

# The Archibald Archive – Genus Guides

## ARUM

We grow and list seed from the majority of species in this small genus of summer-dormant, tuberous plants in the family Araceae, distributed across Europe and the Middle East to Central Asia. While there are 25 species in the genus, seed set is rather irregular with us and we do not have seeds available from every species we grow every year, though we are often helped by fellow aroid-enthusiasts, Mike Tucker, Chris Lovell and Norman Stevens. We believe that we consistently offer by far the most comprehensive range available from any source.

Most species are sufficiently hardy to be grown in the open garden in the south of the British Isles. There are several species, such as *Arum alpinum*, *A. rupicola*, *A. korolkowii* and *A. euxinum*, native to areas with extremely severe, continental climates but it should be remembered that the tubers usually grow deeply, often among rocks or in cliff crevices. In our experience, the tubers of all are vulnerable to prolonged freezing. Some Mediterranean species, which produce overwintering leaves in autumn, can be damaged by frost. For these reasons we grow all our parent stocks planted out in beds protected from excess rain by a netting-sided polytunnel. While providing drier conditions both in winter and summer, this gives very little protection from frost and we provide a little temporary protection to the foliage of such species as *A. palaestinum* and *A. dioscoridis* during cold periods. Planting out in a bulb-frame or in a well-drained bed against a South-facing wall are the best possibilities for these species in UK gardens.

There are often several seeds in each fruit, so, if seed is scarce, it will be cleaned. When we have plenty seed of a species, we dry it with the orange-red pericarp intact, as we find the seed stores a little better uncleaned. As this pericarp contains germination inhibitors, it is best removed before sowing by soaking the seeds to soften it before rubbing it off. The coating is caustic and contains calcium oxalate crystals so can be irritant but cleaning a small quantity is highly unlikely to cause any problem. Seed germination falls into two patterns. The cold climate species, like *A. alpinum*, *A. maculatum*, *A. idaeum*, etc., germinate underground and produce a tuber without any growth appearing above ground during the first growing season. Those from areas with warmer winters, like *Arum dioscoridis* and *Arum pictum*, produce a leaf and initiate a tuber more or less simultaneously.

Nomenclature and Further information: There is only one accessible and comprehensive publication, the Kew Magazine Monograph, 'The Genus Arum' by Peter Boyce (1993). We follow the classification in this. It revises the accounts in both 'Flora Europaea' and 'Flora of Turkey'. The only area, in which we have found this monograph to be seriously defective, is in its treatment of the two most eastern, Central Asian species. As well as being a thorough botanical account, there is a lot of good information on cultivation. There is also brief, reliable information and some photographs in 'The Bulb Book' by Martyn Rix and Roger Phillips.