

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. 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.

‘Desert Candles’

There is one group of plants that always cause a stir when they come into bud at our nursery. The rather untidy tuft of leaves is rather unspectacular but in early Summer a fattened central flower bud between 1” to 2” high suddenly stirs into action and within just a few weeks grows into a spire of tiny flowers anything between 3 and 6 feet high (1 - 2 metres). Now that’s impressive!

The genus I’m talking about is Eremurus and it carries various common names including *Desert Candles* and *Foxtail Lilies*, both names describing well these elegant flowers. There are literally hundreds of flowers on each stem - the lower ones open first and as time goes on, the colour climbs up the slender spire. Colours can be white, orange-yellow or pink with many soft tones in between. They can be a challenge to get established, but in the right conditions they will thrive in a Westcountry garden to form an impressive display each year.

Eremurus grow from fleshy roots formed into a crown up to 12” across with a large central bud (or more) and because the roots can retain water they are often sold as dry crowns amongst autumn bulbs. Many a visitor to the nursery have experienced a mild scare as they mistake them for giant spiders!!

Their natural home is in dry grassland and semi desert in Western and Central Asia and these thick fleshy roots secure them to the ground by spreading sideways rather than growing downwards. They often grow in thin soil over rock, so there is not much point in trying to grow roots deep into the ground. They are fully hardy as the regions

where they come from are often much colder than the UK. They need winter cold to stimulate the flowers but they need some shelter from early frosts which can singe the leaves. The important requirements are really good drainage and full sun as these the home comforts that they miss when transported into our wet UK gardens. Shelter from strong winds – taller varieties can be staked.

To tackle the drainage: I tend to plant the crowns in pots using sandy compost and keep them there until they have rooted – this can take up to 6 months but it is obvious when they have established as bright yellow roots appear from the fleshy finger on the crown. When planting in the ground dig a deep hole and in the base of the hole form a mole hill of grit and broken crocks. Plant the crown above this with a layer of good soil around the roots, making sure that the central bud and leaves are just protruding the surface.

Oh! – and there are two other growing tips:

1). Eremurus are not keen on too many neighbours, they seem to like their space even though their strap like leaves do not occupy much space in the border so keep an area of around 1ft around each crown free from other plants. Mulch the roots in the Autumn but avoid covering the buds.

2). And finally, watch out for the slugs on the new growth in Spring.

Here is a pick of some varieties that have grown well for us.

Eremurus 'Cleopatra' – Rich-orange flowers with a coppery tone. 3-4ft high (90-120cm)

Eremurus 'Romance' – An impressive variety - soft salmon-pink. 4ft high (120cm).

Eremurus robustus – A real giant – only try it once you know that other Eremurus do well in your garden. White to dusky-pink flowers. 6-8ft high once established (2-2.4m).

Eremurus stenophyllus – Soft lemon yellow to rich yellow flowers on shorter stems. This is a good one to start with as the crowns are less expensive. 2-3ft high (60-90cm).

Happy Gardening!

ENDS