

Meconopsis/Blue Poppies



Blue Himalayan Poppy

Meconopsis betonicifolia or *Meconopsis baileyi*

blue poppies. Gerry gave a short master class to the visitor, including the advice that anyone really interested in growing meconopsis should consider joining the Meconopsis Group.²

In his book, **Blue Heaven: Encounters with the Blue Poppy**, local author Bill Terry gives a full account of blue poppies and identifies as a major growing problem that the seed is fragile. He writes that the seed is often dead when bought commercially due to poor storage.³

There is a lot of advice available on the growing needs of meconopsis.⁴ They are described as ‘difficult’ or ‘famously challenging’⁵ to grow. Seeds need exposure to cold weather to germinate. One source advises anyone growing blue poppies: ‘If you save seeds from your poppies, place the seeds in the refrigerator for four weeks before planting.’⁶

The name *Meconopsis* is often used to mean ‘Himalayan blue poppies’. This is misleading as there are many which are not blue and do not come from the Himalayas. One obvious example is *Meconopsis cambric* the Welsh poppy, which is orange. For a detailed illustrated discussion regarding the visible differences between *Meconopsis* and true poppies, in terms of their flower structure, bud openings and seed capsules, see the Meconopsis Group website.⁷ The best known of the blue poppies is probably *Meconopsis betonicifolia* or *Meconopsis baileyi*.⁸ Both names are

Lynn Every, a Sunday Guide, sent some photographs taken by her cousin, Jane Wright of *Meconopsis horridus* (blue), and suggested that Guides may be interested in Jane’s account of seeing them ‘in the wild’.

Meconopsis is a genus of nearly 80 species¹ of ‘poppy-like’ plants found within the poppy family, *Papaveraceae*. The name derives from the Greek ‘mekon’ (poppy) and ‘opsis’ (like).

A few years ago, veteran VanDusen gardener Gerry Gibbens, now retired, helped a visitor who had questions about

¹ <https://www.rhs.org.uk/Advice/profile?PID=946>

² <http://meconopsis.org/index.html> The one year membership fee is £13 (GBP sterling) for non-UK members. The non-UK membership includes postage of up to 10 free packets of seeds in the Seed Exchange programme.

³ **Blue Heaven: Encounters with the Blue Poppy**, Terry, Bill p. 16 Touchwood Editions, Victoria B.C. There is one copy available in the Josef Wosk Library and two copies in the Vancouver Public Library.

⁴ <https://www.gardenshq.com/Meconopsis-Blue-poppy.php>

⁵ <https://www.westcoastseeds.com/products/himalayan-poppy>

⁶ <https://homeguides.sfgate.com/himayalan-blue-poppies-22353.html>

⁷ <http://meconopsis.org/pages/genus12.html>

⁸ www.meconopsis.org/spages/baileybeton.html

in use. Even when a plant is a Himalayan blue poppy, exact identification may be difficult because of hybridisation.

Travels in Yunnan - Jane Wright⁹

“We saw 2 meconopsis in early June 2017 in northern Yunnan Province of the PRC. *Meconopsis integrifolia* (yellow) was in the Pudacuo National Park at an altitude of 3625 m about 20 km from Zhongdian in Shangri-la County in Yunnan Province. It was an interesting habitat – it looked like a place that was regularly flooded. According to The Flora of China, it occurs on grassy and rocky slopes, forest understories, open shrublands, mountain moorlands, stabilized moraines; 2700-5100 m and is fairly widely distributed in south-western China and Tibet.”

“The *Meconopsis horridula*¹⁰ (blue) was in very rocky ground in full sun at an altitude of about 3450 m about 50 km from Zhongdian. We couldn’t get to our target location that day because of roadworks, so just headed up into mountains on unnamed roads and stumbled on this site that was being quarried. The Flora of China says it occurs on grassy slopes, scree, rock ledges, stabilized moraines; 3600-5400 m and is widely distributed in south-western China, Bhutan, NE India, N Myanmar, and Nepal.”



Meconopsis horridula photographs by Jane Wright

⁹ <https://www.science.org.au/learning/general-audience/history/interviews-australian-scientists/dr-jane-wright-entomologist>

¹⁰ <https://worldoffloweringplants.com/meconopsis-horridula-prickly-blue-poppy/>