

Unlike David from the Bible who was known to have kept watch on his flocks by night; lately, I've been keeping watch on my 'David' phlox and others by day. ☺

Mid-summer in Nebraska usually means more heat, less precipitation, and fewer flowers in the perennial borders. However, one perennial flower that seems to thrive in all this heat is *Phlox paniculata*, more commonly called summer phlox, or tall garden phlox.

Summer phlox has long been a standard perennial in the flower border. It provides great color and fragrance from late July through September. Native to the United States, summer phlox is considered old-fashioned. It is often a flower that gardeners pass from one generation to the next. Years ago, I took root divisions from my mother's standard summer phlox. Today, our standard phlox rewards us with heavenly scented, beautiful lavender to pink



flowers. Another great attribute of summer phlox is that it attracts myriads of butterflies. These beautiful creatures dart from flower to flower in search of sweet nectar.

Today, white-flowering phlox, red-flowering phlox and about every shade of color in between exists. Some even have blooms with contrasting "eyes." In addition to Mother's older variety of summer phlox, we also grow some of the newer cultivars.



One such cultivar introduced almost ten years ago is *Phlox paniculata* 'David.' Like all summer phlox 'David' performs very well in Central Nebraska. 'David' looks best when grown toward the back of the flower border since it reaches heights of three to four feet. Its highly fragrant, white flowers are densely arranged in terminal clusters called panicles sitting atop stiff, upright stems. It is

an ideal flower for beauty and fragrance in cut flower arrangements.



Another newer cultivar we have growing is 'Red Riding Hood.' This variety typically grows in an upright clump one to two feet in height. It, too, has very fragrant, tubular, cherry red flowers one-half to one inch in diameter. Its individual flowers are also arranged in terminal panicles attached to upright stems which seldom need staking.

Another cultivar we grow is *Phlox paniculata* 'Bright Eyes.' Although not as mildew resistant as the previous two varieties, its flowers are strikingly bi-colored. As its name suggests, 'Bright Eyes' blossoms are pink with vivid red centers.



One interesting feature I've discovered about *Phlox paniculata* is its ability to cross pollinate. If seedlings are allowed to mature and bloom, one can easily end up with flower colors completely different from the parents.

Growing summer phlox is not difficult. The preference is sun to partial sun in moist, fertile, loamy soil. Light shade is tolerated, but it flowers less. A foliar disease called powdery mildew sometimes attacks the leaves of phlox. Planting phlox in areas with good air circulation will reduce damage from powdery mildew. If possible, also avoid overhead watering.

Summer phlox provides beautiful bouquets of fragrant, cut flowers. To encourage re-blooming and to keep the plants tidy, remove the spent blossoms after their first bloom cycle. In autumn, after they have succumbed to frost, cut the plants to the ground and remove the dead foliage. Summer phlox needs to be divided every few years. The young shoots should be separated from the outside of the clump and replanted elsewhere.

Although my phlox doesn't eat grass as David's flocks would have, I'm quite sure he and I have both enjoyed keeping watch over them. I suggest you round up a phlox or two of your own. Phlox watching is fun.