

Plants of the Heritage Garden: Delphinium— *Delphinium elatum*

by Friends of the Garden



One of the most prized plants in the Heritage Garden is our delphinium. Why? Delphinium is considered a short-lived perennial yet our plant dates back to pre-1927! Delphiniums were rarely grown in old Newfoundland gardens, instead, gardeners grew the closely-related monkshood (*Aconitum napellus*).

The stock for our plant was traced to Ship Cove near Cape Onion on the Great Northern Peninsula. The plant was photographed there in 1927 as a fully mature clump. In the late 1960s, a piece was brought to St. John's by Mr. Roy Decker. Mr. Decker's daughter, Mrs. Suzanne White, then gave a piece of it to the Garden.

Delphiniums grow well in St. John's and in our area, and have proven to be much longer-lived than their counterparts in warmer parts of North

America. They are not as rugged as the related monkshood and require regular attention to provide an impressive floral display. They should be positioned in full sun and the soil should be well-drained, yet not prone to being droughty. They benefit from the regular application of compost or aged manure and are known to be confirmed lime-lovers (Ship Cove, where the original plant was found, is coincidentally within a limestone rich region of Newfoundland). If using commercial fertilizers, make sure the nitrogen is low, as high nitrogen tends to result in weak stems. Because they are tall plants, it is essential to stake the plants. Stakes should be placed early in the season and plants tied to them as they increase in height. As a last word of warning, new shoots of delphinium are a favourite of slugs, so some slug baits should be used around the plants until they reach 30cm or so.

Our delphinium is in bloom from mid-July through early August. It is located in the shelter of the Quiggly fence and has a living wall of hops.

