The Southern African Bulb Group

Newsletter No. 11

Spring 2008, published June 2008

If you have any difficulty reading this Newsletter, either on the computer screen or printed copy let me know at email: mick.reed@blueyonder.co.uk or by telephone to 01293 420975.

Autumn meeting

Sunday 26th ~October 2008, Winchester, UK. See below for more information.

The Autumn meeting of the Group will be on Sunday 26th October 2008, at Badger Farm Community Centre, Winchester, from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00p.m.

Directions to the meeting hall

- Directions by road: Leave the M3 at junction 11 and proceed towards Winchester. At the first roundabout follow the sign to Winchester. At the second roundabout take the second exit up the hill towards Badger Farm. At the third roundabout take the third exit to the superstore (not the second exit marked Badger Farm). Follow the road right round the edge of the car park until you see the doctor's surgery. Next to it is the Badger Farm Community Centre.
- The post code is SO22 4QB for those with satellite navigation.
- MAPS:
    - Map of the location, courtesy of Google Maps (you can scroll around, change scale, etc.)
    - Another m ap which is more like a road atlas, thanks to Streetmap.co.uk (look for the orange arrow pointing to the meeting place)

- A similar map at a smaller scale showing the access roads from the M3

Seed and Bulb Exchange Report

I have learnt a lot from this initial exchange and propose that the following changes for this year's exchange.
a. The list of seeds and bulbs available will be sent to all donors. Non-donors on email will need to request that a copy is sent via email to them. Members only on normal postage will need to send for a list including a stamped addressed C5 envelope.
This is to cut down on expenses for ink, paper and postage.
b. It has been requested that we add a column to the seed and bulb available list stating who the donor was. This will help where wrongly named items are sent by donors. Often plants are sold or given to members that turn out to be wrongly named. With the donor listed we will hopefully be able to contact the donor to correct the name of the bulb.
I will need donations of seeds and bulbs by the 1st September so that I can forward the requested items ordered to Members. Below is my postal address, telephone number and email address

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Veltheimia

Velthemia (pronounced *Velt-eye-mia)* is a lovely genus from the Hyacinth family, related to our native Bluebell, and named after a contemporary of Linnacus, Augustus Ferdinand von Veltheim of Brunswick. Endemic to South Africa, it is a tender bulb, easy to grow under glass or as a house plant.

The two species are easily distinguished. *V. bracteata,* the most commonly grown, has glossy green leaves and a spherical bulb, while the scarcer *V. capensis*is characterised by its glaucous-grey foliage and ovoid, or egg-shaped bulb. *V. bracteata* is indigenous to the Eastern Cape, where it can be found growing on the forest floor, often in quite tropical conditions, hence it is sometimes referred to as the Forest Lily. *V. capensis,* on the other hand, occurs in the Western Cape, often frequenting very arid conditions, the blue-grey leaves with their waxy coating reflecting the dry heat.

Sadly, the heyday of *Veltheimia* is long gone. They were much prized by the Victorians and Edwardians for their reliable and long-flowering pink spikes, often used as cut-flowers. The variety of colours available to them has disappeared, leaving only two recognised cultivars today. The first of these is 'Rosalba', a beautiful but seldom seen form of *V. bracteata* that arose at the Van Tubergen Nursery during the 1950s. It has a striking bi-coloured flower, half the corolla tube is pink, and the other half yellow. The second variety, the better known 'Lemon Flame', is something of a misnomer, since the flower is neither lemon nor flame-coloured, instead a pale, icy yellow-green.

Cultivation is simple; plant the bulbs with the neck proud of the soil level, into a peat or soil-based compost and with modest care it will reward with a display of flowers from November to March. *V. capensis* prefers a drier, gritty soil-based medium with as much sun as possible. The foliage of this species is as handsome as its dusky-pink flowers. During the long and dismal British winter, this elegant and singularly beautiful bulb brings great pleasure to its grower. It is generous with offsets, soon producing a large colony of bulbs with abundant spikes of bloom illuminating many a cold dark day.

The future for this genus, horticulturally speaking lies in breeding. Here resides a great opportunity, for while the species have flowered in varying shades of pink, there is huge potential for increasing the colour range. The possibility exists of flower colours ranging from jade green through chartreuse to primrose and eventually buttercup yellow, even orange. The plant also possesses genes that lend themselves to the creation of a range of reds, scarlet and crimson, darkening to a rich plum-purple.

The other important goal of the breeder is stature. Many plants in cultivation are rather less robust than certain wild forms. It should be quite feasible to breed metre-high plants with the stature of a *kniphofia* and dramatic 10 inch flowers to match. Such drama would undoubtedly increase the appeal of this Cape Hyacinth to a much wider spectrum of growers.

