



Includes  
details of all  
AGM Penstemon



# AGM *Penstemon*

RHS Grower Guide

# About the RHS

The Royal Horticultural Society was founded in 1804 by Sir Joseph Banks and John Wedgwood to inspire passion and excellence in the science, art and practice of horticulture. Our vision is to enrich everyone's life through plants, and make the UK a greener, healthier, happier and more beautiful place.

This is the second of a new series of *Grower Guides* from the RHS. It contains a wealth of information about *Penstemon*, as well as highlighting the important role of Plant Trials in the work of the RHS to better inform gardeners about the plants they purchase.

For more information about the RHS, visit [rhs.org.uk](https://www.rhs.org.uk)

The list of *Penstemon* with an RHS Award of Garden Merit (AGM) in this guide is correct as of November 2017. Awards of Garden Merit are reviewed according to a rolling programme to ensure the standard of garden-worthiness is maintained.





# Welcome

JONATHAN BUCKLEY



Border penstemons are among the most valuable late-summer flowering plants. In profusion they produce elegant spires of tubular, foxglove-like flowers in tones of pink, red, white, blue and purple and are perfect for adding a splash of colour to a well-drained, sunny border.

These clump-forming, semi-evergreen, often shrubby perennials have benefitted from significant interest from plant breeders. Ongoing development programmes over the last century have collectively improved flower form, length of flowering season and general garden performance of these sun-worshippers. Many are now neater and sturdier in habit than previous cultivars and give good garden value, flowering for more than four months. Most hybrid cultivars flower well into the autumn until the first frosts, whereas generally species begin to flower earlier in summer.

In contrast to penstemons usually grown in borders, dwarf and mat-forming penstemons have long been popular with rock and alpine gardeners, appreciated for their prolific flowering. Concerns over the hardiness of the rock garden types, however, have meant they lacked broader appeal. Yet many are worth a second look, making a welcome and versatile addition. They have a refreshing palette of lilac, purple, mauve and pink blooms, which succeed the white, yellow and blue early spring flowers, bulbs and other rock garden plants.

**Janice Shipp, *Penstemon* Plant Trial Forum Chair**



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# Penstemon trials

Penstemons have been the subject of several plant trials by the RHS over many decades.

## *Penstemon* trials pre-1990

As early as 1910 there was a trial of 190 *Penstemon* cultivars at RHS Garden Wisley, Surrey. The huge number was an indicator of their popularity, though their early use in gardens was as summer bedding.

A later trial in 1930–31 included 47 cultivars, each raised from seed, including many that continue to thrive today.

## *Penstemon* trial 1990–93

For this trial, more than 150 *Penstemon* entries were submitted, which was an indication of the resurgence of interest in the genus as well as their enduring appeal. The trial was established to consider the all-round garden merits of each selection, with the additional requirement to advise on the correct naming of submitted entries.

The trial highlighted a number of issues. Many of the entries, although different from each other, were entered under the same name. Conversely, others of similar appearance were entered under different names. The confusion may have been caused in part by the ease in which penstemons are propagated both by seed and cuttings. It is likely that many had got muddled over the years and been renamed, or had not come true from seed. Additionally, flower colour can vary depending on soil type and weather, allowing for confusion of similar selections. The trial, which drew on input from RHS botanists, successfully established the correct names and identities of the most popular cultivars, helping to establish horticulture-wide naming standards.

## Dwarf *Penstemon* trial 1994–97

This trial consisted of 67 entries of dwarf penstemons suitable for rock gardens. It was conducted in raised beds at RHS Garden Wisley. Unfortunately, by the end of the trial most plants were not growing well, with many losses recorded in the winter of 1996–97. This was followed by a severe frost in mid-April, which destroyed developing flower buds and led to poor flowering in summer 1997.

The reason for the poor performance of the trial remains unclear, but a number of contributory factors include a soil pH that was too alkaline, excessive exposure to moisture in winter, and insufficient moisture through two hot summers. Only one selection was awarded the AGM following the trial.



## Penstemon trial 2014–16

The most recent *Penstemon* trial was established to assess the best commercially available cultivars, as well as to clarify naming issues that had arisen since the last trial. Since 1993 many new cultivars had entered the market, providing sufficient material to compare with earlier AGM trial results. At the same time, the hardiness ratings of all *Penstemon* were reviewed and updated.

One hundred entries were trialled at Wisley, submitted by breeders, nurseries and individuals from the UK.

The objectives of the trial were to:

- ◆ judge for garden worthiness (Award of Garden Merit)
- ◆ demonstrate the range and use as garden plants
- ◆ compare established and new cultivars
- ◆ produce a permanent record through herbarium specimens, photographs and written descriptions for the RHS Herbarium at Wisley

## Judging the 2014–16 trial

The *Penstemon* Trials Assessment Forum assessed entries over three flowering seasons on 19 Aug, 9 Sept and 2 Oct 2014; 30 June, 21 July, 19 Aug, 10 Sept and 6 Oct 2015; and 30 June, 28 July, 15 Sept and 27 Oct 2016. The forum voted on AGM recommendations throughout the trial period and at the final trial date confirmed those recommendations. In order to receive an AGM a cultivar was required to perform well for two flowering seasons and receive a 3-to-1 voting majority from the forum.

The forum recommended plants for the AGM using the following criteria:

- ◆ habit and structure
- ◆ floriferousness
- ◆ quality of flower
- ◆ length of flowering
- ◆ foliage quality
- ◆ hardiness
- ◆ pest and disease resistance



## RHS Horticultural Database

RHS Plant Trials provide an important record for RHS research into cultivated plants and their names, and data is stored on the RHS Horticultural Database.

## RHS Herbarium

Trials are an important source of material for the RHS Herbarium at Wisley. The primary focus of the Herbarium is to acquire and maintain reference material of plants in cultivation.



## RHS hardiness ratings

To help gardeners determine which plants may be hardy in their locality, the RHS has a hardiness rating scheme for all plants, and this is listed below.

Temperatures given are absolute minimum winter requirements.

**H1a** Heated glasshouse – tropical (warmer than 15°C / 59°F)

**H1b** Heated glasshouse – subtropical (10 to 15°C / 50 to 59°F)

**H1c** Heated glasshouse – warm temperate (5 to 10°C / 41 to 50°F)

**H2** Tender – cool or frost-free glasshouse (1 to 5°C / 34 to 41°F).

**H3** Half-hardy – unheated glasshouse / mild winter (-5 to 1°C / 23 to 34°F).

**H4** Hardy – average winter (-10 to -5°C / 14 to 23°F).

**H5** Hardy – cold winter (-15 to -10°C / 5 to 14°F).

**H6** Hardy – very cold winter (-20 to -15°C / -4 to 5°F).

**H7** Very hardy (colder than -20°C / -4°F).

Further definitions of these categories can be found at [rhs.org.uk/hardiness-rating](https://rhs.org.uk/hardiness-rating)

## Colour references

In all plant descriptions that follow, the letter and number codes after the colour names refer to the *RHS Colour Chart*. The chart is available to buy at [rhsshop.co.uk](https://rhsshop.co.uk).





# The Award of

## What is the RHS Award of Garden Merit?

The RHS Award of Garden Merit (AGM) is intended to help gardeners select plants that have good all-round garden value, and is only awarded to plants that are:

- ◆ excellent for ordinary use in appropriate conditions
- ◆ available
- ◆ of good constitution
- ◆ essentially stable in form and colour
- ◆ reasonably resistant to pests and diseases

Plants of all kinds may be considered for the AGM, including fruit and vegetables. Currently, more than 7,500 plants have an AGM, but new awards are made each year. Awards are made after assessment by an RHS forum of experts, including nursery owners, specialist growers and horticulturists, all appointed by the RHS. Each assessment is ratified by the relevant RHS plant committee.

