

Brunnera (Siberian Bugloss)

- A Woodlander for Foliage and Flowers

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In recent years a number of popular garden ornamentals have enjoyed resurgence in popularity primarily due to their foliage: *Heuchera*, *Pulmonaria* and *Epimedium* immediately come to mind. Perhaps less well known but also the focus of modern-day plant breeders is the genus *Brunnera*, commonly known as Siberian bugloss or false forget-me-not. The genus *Brunnera* contains only three species but only one is grown in cultivation, *B. macrophylla*, a native of Eastern Europe. It is a member of the Borage Family, Boraginaceae, being related to such plants as borage, lungwort and Virginian bluebells. The genus was named after a 19th century Swiss botanist named Samuel Brunner.

In the wild, *Brunnera* grows in reasonably moist, deciduous woodlands. In the garden, they prefer dappled shade and humus-rich soil but will tolerate morning sun. In May-June plants produce wiry stems topped with

shaped leaves increase significantly in size to reach upwards of a foot across. If well grown, these plants can assume the role of a groundcover in shady areas. While rated hardy to zone 3,



Brunnera 'Jack Frost' foliage and flower (pictured above and below).



their leaves are prone to scorching if exposed to too much sun or wind. While the wild species is very attractive, in recent years there have been a variety of new cultivars grown primarily for their decorative foliage. Among the older cultivars are



Brunnera 'Emerald Mist'

open clusters of blue or rarely white, 'forget-me-not' like flowers. At this stage the leaves are still quite small. After blooming, the round to heart-

'Variegata' (aka 'Dawson's White') with wide, irregular white margins and 'Hadspen Cream' with narrower, yellowish-cream margins.

'Langtrees' is another older cultivar with silver-spotted margins and is the parent which has led to the many newer silver-leaved cultivars. There are currently several cultivars that range in foliage colour from silver spotted to entirely silver. 'Emerald Mist' is a vast improvement over 'Langtrees' with margins boldly spotted in silver. 'Silver Wings' has silver spotting over the entire leaf. 'Jack Frost' was the harbinger of the really silver-leaved *Brunnera* and probably the most responsible for the surge in the popularity of *Brunnera*. This selection, which was released in 2001, has silver leaves with green veins. 'Looking Glass', released in 2003, has foliage that is essentially completely silver. 'King's Ransom' which has the silver leaves of 'Jack Frost' but with the added attraction of



Brunnera 'Diane's Gold'

white-margined leaves, making it extremely popular! Yellow foliage is always in hot demand and thus plant breeders are now looking at *Brunnera* as a possible source for yellow-foliaged woodlanders. 'Spring Yellow' was an

early attempt at yellow foliage. Its spring foliage is heavily spotted in yellow-green lending the leaves a chartreuse colour that contrasts beautifully with the blue flowers. The leaves turn greener as the season progresses. Perhaps the best of the yellow-variegated selections is 'Gold Strike' whose leaves are irregularly streaked and blotched in yellow. This striking colour remains all season. 'Diane's Gold' is another new selection



Brunnera 'Gold Strike'

whose leaves are clean chartreuse-yellow.

If white is your preference for woodland plants, then *Brunnera* can still fit the bill. The cultivar 'Betty Bowring' (aka 'Betsy Baring') and 'Marley's White' are essentially white-flowered version of the regular species while 'Mr. Morse' is a white-flowered version of 'Jack Frost'.



Brunnera 'Looking Glass'

Some of these newer *Brunnera* are still limited in quantities and fetch rather high prices, but plants are long-lived and clump-up quickly so the initial investment is probably worthwhile. In addition, prices drop over time, so if an expensive cultivar strikes your fancy, be patient!

Here in the Garden we grow four selections of *Brunnera*, all located in the shade garden near the field centre. 'Jack Frost' was purchased in 2006 from Fraser Thimble Farms, located on Salt Spring Island, BC. 'Gold Strike' was given to us as a donation from Pamela Pippy in 2007 and it is by far our most striking *Brunnera*.

In the summer of 2010 we added 'Diane's Gold' and 'Emerald Mist' to our collection. Drop by in late May and June to see these beauties in full flower! However, anytime throughout the growing season you can enjoy their bold, beautiful foliage.