

# The Archibald Archive – Genus Guides

## CROCUS

We list an outstanding range of seeds from this summer-dormant genus in Iridaceae comprising almost 100 species of cormous plants, flowering from autumn to spring and distributed from Western Europe and North Africa to Central Asia. Their centre of diversity is in Turkey. While our listing is the most comprehensive in the world, we stress that Crocus is the most difficult in cultivation among the main genera of bulbs and corms which we offer. As a few crocuses are familiar garden plants in temperate areas, many gardeners assume all are easy. Those listed cheaply as wild species in less specialized bulb catalogues are sometimes of hybrid origin or are clones, often untypical of the species as a whole and selected for mass production. If you want good reliable garden-plants, these are for you. For the specialist grower, we are attempting to build up basic fertile parent-stocks, raised from wild seed-collections where possible, as a source of hand-pollinated seeds. This is less easy with Crocus than with many other genera, as there are few seeds in a capsule and maintaining quite a large number of corms is necessary. Seed-collection is also quite critical and can be troublesome, even in cultivation and almost always so in the wild. We usually have one or two wild seed-collections listed but most seed is cultivated by us. Seeds of many will always be expensive and in short supply. In our efforts to list an exceptional range of Crocus species, we have been much assisted by several other growers throughout Europe, particularly David Stephens, who takes the British National Crocus Collection in his care seriously.

Seed should ideally be sown in late summer so that it experiences a warm period before the cold winter spell necessary for germination. Late sown seed may not germinate until after the following winter. The seedlings usually appear in early spring at the same time as the foliage of mature corms. Many of the wild species are essentially plants for the bulb-frame or alpine-house. For general garden use in the UK, the mass-produced selections are both a preferable and a much cheaper option.

Nomenclature: Names follow the standard reference for the genus 'The Crocus' by Brian Mathew (1982). Brian also wrote the accounts of this genus in 'The European Garden Flora', 'Flora Europaea', 'Flora Iranica' and 'Flora of Turkey'.

Further information: While 'The Crocus' by Brian Mathew (1982) will long remain invaluable, it is now somewhat outdated as many new taxa have been described since its publication. A revised version or perhaps a more popular book for gardeners would be welcome. There is also much reliable information in 'The Bulb Book' by Martyn Rix and Roger Phillips, 'The Smaller Bulbs' by Brian Mathew (1987) and 'Growing Bulbs' by Martyn Rix (1983).