

Trial of shrubby *Veronica* (formerly *Hebe*) 2021–2023

N.S Hutchinson 2025

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What are Hebe's?

- ▶ Hebe is named after the Greek Goddess of Youth and the cup bearer to the Gods.
- ▶ Evergreen shrubs and sub-shrubs which can be found growing in New Zealand, South America, Falkland Islands and the French Polynesian island of Rapa.
- ▶ They are a difficult group to identify. The most up to date study comprises of about 100 species and groups them into the larger genus of *Veronica*.
- ▶ All plants from the former genus *Hebe*, *Chionohebe*, *Heliohebe*, *Leonohebe* and *Parahebe* are now ***Veronica sect. Hebe***.

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Hebe facts

- ▶ Largest group of Genera growing in New Zealand.
- ▶ *Parahebe birleyi* grows at an altitude of 2900 m (9500')
- ▶ *Hebe stricta* var. *stricta* is the tallest Hebe at 4 metre's (13')
- ▶ Mainly white flowers, some pinks and mauve-blues.



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Trial of shrubby *Veronica* (formerly *Hebe*) 2021–2023

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- ▶ This trial of shrubby *Veronica* (formerly *Hebe*) took place from 2021 to 2023. At RHS Garden Wisley, 126 entries were grown in the Trials Garden,
- ▶ 109 entries were also grown at Harlow Carr, in the North of the country and were to be a test of winter hardiness and to compare the difference in flowering time at a more northerly garden.



Wisley Trial area.



Harlow Carr
▶ Sun Border

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- ▶ This was the first hebe trial to take place at RHS Wisley since 1980. The severe winter of 1981 recorded the coldest December in the 20th century and led to the loss of 52 entries in that trial.
- ▶ The objectives of the trial were to assist and encourage growers in the selection of new, contemporary and heritage plants, and to assess plants for the Award of Garden Merit (AGM).



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- The plants were assessed using the following judging criteria:
- Plant habit and vigour
- Foliage colour in winter and other seasons
- Flower colour and coverage
- Flowering period and length
- Impact of pest and disease
- Pruning responses
- Plant consistency year to year and south to north

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- The trial was planted out in 2021 for an establishment year, when one forum visit was made.
- From 2022 forum meetings were held in all seasons at RHS Garden Wisley, to assess the spring and winter foliage and the summer flowers.
- A subsection of the forum also visited RHS Garden Harlow Carr in the spring, to assess winter foliage colour and any winter losses, and in the summer to assess differences in flowering time.

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- Plants arrived in February 2021.
- Three plants of each entry were planted out in alternating triangles. Entries were arranged and spaced by their anticipated size after four years.

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- At Harlow Carr the Sun Border was being newly created at the time the trial was planted.
- The soil was heavily mixed with 6mm sharp gravel to make it free draining. The three plants of each entry were kept together and spaced according to the same distances, but the entries were arranged aesthetically in a mixed border with other species.

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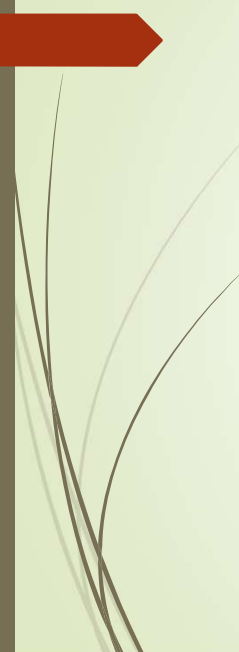
- At Wisley, soil analysis indicated good levels of nutrients in Trials Garden beds. The beds were mulched with medium bark chip and drip irrigation lines were laid for watering in dry spells.
- Entries were arranged and spaced by their anticipated size after four years (height and spread).
- From the largest selections to the smallest, plants were spaced with 120cm, 90cm, 75cm, 60cm or 45cm between plants in an entry and between entries.

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- The members of the assessment forum were:
- R. Marshall (RHS Trial Officer)
- I Ashton (Chair),
- C Carr,
- D Godsmark,
- S Harding,
- N Hutchinson,
- A Marskell,
- L Normand,
- K Pratt,
- R Vernon,
- R Vernon (Snr),
- A Waterfield.

