



Six of the best: all McNaughton gentians. © S da Prato.

Ian's legacy of gentians

Beryl McNaughton

Ian McNaughton's article in *The Caledonian Gardener* of 2002, where he described his aims in working with autumn-flowering gentians, presents an interesting background to his legacy of gentians we now grow in 2019. Over many years Ian produced thousands of plants from which he selected a very small number that he believed were good enough.

Time will tell how good they are but one of the very best is his selection chosen to commemorate the bicentenary of The Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society, appropriately named 'The Caley'. This plant was ideal for the anniversary by flowering at the beginning of October when the Caley's winter programme of lectures starts. It is vigorous, multi-flowered with large, open and upright flowers, finely marked and considered by Ian — and many other growers — as his very best.



Ian with his gentians. Photos © Beryl McNaughton.



G. 'The Caley'.



Show success.



G. 'Oban'.



G. 'Troon'.



G. 'Balmoral'.



G. 'Braemar'.



These gentians do well in pots and containers.



G. 'Tynebank Glory' named after the family home.

One of the main aims of Ian's careful breeding programme was to produce plants that were suitable for container growing meaning that anyone could grow these cultivars even if they didn't have perfect garden conditions. Autumn gentians need a slightly acidic, free draining compost and prefer full sun. If in pots it is important to keep them well watered through any dry spells in summer.

An early selection which makes a compact plant is *Gentiana* 'Balmoral', which he named to mark the Queen's 80th birthday. He knew that Her Majesty came to Aberdeenshire for her annual holiday in August and September. As his gentian began flowering at the end of July he named it 'Balmoral'. He subsequently wrote to the Queen and offered plants for the garden. To his delight a reply came from Buckingham Palace expressing pleasure at the suggestion and asking for plants to go to Balmoral. The result was to drive north and present the head gardener with 20 plants in full flower, and for Ian to be given a tour of the garden where he was introduced to the Queen. That evening there was a ball and the plants were arranged in a large container in the hallway of Balmoral. Imagine Ian's delight.

Other fine Gentians he bred that have been introduced by Macplants and are now commercially available include: 'Braemar' which flowers just after 'Balmoral', the deeper blue and late 'Troon', and paler blue 'Iona'. Several earlier introductions include 'Berrybank Dome', 'Berrybank Star' and 'Berrybank Sky'. There are also the white 'Berrybank Snowflakes' and the newer 'Oban'. 'Tynebank Glory' commemorates the garden Ian and Beryl created at Spilmersford on the bank of the East Lothian Tyne.

***Beryl McNaughton,
Tynebank, Spilmersford Bridge,
Pencaitland EH34 5DS.***

Ian died in spring 2019. He was awarded the Dr Patrick Neil Medal by the Caley in 2006 for his considerable contributions to Scottish horticulture. Beryl founded Macplants in the 1970s and still works in the nursery. She has particular interests in snowdrops and meconopsis.