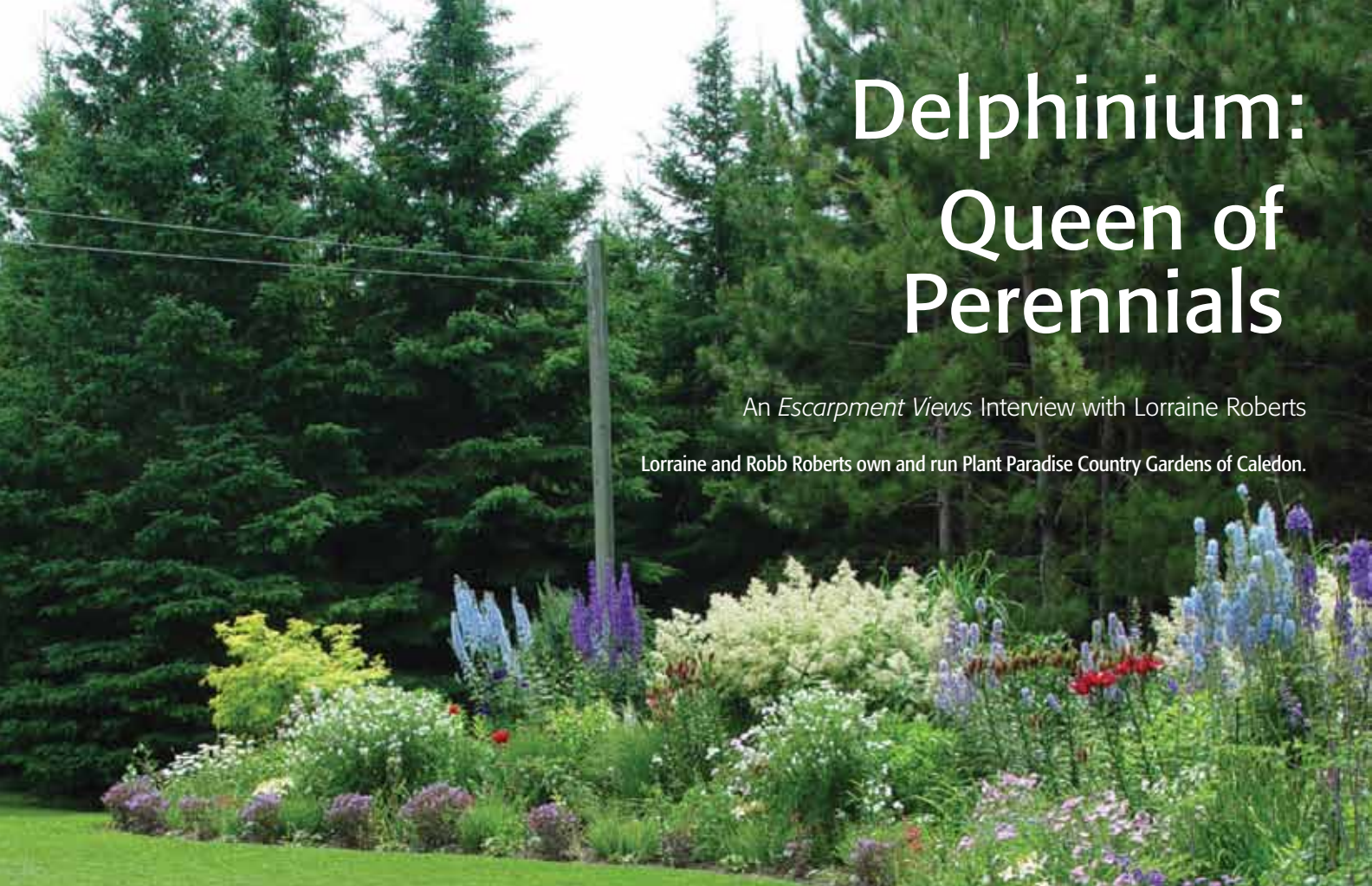


Delphinium: Queen of Perennials

An *Escarpment Views* Interview with Lorraine Roberts

Lorraine and Robb Roberts own and run Plant Paradise Country Gardens of Caledon.



A massive border with a berm takes delphiniums to spectacular heights.



The stately "queen of perennials" reigns supreme.



Display gardens at Plant Paradise provoke awe and inspiration.



All shades from deep purple to light azure make delphiniums a necessity for a blue garden.

Why do delphiniums seem to die out so quickly after a few years when other perennials keep getting bigger and stronger?
There are hundreds of different varieties of delphinium species. As a result of hybridization of the wild species, we are now more commonly familiar with the modern, cultivated, taller varieties of either the Giant Pacific or the Delphinium elatum strains that we see in today's gardens.