RHS awards can also be given by 'round-table assessment'. An award is given when a forum of horticultural experts meets to debate the characteristics and garden performance of plants that the RHS is unable to trial in one of the RHS Gardens or other location.





The AGM logo on a plant's label shows it has the RHS seal of approval.

# Garden Merit

To ensure consistent standards are maintained, the AGM is subject to regular review to make sure that every plant still merits its place on the list. Since 2013, reviews have been conducted by each RHS plant committee on a rolling basis.

## Buying plants with the Award of Garden Merit

It is easy to find and buy AGM plants:

- ◆ search using the RHS 'Find a Plant' feature on [rhs.org.uk/findaplant](https://rhs.org.uk/findaplant) or using our AGM Plant Search
- ◆ download a list at [rhs.org.uk/agmlists](https://rhs.org.uk/agmlists)
- ◆ check the latest edition of the *RHS Plant Finder* book, available to buy at [rhsshop.co.uk](https://rhsshop.co.uk)
- ◆ look out for the AGM logo next time you are in a garden centre or nursery

The following border penstemons have all received the RHS Award of Garden Merit, either following trial or by round-table assessment.

# Border Penstemon

## *Penstemon* 'Andenken an Friedrich Hahn'

AGM 1993, reconfirmed 2016

**Flowering time:** mid-summer to autumn. Frost hardy.

**Habit:** multi-stemmed and spreading though delicate in appearance. This semi-evergreen perennial grows to 90cm (36in) tall.

**Foliage:** narrow, greyish olive-green (NN137A) above, and below (NN137D), slightly toothed, in pairs, opposite and alternately arranged.

**Stems:** moderate olive-green (146A) on areas turned away from the sun but predominantly deeply infused dark red (187A).

**Flowers:** racemes of tubular, bell-shaped flowers, each 3.5cm (1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>in) long. Each flower terminates in three crescents in the lower mouth and is deep purplish red (187C–D) on the outer side. The inside has a white background with deep purplish red (187D) veins at the base and sides. There are longish, sparse, white hairs in the throat. Calyx dark red-brown. Anthers blue-grey.

**Hardiness rating:** H5.





## *Penstemon* *'Beech Park'*

AGM 1993

**Flowering time:** mid-June to autumn.

**Habit:** semi-evergreen perennial to 60cm (24in) tall.

**Foliage:** large, ovate, yellow-green leaves, each glossy, and without hairs.

**Stems:** green with hairs.

**Flowers:** tubular flowers each 4cm (1<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>in) long and borne in large racemes or panicles. Each is deep purplish pink (close to 68A) becoming paler up the stem; the tube is pinker (55B–A) on the upper side and the lobes are mid-pink (55A–58C). The white throat has a definite margin. Anthers dull purple and blotched yellow-ochre.

**Hardiness rating:** H4.

**Note:** named after plantsman David Shackleton's garden near Dublin.

THE FORUM SAID:

*A delicate, compact plant.*

# Penstemon 'Bodnant'

AGM 2016

**Flowering time:** mid-summer to autumn.

**Habit:** semi-evergreen, hardy perennial forming a shrubby, leafy clump, to 90cm (36in) tall.

**Foliage:** leaves mid-olive-green (137A) above, and greyish yellow-green (191A) below.

**Stems:** light yellow-green (145C) at the base becoming suffused further up with mid-purplish red (186B).

**Flowers:** bell-shaped, strong violet (N88B) flowers are produced in panicles. The inner lobes are deep reddish purple (77A) with a white throat, each of which carries deep reddish purple (77A) and narrow markings at the base.

**Hardiness rating:** H3.

THE FORUM SAID:

*Healthy, attractive plants with good shape, strong flower colour, and dark green foliage.*

*It is very floriferous over the season and stands well.*





## Penstemon 'Connie's Pink'

AGM 1993

**Flowering time:** from early June.

**Habit:** upright, semi-evergreen perennial to 1.2m (4ft) tall x 45cm (17<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>in) wide. Resistant to windy weather.

**Foliage:** light green lanceolate leaves, opposite, pointed, finely toothed and hairy.

**Stems:** green-tinged purple, without hairs.

**Flowers:** erect racemes or panicles of bright rose-pink (52A–B) flowers, each to 3cm (1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>in) long. Flowers fade to almost white at the lower tube while the white throats are striped deep red (53A). The calyx is light yellow-green (138D).

**Hardiness rating:** H4.

**Note:** a hybrid of *P. isophyllus*.

THE FORUM SAID:

*Tall stems hold the nodding flowers well over a long season.*

# Penstemon 'Evelyn'

AGM 1993; reconfirmed 2016

**Flowering time:** mid-summer to autumn.

**Habit:** semi-evergreen perennial, compact and bushy, to 60cm (24in) tall x 40cm (16in) spread. Frost hardy.

**Foliage:** narrow, lance-shaped leaves, mid-green (137B), yellower above, slightly glaucous below, glabrous, in pairs, alternate, serrated.

**Stems:** the floppy stem is yellow-green (145A) with a faint purple tinge.

**Flowers:** slim panicles of small, tubular mid-bright pink (66C) flowers, each to 2.5cm (1in) long. The corolla is closest to red-purple group 67B. Each has a white throat marked with dark red lines. Anthers purple (75B) in young flowers. Calyx dark reddish brown.

**Hardiness rating:** H4.

THE FORUM SAID:

*This penstemon has attractive damson-pink flowers.*

*The corolla is fairly elongated.*

*It is floriferous and holds its flowers well.*





## *Penstemon* *'George Home'*

AGM 1993

**Flowering time:** June to August.

**Habit:** clump-forming, semi-evergreen perennial to 70cm (28in) tall.

**Foliage:** narrow, dark green (137A) foliage above, lighter green (137C) below.

**Stems:** yellow-green (145A).

**Flowers:** Panicles of tubular, wine-red flowers each 2.5cm (1in) long. Flowers and petal lips pink-purple (71B), throat and mouth white (N155B).

**Hardiness rating:** H3.

THE FORUM SAID:

*A striking and very  
free-flowering penstemon.*



# *Penstemon hartwegii*

AGM 1993

**Flowering time:** mid-summer onwards.

**Habit:** bushy, semi-evergreen perennial to 70cm (27in) tall x 30cm (12in) wide. Frost hardy.

**Foliage:** narrow, lanceolate foliage. Dark green (137A), arranged opposite and without hairs.

**Stems:** erect purple stems, finely hairy.

**Flowers:** panicles or racemes of slender bright crimson (42A) flowers, each 4cm (1<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>in) long, marked white in the throat with red guidelines. Anthers purple and yellow-ochre.

**Hardiness rating:** H4.

**Note:** often used as a parent plant for seed strains.

THE FORUM SAID:

*Species with attractive  
flower colour.*

*The blooms have pointed petals.*







## *Penstemon* 'Hewell Pink Bedder'

AGM 1993; reconfirmed 2016

**Flowering time:** mid-summer to autumn.

**Habit:** erect, semi-evergreen perennial, clump-forming, to 80cm (31in) tall x 30cm (12in) wide.

**Foliage:** lance-shaped, silvery grey-green (137B) foliage, glabrous and shiny. Young leaves are moderate yellowish green (138A) above, 138B below.

**Stems:** strong yellow-green (144C), with occasional purplish red flush and glandular pale purple hairs.

**Flowers:** narrow panicles of bright reddish pink (52A), tubular, bell-shaped flowers each 4.5cm (1¾in) long. White throat streaked with deep red. Anthers blue-grey. Calyx purplish. Anthers recessed yellowish grey.

**Hardiness rating:** H4.

**Note:** *P.* 'Pink Bedder' was originally grown as summer bedding. *P.* 'Hewell Pink Bedder' distinguishes the selection as a perennial.

