

Crocus Group Bulletin No. 53 : Summer/Winter 2021

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Welcome to the Winter/Summer edition of the Crocus group newsletter. It has certainly been an 'unusual' year so far. After our hot and dry summer. I was curious to see how the Crocus in my garden would have fared. Surprisingly, almost all have survived. The only losses were of *C cvijcii* and *C thirkeanus*. The drought was too much for these moisture and cool conditions loving species. Our winter was one with good growing conditions. Ample rain, snow and sun. A vast contrast to the previous winters conditions.

Every year I have plants flower that are completely new for me *C nerimaniae* is one of these species (see below) I often try the seeds of the various forms or cultivars of the seed offered on the seedlist. There is often very different seedlings appear. I had some seedlings of *C chrysanthus* ex "Constellation" flower for the first time this winter. It appears

to be a
hybrid
of C



chrysanthus x *C pulchricolor*. The seedlings looked like either parents and also combinations of both. Very variable.

Last year a rogue seedling appeared in my front garden. It had a striking dark lilac interior, with a fine white line on the lip of each petal and the outside is a silvery wash. It looked very much like a darker variety of the well known cultivar Crocus "Yalta" although it was slightly earlier flowering. I marked it to see if it kept these characteristics in future years. This year it reappeared and the original plant had increased to 3 flowering plants. I believe it is a hybrid. I have decided to name it after one of the greats of Australian horticulture and a person who has been inspirational to many bulb growers for years. I asked some mutual friends of Otto's what they thought would be a suitable name. We thought to call it Crocus 'Otto's golden goblet' see the above pictures.

Cultivars and species in the spotlight

Crocus nerimaniae

This beautiful, autumnal flowering species, flowered for me the first time this year. It flowered after 3 years from sowing. There was some variability in the seedling colour. one was a pale colour and the other a lilac colour. Both with the dark anthers and yellow throat, typical of the species. It was also pleasantly scented. I was surprised to see seed pods appear in spring on both flowering plants. It is not a difficult species to grow. I keep it cool and dry during summer and it gets plenty of sun and water during its winter growing period.



Crocus alexandri.

In it's best forms this is one of the most spectacular of all species. My plants are seedlings from the Crocus group. The exterior of the petals are a solid purple, with a fine white line. The interior is a pure white. Over time the seedlings have increased well. It is an easily grown garden plant, in a position that is well drained, but receives summer watering.





Crocus

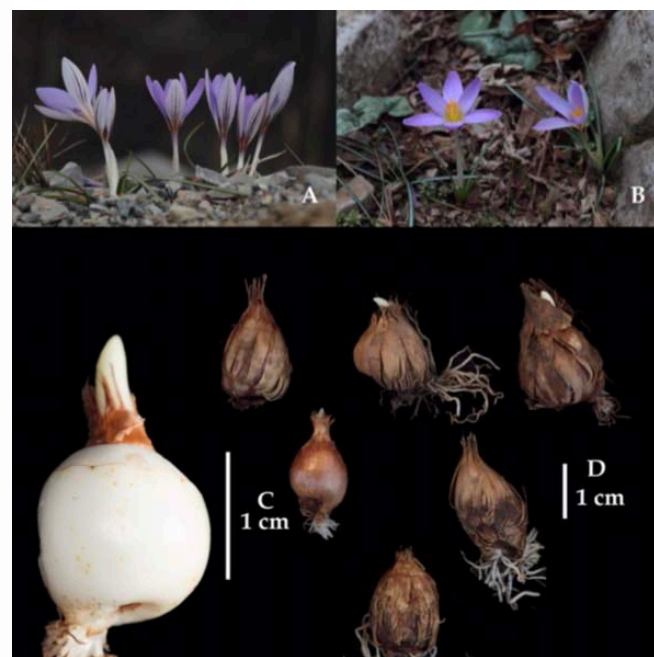
ligusticus

Crocus ligusticus has been grown many years as *Crocus medius*. This is a beautiful, Autumnal flowering species. In 1988 it was discovered that the original herbarium specimen was actually *C. nudiflorus* and so the name had to be replaced with the earliest epithet, *Crocus ligusticus*. This species is highly susceptible to virus and so the commercial forms previously available are often affected with this disease. It has been more recently been collected in the wild and these are often much larger and more vigorous. I grow both the cultivated and wild forms and find them quite different to each other as can be seen by the attached pictures. Both of them are easily grown in a location that does not dry out excessively during Summer. The commercial form was introduced into Australia many years ago before virus became more widespread and remains a vigorous garden plant, that increases well. The wild form is slower to reproduce but sets prolific amounts of seed. It is also a much larger plant. The picture on the left is the wild form and the picture on the right, the commercial form.

