

International Rock Gardener

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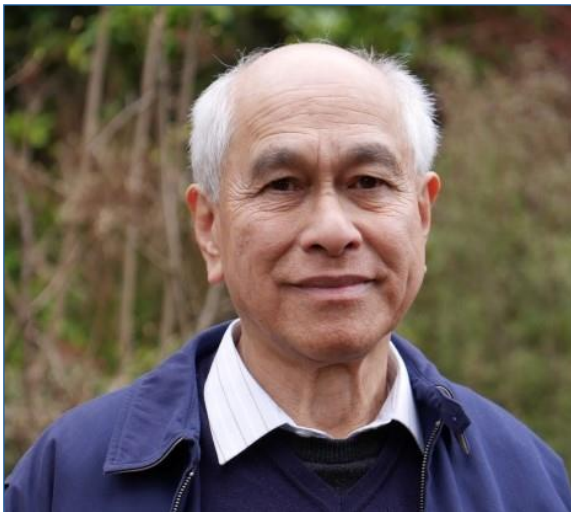
April 2026



Alan Ayton joins us from Australia to provide a photo essay on [Mt. Buffalo, in a national park in Victoria](#) which he visited with family in early 2026.

Next up is word of a *Galanthus* cultivar that is garnering some popularity in Scotland. Plantsman and keen snowdrop lover, Cyril Lafong, tells us about the charming snowdrop *Galanthus* 'Bonnie Green'.

Cyril is an accomplished grower of some of the best alpine plants in the world and from 1995 to the present, Cyril has amassed 70 Forrest Medals, along with 4 Farrer medals (mostly at Joint SRGC/AGS shows) for Best in Show plants – an unparalleled record now, which is unlikely ever to be broken.



Left: Cyril
Lafong.
Right:
Ian
Christie.



The late Nick Courtens of the Betty Ford Alpine Gardens visited Scotland as part of a [Diana Aitchison Fund](#) trip and these photos are from his Blog about [a trip to Cyril's garden](#).



At the [SRGC](#) Perth Show in 2022 Cyril Lafong was presented with the Lyttel Cup on behalf of our friends from the [Alpine Garden Society](#) for his outstanding contribution to the world of alpine plants. Super-plantsman Ian Christie was honoured with the Scottish Horticultural Medal from the [RCHS](#) in 2023. Heroes, both of them!

Finally, this month, there is praise from Grahame Ware, in B.C. Canada, for a new fritillary. Cover image *Galanthus* 'Bonnie Green' – photo Cyril Lafong.

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--- In Australia ---

A Trip to Mt Buffalo – text and photos, Alan Ayton.

A quick trip up to Mt Buffalo just after New Year's Day revealed some lovely plants flowering.

Mt Buffalo is an intrusion of granite which over millennia has slowly been eroded away, in particular the softer material. This has left behind a remarkable plateau with plenty of granite tors and cliffs, average altitude across the plateau is about 1500m with the high point 'The Horn' being 1723m. This altitude makes it a sub alpine environment. It's an incredible mountain to visit.



The Horn 1723m



Alan's son, Tully, doing some bouldering.

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Kunzea muelleri is a flowering plant in the Myrtaceae and is endemic to mountainous areas of south-eastern Australia.