### THE FORUM SAID:

*Good vigour and habit.*

*Floriferous over a long period.*



# Penstemon 'Hidcote Pink'

AGM 1993; reconfirmed 2016

**Flowering time:** mid-summer to autumn.

**Habit:** semi-evergreen perennial, clump-forming and vigorous to 90cm (36in) tall.

**Foliage:** narrow, grey-green leaves with hairs on both surfaces.

**Stems:** light green-tinged purple (N79D) stems with hairs. Strong yellow-green (144A) infused on one side in parts. Glandular hairs below and within the inflorescence.

**Flowers:** slender panicles of rose pink (54B and 61D) flowers each 3.5cm (1½in) long and streaked with pinky red stripes on the creamy white throat. Purplish red (54A) anthers.

**Hardiness rating:** H3.

THE FORUM SAID:  
*Vigorous, healthy,  
uniform plants.  
Very floriferous,  
attractive rose-  
coloured flowers.*





## *Penstemon isophyllus*

AGM 1993

**Flowering time:** mid-summer onwards.

**Habit:** upright, woody-based, many-branched, evergreen perennial to 70cm (27in) tall.

**Foliage:** lanceolate leaves to 6.5cm (2½in) long x 2cm (¾in) wide. The upper leaves are glossy, moderate olive-green (137B) and the lower leaves are moderate yellow-green (139C). Each is fleshy, smooth, entire and auriculate clasping.

**Stems:** yellow-green (144C), turning reddish brown in the sun.

**Flowers:** one-sided panicles of slender, tubular, bright reddish pink flowers each 3–4cm (1¼–1¾in) long. The corolla upper is a strong red (39A), the lower a pale yellowish pink (36D). The throat and lip are pale orange-yellow (19D) and the lip has deep red (53A) streaks. The calyx is strong reddish purple.

**Hardiness rating:** H4.

THE FORUM SAID:

*Tall flower spikes with variably-coloured foliage.*

# Penstemon 'Margery Fish'

AGM 1993

**Flowering time:** from June.

**Habit:** spreading, semi-evergreen perennial, low-growing, to 50cm (20in) tall, and bushy.

**Foliage:** narrow, slightly glossy, deep green (147A) leaves, glabrous, unevenly toothed.

**Stems:** green with occasional brown-red colouring.

**Flowers:** slender, dense panicles of purple-tinged, pale blue flowers, each 3cm (1¼in) long, appear at the top of the stems, becoming pinker with age. The anthers are ochre-brown.

**Hardiness rating:** H3.

**Note:** A hybrid of *P. heterophyllus*.

THE FORUM SAID:  
*Small flowered so  
great for the front  
of the border.*



GAP / NEIL HOLMES



## Penstemon 'Maurice Gibbs'

AGM 1993

**Flowering time:** May to late autumn.

**Habit:** upright, semi-evergreen perennial to 80cm (31in) tall. Free flowering.

**Foliage:** mid-green, glabrous, ovate leaves.

**Stems:** brighter green.

**Flowers:** narrow bell-shaped flowers, 4cm (1<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>in) long, bright purplish red outside. The mouth and throat are white.

**Hardiness rating:** H3.

**Note:** an old cultivar raised in Buckinghamshire before 1930.

THE FORUM SAID:

*The contrasting white throats really stand out, even from a distance.*

# Penstemon 'Osprey' (Bird Series)

AGM 1993

**Flowering time:** July to October.

**Habit:** erect, semi-evergreen, herbaceous perennial, forming a loose clump to 1m (39in) tall.

**Foliage:** ovate leaves, slightly pubescent.

**Stems:** green.

**Flowers:** racemes of fat, bright pink flowers, each 4.5cm (1¾in) long and wide, with a creamy white throat and mouth with deep purplish pink (55A) margins. Few-flowered and closely packed.

**Hardiness rating:** H3.

THE FORUM SAID:

*Best for the middle of the border  
– this cultivar may grow taller  
than average.*





## *Penstemon* *'Pensham Avonbelle'* (Pensham Series)

AGM 2016

**Flowering time:** mid-summer to autumn.

**Habit:** semi-evergreen perennial to 90cm (36in) tall. Compact, floriferous and branching.

**Foliage:** leaves are glabrous, dark yellowish green (139A), each with a mid vein.

**Stems:** yellow-green (147C).

**Flowers:** Five flowers per peduncle. The simple flowers are deep purplish pink (N57C), each to 4.5cm (1¾in) long. Each has a white throat very lightly streaked pink. Anthers dark purple (79A). Green calyx (143C).

**Hardiness rating:** H3.

THE FORUM SAID:

*This cultivar has a striking flower colour and remains floriferous over a long period.*

*It has attractive, unblemished foliage.*



# Penstemon 'Pensham Just Jayne' (Pensham Series)

AGM 2016

**Flowering time:** mid-summer to autumn.

**Habit:** a semi-evergreen perennial forming an erect, leafy, floriferous clump to 1m (39in) tall.

**Foliage:** ovate leaves, smooth, greyish olive-green (NN137A) above, mid-olive-green (137B) below.

**Stems:** yellow-green (144D).

**Flowers:** vivid purplish red-pink flowers to 4cm (1 $\frac{3}{4}$ in) long. Corolla closest to red-purple group (NN71A). White throat heavily streaked with dark purple-red close to N79C. Anthers moderate purplish red (184C). Calyx green (143C).

**Hardiness rating:** H3.

THE FORUM SAID:

*Floriferous – a good late-season cultivar with striking pink-magenta flowers.*

*Consistently good through the season.*







## *Penstemon 'Pensham Tiger Belle Coral'* (Pensham Series)

AGM 2016

**Flowering time:** mid-summer to autumn.

**Habit:** semi-evergreen perennial to 90cm (36in) tall.

**Foliage:** leaves green (137A–C) and smooth.

**Stems:** pale green (144C).

**Flowers:** simple flowers, each 3.5cm (1½in) long, with four flowers per peduncle. The corolla is vivid purplish pink, close to N67C. White throat streaked deep purplish red, close to N59B. The buds are pale green-yellow (145B–C), with the upper lobe rich red (47C). Calyx green (143C).

**Hardiness rating:** H3.

THE FORUM SAID:

*The flowers have exceptionally attractive throat markings.*

*Vigorous, sturdy growth, and an upright, uniform habit make this a pleasing cultivar for the border.*



# Penstemon 'Pensham Tiger Belle Rose' (Pensham Series)

AGM 2016

**Flowering time:** mid-summer to autumn.

**Habit:** semi-evergreen perennial to 1.1m (4ft) high.

**Foliage:** green and smooth.

**Stems:** green (145B) with an exposed side being greyish red.

**Flowers:** the flowers are mid-red, closest to red group N45D, three per peduncle. Each is 4cm (1<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>in) long and has a white throat streaked deep purplish red, close to group 59B. Calyx green (145B).

**Hardiness rating:** H3.

THE FORUM SAID:

*A floriferous and long-flowering cultivar.*

*This penstemon has long flower spikes.*

*Good plant vigour and shape, and it stands well.*





## *Penstemon* 'Pensham Victoria Plum' (Pensham Series)

AGM 2016

**Flowering time:** mid-summer to autumn.

**Habit:** erect, clump-forming, semi-evergreen perennial, to 1.1m (4ft) tall.

**Foliage:** lance-shaped leaves. Greyish olive-green (NN137B) above, moderate olive-green (137B) below.

**Stems:** pale green (144C), with a few sparse short erect hairs in the inflorescence.

**Flowers:** 4.5cm (1¾in) long x 3cm (1¼in) wide. The flower is a strong reddish purple close to purple group N78B, with bright purple (80B) lobes. White throat streaked deep purplish red close to 71A. Calyx green (144B) with some red markings.