Crocus asymmetricus is a newly described species.

Last Easter, I received an Easter card from Osman Errol in Istanbul. I noticed that the Crocus on the card was different from any I had seen before. I contacted Osman about

this plant and he confirmed that it



was indeed a new species. Attached please find the information about this beautiful species. The corm tunic is quite unlike any I have seen before and the specific name is very appropriate for this characteristic.

<https://www.biotaxa.org/Phytotaxa/article/view/phytotaxa.438.2.1>

Here is the thread from the SRGC discussing it

<https://www.srgc.org.uk/forum/index.php?topic=17559.msg412052#msg412052>

Articles on Crocus in cultivation and in the wild.

Following are the continuation of the previous newsletters articles by Tomas Huber and Tony Willis.

All articles on your experiences on growing, or observing Crocus in the wild are very welcome and much appreciated.

I also have an apology to Tony Willis and in the last edition of the newsletter I accidentally ascribed the article on Crocus in northern Macedonia to Tony Willis. It was actually written by Ian Macenery. I will include this excellent article in the next newsletter.

An easy Crocus garden by Tomas Huber (continued)

Buying Crocus

With this knowledge I started buying crocus species and autumn flowering plants in autumn 2004. I ordered from special wholesale dealers in Germany and Holland because their prices were much lower than many special dealers on the internet. I was happy that I have saved sooo much money, but when the plants were flowering I saw, that the low price is resulted by very careless cultivation – many plants were wrong, mixed or even virused. Especially angry I have been with *Crocus pulchellus*, *salzmannii* and *speciosus* cultivars, but also many of the *chrysanthus/biflorus* cultivars have been wrong. Plants of *Crocus kotschyanus* never flowered due to a virus and all offered *Crocus medius* stocks were virused. This is not only annoying because the flowers look withered with ugly stripes on the petals, but also this virus can infect neighbouring healthy plants when transferred by aphids. I rapidly dug up all the ill plants as soon as I spotted them....

I have asked many dealers what went wrong but only one honest man told me, that this is the standard procedure – if a breeder or dealer hasn't got the ordered plants, they are replaced by others that look similar. Most of the customers will not realize that and only a small percentage will complain. The few who complain will get their money back or replacement (which will in most cases also be wrong). I even tried to ask the dealers before I ordered, if the plants were really true – like a judge asking the culprit if he's guilty - but of course no one negated. Not very satisfying, but fact – I had to buy few expensive true corms or cheap wrong/mixed corms.

From my grandpa I learnt that one has to accept things that can't be changed, so I made the best of this situation and planted the corms en masse in my garden (next photo). The true ones were dug up when flowering and replanted with labels in special corners of the garden. I was still fascinated by the flowering of thousands of crocus, even if it were only cheap 'standard' plants, but also by the beauty of a single rare flower.....even if many of the rare and expensive plants are not very showy.



Crocus books

Another source of information are books. Most German books are 'generally' about bulbs and only a small chapter treats crocus. In the first years I was happy with these books, because apart from Crocus I also grew a lot of other bulbs like Galanthus, Tulipa, Narcissus in my garden. But after some years my curiosity in the genus crocus made me search for special crocus books. Unfortunately there was none available in German language – all have been written in English. I haven't been my English teachers darling at school, so this was a big problem for me. But my curiosity was unbending, I have started to improve my English and bought 'A handbook of Crocus and Colchicum' by EA Bowles in 2003 which has been sold on EBay for 5 Euro – this book was wonderful to read and Bowles style was really suited to heat up the crocus fever. The former Crocus bible by Brian Mathew 'The Crocus' has already been out of print and was sold only as used book for 100 Euro and more, which was too much for my purse. Not until I found it in a local botanical library in 2004, where I had the chance to make a copy of the complete book – not the original, but the same information as in the book – meanwhile I have an original print. This information was restricted to endless dates about the plants and their history, but not in such a pleasurable way as in the Bowles-bible. In both books I have missed photos of the flowers in detail and from the wild....For this reason I started my own 'book' with all the information and photos I could get hold of. Only for my own use and still unpublished – But over the years it was a big help for me and some friends who also received it.