Junius de Brisay

Dormancy and Re-growth of Winter and Spring Flowering Bulbs and Corms

Whilst having an exclusive "audience" with Rod and Rachel in my greenhouse recently, we discussed this subject at some length. As most of my early flowering collection consists of iridaceae, my remarks are mainly directed to this family.
Over the years I have tried various ways to store the plants when dormant. Some people suggest giving them a mid-summer soaking (following the pattern of occasional thunderstorms in the wild). My experience is that some corms rot with this treatment, particularly if the weather following is hot. I think our climate is probably humid enough to provide adequate atmospheric moisture.
Rod and Rachel's advice is to keep the pots bone dry once they are dormant. They also treat small 1st year seedlings in the same way. I've had more success following this practice than in the occasional years when I've tried something different, though I think it is quite important to keep seedlings fairly cool while dormant, by covering them with shade material. The mature bulbs seem quite happy in the hot dry greenhouse.
Starting corms into growth in the autumn depends on the weather. If I am re-potting I try to use fairly dry compost and only water the pots when the temperature drops noticeably for a few days and nights –usually sometime in September. If I am not re-potting, I remove the compost above the corms in order to inspect them and select a few for sharing, and then replace with fresh compost. Again, if the weather is still warm, I use dryish compost.
The seedlings are not re-potted until their 3rd year, and sometimes the 4th, depending on their size. They are moved back to the top staging and watered well (temperature allowing). Once growth has started they get a feed of ½ strength seaweed fertilizer. If growth is vigorous on 2nd/3rd year seedlings, I sometimes pot the whole batch on into larger pots, being careful not to disturb the roots. They get regular ½ strength feeds (tomato or similar) throughout the growing season.
Rod and Rachel do advise a summer watering for bulbs with fleshy roots which are dormant in summer.

Audrey Cain

The Group is interested to know if anyone has tried manipulating the flowering time by either starting watering early or delaying watering until at least November. Many of the S.A. Bulbs flower very early in the U.K. and members are unable to show them at the AGS shows and other spring shows. Light is also a problem in our winter

months, do any of you use lights to keep your plants compact and if so it affects the flowering time of these plants.

Mick Reed
Editor

GROW CLIVIAS, A NEW HORTICULTURAL BOOK FROM SANBI

The South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) has brought out a new edition of *Grow Clivias*, one of the most popular titles in the widely acclaimed *Kirstenbosch Gardening Series*.

Written by specialist horticulturist Graham Duncan, *Grow Clivias* provides practical, step-by-step advice on the cultivation and propagation of the six currently recognised species, *C. caulescens, C. gardenii, C. miniata, C. mirabilis, C. nobilis* and *C. robusta,* including the sought-after yellow varieties, *C. miniata* var. *citrina*, *C. gardenii* var. *citrina* and *C. robusta* var. *citrina,* as well as a range of pastel-flowered forms of *C. miniata*.

In addition, detailed information is provided on the fascinating history of clivias, beginning in 1813 with the discovery of the first species, *Clivia nobilis,* by the English naturalist, traveller and artist, William J. Burchell, in the Eastern Cape, to the recently discovered 'Miracle Clivia' (*Clivia mirabilis*), in 2001, and the pinkish-orange 'Mist Clivia', *Clivia* x *nimbicola*, a beautiful natural hybrid from the border between eastern Mpumalanga and northern Swaziland, published as recently as 2006.

Complemented with eight colour paintings and 195 colour photographs, additional information provided covers a range of exciting *Clivia* hybrids, striking variegated clivias, pollination, medicinal uses, conservation, pests and diseases. Presented in an easily readable style, the succinct text is fully cross-referenced and includes a description and colour distribution map for each species as well as a glossary, index, a list of useful addresses and a key to the genus for easy identification.

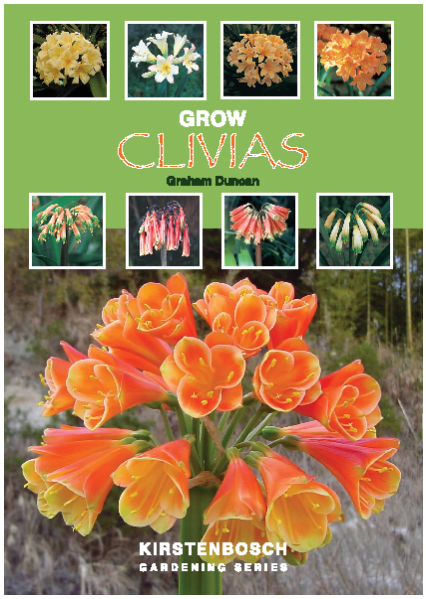
Grown for their strong, warm colours and decorative, strap-shaped leaves, clivias are endemic to South Africa and Swaziland and are among the most rewarding bulbous plants, their greatest asset being their willingness to produce beautiful flower heads in shade. They are 'tough' plants that can be handled almost like succulents, and are noted for their tolerance of a dry atmosphere and drought during their semi-dormant phase. In South Africa they have come to command the attention of virtually every

gardener in the country over the past ten years and continue to gain recognition throughout the world. These long-lived, mainly spring and summer-flowering plants are ideal for containers or for gardens in temperate climates. The trumpet-shaped flowers of the most well known species, *Clivia miniata*, make it an excellent subject for planting in large drifts under deciduous or evergreen trees and it is a useful cut flower, while the pendent, tubular-flowered clivias attract sunbirds to the garden. The eye-catching red or yellow ripe berries of all the *Clivia* species provide many months of additional colour.

This full-colour, 200-page book is available from the Botanical Society Bookshop at Kirstenbosch (Tel 021 762 1621 or Fax 021 762 0923 or E-mail kbranch@botanicalsociety.org.za and the SANBI bookshop at the Pretoria National Botanical Garden (Tel 012 843 5000 or E-mail: mapheza@sanbi.org) at a cost of R139-00.

Title: Grow Clivias
Subtitle: A guide to the species, selected hybrids, cultivation and propagation of the genus *Clivia*
Author: Graham Duncan, Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden
Publisher: South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI)
Number of pages: 200 (including introductory pages)
Book size: 210 x 150 mm (A5)
Year of Publication: 2008
Price: R139-00 (incl. VAT)

For further information or review copies contact:



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I have attached an updated copy of Suppliers of Southern African Bulbs. If you know of any other Suppliers of Southern African Bulbs let me know so that I can add them to this list.

Mick Reed
Editor