

Growing Border Phlox:

Soil and Site:

Border Phlox love rich, moist soil, but often have to put up with less than ideal conditions. In our experience they still flower well but don't get so tall. The key requirement is moisture retention, so dig in lots of compost to enrich the soil. A good thick mulch (blanket of organic material like old potting compost, bark or even grass clippings) helps keep in moisture and protect young shoots from winter frosts.

A sunny position is ideal but we've found most phlox are okay in a slightly shaded site.

Beautiful pictures of Phlox both in close up and in a glorious garden setting can be found on Hartmut Rieger's website www.helenium-phlox.de.

Seasonal Care:

Spring: Protect from slugs if damage is seen. This is not a big problem in our garden but each site is unique. Spring is the time split clumps and take off rooted offsets to make more plants. Use some balanced fertiliser and mulch when the soil is wet.

Summer: Staking of tall varieties may be necessary (although ours never tall enough to worry about this). If you see split stems this is probably due to drying out followed by watering. If split stems are accompanied by badly distorted and whip-like leaves then your plants may have eelworm and they should be dug up and destroyed. Fortunately eelworm is pretty rare these days.

Deadhead regularly. If mildew is a problem in your garden, spray with something like Roseclear from late May once a fortnight 2 or 3 times. If you need to water the plants try to water at their bases and not on the leaves to reduce chances of mildew. Enjoy the great fragrance of the flowers particularly in the evening! Other rarely found problems include Caspid Bug damage - lots of blackened tiny holes in the leaves at the top of the plant: spray or ignore. Look out for "reverted" stems on variegated plants and remove them right at the roots if possible. Some phlox with striped flowers (e.g. Peppermint Twist) can revert and produce plain pink flowers. This may be due to the fact that just about everyone of these comes from micro-propagated stock - time will tell.

Take cuttings of healthy phlox and root in gritty compost.

Autumn: Keep deadheading to get more flowers! You can split phlox now but you may have to pot up and protect small divisions to get them through the winter.

Winter: At the start of winter cut the stems right down to the ground and clear up as much of the fallen leaves as possible and don't put this waste on the compost heap - dispose of it in your green waste bin or burn. This reduces risk of eelworm and mildew for next year. If your garden gets penetrating frosts, mulch around the rootstock to protect it.

Using Phlox:

The major design factors are:

1. All Phlox are pink to some extent. When growers describe Phlox as "Red" or "Blue" these colours have a big lump of pink in them and they can sit clashingly with red or true blue. Interesting or glaring depending on your personal taste.
2. The scent is sweet but not always powerful, so plant them where you can get close to the scent
3. Phlox perform best where they have plenty of air circulation around them, so don't crowd them in.

Propagation:

Phlox can be propagated by:

Division - dig up in early spring and break or chop into sections each with roots. Plant out straight away. Division can be done in autumn but pot up and protect small divisions.

Irishman's cuttings - separate off rooted offsets in spring. Pot up or plant out.

Soft cuttings - take tip cuttings in early summer as very young plants are difficult to keep through winter.

Root cuttings - take 2in root cuttings in winter. These can take 2 years to form flowering plants.