Swapping Crocus

If one has such a special interest, you will soon get to know other people with the same interest. For me this was the case when I started to read in the Forum of the 'Scottish Rock Garden Club' in 2003, where many bulb-loving people all over the world make conversations and special talks about their beloved plants. Soon I registered and I have been welcomed like a friend.

Of course there were not only talks – when the time came in summer I started to swap corms with my new friends. I only had a few special plants which I could offer, but nevertheless I received a lot of goodies from all over the world. Some were ‘standard’ plants, others could be called rare. Everybody has plants in his garden which grow well and increase, some of them in such a dramatic way, that the owners are happy to give some away and give others the chance to grow them in their garden.

In the following years I received many more goodies from my friends and my collection became large and larger – of course I also had plants that increased well, some of them very rare. This gave me the chance to swap them against other rarities, but also to give them to other beginners who didn’t have many plants to swap – and so the story goes on and on.... Advanced growers help beginners to become advanced, who then help other beginners.

Sowing Crocus seeds

So far I only grew Crocus-corms, but soon I learnt, that crocus also can be grown from seed. These seeds need 2-4 years from sowing to flowering. Personally I was too impatient to grow plants from seeds for such a long time, so I preferred corms, but sowing often is the only way to get hold of rare species. And once you start sowing seeds it is only the first years that you have to wait until flowering – if you sow new ones every year you will get new flowers each year, so I was ‘forced’ to start seed-raising. I became member of the Crocus-group which has a good seed-exchange. Members send their spare seeds and receive seeds from other members, which can be chosen from an annual list.

On the SRGC Forum I read that everybody grows these seeds in pots, so I also started pot growing. It sounded so easy, that I didn’t worry about how to do this – it was bound to happen, that my first batch of seeds germinated after only a few weeks – and then died down...! What has happened? I used standard flower soil and watered too much. In result the soil was too wet and the seedlings rotted. Crocus don’t like wet soil, they need a well drained sandy soil to avoid stagnant moisture. In the next years I have experimented with many mixtures for pot growing before I found a good one. Of course one has to make his own experiments with the material one can get hold of, like perlite, lava-grit, vermiculite, pumice – and one has to consider that not each sand is suited for pot growing. Fine (smoothed river-) sand which gets muddy when watered will soon kill the corms; it has to be sharp/broken sand. To feed the seedlings I use liquid fertiliser.

But still the pots are in danger to become too wet if the soil in the pot doesn’t get good contact to the outside soil. This can be done by placing them on a sand plug, which will ‘suck’ the dispensable water out of the pot and balance the water household in the pot.

Another good tip I read on Ian Young’s Bulb Log, which is part of the SRGC website: Ian sows the seeds 5cm deep below the surface helps them to grow stronger and faster, because the seedlings don’t have to pull themselves to their preferred depth. For pulling down they form special contractile roots which need a lot of energy. This energy can be used for building up the corms if sown directly in the correct depth.

The disaster

Due to swapping corms and seeds my collection soon increased in a dramatic way and space in my garden became rare. I had the idea to plant the corms in baskets for water plants (next photo), which are sold in each garden centre. The plants can be lifted every time and nothing could be confused. I wrote the name of the included plants on the basket additionally, because the problem with labels is, that birds often pull them out of the soil. I

even planted the 'tender' plants in baskets in the open garden about which I often heard that they will only survive in pots. 'Seems like nobody has ever tried them outside, so how can they know that they will not survive' – was my thought? For many years I have been successful with most of these 'told-to-be-tender' plants and thought that growing in baskets is the best way to cultivate them. But today I know most of them only survived because in these respective years we had especially mild winters in Germany....



So it was bound to happen that in February 2012 we had a very hard winter with temperatures below -25°C at night, without snow cover for nearly 4 weeks. Generally snow operates as a shelter, protecting the soil from freezing, but this year the frost entered deeply into the soil and killed 80% (!) of my collection in the open garden. In the weeks after the temperatures raise, I found many crocus leaves dying down (next photo). A look in the pots confirmed my worries – all the corms were dead. This was such a depressing experience for me, that I stopped each activity around crocus for nearly two years.