**Hardiness rating:** H3.

### THE FORUM SAID:

*Attractive plants, with a strong, healthy, bushy habit.*

*The long flower spikes tend to dip at the tip, straightening with maturity.*



# Penstemon 'Port Wine'

AGM 1993

**Flowering time:** mid-summer to autumn.

**Habit:** stiffly erect, semi-evergreen perennial to 90cm (36in) tall.

**Foliage:** narrow, dark green (137A) foliage, slightly pubescent, opposite, not toothed.

**Stems:** green-tinged red.

**Flowers:** panicles of bell-shaped flowers are arranged in opposite pairs. Each flower is 4.5cm (1¾in) long, purple-red (187B-C) with a white throat streaked dark red.

**Hardiness rating:** H3.

THE FORUM SAID:

*Attractive dark markings  
on the white throat.*





## *Penstemon* 'Raven' (Bird Series)

AGM 1993

**Flowering time:** June to October.

**Habit:** semi-evergreen perennial, producing a clump of stiff, erect stems to 1m (39in) high.

**Foliage:** narrowly ovate, lanceolate, bright green (137A) leaves, glabrous.

**Stems:** tinged purple with fine hairs.

**Flowers:** panicles of deep purple (187A), bell-shaped flowers, each 4.5cm (1¾in) long. The throat is white and striped deep red.

**Hardiness rating:** H3.

THE FORUM SAID:

*One of the darkest of purple-flowered penstemons.*

# Penstemon 'Rich Ruby'

AGM 2012; reconfirmed 2016

**Flowering time:** mid-summer to autumn.

**Habit:** semi-evergreen perennial forming a dense, leafy shrub to 90cm (36in) high.

**Foliage:** lanceolate leaves. Olive-grey (146A) above and slightly glaucous below.

**Stems:** moderate yellow-green with a purplish tone to one side.

**Flowers:** panicles of large, tubular, bell-shaped flowers, each to 4.5cm (1<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>in) long. Each is deep red closest to red-purple group 59A. The white throat is heavily lined with dark purple patches. Anthers dark purplish grey.

**Hardiness rating:** H3.

THE FORUM SAID:

*Steady flowering through  
the summer.*

*There's a velvety  
texture to the rich,  
red flowers.*

*It has upright,  
clean foliage  
with reddish  
stems.*





## Penstemon 'Rubicundus'

AGM 1993

**Flowering time:** July and August.

**Habit:** stiffly erect, semi-evergreen perennial to 1m (39in) tall.

**Foliage:** dark-leaved foliage, glabrous, leaves not toothed.

**Stems:** mid-green.

**Flowers:** very large, open flowers, 5cm (2in) across the lobes. Each is bright crimson (46C) with a prominent white throat.

**Hardiness rating:** H4.

**Note:** not to be confused with the species *P. rubicundus*

### THE FORUM SAID:

*Its broad, bright red flowers with their prominent, pure white mouths are the largest and perhaps the showiest of all cultivars trialled.*

# Penstemon 'Schoenholzeri'

AGM 1993, reconfirmed 2016

**Flowering time:** mid-summer to autumn.

**Habit:** bushy, semi-evergreen perennial to 80cm (32in) high. Frost hardy.

**Foliage:** narrow foliage, toothed green (137A), opposite leaves.

**Stems:** lax, brown-toned stems.

**Flowers:** panicles of tubular, bell-shaped, crimson flowers, each 3.5cm (1<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>in) wide. Each flower is close to red group 53C with a white throat heavily streaked deep purplish red (close to 61A). Calyx dark purplish brown.

**Hardiness rating:** H4.

THE FORUM SAID:

*Very floriferous over a long period.*

*It has a lax habit so is a good subject for naturalistic planting.*

*The vibrant red-pink flowers contrast well with the pale green foliage.*







## Penstemon 'Sour Grapes'

AGM 2002

**Flowering time:** July to October.

**Habit:** erect, clump-forming, semi-evergreen perennial to 90cm (36in) tall x 60cm (24in) spread.

**Foliage:** light green (139A), lance-shaped leaves, arranged opposite, clasping the stem.

**Stems:** glabrous green with some reddening.

**Flowers:** dense panicles of tubular, two-lipped flowers blending purple and blue shades (81B), whitish within the throat.

**Hardiness rating:** H4.

**Note:** this trial entry and its AGM refers to the 'Sour Grapes' raised by plantswoman Margery Fish.

### THE FORUM SAID:

*The flowers have an iridescent quality and shimmer in different tones of violet and blue.*



# Penstemon 'Stapleford Gem'

AGM 1993, reconfirmed 2016

**Flowering time:** mid-summer to autumn.

**Habit:** bushy, semi-evergreen perennial to 75cm (30in) tall. Frost hardy.

**Foliage:** opposite, lanceolate leaves, deep green (147A) with hairs on both surfaces.

**Stems:** strong, light green, pubescent stems arise from a small base.

**Flowers:** narrow panicles of tubular, bell-shaped flowers, each 3.5cm (1<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>in) long. Each is purple flushed with blue with the lower lobes becoming whitish. There are purple guidelines on the throat. Calyx green.

**Hardiness rating:** H4.

**Note:** often mistakenly sold under the name P. 'Sour Grapes'.

THE FORUM SAID:

*Floriferous over the season.*

*Healthy, uniform,  
vigorous plants.*



# Smaller *Penstemon*



GAP/J.S.SIRA

## *Penstemon davidsonii* *var. menziesii*

AGM 1993

**Flowering time:** Early summer.

**Habit:** prostrate, evergreen subshrub to 8cm (3¼in) tall and forming dense, creeping mats.

**Foliage:** rounded, bluntly toothed, glabrous and thick leaves, each up to 15mm (½in) long.

**Stems:** woody stems, each to 15cm (6in) long.

**Flowers:** erect racemes of funnel-shaped, lavender-blue flowers, each 3–4cm (1¼–1¾in) long.

**Hardiness rating:** H5.

**Note:** ideal for rock and alpine use.

THE FORUM SAID:

*This is one of the best  
penstemons for rock garden use.*

# *Penstemon fruticosus* var. *scouleri*

AGM 1993

**Flowering time:** May to July.

**Habit:** bushy, dwarf, evergreen subshrub to 30cm (12in) tall.

**Foliage:** linear-lanceolate, bronze-green (139A) leaves up to 2.5cm (1in) long x 9mm ( $\frac{3}{8}$ in) wide, becoming smaller up the plant, some with one or two very small teeth. Leathery, lustrous and opposite.

**Stems:** to 20cm (8in) tall and emerging from a basal rosette of leaves.

**Flowers:** erect, short racemes of funnel-shaped, light purple (90B) flowers each to 4cm ( $1\frac{3}{4}$ in) long. The upper lobes are pointed and turned up while the lower lobes are rounded and turned down. Throat white with hairs. Dark purple anthers.

**Hardiness rating:** H4.

**Note:** ideal for rock and alpine use.

THE FORUM SAID:

*Low-growing, compact and floriferous with several months of flowers from early summer.*





## *Penstemon fruticosus* var. *scouleri* 'Albus'

AGM 1993

**Flowering time:** early summer.

**Habit:** dwarf, evergreen subshrub to 30cm (12in) tall and spread.

**Foliage:** smooth and narrow leaves to 5cm (2in) long.

**Stems:** to 20cm (8in) tall and emerging from a basal rosette of leaves.

**Flowers:** short racemes of white, tubular flowers each 4cm (1<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>in) long.

**Hardiness rating:** H4.

**Note:** ideal for rock and alpine use.

The report following the 1994–97 Dwarf *Penstemon* Trial noted that this species is usually one of the best for the garden, but plants failed to thrive in the Trial.

