

## Winter Blues Festival Information

March 3 – 25, 9am – 6pm

The Blues Festival features a first-ever focused display of blue hued plants in the Orangery and Acacia Passage. Free blues music performances in the Conservatory compliment the blue display on Saturday afternoons throughout March. Additionally, ticketed blues performances (sold out) will occur. Check the Daily Lineup for details.

3,000 blue flowering or foliage plants, accented with greys and white will transform the Orangery into a serene sea of blue in March– the largest display of the rarest color in the plant kingdom we have ever offered. This display presented a new challenge for our talented growers who coaxed the thousands of delicate, and sometimes finicky, blue flowers to all bloom at the same time during these three weeks – not an easy feat!

## Talking Points

### The color blue in plants

Blue occurs in less than 10% of plant species' fruit, foliage, and flowers. Not all plants have the pigments (anthocyanins) that produce “blue”. Depending on the soil acidity and presence of certain metallic compounds such as aluminum, these pigments can actually range from blue to pink. A good example of this is the common *Hydrangea macrophylla* which can vary in color from pink to blue depending on the soil pH.

### This display highlights our incredible variety of seasonal display and design

Throughout the year our gardeners and designer offer up ever-changing new vistas and displays to enchant our guests. This monochromatic blue display can be contrasted with the bold and colorful Orangery bed displays which were just removed, or one of our Christmas or Mum displays. Everyone may have an opinion about what they enjoy most – bold colors, cool colors, high contrast or elegant simplicity. Beauty is certainly in the eye of the beholder!

## Orangery Plant Highlights

### *Meconopsis* 'Lingholm'

#### Himalayan blue-poppy

More than 700 blue-poppies have been grown for this display.

These spectacular, delicate flowers—which are native to the high elevations of the Himalayan Mountains—are forced by our talented team to flower after months of careful handling. The blooms on each plant only last about 12 days. They bloom at varying times, so plants will come out on display when in bloom throughout the festival.

The process starts in late fall, when we fly in dormant roots from our supplier in Alaska. Our team pots and places the plants in cool greenhouses until they begin to flower. Water management and careful temperature monitoring are critical to bloom vibrancy and for overall plant health.

Blue-poppies cannot be grown in our area because temperatures get too warm for them.

They grow in areas where temperatures do not go above 60°F and are native to moist, shady mountainous areas and alpine meadows.



## ***Delphinium* 'Blue Jay'**

### **Delphinium**

More than 400 hundred delphinium will be on display. These plants feature delicate cup-shaped blooms along their long inflorescence stalks. They require cool temperatures and moderate weather conditions to thrive. They are short-lived in our growing zone due to the drastic temperature differences between summer and winter.

In our growing houses temperature monitoring and management during production was essential to growing the plants to display size and to synchronizing bloom time. Individual plants were moved in and out of cooler greenhouse environments to time them to bloom perfectly together.

## ***Echium candicans* 'Select Blue'**

### **Star-of-Madeira**

These striking vertical accent plants are native to the Canary Islands and the Mediterranean region. Since these tender biennials are not frost tolerant, they aren't suited to be grown outdoors in our region.

We typically grow this blue crop from cuttings. It takes almost a year (48 weeks) to grow a cutting to display size. Nutrient and soil acidity levels require constant monitoring and correction during production to ensure the plant growth does not stall or succumb to root rot.

## ***Pericallis* × *hybrida***

### **Longwood hybrid cineraria**

These plants require bright, but not direct sunlight and carefully managed temperatures in order to thrive. We produce these plants with temperatures in the 60's, but lower temperatures in the greenhouse to the 50's for several weeks to initiate flower bud formation.

We grew these plants from five specific strains of cineraria we maintain in our tissue culture lab. As a result, the plants have a more uniform deep blue color, a more consistent plant width and height, a large flower petal size, and many more flowers per plant than the seed propagated crops of the recent past. The flower timing of each strain is a little different which enables us to add plants when in bloom and extend the display.

Seedlings from *Pericallis papyracea* seeds, collected during an earlier plant exploration trip to the Canary Islands, were crossed with *Pericallis hybrida* 'Cornflower Blue' here in our Research department. Further breeding with these hybrids led to the seed lines meeting our aesthetic needs. Individual clones were grown in sterile tissue culture so we can maintain them indefinitely. This material is unique to Longwood Gardens.

<https://longwoodgardens.org/gardens/about-our-plants/research/research-projects/longwood-develops-its-own-signature-blue-cineraria>



***Plectranthus thyrsoides***

Blue coleus

This plant grows to three feet tall with heart-shaped aromatic foliage. These plants are brittle and break easily so great care has to be taken when transplanting. Each plant is staked and tied. This plant naturally blooms in October but, with careful manipulation of day length and cultural treatments, we have persuaded it to bloom in March! Because they bloom only during short days of winter and are not readily available, they are not practical for the home gardener.



***Scilla peruviana* 'Sapphire Blue'** Caribbean Jewels®  
Portuguese Squill

This Portuguese squill is a tender perennial bulb and is hardy in zone 7 -10. It is in the same genus as our hardy *Scilla*.



**Our orchids continue their glorious display throughout the rest of the Conservatory. Guests may ask if there are blue orchids?**

The blue lady orchid, *Thelymitra crinita*, is a true blue orchid native to Western Australia. Some other orchid species are nearly blue - some *Vanda* and *Cattleya* orchids are in shades of periwinkle. Note: *Thelymitra crinita* is currently not part of our collection, nor is it on display.



Sources: Jonathan Webb, Kristina Aguilar, Peter Zale, Karl Gercens, Jim Harbage

