

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. Throughout the autumn there is a superb range of less usual dry bulbs from around the world – plant them now for flowers from winter to summer. There is also an unusual range of gifts for gardeners. 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.

‘The Bells Of Cape Cowlips’

Bulbs that are naturalised in the wild gladden people all over the world. In England we have drifts of fragrant bluebells that delight us all in the spring. In Asia it might be the sight of massed wild tulips on arid hillsides, and in North America it might be gatherings of pink and white ‘Dogs’ Tooth Violets’ in open woodland.

South Africa is a country that overflows with vibrant colours and one bulb that no doubt creates the same ‘wow’ effect down there is the Cape Cowslip or Lachenalia.

Lachenalia come from the Western Cape region of South Africa which is the area that follows the coastline in the far south-west of the county. In the wild they grow in grass or rocky hillsides where the soil often becomes reasonably moist for part of the season.

They will tolerate cold but not frost, so here in Latchley we grow them in pots which can be kept in an open porch or cool greenhouse to protect them. Some Cornish gardeners that have frost-free gardens will be lucky enough to enjoy them outdoors in the rock-garden.

Very early in the year, when the dominant colours in our gardens are more green and brown, Lachenalia start to flower. The flowers are held on spikes that are 6-8” tall (sometimes taller on older plants) and each bloom is long and tubular. They change in colour as they age – the colours are typically bright like so many other South African

plants and can be any combination of gold and yellow, orange, red , green and purple. There are also blue forms.

HOW TO GROW LACHENALIA

Lachenalia are easy to grow and generally need little care.

For much of the year (April until September) the soft, rounded bulbs sit below the ground in a dormant state. We pot our Lachenalia into 4-5” plastic or terracotta pots, using compost with a little added sand and whilst they are dormant the pots are kept under the bench with only an occasional splash of water.

In the autumn fleshy leaves will appear and it is time to bring them into a sunnier place and start to water, just occasionally. The leaves are spear-shaped and often have dark markings. By the end of the year spikes of flower buds around 6-8” have developed and early in January they start to open their spectacular blooms.

Flowering often lasts into early April if the plants are kept cool, after which the flowers and leaves wither away and the bulb lies dormant for another year. The good news is that most varieties readily form extra bulb-lets at the base which will go on to flower the following season, giving you an even more impressive display.

Feeding can be useful when the plants are growing and a good time to replace the top layer of compost is late summer, just before the new growths appear. We only split the clumps and pot them on when the bulbs have completely filled the pot.

Avoid excessive watering especially over the summer, and try to give the plants plenty of air and light when in flower. They can be brought into the home when in bloom but the added warmth will usually shorten the flowering period and encourage tall soft growth, so stick with a really light & cool room.

SO MANY COLOURS

There are an increasing number of varieties of Lachenalia to be found but you are unlikely to find them in garden centres. The bulbs are quite small and soft so do not keep well in a pack – look out for specialist nurseries (such as ours!!). We also offer the budded plants early in the year – a good time to see the real colours.

Lachenalia aloides – is the most common variety (sometime known as *L. tricolor*). It has around 20 yellow flowers on a spike with reddish tips and orange-red base.

Lachenalia aloides var aurea – is a pure golden yellow form, with clear green leaves.

Lachenalia aloides var. quadricolor has colours in each bloom – green, yellow, orange and dusky red-purple.

Lachenalia 'Namakwa' is a hybrid with larger russet-yellow flowers and purple tips.

Lachenalia pustulata has almond scented flowers and incredible leaves that are heavily rippled on the upper surface. It flowers a little later than other – usually Mch/Apr. There are both blue and yellow forms of this species so make sure you know which one you have!

Happy Gardening!

Mark Wash