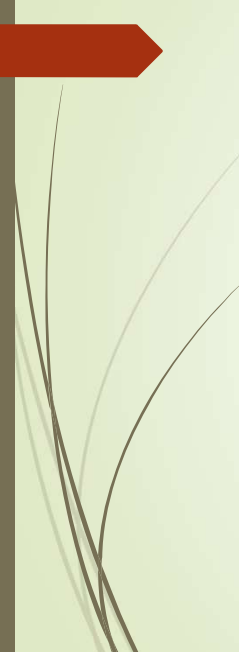
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- December 2022 was the coldest start to a meteorological winter since 2010, and plants were not subject to gradual chilling.
- The lowest temperature, -8.1°C occurred on 15th December. Clear skies overnight led to intense radiation frost, which caused most of the damage across Wisley.
- The start to 2023 saw a second cold wave in January that lasted for 10 days. This led to complete devastation of the trial at Wisley.



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- At Harlow Carr there were very few losses over the same winter. Temperatures dropped more gradually and the lowest temperature recorded was -5.3°C .
- The gritty soil mix and the protection from the surrounding plants in a mixed border is likely to have helped them survive.
- Assessment of these plants continued throughout 2023, a meeting was held in November 2023 to wrap up the trial and make AGM recommendations.
- The temperature in my garden only 20 miles (32Km) away from Harlow Carr plummeted to -12°C on the same night.



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The shrubby *Veronica* Trials Assessment Forum recommended the Society's Award of Garden Merit is **RECONFIRMED** for the following 10 entries:

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- **Veronica 'Mrs Winder' AGM (H4) 1993** [Trial no. 34]
- **Forum comments:** *Good bushy habit. Beautiful dark winter foliage. Spring and summer foliage green, but the year-round dark stem colour adds interest. Not usually known to flower, surprised to see some flowers on trial plants.*
- **Average height after two years:** 58cm
Flowering time: A few flowers from September to November



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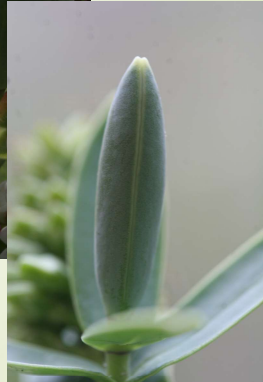




- **Veronica rakaiensis AGM (H4) 1993** [Trial no. 44]
- **Forum comments:** *Neat, consistent, dome-shaped plants. Healthy, apple-green foliage. Flower cover should even out as the plants mature (5 years plus).*
- **Average height after two years:** 38cm
Flowering time: June to early July –September.


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- **Veronica albicans AGM (H4) 1993** [Trial no. 82]
- **Forum comments:** *Compact habit. Really came into form in May and June, with fresh new grey-green foliage. Masses of white flowers. Older brown seed heads created 'salt and pepper' effect! Eventually covered up old flowers. Not as much yellowing as expected.*
- **Average height after two years:** 37cm
Flowering time: June to August


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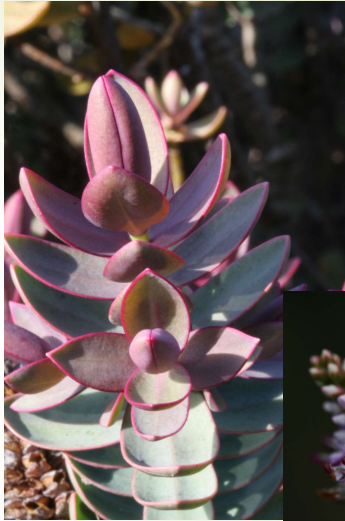
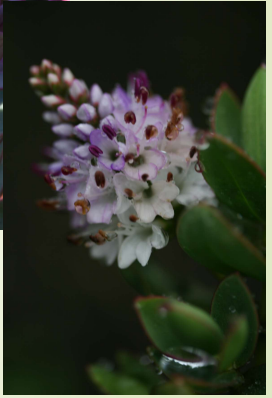
- **Veronica albicans (Recurva Group) 'Boughton Silver' AGM (H4) 1993** [Trial no. 83]
- **Forum comments:** *Stunning. Good flower volume. Love the pink-tinged flowers contrasting with the silver foliage. Covered up old flowers well. Recurva Group flower two weeks later than albicans.*
- **Average height after two years:** 33cm
Flowering time: Late July into October,


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- **Veronica 'Red Edge' AGM (H4) 1993** [Trial no. 86]
- **Forum comments:** *Excellent. Nice compact habit with good foliage, upper leaves a beautiful colour. Irregular flowering. Difference between this selection and 'Super Red' (a Wyvale selection, introduced as a bigger leaved improvement) was studied, and no reliable distinguishing characters were identified. Both entries performed well in the trial. If 'Super Red' was registered now the new name wouldn't be supported because of the similarity. Landscaping companies use the name 'Super Red'. Name requires more investigation.*
- **Average height after two years:** 38cm
- **Flowering time** Late June to early July,


