Trecanna Nursery is a family-run plant nursery owned by Mark & Karen Wash and set on Cornish slopes of the Tamar Valley, specialising in unusual bulbs & perennials, Crocosmias and other South African plants, and Sempervivums. Each month Mark will write a feature on some of his very favourite plants.

NEW OPENING HOURS - Trecanna Nursery is now open from Wednesday to Saturday, plus Bank Holidays throughout the year, from 10am to 5pm, (or phone to arrange a visit at other times). There are currently over 160 varieties of potted less-usual bulbs plus over 80 varieties of Crocosmia ready for sale - this is the best time to pick up the rarer varieties. Trecanna Nursery is located approx. 2 miles north of Gunnislake. Follow the Brown signs from opposite the Donkey Park on the A390, Callington to Gunnislake road. Tel: 01822 834680. Email: mark@trecanna.com

## **Fritillaries**

You can travel all around the world in search of beautiful wild flowers but hidden in our own wild meadows are some of the loveliest flowers of all. The fritillaries are a genus of bulbs that occur naturally as far and wide as California, Alaska, Turkey, Italy and China and yet one of the most exquisite of all the fritillaries is native to our own isles.

Fritillaria meleagris (commonly known as The Snakeshead Fritillary, amongst other names) grows naturally in grass, often amongst water meadows alongside streams and rivers. Here it enjoys the cool conditions and plentiful supply of moisture. It's not hard to see how it acquired its common name – the downward facing young flower buds mimic a snake-like head perfectly, both in shape and in markings. The pale lilac-purple/pink buds normally appear from March and they gradually enlarge until they open in April into perfect lanterns decorated with pale watermark-like markings. The decoration and colour of flowers on different plants can vary quite dramatically with some forms bearing pure white petals marked with green and others deep purple. You can plant the moist bulbs in early autumn, however a better way to success is to plant them 'in the green'. That means to plant whilst in leaf, preferably just after flowering.

They grow around 8" (20cm) high and can be planted in a variety of places. Planting in grass is the perfect place and looks the most natural, whether it be a lawn or a wild part of the garden. Try some in the border and also in pots where they can be brought up onto an outdoor table when in flower so you can enjoy their wonderful flowers at eye level.

Many other fritillaries have almost square checker board markings on the flowers and this helped earned the genus their latin name *Fritillaria* (the latin for dice box is fritillus). Here are a few others from these genus:

## Fritillaria uva-vulpis

This is becoming a popular fritillary with its superb pendant brownish-purple flowers and deep yellow tips - 1-2 per stem. The insides of the bells are tinged yellow. It will form good sized clusters fairly quickly due to the large numbers of tiny bulbils formed underground and these naturalise through the border. Like many fritillaries it appreciates moist but well-drained soil particularly over the summer and autumn when it is dormant. Grow in pots, rock gardens and borders. Plant around 6" deep with grit underneath. Flowers Apl-May, 8" (20cm) high. Originally from Turkey & Iran

## Fritillaria imperialis (The Crown Imperial)

A truly spectacular plant for the garden and quite unlike other fritillaries in appearance. It comes from a 2000 mile stretch of land from Southern Turkey in the east through Iran, Afganistan, Pakistan and into Kashmir. The first Crown Imperials were introduced to European gardens in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and within 100 years there were 30 different varieties available.

The name comes from the imperial look of a flowering plant – up to 3 foot high (sometimes more) with 4-6 giant bell shaped flowers and crowned by a cluster of slender leaves. Legend says that the Crown Imperial failed to bow its head on the first Good Friday and ever since has carried a tear of regret inside its flowers – tap them gently and they will indeed drop a tear.

The Crown Imperial is also renowned for its foxy fragrance emitted by some but not all plants. It's certainly unusual.

The bulbs can become huge in time – up to 5" wide and should be planted deeply (10-12"). They are delicate to handle and are one of the last bulbs in Holland to still be lifted by hand to avoid damage by machinery. I always place a good amount of grit and sand both under and around the bulb and plant it slightly tilted to one side so that water does not collect in the central part of the bulb.

Once established the display will be reliable and spectacular year after year. The flowers appear in April/May and come in tones from yellow to orange to deep red according to the variety. They stand proud in herbaceous borders but also make good plants for larger containers. Make sure they get plenty of sun, shelter from strong winds and water well when in growth.

## <u>Fritillaria (syn. Verticillata (syn. thunbergii)</u>

The curled tendrils on the flowers stems of this pretty bulb from Southern Asia give it the impression of a climber. It grows as tall as 30" and in April/May each stem can bear up to 6 flowers, each one creamy white with green veining. The tendrils are used in the wild to attach it to neighboring grass stems to help support its heavy load of flowers This fritillary enjoys full sun and is a tough variety good for gardens. Plant the bulbs deep (up to 12") with grit underneath and do not feed - this is the best way to see a good flower display. The plants are grown in China and Japan as a cough medicine. I find it good in borders, grass, rock gardens and pots.

There are plenty of other fritillaries to choose from – some easier to grow than others - hopefully this has given you the inspiration to start a collection in your own garden.

Happy Gardening!

**ENDS**