Delphiniums in a range of colours fascinate with their centre "bees."

Unfortunately, the Giant Pacific delphiniums have been the most commonly sold delphiniums at garden centres. These delphiniums were never bred for hardiness or longevity. Savvy gardeners are now learning that the delphinium elatum variety lives up to its nickname, "queen of the perennial garden." This variety has proven its longevity and hardiness. It grows in areas that have a temperature range from minus-35 degrees Celsius in winter to 35 degrees Celsius in summer.

How should we care for delphiniums?

Delphiniums require staking and some proper care. The delphinium elatum cultivar can grow for well over 10 years, but as with most perennials, will eventually require dividing to continue to grow successfully. This is easily done in early spring when there are only a couple inches of new growth. Dig up the whole plant, wash off the roots and divide it into healthy sections with a sharp knife.

How should we plant them?

To be healthy, delphiniums need rich, organic, moist and well-drained soil. If the soil is not well drained they will get crown rot. If they are too dry they will not grow or bloom properly and they will be more susceptible to powdery mildew. Therefore, on initial planting, mix composted horse or cow manure into the soil to a depth of 12 inches. Adding *mycorrhizal* fungi when planting will substantially aid in greater root growth and the over-

all health of the plant. Each year additional organic nutrients should be added in the spring around the plant, not on top of crown where the new shoots appear.

How do you get such fantastic delphiniums at Plant Paradise?

We also feed our perennials a liquid, certified organic solution called "Orgunique." We also have more growth and development when Orgunique is watered into the hole upon planting, compared to when we use water that contains no nutrients. Delphiniums have relatively shallow roots so regular watering may be necessary during the growing season if it hasn't rained in a long time. Watering also depends on your soil conditions and if you have properly amended your soil when you initially planted them. Overwatering and being planted in waterlogged soil will cause the crown and the roots to rot. Young, new plants should always be kept moist.

How much room and sun do they need?

The modern delphinium elatum can usually grow to a height of six feet and a width of three feet. Delphiniums require at least half a day of sun but the best location to plant them in is full sun. They are well suited to large or small gardens. Some gardeners with small gardens think they can only grow small plants. This would be unfortunate, because the delphinium gives a small garden height, which gives it the illusion of a larger garden without sacrificing space.

How do you keep them from falling over or breaking?

Staking and support of the blooms is absolutely necessary. This should be done in early May as the delphinium is growing. We use a grid plant support system that holds each bloom individually and we move it up the plant as it grows. It's best not to plant delphiniums next to a wall, as the wind will shred them.

What should we do when the flowers finish?

The length of the bloom period is usually about four to six weeks. They may bloom again in the fall if the bloom stems are cut down right after the plant has finished flowering. Let the leaf foliage die back naturally, unless there are signs of new growth. In this case remove all the old foliage, which will allow all the energy to be directed towards the new growth and it will then encourage re-bloom in the fall. After frost, cut back and remove all the foliage.

Are there any pests to be concerned about?

Slugs and snails are the most common pests to affect delphiniums and of course many other plants in the garden. They can cause serious damage to new shoots and may even destroy new plants. There are a few methods for control. At all times, keep your garden free of decomposing debris where slugs are able to find shelter. An environmentally safe and non-toxic

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solution would be to use slug and snail bait that contains iron phosphate, such as Safer's slug and snail product. Try to provide shelter and habitat for toads in your garden. One toad will eat 10,000 garden pests in one season including slugs and snails.

Where do delphiniums originate from?

Delphiniums have been grown for hundreds of years and there are references to them in early writings as far back as the first century A.D., but it was the ancient Greeks who

gave them their name. The Greeks believed the unopened buds resembled miniature dolphins.

Why bother with delphiniums if they're so much work?

Almost all plants require some care and maintenance and the delphinium elatum is no exception, but their majestic beauty will add a touch of drama and elegance to any garden.

How do you describe Plant Paradise Country Gardens?

It's a unique organic perennial nursery, garden centre and tourist destination located in the Caledon Hills on 24 acres of managed forest. Natural and formal perennial display gardens of continuous bloom are presented in harmony with the picturesque Oak Ridges Moraine. It's dedicated to promoting organic gardening as a way to heal the planet by providing visitors with an inspirational and educational experience that connects them to the natural world. **EV**

Delphinium Day

July 3, 11 a.m.-4 p.m.

Display gardens with delphiniums, gourmet lunch, a complimentary plant & horticultural speakers Charlie Dobbin & Christine Gill.

Tickets & details:

www.plantparadise.ca

or call 905 880 9090