### THE FORUM SAID:

*Among rock garden penstemons this selection is the most tolerant of wet conditions.*

# Penstemon newberryi

AGM 1993

**Flowering time:** spring to early summer.

**Habit:** dwarf, evergreen subshrub to 15cm (6in) tall, slow-growing with a spreading habit.

**Foliage:** small, leathery, ovate, plum-coloured leaves.

**Flowers:** tubular, deep rose-pink flowers, each 4cm (1<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>in) long, are borne in clusters reaching a height of 20cm (8in). Flower bud colour is close to 67A. Flower 74A, fading slightly as it ages.

**Hardiness rating:** H5.

**Note:** ideal for rock and alpine use.

THE FORUM SAID:

*Showy flowers in a striking colour,  
and an attractive rounded habit.*





## *Penstemon pinifolius*

AGM 1993

**Flowering time:** late spring and summer.

**Habit:** spreading, prostrate, evergreen, dwarf subshrub to 20cm (8in) tall x 25cm (10in) wide.

**Foliage:** short, needle-like leaves.

**Stems:** green and woody brown at the base.

**Flowers:** short, erect racemes of tubular, scarlet flowers, each 2.5cm (1in) long, issue from the leaf axils, one from each pair of leaves. Each is covered in short white glandular hairs. The throat is reddish orange. Calyx green with a purplish tinge.

**Hardiness rating:** H4.

**Note:** ideal for rock and alpine use. Will tolerate clay soil.

### THE FORUM SAID:

*It makes a low, dense shrub, with pale green, needle-like leaves and a succession of bright red to orange flowers.*

*A reliable species for the garden.*

# *Penstemon pinifolius* 'Wisley Flame'

AGM 1998

**Flowering time:** summer.

**Habit:** neat, dwarf, evergreen shrub with a decumbent, spreading habit, to 20cm (8in) tall x 60cm (24in) wide.

**Foliage:** small, needle-like, dull, mid-green leaves.

**Stems:** flowering stems are green, glabrous, and issue from a woody base mat of foliage. Older stems turn brown.

**Flowers:** bright orange-red (34A) tubular flowers with yellow-red throat, each to 2.5cm (1in) long.

**Hardiness rating:** H4.

**Note:** ideal for rock and alpine use.

THE FORUM SAID:

*This selection arose at RHS Garden Wisley as a chance seedling of *P. pinifolius*. It differs from the species in its greater vigour and its flower colour, which is richer.*







## *Penstemon procerus* 'Roy Davidson'

AGM 1997

**Flowering time:** April to August.

**Habit:** a vigorous, very floriferous, mat-forming cultivar, 7cm (2<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>in) high x 40cm (16in) wide.

**Foliage:** shiny leaves, dark green (137A) above and 137C below. Each is entire, lanceolate, 3cm (1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>in) long with a short petiole.

**Stems:** each is 8–10cm (3<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>–4in) long, fairly stout, and pale green.

**Flowers:** each corolla is 2–2.5cm (<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>–1in) long, compact, dense with one or two pairs of flowers. Flowers 1cm (<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>in) long and held horizontally. Purplish pink (74B), becoming paler towards the mouth. Throat white to very pale pink.

**Hardiness rating:** H5.

**Note:** ideal for rock and alpine use.

### THE FORUM SAID:

*This excellent cultivar was the only plant awarded an AGM in the Dwarf Penstemon Trial of 1997.*

*It makes a dense mat from which short stems carry dense, rounded heads of clear, pink flowers each with a broad, white lip, and flaring lobes.*

# *Penstemon rupicola*

AGM 1993

**Flowering time:** spring.

**Habit:** creeping, dwarf, evergreen subshrub to 6cm (2<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>in) tall. Mound- and mat-forming.

**Foliage:** small, rounded, glaucous, leathery green, thick leaves.

**Stems:** purplish stems.

**Flowers:** tubular, two-lipped, rosy pink, bell-shaped flowers each 3cm (1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>in) long.

**Hardiness rating:** H5.

**Note:** ideal for rock and alpine use.

THE FORUM SAID:

*Fabulous for a cool crevice  
in a rock garden.*



# AGMs rescinded following the RHS Plant Trial 2014–16

All plants that are awarded an RHS Award of Garden Merit (AGM) are periodically reassessed to ensure that current stock is consistent in all aspects with the standard required for the AGM. An AGM can be rescinded if, under assessment, a selection is deemed to have lost those characteristics for which it earned the award.



## ***Penstemon* 'Alice Hindley'**

AGM 1993

**Reason:** lacked consistency and generally performed poorly. Tired, leggy and yellowing foliage.



## ***Penstemon* 'Apple Blossom'**

AGM 1993

**Reason:** plants lacked flowers, were prone to dying out at centre and had yellowing leaves.



## ***Penstemon* 'Cherry'**

AGM 1993

**Reason:** plants struggled with poor growth and health. Few flowers were produced and the stems turned brown. Lax habit.



## ***Penstemon* 'Chester Scarlet'**

AGM 1993

**Reason:** plants struggled throughout the trial, had a lax habit and produced few flowers. Plant split in the centre and the foliage turned yellow.



## ***Penstemon heterophyllus* 'Catherine de la Mare'**

AGM 1993

**Reason:** lacked vigour. Flowered early, but was unreliable. Poor foliage turned yellow. Spreading habit, bare at centre.



## ***Penstemon* 'Pennington Gem'**

AGM 1993

**Reason:** good foliage but lacked flowers and buds. Breaks in the centre of the plant.



## ***Penstemon* 'White Bedder'**

AGM 1993

**Reason:** small plants did not grow well. Lacked flowers and the dead blooms detracted from the overall impression.

# Penstemon series

Breeders have introduced a number of series of cultivars, often bred with a specific requirement in mind. A series is a set of cultivars sharing certain characteristics, usually differing from each other in one characteristic, such as flower colour. These include:

## Arabesque Series

Hybrids of *P. hartwegii* and including 'Arabesque Apple Blossom', 'Arabesque Pink' and 'Arabesque Violet'.



*P.* 'Flamingo'

## Bird Series

Introduced in the 1960s by Ron Sidwell (1909–93), the series includes 'Blackbird', 'Flamingo', 'Osprey', 'Raven' and 'Whitethroat'.

## Cha Cha Series

Cha Cha was bred to be compact but with increased hardiness, while maintaining a long period of blooming. Includes 'Cha Cha Cherry', 'Cha Cha Hot Pink', 'Cha Cha Pink' and 'Cha Cha Purple'.

## Elgar Series

Named for the famous composer and bred by Edward Wilson, cultivars in the Elgar Series are characterised by their spring- to autumn-flowering season and by being easy to grow. Includes 'Elgar Enigma', 'Elgar Firefly', 'Elgar Music Maker' and 'Elgar Nimrod'.

## Ice Cream Series

This series of 11 cultivars is characterised by large, bell-shaped flowers, strong, erect stems and blue-green leaves. Includes 'Blueberry Fudge', 'Strawberries and Cream', 'Sweet Cherry' and 'Vanilla Plum'.

## Patio Bells Series

Developed as plants for patio containers with strong upright growth and a long flowering season. The series includes 'Patio Bells Coral' and 'Patio Bells Wine'.

## Pensham Series

Edward Wilson (1948–2009) successfully bred more than 50 Pensham cultivars and it is this series that has proved



*P.* 'Elgar Nimrod'



*P.* 'Strawberries and Cream'

most successful in the latest RHS Plant Trial. 'Pensham Just Jayne' was the main crossing parent line and many of its characteristics appear in other selections. As well as the award-winners, the series includes 'Pensham Czar', 'Pensham Plum Jerkum' and 'Pensham Ted's Purple'.



**P. 'Pensham Ted's Purple'**

## Pentastic Series

Bred by plantsman Fred Yates, the Pentastic Series is characterised by large, dense flowers and a compact growth habit. Available in three colours – rose, pink and red.