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- **Veronica topiaria AGM (H4) 2002** [Trial no. 87]
- **Forum comments:** *Fantastic. Consistent, healthy, dome-shaped plants. Stayed compact and neat. Lovely grey foliage. No flowers until third year at Harlow Carr.*
- **RHS Find a Plant description:** A very compact evergreen shrub of dense, neat growth, with small grey-green leaves and white flowers in dense short racemes in early and mid-summer.
- **Average height after two years:** 32cm
- No flowers




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- **Veronica 'Silver Queen' AGM (H3) 1993** [Trial no. 103]
- **Forum comments:** *Variegated foliage creates year-round interest. New shoots silver, older leaves cream. Brilliant violet purple flowers contrast well. Suffered exposure damage in the winter, but recovered well. A patio, or courtyard plant, or for a coastal location.*
- **Average height after two years:** 43cm
- **Flowering time:** Late June to early July/August sometimes later

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- **Veronica ochracea 'James Stirling'** AGM (H4) 1993 [Trial no. 104]
- **Forum comments:** *Consistent, slow-growing, with an even habit. Great burnt gold foliage colour, especially bright in winter. Some white flowers. Dislikes being potted on. Survived winter 22/23 at Wisley.*
- **Average height after two years:** 17cm
- **Flowering time:** Some flowers in May




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- **Veronica pinguifolia 'Pagei'** AGM (H4) 1993 [Trial no. 106]
- **Forum comments:** *Reliable. Nice blueish foliage colour. Spreading, low-growing habit. Some white flowers, and dark seed heads. A great rock garden plant. Started to grow over wall at Harlow Carr.*
- **Hardiness rating:** Recommend to change to H4.
- **Average height after two years:** 17cm
- **Flowering time:** June to early July and September to November



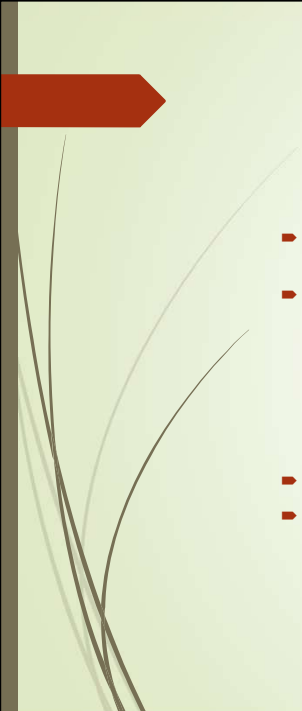
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- ▶ **Veronica pimeleoides**
'Quicksilver' AGM (H4) 1993 [Trial no. 107]
- ▶ **Forum comments:** *Good silvery foliage colour, contrasting with dark stems. Reliable, with a unique spreading habit. Grew denser after pruning with bright, fresh foliage. A rock garden plant. Held up to competition at Harlow Carr. Survived winter 22/23 at Wisley.*
- ▶ **Average height after two years:** 35cm
- ▶ **Flowering time:** July-August







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- ▶ **Veronica 'Wiri Cloud' AGM (H4) 2002**
[Trial no. 118]
- ▶ **Forum comments:** *Uniform, neat habit. Glossy green foliage, not browning at the base. Stunning in flower, with lots of shell pink flowers, and covered up old flowers. Resistant to overshadowing at Harlow Carr. The hardiest pink-flowering hebe. Didn't recover well after clipping at Wisley.*
- ▶ **Average height after two years:** 35cm
- ▶ **Flowering time:** June-July



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- **Veronica 'Pewter Dome' AGM (H5) 1993** [not included in trial]
- **Forum comments:** *Forms a tight rounded dome with small grey green leaves, covered in masses of small spikes of white flowers. Possibly flowering slightly later in June and July than the similar V. albicans. Beautiful. Really hardy.*
- **Hardiness rating:** Recommend to change to H5.
- **Flowering time:** July-August.

