

Heliotrope

Heliotropium arborescens

No Victorian home or garden was complete without a smattering of heliotrope plants. They were probably charmed by its habit of always turning to face the sun; east to west during the day, and back to the east during the night so that it can meet the dawn when it comes. Both the Greek name heliotrope (helios for sun, and tropein, to turn) and the old English name turn-sole refer to this tendency. Well loved for their sweet scented violet-blue flowers, they are still favourites as pot plants or outdoor bedding plants. They are cultivated for perfumery and for scenting bath waters. In the past it has been used for “clergyman’s sore throat” according to Mrs. Grieve in *The Modern Herbal* (1931); however, the plant contains potent alkaloids that render it difficult to use safely. Native to Peru, heliotrope prefers a rich, well-drained soil in full sun. It is attractive to butterflies and bees. The plant requires a moist soil, but should not be overwatered, which weakens the scent. Ideal for windowboxes or hanging baskets; anywhere the lovely vanilla and cherry scent can be best appreciated!