After the disaster

The only activity in my garden at this time was to dig up all the empty pots. In some baskets I found one or two surviving corms, but in others I found a lot more. Some species seem to be especially hardy for harsh climate, for example: *Crocus malyi*, *neglectus*, *angustifolius*, *variegatus*, *exiguus*, *versicolor*, *etruscus*, *weldenii*, *tommasinianus*. I replanted all the surviving corms directly into the soil and spent my time with other good stuff of life.....and then forgot them.

Autumn came and I was surprised when I found some of the wintergreen autumn crocus flowering all over the garden. In the past I scattered these spare corms all over the garden directly into the soil as backup-plants, in case the main stock in the basket would disappear – I never had hope that these plants have survived because their leaves have also been destroyed, but obviously they did. It might also have helped that I covered these backup-beds with fir tree branches during the cold period. Meanwhile I also use a cold protection fleece for additional covering above the branches.

In the following spring I found many more plants in the open garden that have disappeared in the baskets – does this mean, that cultivating in baskets is not as ideal as I thought? Now I know: It isn't – because exactly like the soil in pots, the soil in the baskets also needs good contact to the surrounding soil to guarantee an optimal exchange of moisture. When I repotted the baskets I often wondered why the soil in the baskets was wetter than outside – this was resulted by not having good contact to the outside through the small basket holes. Today I wish I had realized this earlier – a lot of rarities would have survived in my garden!

But why did the corms in the open garden survive, while the ones in the baskets died? I think that due to the remaining moisture in the baskets the soil was packed together and the corms were crushed and probably also frozen to dead – in the open garden the moisture-level was much lower because no basket restrained their exchange. Furthermore I found, that plants near the house wall had a better surviving rate than a few meters away in the open garden. Obviously the warmth of the house has also helped them to survive here. Although the leaves also died, the corms have survived – seems like the frost has

been softened by the fir tree branches. In other parts of the garden I found Galanthus and Cyclamen-leaves destroyed after the frost – but again only the leaves and other above-soil-parts, while the underground-parts survived and started their growth again next season.

From friends in Holland and Belgium I heard later, that they are surprisingly successful with growing bulbs in baskets. They have a very sandy soil in their garden, while my own soil is loamy-sandy and keeps moisture much longer than pure sand. Therefore it might be possible to grow bulbs in baskets in gardens with such a sandy soil.



The Comeback

Another year later (2014) I had the best spring flowering ever on my lawn: Thousands of hybrids from all the garden centre- and wild-plants appeared (photos above and below) while many of the original plants have disappeared. Now I realized how important it is to grow crocus from seeds: Even if it's depressing to loose many seedlings, I do know now that the few surviving plants are the strongest and best for the special micro-climate in my garden. This is the reason why I sow most of my seeds in the open garden now. They don't need any care and one day you will find a wonderful new flower in the garden – and of course you won't be depressed because you don't spot when a seedling dies. But to avoid that ants grab the seeds, they should be covered with soil or buried, also late sowing in October helps. For the same reason I collect as many seeds as possible and sow them only in September or later, when the ants reduce their activity.

These hybrids and the surviving species finally reawakened my passion – Crocus fever was back!!!!



Finally I knew which species are especially hardy and where I can grow the tender plants. With this knowledge I started again buying and swapping, corms and seeds. And finally I built a cold frame that I filled with sharp sand and 20% garden soil and planted 2-3 corms of each crocus that I received directly into the sand – these corms are the backup plants. If I have more corms I divide the stock and plant them in as many places as possible in the open garden – some under shrubs or trees to protect the flowers from heavy rain, some near the warm house wall, others directly in the lawn. Planting the corms in this way makes me learn where they like the growing conditions in my garden and where not – and if they disappear in one spot they will hopefully survive in the other, or at least in the cold frame. The cold frame is also suited for the tender plants because it isn't open to the weather and can be protected from rain and frost.