## Phoenix Series

Bred using *P. hartwegii*, cultivars in the Phoenix Series have showy, spike-like racemes of large, wide-mouthed, tubular flowers. Includes *P. Phoenix Magenta* ('Pheni Magna'), and *P. Phoenix Pink* ('Pheni Pinka').

## Riding Hood Series

Bred at the start of the new millennium to withstand exceptional cold. Includes seven vibrant colours – cultivars include 'Delfts Blue', 'Hot Pink', 'Marble Cream', and 'Red Riding Hood'. Characterised by prolific flowering, compact habit and winter hardiness.

## Rock Candy Series

Five cultivars with an emphasis on vibrant colours have been selected for their compact habit. Each grows to 30cm (12in) tall. Cultivars include 'Blur', 'Light Pink' and 'Ruby'.

## Taffy Series

With a vigorous, upright habit and glossy foliage, this series of cultivars has very large flowers and strong stems. Includes 'Blueberry Taffy', 'Grape Taffy' and 'Strawberry Taffy'.

## Volcano Series

With narrow leaves and bright flowers with white throats, the Volcano Series are ideal for container planting. Includes Kilimanjaro ('Yajaro'), Stromboli ('Yaboli'), and Vesuvius ('Yasius').



**P. 'Red Riding Hood'**



**P. Kilimanjaro ('Yajaro')**



# How to grow

The genus *Penstemon* is a member of the plantain family, *Plantaginaceae*. There are more than 250 species, mostly native to North America and distributed across a wide range of habitats including rocky plains, open woodland and alpine regions. Species have evolved to suit each environment.

The most distinguishing feature of the genus is a prominent, often hairy, staminode (modified, sterile stamen) that generally looks like a downy tongue protruding from the flower, and earning it the common North American name of beardtongue. Penstemons have opposite leaves and tube-shaped, two-lipped flowers.



MARIANNE MAJERUS

# Penstemon

Offering perpetual flowering over a long period of time, penstemons can give fantastic garden value. They prefer not to be too crowded or shaded by other garden plants but will reward you best if planted in these conditions. Being reasonably drought-tolerant when established, they thrive best when sited in an open, sunny, free-draining area of the garden where they can bask day-long in sunshine. Selections grown in borders are more or less evergreen but can suffer dieback in cold winters. Plants will often produce shoots from the base in spring and recover to flower again during the summer. After a few years plants are inclined to become woody and untidy and will need pruning in spring to keep them gardenworthy. Alternatively, raise new plants from cuttings, which will quickly develop into flowering-sized plants.

Smaller alpine types, which flower earlier in the year, tend to produce mats of foliage above which flower stems arise.

# Penstemon

◆ **Overview** Border penstemons are among the most valuable of late summer-flowering perennials. In all but the coldest regions they are easy to grow and maintain. Unreserved and often prolific in flowering habit, many begin to bloom in early summer and will continue at a pace until the cold snaps of November. Penstemons grow to their full potential within two to five years, and are propagated easily.

◆ **Soil** Penstemons prefer moist, well-drained soil that is moderately fertile.

◆ **Size** 15cm–1m (6–39in) x 30–60cm (12–24in).

◆ **Garden position** Sunny borders; offer good value in small gardens where space is at a premium; cottage gardens.

◆ **Aspect** Many penstemons are sun worshippers that thrive in a sunny or partially shaded spot. They are hardy in coastal and mild areas of the UK, but need protection in cold winters and from sudden frosts. In general, plants can withstand temperatures to  $-5^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $23^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). The protection of a wall may help penstemons survive in colder areas of the UK. In general, narrow-leaved cultivars are hardiest.

◆ **Planting** Young plants are best planted in spring so that they establish a strong root system through the summer. Enrich the soil with about a bucketful of well-rotted organic matter and 70g per sq m (2oz per sq yd) of balanced general-purpose fertiliser to aid good establishment. Allow 45cm (18in) between plants.





# at a glance

- ◆ **Pollinators** Penstemons are extremely attractive to bees and butterflies.
- ◆ **Water requirements** They can cope with dry conditions. Neither species or cultivars appreciate being sited in waterlogged ground. Well-established plants seldom need watering unless they are growing in light, free-draining soils.
- ◆ **Pruning** Prune penstemons once the last frosts have passed (usually mid-April to early May), removing last year's flower spikes. Plants with few or no shoots emerging should have their stems shortened, making the cuts just above the lowest set of healthy leaves. Where shoots are growing from the base, cut out all the old stems close to the bottom to remove leggy growth.
- ◆ **Pests and diseases** The RHS Plant Trial highlighted few pests and diseases that affect penstemons. See page 53 for more details. Penstemons resist many pests including slugs, rabbits and deer.



## Regular garden care

- ◆ Apply a balanced, general-purpose fertiliser at the rate of 70g per sq m (2oz per sq yd), followed by a 5–8cm (2–3in) mulch of well-rotted organic matter to help promote strong, healthy growth. Penstemons flower on new, vigorous growth that is not lush.
- ◆ Throughout the growing season remove faded blooms and old flower spikes regularly to prolong flowering and promote and maintain the plant's vigour.
- ◆ In summer, take softwood cuttings.
- ◆ In autumn, apply a dry mulch of well-rotted compost around the base of the plant to protect the roots from frost damage.
- ◆ Remove seed heads but refrain from cutting back growth, which may look leggy. Instead, leave foliage and top growth to protect the plant through winter and save hard pruning until spring.
- ◆ See page 5 for hardiness rating table.



# Propagation

Penstemons can be propagated by seed, division and softwood cuttings. For named cultivars taking cuttings is the only method of propagation and good results may be achieved relatively easily. This is particularly worthwhile if you have a cultivar that you enjoy, since penstemons are not long lived.

## Softwood cuttings

This is the best method to produce plants true to the parent. Softwood cuttings can be taken any time during the growing season, though those taken in July and August often yield good results.



- 1 Fill a small seed tray with a 50:50 mixture of compost and perlite and water it well.
- 2 In a cool part of the day take non-flowering tip cuttings of about 10–12.5cm (4–5in) long and trim with a sharp knife to just below a leaf node.
- 3 Gently remove the bottom two leaves and trim the top and side leaves by up to one-third to reduce leaf surface area and, in turn, moisture loss.
- 4 Dip the cut ends in hormone rooting powder and insert in the seed tray.
- 5 Up to five cuttings can be inserted into a 9cm (3½in) pot to two-thirds of their depth. Modular trays can be used for larger quantities.
- 6 After rooting, they can be left undisturbed over winter or individually potted on and kept in frost-free conditions.

## Division

Vigorous clumps can be divided with care in spring.

## Seed

Penstemons are easily propagated from seed sown in early spring in a heated propagator; plants can usually be put out in early summer. However they are unlikely to come true to the parent plant.



# Penstemons for rock and alpine gardens

Most smaller penstemons prefer soil with neutral to slightly acid pH, demand full sun and good drainage, and appreciate reasonable moisture at the roots during summer. In the wild, alpine types thrive in soils with poor fertility and it is generally thought that providing a richer soil type will increase floriferousness but shorten the life of the plant.

Rock garden species are less woody and more tolerant of poor drainage than shrubby species. If planting in a rock garden, a trough or sink, take out the soil and replace the base layer with a deepish layer of stones, gravel and rock. Replace the topsoil and add quantities of coarse sand and grit to improve drainage. Leaf mould is a good addition. Cover the soil surface with 3cm (1¼in) of gravel or grit to keep the necks of plants dry in winter and to allow air to circulate.

## Propagation

The only way to propagate choice plants without danger of hybridisation is by shoot-tip cuttings rooted in very gritty compost. Take these in summer from new growth produced when plants have been trimmed after flowering. Once rooted, over-winter them in a cold frame, then pot on in spring or plant in summer.

Seed is a useful method of increasing plants. Seedlings will show variation, so superior forms can be selected and propagated by cuttings.





