

CROCUS GROUP SPRING 1992

This is just a reminder to make sure you have entered these events in your 1992 diary.

Saturday - 22 February 1992

The Crocus Group is invited to the garden of **Tony Colmer, Woodside, Send Barns Lane, Send, Woking, Surrey GU23 7BY - Tel: 0483 233 073**

He has kindly offered us coffee when we arrive at 11.00am and somewhere to eat a picnic lunch. Afterwards we are invited to visit the nearby garden of **Joy Hulme, Summerley, Heath Side, Park Road, Woking - Tel: 0483 761 163**

She has very kindly offered to provide tea. Please say if you intend to come and bring any interesting crocuses you may have out to show the rest of us.

Sunday - 1 March 1992

Mr & Mrs Ray Cobb have kindly invited us to come and see their crocuses, not to mention snowdrops and many other bulbs. Ray holds the National Crocus Collection.

Telephone beforehand if you intend to come (0602-281 525).

Arrive at 11.00am, when coffee will be provided, and bring a picnic lunch.

The address is: **188 Bramcote Lane, Wollaton, Nottingham NG8 2QN.**

On receipt of an SAE they will send you a map.

Tuesday - 10 March 1992

RHS New Hall

Alan Edwards has agreed to give the annual Crocus Lecture. The title will be "Crocuses in a Surrey Garden". Alan is a member of the Joint Rock Committee and is a very experienced photographer of crocuses in the wild. He also grows them superbly in his garden.

The lecture will start at the earlier time of **5pm** and will be followed by an auction of crocuses in aid of Crocus Group funds. Please support this if you can, or send me spare corms, if you cannot be there.

**Primrose Warburg
South Hayes
Yarnells Hill
Oxford OX2 9BG
Tel: Oxford 247883**

CROCUS IN THE ALPINE HOUSE

When selecting plants for cultivation in the limited space available in my so-called Alpine House - it is really an ordinary small greenhouse, stocked almost entirely with monocots or honorary monocots such as Cyclamen and Corydalis but with a few civvies (ie dicots) to add a little leaven - three criteria are applied.

Firstly rarity, coupled with expense. If a bulb, or corm as I am particularly referring to Crocus, costs me much more than £2 and there is only a solitary example, then it is almost certain to be grown under glass for at least its first season. Depending on performance it will then either stay inside or be put out to take its chances; sometimes an insurance corm or two will be kept inside while the majority are planted out. This is a good system for evaluating the quality of the plant while the stock is small and then maximising its potential when it is more abundant. For example, C. goulimyi albus, a beautiful flower with as much vigour as the usual mauve plant, was potted for the first season that I had it, after which the increase suggested that there was no further need for cossetting and the entire stock was planted out. In two years the solitary original has produced no less than eight flowering size corms. Similarly C. pallasii ssp pallasii, has flourished and increased prodigiously. The largest part of my stock is planted out, but it is a plant that, I feel, perhaps ought to be more carefully safeguarded and there is still a two-corm pot in the alpine house. Recent acquisitions still in the coddling stage are C. baytopiorum, C. kosaninii and C. robertianus; of these the latter two will almost certainly make the grade to the outer world before very long.

The second qualification for cultivation under glass is a feeble temperament; they are plants that dislike the British climate, or which are reputed to do so. There is a certain overlap with the provisions of clause one; such plants are usually expensive but because of their reputation the stock is

maintained under glass for longer. C. asumaniae is one such and is very satisfactory in pots where it increases steadily. Next year it should be possible to try a corm or two outside. A small form of C. cancellatus ssp cancellatus (bought as C. baytopiorum and almost certainly wild-collected) has a distinctly 'not-long-for-this world' appearance, but in fact grows reasonably well indoors. C. cancellatus ssp mazziaricus is not satisfactory in pots as it grows too fast and rapidly exhausts the compost, soon dwindling to numerous small corms. Outside it has not been a great success either. Interestingly, the commercial "Crocus cancellatus", if keyed out in 'The Crocus', will be found to belong to this subspecies. The Portuguese C. serotinus ssp serotinus has a reputation for intractability in cultivation but my stock has done extremely well in the alpine house over three years and a few will be risked outside soon. On the other hand C. reticulatus will almost certainly be a permanent inmate, and an unhappy one at that as it seems to resent captivity. Of course I could throw it out altogether, but that goes against the collector's grain.