For a beginner this means that the first corms have to be planted in a safe place. When it has increased, the surplus corms can be planted elsewhere to find the right place in the garden. There's no general rule which ones grow in the open garden, the conditions in each garden are too different, depending on their altitude, climate zone, annual rainfall, direction (North/South), soil (loamy, sandy, rocky..).... you only have to be brave enough to try it.

It might be helpful if one knows where a crocus grows in the wild. Woodland crocus should therefore be planted in a shaded and humus-rich soil because most of them will not like sunbaking. On the other hand most crocus from sunbaked places will not like wetness.

But even so I have many crocus in my wet and loamy garden conditions that grow in the wild in very hot and dry habitats during summer like *Crocus weldenii*, *variegatus*, *versicolor*, *etruscus*, *ligusticus*, *goulimyi*, *niveus*. So one should try to make its own experiments! If you have increased your 'told-to-be-tender-plants' give'em a try and plant a few in the open garden to see how they thrive!

Crocus cultivars

Although I grow a lot of wild species I still love the Dutch cultivars. Unfortunately not many people have the same passion. Why should one grow these breaded plants and how?

Crocus cultivars are easy available in the garden-centres and many of them have adapted to our growing conditions in the open garden for decades or sometimes even centuries. This makes it easy to grow them in the open garden – they are the best Crocus for

beginners. Named cultivars do all look the same which makes it easy to create interesting spots in the beds or in the lawn.

Pure plantings of cultivars show them in all their beauty. Small clumps of these special plants can make a wonderful display in the garden. Unfortunately many of the plants from the garden-centres lack this beauty – they are sold because they have a high increasing rate, which means good business for the growers. But there are many old cultivars still available in small numbers from special dealers. To list them all is not the sense of this monograph, but of course the groups of cultivars should be mentioned with a few lines:

chrysanthus/biflorus cultivars

The biggest cultivar group are the chrysanthus/biflorus cultivars. These are hybrids of the former groups of *Crocus chrysanthus* and *biflorus*/Mathew, which are meanwhile both divided in numerous single species. To name only a few: *Fuscotinctus*, *Ard Schenk*, *Dorothy*, *Cream Beauty*, *Blue Pearl* which are easy available in each garden-centre today. Mixed packages in the garden-centres often contain these forms. Over the years more than 100 chrysanthus/biflorus cultivars have been registered and some of my favourites I would like to introduce here:

Advance: Registered by G. Hagemann in 1953, fragrant, with an interesting colour-combination of chrom-yellow and campanula-violett. Very small flowers.



Eyecatcher: Registered by PB van Eeden in 1971, large dark-purple outer petals with a white edge – they really deserve their name. Not available in trade nowadays, only a few private collectors still grow it. Probably a cross between *Crocus alexandrii* and *biflorus*.



Herald: Registered by WP van Eeden in 1971, looking like a yellow Eyecatcher, and still available in Trade. Very large flowers. Probably a cross between *Crocus alexandrii* and *chrysanthus*.



Warley: Registered in 1905 by Van Tubergen, disappeared from Trade and from most private collections, but in 2010 I discovered some clumps in a public park and re-introduced this wonderful cultivar in cultivation.



Jeannine: Registered by Michael Hoog in 1973, named after his wife, big rounded petals with a purple blotch on soft-yellow ground. In the last years furtive replaced by a better increasing form, which lacks the beauty of the original.



A detailed compilation of this group can be found here:
<http://www.srgc.net/forum/index.php?topic=5060.0>

[vernus](#) and tommasinianus cultivars

Another important group are the vernus and tommasinianus cultivars. Easy available in each garden-centre are for example the vernus cultivars: Remembrance, Flower Record, Jeanne D'Arc, Pickwick. They are much larger than the chrysanthus/biflorus cultivars and flower in average 2-3 weeks later.

Crocus tommasinianus and vernus/Mathew (now divided in heuffelianus, napolitanus, neglectus, sculus, exiguus and montenegrinus) often hybridise in gardens and make interesting new plants.

Tommasinianus cultivars from the garden centres are: Whitewell Purple, Ruby Giant, Roseus and Lilac Beauty. Among my favourites are the following plants which are only available via special dealers:

Pictus: Selected by EA Bowles around 1930, probably a hybrid with *Crocus heuffelianus*



Eric Smith: Pure white flowers, looking like stars in the lawn and one of the few with permanent 8 petals.