# Planting partners

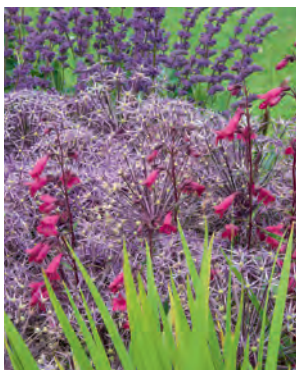
Penstemons are grown for their attractive and colourful flowers as well as for the length of their flowering season, which lasts into autumn. These flowers work hard and deserve their place in the border and will associate well with a wide range of different plants.

Choose penstemons and you're guaranteed months of colourful blooms. In June, when the late spring flowers of other plants have just passed their best, these elegant and upright flowers seize their moment. They bridge the seasons to offer an uninterrupted progression of flowering from early summer until late autumn in a way that few other perennials offer.

In colour-themed borders, penstemons can make a good choice since their prolific flowering ensures blooms are ever present. In cool or pale arrangements choose soft pink or white-flowered cultivars and blend with silver-leaved plants such as *Artemisia* or *Anaphalis*, and contrast the upright flower spikes with plants that have a rounded shape. These

same selections could be used in a night-time garden. Try placing the iridescent blooms of *P. 'Stapleford Gem'* alongside variegated or other white-flowered plants.

Pair cultivars with fiery flowers with more exotic-looking plants such as dahlias or cannas, or in prairie-style plantings mix penstemons with airy grasses and perennials such as *Gaura* or *Verbena bonariensis*.



**Penstemons blend with purple salvia and alliums.**



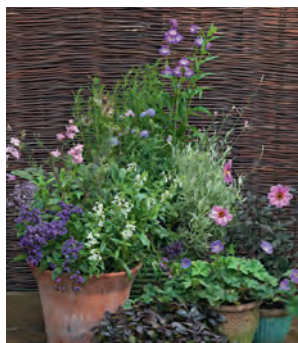
JOHN GLOVER

Using penstemons in this way will increase the range of foliage and flower shapes and textures in the garden.

Penstemon flower shapes and sizes vary from large, blowsy bells to small and dainty tubular types. Try planting penstemons in blocks of colour among late-flowering shrubs, and as they begin to fade the late flowerers will dominate the space. Alternately, you could combine different cultivars of penstemon for a simple but truly spectacular display in a border that will be seen from all sides.

In an autumn foliage garden, penstemons make perfect partners for euonymus, acers, vines and light and airy grasses, injecting flower colour to dazzling autumnal displays as well as helping to provide contrast of form, shape and structure. Sculptural plants such as cardoons and phormiums, which make bold architectural shapes, can also be softened by the nodding bells of penstemons.

As for location, plant penstemons according to their ultimate height. They prefer not to be overshadowed, so it's best to choose open situations. Add smaller selections to the front of the border where they can spill over a path, or grow happily against a wall.



**Penstemon are good candidates for cottage gardens - including pots.**

Penstemons thrive in containers too. Choose some of the more modern and compact-growing selections and use the containers to fill the gaps in the borders.

Rock garden penstemons suit containers well too. Use them in sinks, troughs and saucer planters as well as in gravel gardens, with their necks firmly protected from contact with the soil by a layer of grit or gravel.



# Where to use penstemons

## Gravel and scree garden

- ◆ *P.* 'Beech Park'
- ◆ *P. fruticosus* var. *scouleri*
- ◆ *P. isophyllus*
- ◆ *P.* 'Margery Fish'

## Borders

- ◆ *P.* 'Andenken an Friedrich Hahn'
- ◆ *P.* 'Bodnant'
- ◆ *P.* 'Evelyn'
- ◆ *P.* 'George Home'
- ◆ *P.* 'Hidcote Pink'
- ◆ *P.* 'Osprey'
- ◆ *P.* 'Pensham Victoria Plum'
- ◆ *P.* 'Schoenholzeri'
- ◆ *P.* 'Stapleford Gem'

## Rock and alpine garden

- ◆ *P. davidsonii* var. *menziesii*
- ◆ *P. newberryi*
- ◆ *P. pinifolius*
- ◆ *P. procerus*
- ◆ 'Roy Davidson'
- ◆ *P. rupicola*

## Containers

- ◆ *P.* 'Sour Grapes'
- ◆ *P. pinifolius*
- ◆ 'Wisley Flame'

# Pests and diseases

Penstemons are generally hardy plants that are untroubled by pests and diseases.

Unattractive to slugs, snails, deer and rabbits, penstemons are most likely to be susceptible to attack by eelworm (which wasn't prevalent during the trial). These nematodes are barely detectable by the human eye, but the damage they create by puncturing plant cells creates distortion, swelling and discolouration, most typically in leaves and stems. Affected plants will fail to thrive. Damage begins in leaves at the lower part of plants, and spreads up the stem. Infected leaves turn black. Remove and destroy any plant parts affected by eelworm. This pest can live on in the soil once infected plants are removed, so plant new penstemons in a different area of the garden to deter the problem from recurring.



Penstemons dislike heavy, waterlogged soils and may be damaged by frost and cold. Several plants died during the trial from severe frosts affecting the trials field.

During the latest trial, all plants were sprayed regularly with fungicide and insecticide. On occasion the beds were treated with a control for *Sclerotinia*, a fungus that may cause white mould if soil conditions allow, and which was noted to be prevalent on a handful of occasions. *Sclerotinia* is not a common or expected issue with penstemons, but may have been already present in the trial bed.

- ◆ Cold and wet are the main enemies of all penstemons, but aphids can attack young shoots in summer.
- ◆ Occasionally, plants are prone to mildew, which can be prevented by spraying or adjusting the plant's environment.
- ◆ Water-borne foot rots (*Phytophthora*) may result from poorly drained soil.



# Penstemon

- ◆ P. 'Alice Hindley' AGM
- ◆ P. 'Andenken an Friedrich Hahn' (syn. Garnet) AGM
- ◆ P. 'Apple Blossom' AGM
- ◆ P. 'Blackbird' (Bird Series)
- ◆ P. 'Blue Riding Hood' (Riding Hood Series)
- ◆ P. 'Blueberry Fudge' (Ice Cream Series)
- ◆ P. 'Bodnant'
- ◆ P. 'Bubblemum' (Ice Cream Series)
- ◆ P. 'Burgundy'
- ◆ P. 'Cherry' AGM
- ◆ P. 'Chester Scarlet' (syn. 'Joy') AGM
- ◆ P. 'Countess of Dalkeith'
- ◆ P. 'Dark Towers'
- ◆ P. 'Delfts Blue Riding Hood' (Riding Hood Series)
- ◆ P. *digitalis* 'Husker Red'
- ◆ P. 'Elgar Firefly' (Elgar Series)
- ◆ P. 'Elgar Light of Life' (Elgar Series)
- ◆ P. 'Elgar Nimrod' (Elgar Series)
- ◆ P. Etna ('Yatna') (Volcano Series)
- ◆ P. 'Evelyn' AGM
- ◆ P. 'Flamingo'
- ◆ P. Fujiyama ('Yayama')
- ◆ P. 'George Elrick'
- ◆ P. 'George Moon'
- ◆ P. *glaber* 'Roundway Snowflake'
- ◆ P. *hartwegii* 'Albus'
- ◆ P. *heterophyllus* 'Catherine de la Mare' AGM
- ◆ P. *heterophyllus* 'Heavenly Blue'
- ◆ P. *heterophyllus* 'Margarita Bop'
- ◆ P. 'Hewell Pink Bedder' AGM
- ◆ P. 'Hidcote Pink' AGM
- ◆ P. 'Hidcote Purple'
- ◆ P. 'Hot Pink Riding Hood' (Riding Hood Series)
- ◆ P. 'Juicy Grape' (Ice Cream Series)
- ◆ P. Kilimanjaro ('Yajaro') (Volcano Series)
- ◆ P. 'King George V'
- ◆ P. 'Maurice Gibbs' AGM
- ◆ P. 'Melting Candy' (Ice Cream Series)
- ◆ P. 'Midnight'
- ◆ P. 'Mother of Pearl'
- ◆ P. 'Newbury Gem'
- ◆ P. 'Opsrey' AGM (Bird Series)
- ◆ P. 'Pennington Gem' AGM
- ◆ P. 'Pensham Amelia Jane' (Pensham Series)
- ◆ P. 'Pensham Avonbelle' (Pensham Series)
- ◆ P. 'Pensham Blackberry Ice' (Pensham Series)
- ◆ P. 'Pensham Blueberry Ice' (Pensham Series)
- ◆ P. 'Pensham Capricorn Moon' (Pensham Series)



