</i>	<i>H. pinguifolia 'Pagei'</i>
<i>H. canterburiensis</i>	<i>H. prostrata</i>
<i>H. 'Colwall'</i>	<i>H. willcoxii</i>
<i>H. loganoides</i>	

Large rock gardens and fronts of borders

<i>H. albicans</i>	<i>H. colensoi 'Glauca'</i>
<i>H. amplexicaulis</i>	<i>H. lavaudiana</i>
<i>H. boscawenii</i>	<i>H. 'McEwanii'</i>
<i>H. 'Caledonia'</i>	<i>H. pinguifolia</i>
<i>H. 'Carl Teschner'</i>	<i>H. vernicosa</i>
<i>H. carnosula</i>	<i>H. 'Wingletye'</i>

Ground cover

H. 'Carl Teschner'
H. carnosula
H. 'County Park'

H. decumbens
H. rakiensis

Hedges up to 1 m

H. 'Autumn Glory'
H. buxifolia
H. edinensis
H. × *franciscana* 'Variegata'

H. gracillima
H. rakaiensis
H. × *warleyensis*

Hedges over 1 m

H. angustifolia
H. cupressoides
H. 'Great Orme'
H. 'Jewel'

H. 'Killiney'
H. 'Midsummer Beauty'
H. 'Waikiki'

Hebes for background screening

H. brachysiphon
H. 'C. P. Rafill'
H. 'Miss E. Fittall'

H. salicifolia
H. 'Violet Wand'

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