Claret: Selected by Primrose Warburg, former Secretary of the Crocus-Group, for its outstanding colour



sieberi cultivars

The greek *Crocus sieberi* and its related *Crocus nivalis*, *atticus* and *sublimis* generated many selections that are easy available, for example: Firefly, Violett Queen, Tricolor. In the past all these species were handled as Subspecies of the Cretan *Crocus sieberi* and are still named as this. Two of many more selections are among my favourites of this group:

Hubert Edelsten: Hybrid of *Crocus atticus* and *sieberi*, selected by Hubert Edelsten. Still available from special dealers.



Bowles White: Selection of EA Bowles, who found two white plants after many years of waiting and searching. One survived and is still available in trade.



Crocus x leonidii is a new group of cultivars. Leonid Bondarenko from Lithuania found some yellow flowering plants between seedlings of white/blue *Crocus reticulatus* which grew side by side with *Crocus angustifolius* and selected some of them. These plants are especially hardy, sterile but well increasing and are immune against most diseases and

wetness. They have done very well in gardens and were later named by Janis Ruksans as *Crocus x leonidii*. There are: Nida, Early Gold, Alionka, Ego, Janis Ruksans and Little Amber (Photo):

korolkowii cultivars/selections:

Another result of Baltic collectors are the *Crocus korolkowii* selections, made by Janis Ruksans, Leonid Bondarenko and Augis Dambrauskas. They also have a special beauty, but unfortunately are not as easy as *Crocus x leonidii* and should be planted in protected parts of the garden or in the greenhouse if grown in a garden without snow cover all over winter.



Some beautiful examples are: *korolkowii* Mountains Glory, Yellow Tiger and Albus



Of course there are also autumn flowering cultivars, mainly from the *speciosus/pulchellus* group. Meanwhile *Crocus speciosus*/Mathew has been divided into many single species, and it's hard to say if all cultivars are in fact true *speciosus*. There are some old names

listed like: Conquerer, Aichinsonii, Pollux, Cassiope, Oxonian. Unfortunately one can't buy plants true to name today, with very few exceptions. Most commercial stocks contain mixed plants and hybrids, even with *Crocus pulchellus*. Some of my favourites among this group are:

speciosus Artabir: Selected 1896 from corms collected in the Caucasus by Van Tubergen, striking flowers with dark feathering and fragrant, smaller than the other *speciosus* cultivars but standing strong in autumn rain and wind – most of the others are soon bended and fall down.



speciosus Albus: Collected in the Southern Caucasus, just one single open flower attracts your eyes at autumn time.



pulchellus Zephyr: Selected by Thomas Hoog in 1940, probably a hybrid with *Crocus speciosus*.



Other cultivars:

More than 300 years in cultivation is *Crocus flavus* 'Yellow Mammoth' or 'Golden Yellow', and it is still available in trade. A very robust plant and a good increaser – this was the first *Crocus* that I have planted in my lawn in 1999. It can be said, that my Crocus fever has been started by this plant.



An especially striking selection has been made by my friend Dirk Schnabel from Germany. Between seedlings of *Crocus veluchensis* he found an interesting plant:
veluchensis x *cvijicii* Rainbowgold:



In this case the hybrid is much easier than the two parents are and meanwhile it's available in trade from special dealers. Dirk has also made some other interesting crosses like:

hadriaticus x sativus,
candidus x olivieri and
sublimis x gargaricus.

Furthermore there are many other cultivars from different species in trade:

Crocus ancyrensis: Golden Bunch

Crocus etruscus: Rosalind, Zwanenburg – these plants are in fact *Crocus neglectus*!

Crocus goulimyi: Mani White

Crocus hadriaticus: Tom Blanchard, Elysian Pearl, Indian Summer

Crocus kosaninii: April View

Crocus kotschyanus: Reliance

Crocus laevigatus: Fontenayi

Crocus malyi: Ballerina and Sveti Roc

Crocus salzmännii: Erectophyllus, El Torcal

Crocus suaveolens: de Jager

Crocus hybrids in my garden

Finally let's come to the joy of breeding your own hybrids. You can use the paintbrush to transfer pollen to the style of the mother plant or you can just plant different species and cultivars together and let the bees do this job, like I do it in my lawn. Often the resulting seedlings are much better than the parents and worth separating for individual growing. See below only a few hybrids that I have selected from my lawn over the years:

Not each cultivar is suited for producing hybrids. For example from the *tommasinianus* group there are some that have never produced seeds in my garden: Whitwell Purple,

Ruby Giant and Eric Smith. But their pollen is fertile and can be used to pollinate other *tommasinianus* or *vernus*/Mathew plants.

