

## Cotswold Cottage Gardening

# Lovely Lupins, Perfect Peas.

Lupins are one of the great stalwarts of the traditional cottage garden, their great spikes of pea flowers wafting distinctive scent. Last year my lupins flowered for seven weeks, from late May to mid July. The length of the display is helped by cutting the flower stems down to the base as soon as the flowers have faded to about halfway up the stem, and by giving a judicious helping of liquid fertiliser about halfway through, to give the new flowering spikes a boost.

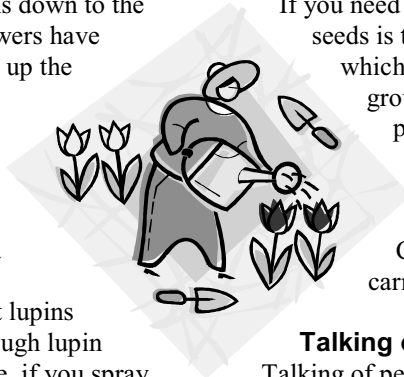
I have never found that lupins need staking, and although lupin aphid can be a nuisance, if you spray with a systemic insecticide as soon as they appear, they are usually discouraged for the season.

### Keeping Them Going

However, lupins are short-lived compared to some perennials, generally dwindling or completely rotting-off after four or five years. You can take cuttings in early spring, but I have never found the resulting plants to be very strong. The best way to keep them going is to save seed from your favourite plant – you only need to keep the bottom few pods on a stalk. When the pods are brown, snap them off and keep them until the next spring. Like many of the pea family, you can get better germination by chipping them (removing a very small part of the outer coat) or just soaking overnight until they swell up a little. Sow them in a tray or in individual cells in April, and line them out when they are about three

inches high and have a decent root system. Grow them on, keeping them well watered, and plant them in the flowering position in autumn. They will flower in the next year, but be much better in years two and three.

If you need plants, one of the better seeds is the “Gallery Series”, which are available in colour groups as well as mixed packets. Most garden centres sell “Band of Nobles” plants; the most striking is “My Castle”, a good sturdy carmine-red.



### Talking of Peas

Talking of peas, and their close relatives, beans, I have found that a late sowing of mange-tout, runner and french beans in June does very well, and extends the cropping by several weeks. The best mange-tout I have ever grown, wind & drought tolerant and very productive, is an old French variety called “Caroby de Maussaune”. It is available from Chase Organics by post, and Mr Fothergill sometimes offer it in their shop range as well.

It is worth taking half an hour to paint the handles of all your hand tools a nice bright colour; preferably pillar-box red! Natural wood or dark green handles look very tasteful, but it is only too easy to put one down in the middle of a border as you are working, and then be completely unable to spot it. I mislaid my best-ever daisy-grubber for nearly a year like this – now it is scarlet, and I can always find it!

**Elaine Hunt**