



This striking plant is *Beschorneria yuccoides* and can be seen in the area approaching the entrance to the alpine department from Weather Hill. It is sometimes called Mexican Lilly, giving a hint as to its origins where it is found growing at altitudes of up to 3500m. The flowers are green with red bracts, giving a wonderful contrast.



It is a member of the Agave family but unlike an actual Agave this won't stab you, as the leaves are much softer and without spikes at the tips.

The altitude at which it grows in the wild means it is hardier than you might think, though certainly not fully hardy in the UK, especially as a young plant. After the hard frosts of last winter when it experienced minus 10 centigrade, we thought we had lost them. The leaves looked awful, many had rotted away and the growing centres were yellow and looked dead. But to our surprise they recovered and then flowered as you see here. In the same bed are several species of *Eucomis*. Most of these also survived the cold winter except for our plants of *E. montana* – every one of about 20 plants perished.

June of course is another month for lots of colour in the department and all manner of plants have been performing. Our troughs have been looking good, with many plants making a splash. Just a couple of these, shown below, are *Penstemon hirsutus* var. *pygmaeus* f. *albus* and *Castilleja chromosa*. I think the latter, a partially parasitic plant, has managed to infiltrate the nearby *Penstemon* to gain some extra nutrients.



Above: *Penstemon hirsutus* var. *pygmaeus* f. *albus*



*Castilleja chromosa*

Many years ago I saw a very large trough at Harlow Carr devoted to a single plant – *Tropaeolum polyphyllum*. About five years ago I planted some tubers of this species in a raised bed at Wisley. It has taken all that time to get anywhere, but finally this year it flowered reasonably well:



In the nearby Landscaped House, the well known *Verbascum* 'Letitia' is absolutely smothered in bloom:



Staying with the yellow-flowered theme, another couple of performers right now are *Hypericum olympicum* 'Edith' followed by *Calceolaria lagunae-blanca*:



Back outside on the Rock Garden, in an acidic area, we have some of the dwarf kalmias. These make excellent plants given the right conditions and cover themselves with flowers. One of the best of these smaller types is *Kalmia latifolia* 'Minuet':



The individual flowers of this cultivar are delightfully marked inside with a band of reddish-brown.



This very compact variety will only get to between 60 and 90 cm tall with a similar spread, so is ideal for a situation where a normal sized *Kalmia* wouldn't fit.

Another dwarf flowering at the same time is *Kalmia latifolia* 'Elf'. This variety has pale pink buds which open to white (or sometimes very pale pink) flowers. The plants we have are still young, but they should eventually get to the same size as 'Minuet' at 60 to 90cm. This variety is also unusual in having small leaves, about half the size of other varieties.



We have been trying to get some seed-raised *Physoplexis comosa* to establish in our tufa walls and seem at last to have succeeded with at least a dozen seedlings now having got a hold and some flowering for the first time this year at 3 years old:



Finally this week a look at orchids:



This is *Dactylorhiza* 'Harold Esslemont', a robust and large flowered selection. Maggi Young wrote about this plant on the forum:

"This orchid, thought by some to be *D. foliosa* (though doubted as purely that because of its hardiness over more than 50 years in Aberdeen!) was grown and shown by the late Harold Esslemont, an SRGC grower and exhibitor of great renown. The plant was given his name by Mrs Kath Dryden, who gained a PC in 2002 and an Award of Merit in 2003 for it from the RHS Joint Rock plant committee."

Our plant came from Kath and has established well to produce 4 flower spikes this year, after about 4 years since planting as a small division.

Out on the alpine meadow other *Dactylorhiza* are at their best now too. I have noticed that since we started cutting the meadow a month later than we used to, the colonies of various plants have been increasing, due presumably to having more time to mature their seeds and drop them. The *Dactylorhiza* and the *Fritillaria meleagris* are two that have definitely benefitted.