The third criterion is merely indulgence, permitting the inclusion of hardy plants that could be grown equally well in the open ground. Space does not permit pans of C. chrysanthus and other things grown for colour alone, but the point can be stretched for a few plants whose flowers are particularly vulnerable to the weather, such as C. tournefortii, or those with small flowers such as C. pestalozzae. The ordinary white form of this is as floriferous as one could wish for, and I counted some forty flowers on a 3½" pot this spring. In the garden they would probably appear insignificant so I prefer to enjoy them in the alpine house.

It is probably apparent from the foregoing that I prefer to cultivate my crocuses outside; for one thing they are much less work there. I like to repot my alpine house bulbs annually as they soon exhaust their compost if neglected and corm size rapidly dwindles if this happens. A newly received single specimen of a rarity will be potted into a 3½" pot (usually

plastic) in a gritty compost based on JI3. In the second year it and its offspring, depending on the number, will then be replaced in a similarly sized pot unless increase as been very good, when it will be given a progressively larger container, or planted outside. It is important that ample water is available during growth and I usually give a dilute liquid feed once or twice a year. Spent flowers are carefully removed as soon as possible, thereby minimising botrytis infections, but Benlate is used as a spray if necessary.

Despite the work involved, the cultivation of Crocus in the Alpine House is fun and usually very rewarding. Few genera have such a lengthy season, and the obvious exception, Cyclamen, is complemented by the different form and colours of Crocus; together with other bulbs they can produce a winter-long display of colour, easily appreciated under the protection of glass.

JOHN GRIMSHAW

CROCUSES DOWN UNDER

Up until five years ago I would have had difficulty in being able to identify a crocus from a chrysanthemum such was (and to some extent still is) the dearth of material cultivated in Australia. According to visiting Dutch specialists, Tasmania, my home State, has an ideal climate for growing bulbs. However, with the exception of daffodils and to some extent tulips, little effort has been made with other Genera that are widely available to English gardeners.

My interest with crocuses began by a chance meeting with a number of pots of chrysanthus varieties at an early season daffodil show. Their brilliant markings and dainty forms so entranced me that before I knew it I was heading down the path of the collector. Specialist bulb growers are few and far between in Australia and one soon exhausts existing sources. When one ventures overseas in search of better "seams to mine" the reason for this sad state of affairs soon becomes apparent. Often times, unfavourable exchange rates (you think you lot have got a recession!) expensive and deleterious quarantine treatments in Australia, the change over from northern to the southern hemisphere and the lack of information/organised interest groups are all factors that confront the importer.

In the face of these drawbacks one must be a brave soul to persist in tapping into overseas supplies. I now keep my importation to a minimum (I have my own quarantine station) and only get tempted by exciting forms or rarely available species. By far the safest and most interesting method of establishing stocks is by raising from seed and this is the area that takes up most of my spare time.

All my plants are grown outside, mostly in pots but some in the open garden, in raised beds prepared for and devoted to them. Hobart, my home town, experiences a temperate maritime climate; annual rainfall is 25 - 35 inches and average temperatures range from 40°F in July to 73°F in February. Summers are warm/hot and quite dry and winters coldish and fairly wet though Spring can be the wettest season (this ruins flowering and thus pollination).

At present all of the Mediterranean and most of the Western European species appear to be not too difficult (famous last words!) in this environment and there appears to be no need for a bulb frame. This may change as I obtain more easterly occurring species. I have been able to provide a number of Micro-climates by taking advantage of walls, tree belts and topographical features on my property.

The major cultivation problem up to date has been keeping the moisture loving/snow melt species happy during the dry summer. My home is on a north facing hill thus it is essentially a hot dry site, so shading, extra peat and plunging into sand has been employed.

I am still at a loss as to knowing the best regime/method of feeding young seedlings. Also because of the reversal of the seasons I often receive seed at the wrong time for sowing - should I sow straight away because of possible loss of viability if stored? If not then what is the best way to store seed to ensure a good future germination? Answers to any of the above questions would be much appreciated.

I am obviously still a novice and I am extremely grateful to a number of collectors and nurserymen in England in assisting me to develop my collection through the gifts of plants and advice.

I am unable to attend any of the crocus auctions run by the group but I am still keen to obtain more plant material. Because of the difficulties with corms, seeds would be my preferred choice. So if there are any members who are interested in selling or exchanging seed I would like to hear from them.

A short list of my most desired items include *biflorus nubigenus*, *vallicola*, *scharojanii*, *cambessedsii*, *malyi*, *kosaninii* and dare I ask *scardicus*, *leichtlinii*, *baytopiorum* and *sieben ssp sieberi*.

My address is:

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