P. 'Blueberry Fudge'



P. 'Kilimanjaro' ('Yajaro')



# Trial 2014–16

- ◆ P. 'Pensham Czar' (Pensham Series)
- ◆ P. 'Pensham Eleanor Young' (Pensham Series)
- ◆ P. 'Pensham Freshwater Pearl' (Pensham Series)
- ◆ P. 'Pensham Great Expectations' (Pensham Series)
- ◆ P. 'Pensham Just Jayne' (Pensham Series)
- ◆ P. 'Pensham Kay Burton' (Pensham Series)
- ◆ P. 'Pensham Laura' (Pensham Series)
- ◆ P. 'Pensham Loganberry Ice' (Pensham Series)
- ◆ P. 'Pensham Louise Wilson' (Pensham Series)
- ◆ P. 'Pensham Marilyn' (Pensham Series)
- ◆ P. 'Pensham Plum Jerkum' (Pensham Series)
- ◆ P. 'Pensham Raspberry Ice' (Pensham Series)
- ◆ P. 'Pensham Saint James's' (Pensham Series)
- ◆ P. 'Pensham Skies' (Pensham Series)
- ◆ P. 'Pensham Tayberry Ice' (Pensham Series)
- ◆ P. 'Pensham Ted's Purple' (Pensham Series)
- ◆ P. 'Pensham Tiger Bell Coral' (Pensham Series)
- ◆ P. 'Pensham Tiger Bell Rose' (Pensham Series)
- ◆ P. 'Pensham Victoria Plum' (Pensham Series)
- ◆ P. 'Pensham Wedding Day' (Pensham Series)
- ◆ P. 'Pensham Westminster Belle' (Pensham Series)
- ◆ P. 'Pershore Pink Necklace'
- ◆ P. Phoenix Appleblossom ('Pheni Ablos') (Phoenix Series)
- ◆ P. Phoenix Pink ('Pheni Pinka') (Phoenix Series)
- ◆ P. Phoenix Magenta ('Pheni Magna') (Phoenix Series)
- ◆ P. Phoenix Red ('Pheni Reeda') (Phoenix Series)
- ◆ P. Phoenix Violet ('Pheni Vio') (Phoenix Series)
- ◆ P. 'Port Wine' AGM
- ◆ P. 'Precious Gem'
- ◆ P. 'Purple Passion'
- ◆ P. 'Purple Riding Hood' (Riding Hood Series)
- ◆ P. 'Red Riding Hood' (Riding Hood Series)
- ◆ P. 'Rich Ruby' AGM
- ◆ P. 'Schoenholzeri' (syn. 'Firebird') AGM
- ◆ P. 'Stapleford Gem' AGM
- ◆ P. 'Strawberries and Cream' (Ice Cream Series)
- ◆ P. 'Storm'
- ◆ P. 'Sweet Cherry' (Ice Cream Series)
- ◆ P. 'Thorn'
- ◆ P. Vesuvius ('Yasius') (Volcano Series)
- ◆ P. 'White Bedder' AGM
- ◆ P. 'Windsor Red'
- ◆ P. 'Woodpecker'



P. 'Pensham Tayberry Ice'



P. 'Thorn'

# Suppliers to the *Penstemon* Trial

## **Cotswold Garden Flowers**

Sands Lane, Badsey,  
Worcestershire WR11 7EZ

## **Delamore Young Plants**

Now incorporated into Volmary. [www.volmary.com](http://www.volmary.com)

## **Fairweather's Wholesale Nursery**

Hilltop, Beaulieu,  
Hampshire SO42 7YB

## **Hardys Cottage Garden Plants**

Priory Lane Nursery,  
Freefolk Priors, Whitchurch,  
Hampshire RG28 7NJ

## **Hayloft Plants**

The Pack House,  
Manor Farm Nursery,  
Pensham,  
Persnore WR10 3HB

## **Hoo House Nursery**

Gloucester Road,  
Tewkesbury,  
Gloucester GL20 7DA

## **Kernock Park Plants**

Pillaton, Saltash,  
Cornwall PL12 6RY

## **Thompson & Morgan**

[www.thompson-morgan.com](http://www.thompson-morgan.com)

## **Syngenta**

[www.syngenta.co.uk](http://www.syngenta.co.uk)

## **Worlds End Garden Nursery**

Now closed

## **Wyeval Nurseries**

[www.wyevalnurseries.co.uk](http://www.wyevalnurseries.co.uk)

# For more information

Details of current and past RHS Plant Trials, including Trial Reports, can be found online at [rhs.org.uk/trials-awards](https://rhs.org.uk/trials-awards)

There are also a limited number of earlier Plant Trial Bulletins available to download, or as printed copies. Printed copies can be obtained from The Wisley Plant Centre at RHS Garden Wisley, or by contacting the Trials Office at the address below (donations are requested to cover the cost of these bulletins).

**Horticultural Trials and Relations office,  
RHS Garden Wisley,  
Woking, Surrey GU23 6QB  
Email: [trials@rhs.org.uk](mailto:trials@rhs.org.uk)**

## **In 2018 the following trials will be taking place at RHS Gardens and Partner Gardens:**

Aubergine	<i>Hibiscus syriacus</i>
Chinese cabbage	<i>Hydrangea macrophylla</i>
<i>Chrysanthemum</i> (in containers)	<i>Hypericum</i>
<i>Colchicum</i>	<i>Iris reticulata</i>
<i>Cornus</i>	<i>Lilium</i> (Asiatic hybrids)
<i>Cypripedium</i>	<i>Paeonia</i>
<i>Echinacea</i>	<i>Physocarpus</i>
<i>Eucomis</i>	<i>Rosmarinus</i>
<i>Erica</i> (winter-flowering)	<i>Sanguisorba</i>
<i>Gentiana</i>	<i>Sarracenia</i> (outdoors)
<i>Geum</i>	Shallots
<i>Hemerocallis</i>	<i>Viburnum plicatum</i>
	Winter cabbage

This *Grower Guide* was compiled with information from the RHS Plant Trial *Penstemon Final Trials Report 2014–16*, written by RHS Trials Officer Karen Robbirt. With thanks to Nigel Hewish, Janice Shipp, Barry Phillips and Saskia Harris. For more information about RHS Plant Trials visit

# Helping gardeners choose the best plants

The Royal Horticultural Society trials a wide range of ornamental and edible garden plants to test their health, performance and weather endurance. The best performers may receive a prestigious RHS Award of Garden Merit (AGM). Plant Trials provide the opportunity for multiple selections of the same plant to be grown side by side for the purpose of comparison. The selections are assessed by an expert RHS forum panel and the trial results are used to inform their decision to award plants the RHS AGM status.

The plants are usually grown from seed and vegetative material, submitted by nurseries, individuals and breeders. Visitors to RHS Garden Wisley are encouraged to view ongoing plant trials on the Trials Field. Off-site trials are also held at gardens and nurseries across the UK.

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