Herpolirion novae-zelandiae

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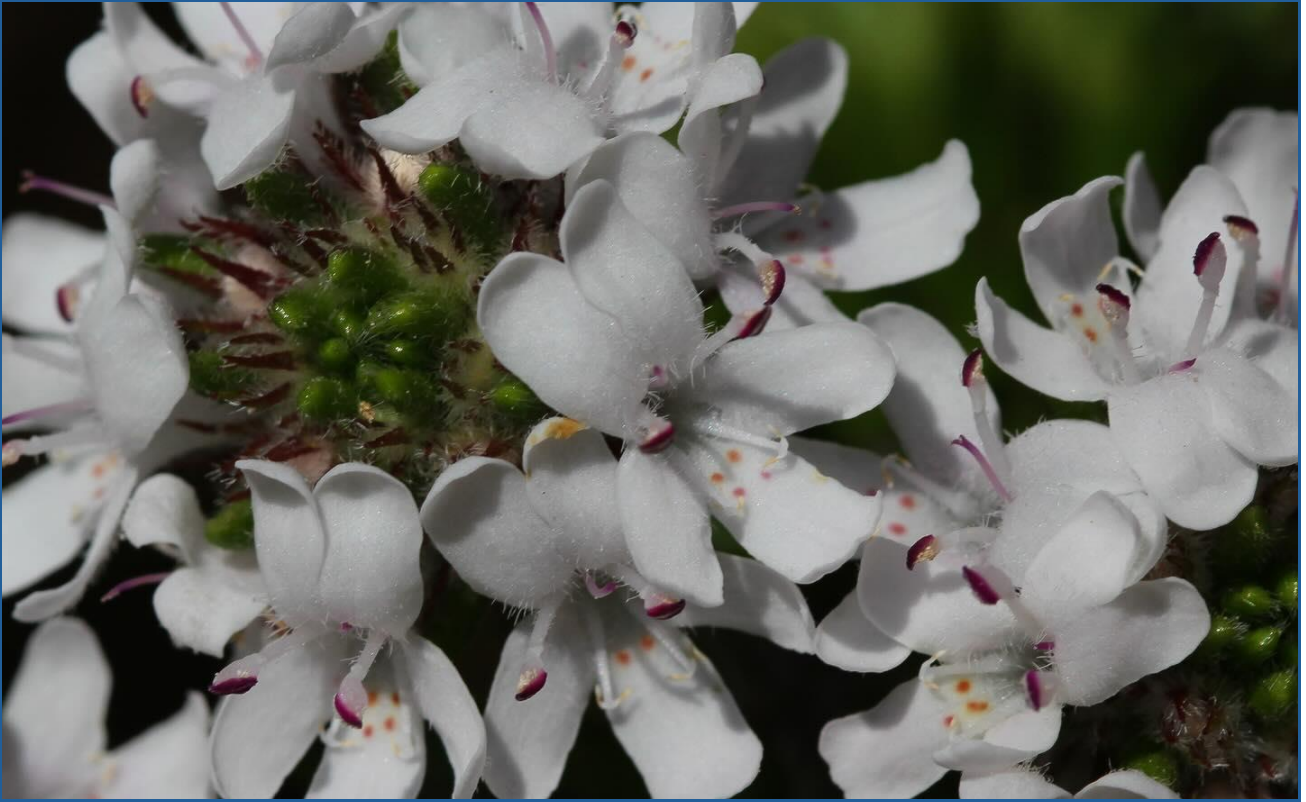
Craspedia aurantia



*Brachyscome
spathulata* and a
close up of its
flowers.



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Westringia senifolia



Coronidium waddelliae

Coronidium waddelliae is in the Asteraceae, a member of the “paper flower” family. A perennial herbaceous plant that primarily thrives in sandy and well-drained soils. In Victoria, it is restricted to eastern ranges where it is largely confined to high altitude areas but is locally common in Snow Gum woodland and treeless communities, often in rather dry, rocky sites.

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Ranunculus graniticola - plant and flowers.

Ranunculus graniticola has an ecological importance which should not be underestimated. This species is an important food source for various pollinators, including bees and butterflies, which are drawn to its attractive flowers. Grows in New South Wales and Victoria in sub-alpine to alpine areas.

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Aciphylla simplicifolia – plant and flowers.

This hardy plant thrives in typical of volcanic areas and is well known in Australia. *Aciphylla simplicifolia* prefers well-drained soils with a rich organic content. These conditions help the plant establish strong roots, enabling it to withstand the harsh weather patterns prevalent in its natural habitats. Occurring on slopes and ridges, it successfully competes for nutrients despite the challenging conditions.