Same goes for the *chrysanthus*/*biflorus* group, where I have never found seed on: Advance, Blue Bird, Blue Pearl, Ladykiller, Saturnus, Snowbunting, Warley to name only the most important. On the other hand there are many cultivars in this group that have defective anthers: Aubade, Cream Beauty, Elegance, Ladykiller, Prins Claus, Romance, Skyline, White Triumphator, but these plants can set seed with pollen from other plants. Dorothy and *Fuscotinctus* belong to both groups and produce neither seeds nor fertile pollen, but both stand out by very fast vegetative increasing. For this reason they are often contained in mixed bags of *Crocus chrysanthus* from the garden-centre.



Growing Crocus in this way is very easy and doesn't need a lot of care. One can let nature do what has to be done and at flowering time one can simply enjoy the wonderful display of flowers like a little child in a sweets shop.

Crocus in the rockgarden

This could be the end of the 'story', but there's still one drop of bitterness: Seeing a crocus flowering in a pot, a basket, a raised bed, a cold frame or a monoculture bed doesn't make me as happy as seeing them in their natural habitat.

Of course pot growing is the safest way for growing them clean, without worrying to confuse them, but not good for the gardener's eye and heart. So why not building a natural rockgarden to set the beauty of the crocus into the right surrounding?



Rockgardens are characterized by a good drainage, if the soil is mixed up correctly with grit and rocks in all dimensions. The crocus like this 'nearly' natural habitat and even in areas with more summer rain most of them don't care about the unusual wetness because the water is just draining downwards. If a rockgarden is built around a big tree, the plants below the branches are also protected from heavy rain and additionally the roots care for dryness. And once finished building it, the rockgarden doesn't need much care – the best solution for an easy garden.



How to build a rockgarden is not the sense of this article, there are many websites and books written about this theme, where one can get the necessary information. And of course it is a question of personal taste how to arrange a rockgarden. Also one has to consider which material is available. The rocks can consist of granite, sandstone, pumice, lava or whatever one can get hold of in your area – same goes for the topdressing. Use your fantasy and try whatever you want.

Good luck and happy gardening
 Thomas Huber
 Neustadt/Hessen
 Germany

Crocus in Northern Macedonia by Tony Willis

For many years I had wanted to see *Crocus scardicus* in the wild. I had read with interest Janis Ruksans' notes on the Scottish Rock Garden Club forum about his trip to look at crocuses in Northern Macedonia (then called FYROM), where he detailed finding *C. scardicus*. **CROCUS SCARDICUS (image attached)** He had visited in 2013 and I decided to follow his itinerary the following year.



With much assistance on sites from Janis and Kurt Vickery I travelled to Skopje on 7th June 2014 with Ian McEnery. We arrived that evening at the Hotel Scardus at Popova Sapka ski resort above Tetovo and walked out the following morning in search of the crocus.

Having seen *C. pelistericus*, the only other one in the same series *Scardici*, several times on Mt. Voros (Kymachalan) in northern Greece, I had expected *C. scardicus* to grow in similar conditions. There it grows in thick sedge grass in what is, in effect, a vernal lake formed by a bowl in the mountain with large numbers of the bulbs under water at flowering time.

After a steady climb along the 4x4 track towards the radio station we came to an area of flat dry turf and here we found our first plants in flower, widely spaced and few in number but in good condition. Further investigation around the area revealed only a few more plants in flower.

