

Tips From Trecanna



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

*Trecanna Nursery is now open from Wednesday to Saturday throughout the year, from 10am to 5pm, (or phone to arrange a visit at other times). There is a wide range of unusual bulbs, herbaceous plants and hardy South African plants including the largest selection of Crocosmia in the South. **On 6th/7th August there is a special South African Weekend with plenty to see. Our renowned supply of autumn planting bulbs is available from mid-month.** We are located approx. 2 miles north of Gunnislake. Follow the brown tourist signs from the A390, Callington to Gunnislake road. Tel: 01822 834680. Email: mark@trecanna.com Talks to garden clubs and societies.*

‘Kaffir Lilies’

We gardeners spend a lot of time looking at the weather forecast but it still catches us out on a regular basis. Garden plants are generally a little cleverer than us but even they become confused from time to time, and that is certainly what has happened to the *Kaffir Lilies* in our borders over the past year.

Kaffir lilies are generally regarded as autumn flowering plants for the border, but over the past year I don't think that a month had gone by without an odd flower on display. There was even one spike in full bloom on Christmas Day last year!

The latin name for Kaffir Lilies is a heck of a mouthful - '*Schizostylis*'. It makes more sense when you break it down - '*Schizo*' translates as 'to divide' and '*stylis*' translates as 'column' or 'style' (part of the female organs in the flower). The style on *Schizostylis* is split into three, right down to its base, which is easily seen when you look at a flower. Point this out to your gardening friends this autumn – they are sure to be impressed with your gardening expertise and knowledge!

Kaffir Lilies are hardy perennials that grow from rhizomes (creeping, swollen roots) and they originally come from South Africa where they grow in damp water meadows and stream banks - they make excellent garden plants. The leaves are like flattened grass blades and can form good ground cover to keep out unwanted weeds. The flower stems are somewhat like a wispy shortened *Gladiolus* but the flowers that are held on the spike resemble something closer to a crocus. The flowers range in colour from white, through

all shades of pink, to scarlet red and the petals often have a glossy sheen to them which makes them stand out on a sunny day.

The overall effect is very pleasing and the display long lasting. Most varieties remain fairly low in habit for the majority of the year (up to 12"/30cm) but when they come into bloom that height will double, or more. The main flowering period is from late August onwards with most varieties continuing in bloom until late autumn. But, as you've already heard the odd flower can appear at almost any time, and if there is good protection there is no reason why you shouldn't enjoy flowers well into the winter.

Where, and how to grow them.

Kaffir lilies are definitely most at home in a warm border, in damp soil. They also make excellent pond-side or stream-side plants. I've even seen them growing actually in the pond as a marginal plant. I also like to grow them in damp, uncut grass where the leaves blend in with the grass blades and the flowers rise above the green sward in a spectacular display. In the border, they are best positioned towards the front and in full sun or part shade. *Schizostylis* are also excellent in large containers where their roots can spread and particularly if you can bring these containers into shelter during the autumn, as your display of flowers will then be protected from any rain or gales.

Despite their love of moist soil, I have also found Kaffir lilies to be incredibly tolerant of drier soils provided that you incorporate a good amount of humus into the soil and mulch the surface of the soil with a 2 to 3" of bark.

A sprinkling of general purpose organic feed won't go amiss each spring, but is by no means essential. Splitting the clumps every three years or so can help to improve vigour and flowering – I find that this is best done in early spring and is the best way to generate extra plants. No other care is really needed other than maybe cutting back the old flowering stems once they have finished. On the pest front, they are really trouble-free – even slugs seem to leave most plants alone. Overall, they are what I would call good 'FIVE MINUTES CARE A YEAR PLANTS'.

Here are a good few varieties to look out for. All grow to around 2ft (60cm) tall when in flower.

Schizostylis coccinea – spikes of scarlet red flowers around ¾" (2cm) across. This is the parent of all garden hybrids. Probably the toughest and strongest grower of all.

Schizostylis coccinea f. *alba* – is the white form with spikes of smaller pure-white blooms around ¾" (2cm) across.

Schizostylis coccinea 'Jennifer' – large mid-pink flowers up to 25" (6cm) across.

Schizostylis coccinea '**Major**' – the same of scarlet red flowers as the species but larger – 2 to 2.5" (5-6cm) across.

Schizostylis coccinea '**Molly Gould**' – not quite so strong growing as other however the flowers make up for it, 2" (5cm) across, soft-pink with darker pink veins.

Schizostylis coccinea '**Pink Princess**' – soft candy-pink flowers around 2"(5cm) across.

Happy Gardening!

Mark Wash