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Hydrocotyle algida grows in mossy areas, sometimes even in running water in forest understorey and in grassland on shales and granites at higher elevations.



Goodenia hederacea subsp. *alpestris* is a prostrate or scrambling perennial herb.

Its long trailing stems often root at the nodes, grow up to 80cm long, and are softly hairy. It occurs from southeastern Queensland to eastern Victoria, growing in forest to alpine woodland and grassland. It is also widespread along the coast and appears easy to grow.

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The Hump 1695m

Standing tall in the middle of the Buffalo Plateau the view from the Hump is spectacular with views of the pinnacle, Cresta Valley and the Horn.

Gleichenia dicarpa, (the pouched coral fern or tangle fern), is a small fern found in eastern Australia, New Caledonia and New Zealand and parts of Southeast Asia.



It forms tangled thickets in wet places such as swamps and riverbanks.



Podolobium alpestre, the alpine shaggy-pea, is a flowering plant in the family Fabaceae and is endemic to south-eastern Australia.

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Lake Catani is an artificial lake in the [Mount Buffalo National Park](#) in Victoria, Australia. It was constructed in 1910, to provide recreational facilities in the newly opened winter resort.



Arthropodium milleflorum or pale vanilla lily, is a species of herbaceous perennial plants native to Australia. It occurs in various habitats including alpine. The fleshy tubers were eaten by Aboriginal Australians. The plant emits a strong vanilla fragrance, which becomes more noticeable on warm days. *Arthropodium minus* is a related but smaller species, producing only one flower per node.

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--- Snowdrop Story ---

Galanthus plicatus 'Bonnie Green' – by Cyril Lafong.

Galanthus plicatus was introduced to Brechin Castle in Angus, Scotland, a historic private estate, in the late 19th century from soldiers returning from the Crimean War. Ian Christie, proprietor of Christie's Alpines (now closed), discovered colonies of *Galanthus nivalis* and *G. plicatus* at the castle in the early 2000s.

Brechin Castle is famous for the origin of several distinct *Galanthus plicatus* cultivars, notably 'Castle Green Dragon', a striking, mostly green snowdrop found in 2006, named after the Clan Maule's green dragon emblem. It is challenging to grow and still rare in cultivation. Other named virescent *G. plicatus* varieties from the castle include 'Greenmantle' and 'Galaxy' found in 2015. Despite an annual search since then, no further virescent *G. plicatus* have been found.

All the three named *G. plicatus* varieties have produced virescent seedlings, with roughly 1 in 4 seedlings showing the trait, suggesting a recessive inheritance pattern. The first such seedling, *G. plicatus* 'Green Shadow' appeared in Ian Christie's nursery in 2013 as a seedling growing close to 'Castle Green Dragon'. This variety has pale lines on the outer segments from above the apex almost to base. During a visit to Ian Christie's nursery in 2015, Matt Bishop, Jörg Lebsa and I were shown 'Castle Green Dragon' in flower but Matt noticed in the same bed in the polytunnel a different and distinct virescent *G. plicatus*. We all thought this looked more elegant than 'Castle Green Dragon' and this was later named 'Green Elegance'. This snowdrop made its debut in John Morley's final snowdrop catalogue in 2024.

I have grown many seedlings from the original three named varieties from Brechin Castle. Most were ordinary *G. plicatus* but a few showed varying degrees of green on the outer segments. *G. plicatus* 'Castle Green Dragon' set seeds in 2015 and one of the seedlings was selected for the bold green character of its parent combined with enhanced refinement and balance, which I named '**Bonnie Green**'. It first flowered in 2020 and was chipped (twin-scaled) the following year. A few of the resulting plants flowered in 2024 but the following year most of the plants flowered, see image shown taken on 26th January 2025.

