
« [Eastern Europe Take It Easy](#) »

Lungwort

LUNGWORT

Pulmonaria always takes me by surprise. Sure, the soft, silver-splashed leaves cling to the ground on the edges of my shady beds, and I see them every time I pass by. In fact, I see them so often that I take them for granted. Then, every year in the early spring, a day arrives when I catch sight of a few cobalt-blue flowers. Those flowers, which are pink when they open, morph to a more dramatic shade as they age, and that blue—true blue, not blue-purple—is so bright and clear that it grabs the eye and holds it. By the time all the pulmonaria plants have burst into bloom, the newly opened pink flowers and the mature bright blue blossoms combine to create a magical color mix.

Every year when the pulmonaria bloom, I vow to order more of them and start a collection of species and varieties. Some year I may actually accomplish this.

What I have done in the meantime is divide my existing plants and spread them around so that the annual surprise repeats itself throughout the garden. The plants reproduce like guppies when they are given the partially-shaded, reasonably moist situations they prefer.

Pulmonaria is one of those plants that has acquired a host of common names over the years. Some, like “Bethlehem sage”, “Jerusalem cowslip” and “Joseph and Mary” are Biblical; others, like “lungwort”, “soldiers and sailors” and “spotted dog” are more picturesque. The relatively uncommon true blue flowers are typical of members of the borage family. Pulmonaria is related to other blue-flowered garden stalwarts like common forget-me-not and Virginia bluebells.

Equally at home in the herb garden or in ornamental design schemes, the genus has long had medicinal uses. The nickname “lungwort” is related to the botanical name, which was bestowed by Linnaeus in the eighteenth century and derived from the Latin word for “lung”. Under the “doctrine of signatures”, sometimes known as “sympathetic medicine”, healers from ancient to medieval times looked for plants whose parts resembled organs or limbs of the human body. Those plants were thought to be beneficial for the body parts they resembled and were used to accordingly to treat specific ailments. Practitioners of sympathetic medicine used pulmonaria to treat respiratory complaints.

These days, people do not treat their coughs and wheezes with lungwort decoctions, but plant breeders have used the genus to fatten up their pocketbooks. There are scores of species and cultivated varieties on the market, with more arriving every year.

Most of the pulmonaria in my garden are a wonderful older variety called ‘Mrs. Moon’. The spring leaves are apple green with silvery spots and the young pink flowers age quickly to true blue. ‘Mrs. Moon’ is a selection of *Pulmonaria saccharata*. Other popular *saccharatas* include the white-flowered, ‘White Wings’, which is sometimes sold under the name ‘Ice Ballet’; and ‘Janet Fisk’, which is similar to ‘Mrs. Moon’ but with more silver on the leaves.

‘Sissinghurst White’ is a variety of *Pulmonaria officinalis* and is named after English writer Vita Sackville West’s famous garden as Sissinghurst Castle. Both the flowers and leaf markings are white,

which makes 'Sissinghurst White' a good choice to lighten up any particularly dreary corner of the shade garden.

Pulmonaria longifolia, which means "long-leafed lungwort," have the same flowers as other members of the genus, but the leaves are longer and narrower. Among the more popular *P. longifolia* varieties is 'E.B. Anderson', whose flowers also resemble those of 'Mrs. Moon'.

One lungwort that has made a big splash in the marketplace is 'Raspberry Splash', which has a clumping habit; long, silver-splotted leaves and bright raspberry-pink flowers. Since silver-leafed plants are enjoying a wave of popularity, you might want to try any of the varieties with "silver" in their names. These include 'Silver Lance', 'Silver Shimmers' and 'Silver Streamers'. For landscape plantings where leaf coloration is more important than flowers, try 'Dark Vader', with silver-splashed, dark green leaves and the usual blue spring flowers.

People always complain that they are cursed by too much shade in their gardens, but it's much more constructive to think of shade as a creative opportunity. Like hosta, brunnera, tuberous begonias and heuchera, lungwort can do great things for dark places. And it will sweep you off your feet every spring.

Terra Nova Nurseries, the American wholesale nursery and plant breeding company, carries an extensive inventory of interesting lungworts. To find retailers in your area, go to www.terravanurseries.com and click on the "retail sources" tab on the left hand side of the page.

This entry was posted on Monday, April 21st, 2008 at 5:38 am and is filed under [spring](#).

[Print this article](#)

[E-mail this article to a friend](#)

-



- [Home Page](#)

- [Links](#)

- [Archives](#)

- [May 2008](#)
- [April 2008](#)
- [March 2008](#)
- [February 2008](#)
- [January 2008](#)
- [December 2007](#)
- [November 2007](#)
- [October 2007](#)
- [September 2007](#)
- [August 2007](#)

- [July 2007](#)
- [June 2007](#)
- [May 2007](#)
- [April 2007](#)
- [March 2007](#)
- [February 2007](#)
- [January 2007](#)
- [December 2006](#)
- [November 2006](#)
- [October 2006](#)
- [September 2006](#)
- [August 2006](#)
- [July 2006](#)
- [June 2006](#)
- [May 2006](#)
- [April 2006](#)
- [March 2006](#)
- [February 2006](#)
- [January 2006](#)
- [December 2005](#)
- [November 2005](#)
- [October 2005](#)
- [September 2005](#)
- [July 2005](#)

• Search for articles by season

- [Uncategorized](#) (8)
- [spring](#) (25)
- [summer](#) (19)
- [fall](#) (11)
- [winter](#) (11)
- [general interest](#) (39)

All site content is © 2007, The Gardener's Apprentice. Site design by FOURSTORYDESIGN.COM utilizing [WordPress](#) technology.