During the following week we moved on to other areas to look for both *C. jablanicensis* and *C. cvijicii*. We found only a couple of each in flower. Clearly, we were too late in the season. **CROCUS JABLANICENSIS** (image attached)



Returning in 2016 with Ian and two other friends we were a week earlier, 30th May, and on this occasion found many more plants of *C. scardicus* in flower but in completely different growing



conditions. This time we found them growing on the sides of a snowmelt gulley but not actually in very wet conditions. **CROCUS SCARDICUS AND VELUCHENSIS** (image attached)

Over the crest from the gulley on a dry hillside almost too steep to stand on were many hundreds of *C. veluchensis* in flower growing amongst coarse grass. The weather was glorious sunshine and the crocuses were perfection. **CROCUS VELUCHENSIS** (image attached)

Re-visiting the areas for *C. jablanicensis* and *cvijicii*, there were also many plants in flower, and it was interesting many of the latter were flowering in running meltwater. Revisiting that area again on the same date in 2017 it was very dry and there were no flowers at all. **CROCUS CVIJICII** (image attached)



We decided to visit again in 2019 this time even earlier and arrived on 22nd April which proved to be perfect timing. We started with a visit to see *C. cvijicii* on Mt. Magero and the flowers were just emerging from the snow on a steep bank much drier than where we had found them before. At our next stop, above Gorna Belijca, *C. jablanicensis* was present in large numbers **CROCUS JABLANICENSIS** (image attached from IAN MCENERY)

It was growing with *C. pelistericus*, the latter growing in much drier conditions than in Greece, although still very damp, in turf along the side of a stream. **CROCUS PELISTERICUS** (image attached from ROY SKIDMORE)





We finished again at Popova Sapka and walked up to the radio station to look for the *C. scardicus*. As we neared the radio masts the hillsides were gently rolling short grassland with countless thousands of the crocuses growing through. The gulley where we had seen them previously was still full of snow. Unfortunately, it had rained and was cold and dark and they had fallen over and looked miserable. **CROCUS SCARDICUS (image attached)** In some areas there were lots of *C. veluchensis* and although in parts these did overlap with *C. scardicus* on the whole, they were quite separate and again they were growing amongst coarse grass.

The sun came out as we walked back down, and many plants opened their flowers. **(INSERT PICTURE CROCUS SCARDICUS 2)**

On our final morning two of our party had a walk to the

woods below the hotel and found the *C. scardicus* growing there in small numbers.

What has been interesting from a cultivation point of view is that only having seen the Greek *C. pelistericus* in the wild we had assumed that *C. scardicus* and now the Northern Macedonian *C. pelistericus* must grow in similar conditions. This is clearly not the case with the latter two growing in much drier conditions.



In 2019, we did attempt to find *C. pelistericus* on Mt. Pelister for which it is named but were thwarted by it being far too early to get up the mountain with the route to where it is supposed to grow still snowed up.

The seed exchange been completed and the seed distributed by Wim Boens. Thank you so much for again providing this service to the members of the Crocus Group. Without it, many of us would not have the opportunity to grow many Crocus species. Please pollinate and collect any seed produced for next years seed list. I am currently collecting and drying last seasons seed.

Below is the breakdown of the distribution of the last seed list.

Seed-exchange Crocus Group 2020 closed

Some numbers regarding our latest seedex.

We made about nine hundred small packets of seed from 229 different species/cultivars/forms of Crocus which were sent in by 30 donors and sent out to 45 members.

Here below the top 10 of the “most wanted” species, but almost all seeds were asked in high quantity. As always, I could not give everyone everything they asked for, but I did my best.

No.	Name	Packets requested
111	Crocus leichtlinii	22
202	Crocus vallicola	21
46	Crocus cvijicii ex Vermion (Greece/2007) - (cormlets)	18
47	Crocus cyprius	17
84	Crocus hittiticus	16
88	Crocus katrancensis	15
45	Crocus cvijicii	15
137	Crocus nudiflorus ex 'Orla'	14
87	Crocus karduchorum	14
225	Crocus zubovii – (cormlets)	13
71	Crocus goulimyi ex dark form	13
55	Crocus danfordiae ex. RIGA-028	13
26	Crocus carpetanus	13
18	Crocus banaticus ex 'Albus'	13

Total price for sending to a member (package and postage) was up to 6.02 € p.p. this year. So, I'll have to increase the fee to 6,50 € for next year.

I would like to thank the donors for taking the time to collect and send the seeds and the members who asked for seeds.

Looking forward to a year with a good seed set and a wonderful seed-exchange next year.

Happy sowing/growing,

Wim Boens
Seed-exchange manager.