

## FLAX IN FIELDS AND GARDENS

*Over the next weeks, you'll find several articles highlighting different aspects of flax in the fields and gardens*

### FLAX IN FIELDS (1<sup>st</sup> part)

*'LINUM USITATISSIMUM'*

#### BOTANY

Flax is a fast-growing, annual, herbaceous plant grown for its fibre and predominantly blue flowers (white flax is less productive). There are more than 200 species around the world. It can reach one meter in height at maturity and its stem can grow to a diameter of 0.5 to 1cm.

You can't miss these pretty blue flowers with their long, tender, green stalks swaying in the wind; at maturity, thousands of round pods appear before the plants are left to dry on the ground, their stalks turning from a bright green to light green then to straw yellow ...



A peculiarity of flax is that its pollen is not attractive to insects, although the flower is visited by bees, bumblebees and butterflies and is therefore pollinated like most other flowers. But often, in hot and dry weather, the flower opens, the anthers, which form the end part of the stamen that is the male organ, split apart, allowing pollen to escape. The anthers stretch and curl, depositing the pollen on the female organs, the stigmata, causing the flax flower to self-pollinate. The flower fades and its petals fall.

Flax flowers open only for a few hours and are often already faded by midday. Each plant has multiple flowers opening in continuous succession over about two weeks, but the most beautiful bloom is when the first flower comes out. Photographers and amateur painters of blue flax, are often in contact with growers around Lommoye in the Eure and Loir département (France) so they may be present during this exceptional first flowering that lasts a single morning.

To be continued