

Trecanna's Choice



Trecanna Nursery is a family-run plant nursery owned by Mark & Karen Wash and set on Cornish slopes of the Tamar Valley, specialising in Crocosmias and other South African plants, Sempervivum, unusual bulbs and perennials. Each month Mark will write a feature on some of his very favourite plants.

Trecanna Nursery is open on Fridays & Saturdays, from 10am to 5pm, throughout the year (or phone ahead to arrange a visit at other times). It is located approx. 2 miles north of Gunnislake. Follow the signs from opposite the Donkey Park on the A390, Callington to Gunnislake road. Mark also gives talks to gardening clubs and societies throughout the South-West – contact him on 01822 834680 for further information.

‘Crocosmia Revisited – A Fresh Look’

Last summer I penned an introductory article on the fabulous summer flowering Crocosmias for ‘The Cornish Gardener’. This colourful summer-flowering bulb is a main feature of our display here at Trecanna so I thought I might revisit and expand on my previous notes – just ahead of the main flowering season for these colourful bulbs.

As I write this article the glorious June weather seems to have come to an end for a while and strong winds and rain are reeking havoc with the remaining Spring and early-Summer herbaceous flowers which were already coming to the end of their main display - I don't anticipate that there will be much left to see once the weather clears again. Plants that *start* to flower in July and August can really help to bring a garden back to life at this time of the year.

Crocosmias are one of those plants that just ‘fit the bill’ – the first varieties flowering from late June/early July and later forms starting as late as mid-August.

DESCRIPTION

Crocosmias are a herbaceous plant that grows from a corm to flower again year after year. When a Crocosmia is in flower in the garden you will not fail to notice it due to its vibrant colours! They have elegant tubular flowers and their ‘*hot*’ colours range from lemon-yellow to canary-yellow, apricot, and orange through to salmon and deep red. Some grow no taller than 2 ft (when in flower), whilst others tower around 5 to 6 feet. Different varieties have upright or arching stems that are tough and wind-resistant - the flowers can be arranged upward facing or horizontal. On many varieties the flower-buds and seeds-heads can be just as attractive as the flowers!

The large sword-shaped leaves on many varieties can also add huge impact to a border well before the flowers start to appear. They vary in shades from apple-green to olive-green and even bronze or copper. Many are richly pleated to add extra texture.

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Crocosmias are generally hardy throughout the South-West, particularly if you take a little care when planting (see below).

A BRIEF HISTORY

There are currently over 350 varieties of Crocosmia in existence and many more that have been lost over the years. The dried flowers emit a strong saffron fragrance when added to a bowl of warm water – hence their original Greek name ('krocós' = saffron, 'osme' = smell).

Their original homeland is South Africa where they grow in grassland and on mountainous areas, often on the edges of streams. Many hybrids were bred in France in the late 1800's and a host of new varieties came into existence in the early 1900's when they were a popular cut flower. Norfolk was the hotbed for hybrids at this time. The common name for one particularly vigorous form of Crocosmia (*Crocosmia x crocosmiiflora*) is *Montbretia* – a variety that runs riot in many a West Country border. Yes, I know that it spreads like mad and swamps other plants but please don't be put off – most Crocosmias are clump-forming and not nearly as vigorous as this attractive but invasive form.

Crocosmia really seem to like the weather conditions down here in the South-West of the UK – hence the reason that they grow so well. They also have the advantage of being happy in both windy and coastal locations.

HOW TO GROW THEM

Grow Crocosmias in a sunny border, in moist but well-drained soil. Keep well watered during the Spring months but don't worry if they become dry over the Summer. Plant dry corms 5-6" deep in March/April or better still plant ready-grown clumps at any time of year, a little deeper than the level of the compost. They need very little care – a sprinkling of organic feed in early spring, and again after flowering is a good idea. In winter the corms can be left in the ground in all but the coldest of areas (hardy to -5 degrees centigrade) - leave the withered leaves in place and mulch the surface of the soil with a good 3 to 4" layer of bark or compost. Remove old leaves in the spring once new growth appears and split clumps every few years in Feb/March.

Crocosmias are also great in pots, and make superb cut flowers – lasting for a long time.

SOME OF OUR FAVOURITES

Here are some of our favourite varieties at Trecanna. I have listed them according to colour to help make your selection easier. All will be in flower in our display gardens at the nursery during July and August. Also look out for them at many of the Cornish gardens such as Lanhydrock. Those with the suffix 'AGM' have been awarded the Royal Horticultural Society Award Of Garden Merit.

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YELLOWS:

'Citronella' – 2ft 6". Pale to lemon-yellow flowers on numerous short, upright stems. Apple-green leaves.

'George Davison' – 2ft 6" to 3ft. An excellent yellow variety with apple-green leaves and rounded golden-yellow flowers in profusion.

'Irish Dawn' – 2ft. Warm yellow flowers with apricot outer petals that recurve backwards. Rare.

'Solfatare' AGM – 2ft 6" to 3ft. Small to mid apricot yellow flowers and distinct bronze leaves. A superb combination – best in a sheltered position

ORANGES:

'Carmin Brilliant' – 2ft 6". Masses of long-lasting small orange flowers with brush-strokes of red. Very long flowering period.

'Constance' – 3ft. Large flowers with rounded petals of clear yellow-orange and a yellow base with small mahogany markings. Flowers over a long period.

'Emily McKenzie' – 2ft 6". Large apricot-orange flowers with significant mahogany markings. Olive-green leaves – excellent for part-shade and well-drained sites.

'Orangeade' – 3ft. Extremely large open blooms of day-glow orange with an amazing shimmer to them. Very aptly named – rare.

'Star Of The East' – 3ft. One of our favourites – huge downward-facing orange flowers looking like upturned umbrellas. Often develops markings as the flowers age. Late season and very long in flower.

'Venus' – 2ft 6" to 3ft. Sturdy upright stems with orange/red flowers with a broad yellow band and exquisite mahogany markings. The flowers are held horizontally for a striking effect.

REDS:

'Babylon' – 2ft 6" to 3ft. A superb variety with dusky red/orange flowers with darker markings and a yellow throat.

'Emberglow' – 3ft to 4ft. Red to deep crimson flowers held in horizontal herringbones. Good for red August flowers to follow 'Lucifer'.

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'Lucifer' AGM – A tall 5ft high variety with fiery red flower on arching stems and large pleated leaves. A real 'must' for all medium to large gardens – flowering in July. Lucifer has the RHS Award of Garden Merit.

OTHERS:

'Mistral' – 3ft high (in flower), Arching stems, red flowers with a distinct shimmer of magenta as they age. Early to flower. Thin pleated leaves.

'Severn Sunrise' – 2ft 6". Tightly clustered flowers in shades of salmon, apricot and yellow. Very different and attractive – likes a sheltered site.

Visit Trecanna over July & August to see a large number of unusual varieties in flower in our display gardens. You'll become hooked!

Happy Gardening!