

## *Hebe Scrophulariaceae*

Hebe may be one of the most overlooked of the flowering evergreen shrubs. Attractive foliage, showy flowers, and a long blooming season make hebe a welcome addition to just about any garden. The tightly packed leaves are deep green or variegated, and the flower spikes come in various shades of violet, pink, and white.

This beautiful compact plant is named after Hebe, the Goddess of Youth and bearer of the ambrosial cup of immortality on Mount Olympus. Hebes are New Zealand natives closely related to veronica and sometimes sold as shrubby veronicas. The flowers of hebes and veronicas are very similar. There are about 100 species of hebe. All do best in cool-summer, mild-winter climates. Most are fast growing, rather low, bushy shrubs, growing one to three feet in height.

There are many uses for hebe in modern gardens. They are ideal for edging, low borders, rock gardens, and containers. Plant individually or in groups for spot color. Intersperse hebes in a boxwood hedge for added color. They are very easy to grow, will attract butterflies, and are generally pest-free. Plant them only in well-drained soil, as many a hebe has succumbed to our cold wet winters. They prefer full sun, but will tolerate part sun/shade. Look for a location that offers some protection from the wind.

Hebes require regular pinching off of spent blooms. Take care to pinch off only the old flowers, since new flowers will appear at the tips of the new growth. If you pinch too far back, the plant may cease flowering until the next year. It is also important to keep your hebe pruned. Prune just after it has bloomed, shortening stems that have flowered by about half to keep plants compact and bushy. Rejuvenate ragged plants by cutting back severely; they will resprout easily from old leafless wood. The pruned material makes good cuttings.

Hebes are easy to propagate from cuttings. In late summer, cut just below a leaf joint. Remove the bottom two leaves and dip into a rooting hormone before potting. Remove the growth tip to induce a bushier plant.

Hebes don't require much fertilizer. They can get by with just a dose of an evergreen-type fertilizer every other year. Apply mulch in the winter, but not during the growing season.

Select varieties with care and choose only those that are hardy to your area. Some will do better than others in the Pacific Northwest. The general rule is the smaller the leaf, the hardier the hebe. Take care to give extra protection if there is severe frost or snow.

For the Pacific Northwest, consider Hebe 'Autumn Glory,' a very hardy shrub with dark evergreen foliage topped with deep purple flower spikes. It blooms in the spring and fall, and at maturity is only two feet tall by two feet wide. Hebe 'Buxifolia,' sometimes called the Boxleaf Hebe, is also a proven variety in our area. It has small leaves, with clusters of white flower spikes in mid-summer.

To learn more about hebes, check out the [Hebe Society](#) website at

## Resources

[Evergreen Veronicas \(Hebe\)](#). Ed Hume Seeds. Retrieved February 13, 2006.

Hutchins, Graham. *Hebes Here and There*. Hutchins and Davies Publishers. 1997.

*Sunset Western Garden Book*. Sunset Publishing Corporation. Menlo Park, CA. Seventh Edition.