Perfectly Puzzling Phlox
*Phlox ‘Perfectly Puzzling’ PP31,487*

*Phlox ‘Perfectly Puzzling’* is so named because it is puzzling that it produces flowers in three different colors: white, light raspberry-violet, or medium-dark raspberry-violet. The different flower colors are randomly produced on any given plant, and it is attractive in all color forms. ‘Perfectly Puzzling’ is a well-behaved and durable moss phlox selection that blooms for four weeks, commencing in mid-April to early May in northern Illinois (USDA Zone 5). At peak bloom, the blooms cover the plants completely. The petite 0.6-inch-wide flowers are star-shaped with narrow petals and cleft petal tips. Like many moss phlox, ‘Perfectly Puzzling’ forms a low-spreading mound that strongly layers in as it spreads. Never more than 4 to 5 inches tall in our trials, test plants grew to 15 inches wide after two years and 18 inches wide after three years. The trial plants eventually grew together to form a continuous ground cover. Hardy to USDA Zones 4-8.
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Phlox 'Perfectly Puzzling'
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Botanical Name
Phlox 'Perfectly Puzzling'

Common Name
Perfectly Puzzling Phlox

Family
Polemoniaceae (Phlox family)

Origin
Open-pollinated seed was collected in 2009 from the diminutive, white-flowered selection Phlox ‘Ellie B.’, which is thought to be a hybrid between Phlox subulata and Phlox bifida. The pollen parent was likely a Phlox subulata selection, as many cultivars of moss phlox were growing nearby. ‘Perfectly Puzzling’ was selected as it bloomed in April of 2012. Careful study of individual flowers led us to observe that no one flower transitions through all three colors. Two rounds of vegetative propagation convinced us that this selection is actually a chimera of sorts, as the three flower colors can appeared in random patterns on the propagules. The medium raspberry color may dominate over time.

Hardiness
USDA Zones 4-7

Bloom Season
This selection blooms for four weeks, commencing in mid-April to early May (weather-depending) in northern Illinois (USDA Zone 5). At peak bloom, the blossoms cover the plants completely.

Plant Habit
Like many moss phlox, this selection forms a low-spreading mound that strongly layers in as it spreads. The needlelike, 0.8-inch-long foliage is moderately yellow-green in all growing season and semi-deciduous most winters.

Size
Three-year-old plants measured 4 inches tall and 18 inches wide in trials in northern Illinois.

Growth Rate
A moderate grower, comparable in growth to other moss phlox.

Ornamental Characteristics
The diminutive, starry flowers are attractive in any of the three colors that may appear. The unpredictable pattern of the flower colors adds to its charm. Enjoy its early spring bloom, and well-behaved, needlelike summer foliage. Despite the smaller-sized flowers than is usual for a moss phlox, the plants will be covered completely by the blossoms at peak boom. Expect a full month of floral display.

Culture
Both full sun and a well-drained soil are recommended. Drought-tolerant once established. If properly sited, it should spread over time, making a low-growing ground cover. Otherwise, maintenance is minimal, and no pruning is necessary. The foliage may be deciduous in severe winters, but it will renew itself each spring.

Pest and Disease Problems
Unlike the summer-blooming phlox (Phlox maculata and Phlox paniculata), this and other moss phlox are not beset by powdery mildew or browsed by deer or rabbits.

Landscape Value
Use this multi-hued selection in full sun toward the front of the perennial border, in the rock garden, on slopes, over stone walls, between pavers, and in similar sites. Mass it as a ground cover for a striking spring floral display.

Propagation
Easy to root from shoot tip cuttings taken from the vegetative growth that commences as flowering is finishing in early to mid-June.