Description of *Galanthus plicatus* 'Bonnie Green'

- Flowers with strong green markings. Outer segments, reaching 21mm long x 19mm wide, broad and rounded, heavily marked with longitudinal green lines over a green-flushed base covering most of the segment surface. Inner segments with a single, bold, dark green mark extending from above the sinus to the base. Early flowering, typically at its best from mid to late January, depending on season.

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- Leaves erect, plicate, glaucous, blue-green colour, reaching 130mm long and 15mm wide. Habit tall and elegant, with flowers well poised above the foliage.
- Scape & Spathe: The flowering scape is sturdy and erect, reaching approximately 150mm in height. The spathe is prominent and emerald green.
- Ovary rounded and a deep, saturated green, complementing the virescent tones of the petals

Comparison of *Galanthus plicatus* 'Bonnie Green' and its parent, *Galanthus plicatus* 'Castle Green Dragon'

In 'Bonnie Green', the flower shape is slightly more slender and elongated; the outer tepals narrower. The green striping on the outer tepals is slightly more defined and vibrant. The outer tepal texture is generally smooth and satiny. 'Castle Green Dragon' has a 'chunky' or globular flower shape and it is known for its puckered or textured (seersucker) outer tepals, adding a distinct physical depth.

In cultivation, 'Bonnie Green' has proved easier to manage and a better performer, growing strongly and clumping up well. It provides an eye-catching display in a garden setting.



Galanthus plicatus 'Bonnie Green' - 26th January 2025



Galanthus plicatus 'Castle Green Dragon'

Some notes on *Galanthus plicatus*

Galanthus plicatus, originates from Eastern Europe and Western Asia, specifically the Crimean Peninsula, southern Russia, Romania, Ukraine, and northern Turkey, thriving in woodlands. Its name comes from the distinctive two-fold, or plicate, edge on its broad, grey-green leaves. It became popular in Britain when soldiers brought bulbs back from the Crimean War (1850s). It is noted for its impressive size and distinctive folded leaves (hence "plicatus") grey-green leaves. The species includes *G. plicatus* subsp. *plicatus* (widespread) and *G. plicatus* subsp. *byzantinus* (north-west Turkey).

Cultivation: *G. plicatus* is slightly more tolerant of diverse conditions than the common snowdrop (*G. nivalis*), making it a great choice for both beginners and collectors. It can handle more sun than other species if the soil remains moist, especially in Scotland. In hotter climates it prefers dappled or partial shade (e.g., under deciduous trees). Yellow-marked *G. plicatus* varieties (like 'Wendy's Gold'), often prefer a slightly sunnier spot than the green-marked ones to develop their best colour. Do not plant under evergreens as these will block out essential winter light, and the soil will end up too dry for them. They do well planted under hydrangeas or mixed among geraniums and hellebores, although they should not be planted too close to the latter.

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When to plant: Plant dry bulbs in autumn (Sept–Oct). Galanthus bulbs dry out quickly; buy from a reputable specialist and plant immediately at least 10 cm deep. In the Green: Best done in late February or March just after flowering. Snowdrops can be bought bare root or potted. Potted plants are preferable as the roots are delicate and once broken do not regrow that season. If buying bare root, get them into the ground as soon as possible, provided the ground is not frozen.

Aftercare: A liquid seaweed or high-potassium feed (like tomato food) after flowering can help the bulb bulk up. Do not cut foliage, let the leaves yellow and die back naturally to feed the bulb for next year.

Propagation:

- Division is the easiest method. Lift and split clumps when the leaves start to die down. Used for named varieties.
- Seeds. Collect seeds in late spring (May/June) when the seed pods turn yellow and feel soft. Sow immediately. They need the winter cold to germinate the following spring. Typically takes 3 to 4 years from seed to the first flower. Not suitable for named varieties.
- Twin-Scaling or Chipping - for rapid multiplication. More technical method to turn one expensive bulb into several. Used for named varieties.
- Pests: Squirrels may dig up new bulbs. Narcissus bulb fly (*Merodon equestris*) can hollow out larger bulbs. *Stagonospora curtisii* (recently renamed *Peyronellaea curtisii*), is a fungal disease that can be particularly devastating for *G. plicatus*. Difficult to treat. Prevention is better than cure: space plants out, avoid overwatering and quarantine.



