



Gentiana angustifolia - by Paddy Smith

One of the more reliable members of the *acaulis* group to flower is *Gentiana angustifolia*. Its distribution in the wild is limited and it grows on limestone formations in the Alps in south-eastern France and in a solitary location in Switzerland. It can be found in diverse habitats in nature, from settled scree, upland grass slopes to rock fissures. *Angustifolia*, meaning long narrow leaves makes this gentian a distinct species. Its trumpet flowers that extends up to 7cm tall make this ideal for use as cut flowers. The flower colour is usually a vivid dark blue and the insides are paler, tinged pale green and with dark purple spots.



There are also very attractive white and light blue free flowering forms in cultivation. The best known cultivars are 'Iceberg' and 'Mrs Vorger'. *Gentiana angustifolia* flowers late in April into May. Flowers will last up to three weeks in cool settled weather.



Gentiana angustifolia purpurea

To grow successfully plant it in a sunny free draining position where it can avail of a deep root run. It is a very hardy, slow spreading, mat forming plant. It is also a very suitable plant for pot cultivation. I suggest using a compost that contains approximately 10% soil, 30% peat or leaf mould or mix of both, 40% grit and ideally 20% perlite. As gentians are gross feeders, I add 5 grams of a slow release fertiliser per litre of mix. (equivalent to one ounce per 5 litres mix)

Plants are easily propagated, either from cuttings (non-flowering shoots) or shoots containing roots from the outer areas of the rootball after 3 to 5 years. Propagation is best carried out from plants that are healthy and always during a damp spell when the plant is not under stress. Gentians are easily raised from fresh seed, however, expect some variation in the progeny.

I grew mine initially from Society seeds and I am delighted to have got some colour variations from these sowings including the purple plants in the photograph above. Now, I propagate these plants taking rooted shoots to ensure continuation of these forms and I also sow seeds out of interest for variations.