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The shrubby *Veronica* Trials Assessment Forum recommended the Society's Award of Garden Merit to the following 9 entries:

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- **Veronica salicifolia 'Adel White' AGM (H5) 2024** [Trial no. 13]
- *Vigorous and hardy. Substantial, healthy plants with lots of fantastic, slightly scented flowers, in two flushes. Wind damage split two of the plants at Wisley to the base, and they shaped up again. The plants entered into the trial, originating from a clone growing in Rachel Vernon's grandmother's garden in Adel, Leeds, since at least the 1950s, have been given the clonal name 'Adel White'.*
- **Average height after two years:** 105cm
Flowering time: Wisley July to August, plus autumn flush
- Availability Bluebell Arboretum and nursery




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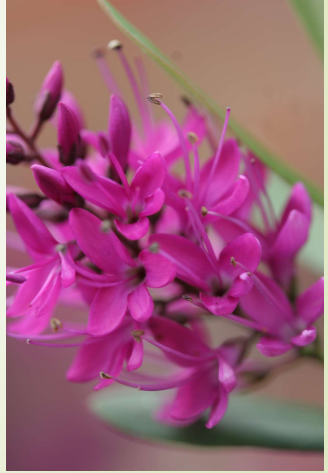
- **Veronica MIDNIGHT SKY 'Lowten' (Garden Beauty Series) AGM (H4) 2024** [Trial no. 33]
- **Forum comments:** *Stood out in both locations year round. Good habit, open but not floppy. Deep purple-red winter growth. Green new spring leaves contrast with the always dark stems. Lots of purple flowers, old flowers covered up well. Also a good container plant.*
- **Average height after two years:** 77cm
Flowering time: Late June




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- **Veronica 'Wiri Charm' AGM (H4) 2024** [Trial no. 37]
- **Forum comments:** *An all-time favourite, fabulous. Healthy. Great uniform shape. Repeat flowered and covered up old flowers well.*
- **Average height after two years:** 70cm
- **Flowering time:** late June–July, some flowers from January

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- **Veronica stricta var. egmontiana AGM (H4) 2024** [Trial no. 41]
- **Forum comments:** *Striking, with large, pointed leaves and dark stems. Uniform, bushy, the three plants eventually knitted together. Healthy. Beautiful large flowers that are slightly fragrant. Old flowers covered up well. Held its space at Harlow Carr.*
- **Average height after two years:** 87cm
- **Flowering time:** July, August to September




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- ▶ **Veronica 'Mint Chocolate' AGM (H4) 2024** [Trial no. 47]
- ▶ **Forum comments:** *Consistent performer, healthy. Uniform, compact plants with glossy foliage and lovely dark winter colour. Green summer foliage retains a dark midrib and leaf margin. Standing up to the nearby competition at Harlow Carr.*
- ▶ **Average height after two years:** 73cm
- ▶ **Flowering time:** July





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- ▶ **Veronica PINK CANDY 'Tulpink' AGM (H4) 2024** [Trial no. 75]
- ▶ **Forum comments:** *Very even, making a good, compact shape. Healthy. Very dark, bronzy winter foliage, dark green over summer with a purple midrib. Stunning flowers, great contrast with the dark foliage, white, with pink stamens. Seed heads not detracting. Stood up well to the surrounding competition at Harlow Carr.*
- ▶ **Average height after two years:** 50cm
- ▶ **Flowering time:** July to September-November





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- ▶ **Veronica 'Wiri Mist' AGM (H4) 2024** [Trial no. 81]
- ▶ **Forum comments:** *Consistent and compact. Healthy. Leaves apple-green. Flowered abundantly, and covered up old flowers well. Resistant to crowding at Harlow Carr.*
- ▶ **Average height after two years:** 40cm
Flowering time: May-June



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- ▶ **Veronica BLUE STAR 'Vergeer 1' AGM (H4) 2024** [Trial no. 105]
- ▶ **Forum comments:** *Beautiful dense habit and great bright blue foliage. Uniform and healthy. Lots of flowers and covered up old flowers well. Superb example on Harlow Carr rock garden, trial plants at Harlow Carr affected by crowding.*
- ▶ **Average height after two years:** 38cm
Flowering time: June to July-August





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Average height after two years: 60cm
Flowering time: WSY = June, HC = July?

**Veronica CHAMPION
'Champseiont' AGM (H4)
2024 [Trial no. 109]**

- ▶ **Forum comments:** Fantastic, consistent healthy. Upright habit with black stems. Leaves uniquely cup-shaped, bronze and when young and over winter. Lots of flowers and covered up old flowers well. Would benefit from clipping after flowering.
- ▶ **Average height after two years:** 60cm
- ▶ **Flowering time:** June-July




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The shrubby Veronica Trials Assessment Forum recommended the Society's Award of Garden Merit is **RESCINDED** for the following 18 entries:

- ▶ **Veronica 'Great Orme' AGM (H4) 1993** [Trial no. 2] (Votes 10:1:0)
- ▶ **Veronica 'Midsummer Beauty' AGM (H4) 1993** [Trial no. 3] (Votes 10:0:1)
- ▶ **Veronica 'Neil's Choice' AGM (H4) 2002** [Trial no. 35] (Votes 11:0:0)
- ▶ **Veronica 'White Gem' AGM (H4) 2002** [Trial no. 45] (Votes 9:0:2)
- ▶ **Veronica 'Nicola's Blush' AGM (H4) 2002** [Trial no. 74] (Votes 6:1:4)
- ▶ **Veronica vernicosa AGM (H4) 2002** [Trial no. 79] (Votes 10:1:0)
- ▶ **Veronica 'Caledonia' AGM (H4) 2002** [Trial no. 89] (Votes 11:0:0)
- ▶ **Veronica 'Pascal' AGM (H4) 2002** [Trial no. 97] (Votes 10:1:0)
- ▶ **Veronica 'Pink Elephant' AGM (H4) 2002** [Trial no. 101] (Votes 11:0:0)
- ▶ **Veronica 'Wingletye' AGM (H4) 2002** [Trial no. 108] (Votes 6:0:5)
- ▶ **Veronica 'Youngii' AGM (H4) 2002** [Trial no. 111] (Votes 11:0:0)
- ▶ **Veronica 'Emerald Gem' AGM (H4) 1993** [Trial no. 115] (Votes 11:0:0)
- ▶ **Veronica 'Margret' AGM (H4) 2002** [Trial no. 116] (Votes 11:0:0)
- ▶ **Veronica 'Blue Clouds' AGM (H4) 1993** [not included in trial] (Votes 8:0:3)
- ▶ **Veronica macrantha AGM (H4) 1993** [not included in trial] (Votes 9:0:2)
- ▶ **Veronica 'Oratia Beauty' AGM (H4) 2002** [not included in trial] (Votes 9:0:2)
- ▶ **Veronica 'Sapphire' AGM (H4) 2002** [not included in trial] (Votes 10:0:1)
- ▶ **Veronica 'Wiri Dawn' AGM (H4) 2002** [not included in trial] (Votes 7:0:4)

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The final meeting



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During the trials Lewis Normand, Stephen Harding and myself got discussing the Hebe's that are not registered and after further research found that no new Hebe's had been registered since the 1990's, 35 years ago!

In 2023 I became the area Registrar (UK and Europe) and embarked on updating the **International Register of Hebe cultivars**, by Lawrie Metcalf, 2001 published by the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture. The Registrar for Veronica is Murray Dawson at the RNZIH.

2000 names are recorded, many now not in cultivation.


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- For the last 25 years I have been photographing, making botanical descriptions and making herbarium specimens of Hebe cultivars.
- These will be eventually be used to make a digital version of the Registration.
- I would like to ask any growers who are present to register their new Hebe's and contact me afterwards.
- Registration is free and will help reduce duplicate names and confusion in the trade.


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Botanical descriptions of the cultivars and photographs showing botanical detail



NAME: *Hebe albicans* 'Blue Star' Syn. *Hebe* 'Vergeer 1' Valkplant listing 2006
 DESCRIPTION: Compact, glaucous-green shrub, growing to a height of 400 mm and spreading to 600 mm or more. Leaves are more glaucous blue than other *Hebe albicans* varieties. **INTERKNOES:** Four times the diameter. Pale green, glaucous. **LEAVES:** Linear, semi-erect, glaucous-green, venate, 40-70 mm long, 15-18 mm wide, margin entire, pale dorsal, vein tooth. **INFLORESCENCE:** Spike, subcylindrical, 10-20 mm long including the 15 mm long pedicel. **FLOWERS:** White, pinkish in bud, petals spreading, 6 mm diameter. **TUBE:** White, 2 mm long, 1.5 mm diameter. **FRUIT:** 2 mm long, white, arched purple. **STEM:** White, 12 mm long, ovary green.

Flowers appear July-August.
 Hardy to -10°C.
 Hebe 'Vergeer 1' = 'Blue Star' EU PVR: 9878/2005.
 Propagated and listed in Romebox 2003 replacement 2009.
 DATE: 2005
 ORIGINAL SOURCE: Plants in collection from R.H.S. Harlow Carr Garden Nursery.





National Hebe
 Collection. Nigel S.
 Hutchinson 2024
NAME: *Hebe albicans* 'Blue Star'
 Syn. *Hebe* 'Vergeer 1'
 Valkplant listing
 2006

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FINALLY

- Hebe should now be correctly called Veronica, the name was reinstated in 2008 and in general use in New Zealand.
- The RHS and Plant Heritage also uses this name in any of its literature.
- Container grown plants grown and sold in the UK have mixed labels, both Hebe and Veronica.
- The Hebe Society have decided not to change its name.



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THANK YOU



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