ED: Pot of Anne Wright's new Galanthus. Chipped and twin-scaled as per her Masterclass in IRG 118 – download to read, free, [here](#).

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--- Experience with a New Cultivar ---



Fritillaria 'Red Beauty' around noon (sunny) on March 30th after an overnight rain.

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Red Beauty is Top of the Pops by Grahame Ware.

My experience in the Spring of '25 with *Fritillaria* 'Red Beauty' went beyond mere delight—it was astonishing. Yes, it was great that it didn't stink but more than that, I was struck by how strong and stout the stem was and how gorgeous the flowers were displayed over weeks and weeks. It stood up valiantly in those near violent winds of my late Winter/early Spring. Its stout stem was more than adequate for gusts that were knocking over other plants. As the flower developed and unfolded, it seemed almost unreal. Here was an absolute garden diva, serenely surveying all within her realm, the unquestionable queen of the early Spring garden scene. It stayed in magnificent bloom for weeks on end, adding an early and exotic aspect to my new bed — seemingly telling the daffs and tulips to speed it up. 'After all, my little dears, look at me— I'm in full bloom.' she announces with blissful disdain.



'Red Beauty' seen about noon (overcast) 10 days later than previous photo.

The RHS trial concluded in 2022 that it had “good deep red colour flowers that look good against green foliage. It has performed well. “They list its’ dimensions as 70 cm high x 30 cm wide. Mine was slightly taller and not nearly as wide.

During its flowering, many of my hellebores were at their peak as were the double *Primula* from David Kerley such as 'Lemon Chiffon', 'Snow' and 'Baltic Blue'. The lovely display came about when I planted out a sizeable and pricey bulb last October in a new bed in very thin, rocky soil. Still, it made about 72 cm in height.

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Despite the poorish soil, it rose up triumphantly through the cold, windy and often frosty month of March. This precocity and earliness indicate to me the influence of *F. eduardii* in its DNA.

[Leonid Bondarenko, sole proprietor of the Lithuanian Rare Bulb Garden in Vilnius](#), makes note of these qualities on the Fritillaria Group web in his report, [The Fritillaria Forest: Fritillaria eduardii in Tadjikistan](#), “In Lithuania night frosts are common and cause problems with many bulbous plants, but the frost resistance of *F. eduardii* is phenomenal. This species flowers at the same time as the earliest bulbs. The plants come up early and quickly and flower 10 - 14 days earlier than forms of *F. imperialis*. More than once, I have seen plants of *F. eduardii*— after a very cold night— standing like columns of ice but they’ve always come to life under the rays of the sun. The leaves are never damaged, even by very heavy frosts.”

It should be noted that the population that Bondarenko reported on and collected both seeds and bulbs from was from an alpine zone between 2700-2900 m. above Tajikistan’s famous Nurek Reservoir/lake that, coincidentally, supplies 70% of that country’s electricity. He reports that *F. eduardii* can get to 5’ in height at his home nursery. ‘Red Beauty’, does not come close to that verticality, achieving but half that scale.



Leonid Bondarenko in the field botanizing.

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So delighted am I with 'Red Beauty', I plan on planting many more of them and also trialling others including 'Early Fantasy', another interspecific hybrid from VOF de Keiserkroon, the same breeders from the Netherlands that created 'Red Beauty'. 'Early Fantasy' has been on the market considerably longer than 'Red Beauty' having been registered in 2010. I can inform the reader, that whilst it may have the 'early' designation in its name, it is not earlier to arise from the ground and flower than 'Red Beauty'. I'm sure that I'll be trying out more of these as time unfolds. These Frits represent a whole new ball game: big, early characters that add a ton of punch to the early Spring garden here (the Pacific coast of BC, Canada). The foxy smell is no longer a negative factor. I can highly recommend this cultivar for flourishing in light, well-drained soils. Indeed, I would imagine that they would excel in many maritime climates around the world with similar alkaline soils.

It has been proposed by the hybridizer Wietsma that this cultivar (and others closely related to it) go by the 'cultorum' handle of Crown Imperial (Early Interspecific Orange-Red Group). That's a bit of a mouthful and not likely to catch on. As Wietsma says, "These new cultivars are not only produced within the species *F. imperialis*, but are **mostly** (my emphasis) interspecific hybrids between the four species of section *Petilium* (*F. chitralensis*, *F. eduardii*, *F. imperialis*, *F. raddeana*)." ([IRG, Dec. 2019, #120](#) p 11). It seems that *F. x imperialis* (Interspecific Group) might work better than having 4 different clans based on flowering time and colour. In fact, the least confusing might be just to say, *Fritillaria* x 'Red Beauty'. However, the accurate horticultural nomenclature has not, to the best of my knowledge, been officially approved by either the KAVB (Dutch Bulb Council) or the IBC (International Botanical Congress).

When I see it offered in the marketplace, I'm dismayed that plant brokers such as Phoenix Perennials (and most others it seems) continue to call the new interspecifics like 'Red Beauty' a 'Crown Imperial' without denoting the distinction that it is a heavily influenced *eduardii* cross. It appears that 'Red Beauty' has a sizeable amount of *F. eduardii* in its DNA but given how close in looks and so many aspects that *F. imperialis* and *F. eduardii* are, I suppose a naming such as *F. x eduardii* 'Red Beauty' isn't going to fly either. Indeed, as the exquisite painting by Redouté shows, the *F. imperialis* he painted is very close, indeed almost a doppelgänger for *F. 'Red Beauty'*. With the same colour as 'Red Beauty' and its dark shoulders (base of petals), Redouté's painting bears a striking resemblance to 'Red Beauty'.

The difference between *eduardii* and *imperialis* weren't fully known at that time so it may well be that it is, in fact, *F. eduardii*.

This significant hybrid fritillary owes its genesis to two people:—"Partners Willem Wietsma, an academic scientist and the late Doede de Jong, a professional plantsman and cannabis

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activist. They started growing crown imperials in 1978 in Midlum, Friesland. The cultivation, which started as a hobby to improve the species as a cut flower and as a subject for the open garden, expanded over the years and naturally led to a hybridizing program.”

The scientific info has been reproduced earlier in *Taxon* and the *IRG* and in other respected horticultural journals. “Crosses between *F. eduardii* var. *eduardii* and *F. eduardii* var. *inodora* and vice versa (normal pollination), result in intermediate F1-hybrids. The flower colour of the F1-hybrid is darker red compared to *F. eduardii* var. *inodora*, but not purple as in *F. eduardii* var. *eduardii*. These F1-hybrids, when crossed again with *F. eduardii* var. *eduardii*, result in intermediate flower colours, darker red, although not purple as *F. eduardii* var. *eduardii*.” *Taxon* 60 (6), December 2011, p 1758. This seems to indicate the source of red for ‘Red Beauty’.



In any case, ‘Red Beauty’ was the first one out of the ground, braving chilly late Winter winds and frost to send up a glorious spike topped by a circular crown of glorious flowers with haunting beauty. This spring it has shown the same vigour, precocity and stunning good looks. It truly is a red beauty. They’ve adapted wonderfully to container culture as well making them even more useful and desirable as garden subjects.

Redouté, *Fritillaria imperialis*
from *Liliacées* Vol. 3. 1



F. imperialis 'Maximus' in *Hortus nitidus*, Trew & Seligman Vol 1, 1768.