



Having been away for a week this log is a little late, so apologies for that. As I catch up with the changes that have occurred during my time off, I'm going to take the opportunity to also catch up with some bulb highlights from the past month that there has not yet been space to share with you. First some *Fritillaria*.



The fritillaries have flowered well for us this year, many apparently favouring the colder winter. This one is *Fritillaria reuteri* which comes from Iran. While having the usual dry dormancy, its habitat is wetter during the growing period than for many *Fritillaria* so it needs more frequent watering then. While it can have up to eight flowers per stem, two is more usual as with the ones shown.

Fritillaria of course are loved among other reasons for the tessellation, spotting and other markings that many of their flowers demonstrate. I particularly like those that hide these markings inside the flowers so as to surprise you when you lift the hanging flower to look in. One of these is *Fritillaria tortifolia*, one of the Chinese fritillaries. It does have some tessellation outside the flower as the following photo shows:

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*Fritillaria tortifolia*

It is when you look inside that you see how much more intense the markings are, and see the red colour at the base of the flower.



Perhaps the species with the biggest surprise is *Fritillaria walujewii* which outside appears off-white but on turning up to look inside reveals a startling amount of colour:





The surprise in some bulbs is the other way around. We were given some bulbs of *Moraea atropunctata*, an inhabitant of the south-western Cape in South Africa.



Having not seen this before I was excited when the first buds appeared this year. I loved the chocolaty brown colour on the reverse of the petals and had thus expected a dark flower. I had not at all anticipated that inside the flower would be....white!



Another two of my favourite South African bulbs have flowered over the past few weeks. Mind you, I seem to use the word “favourite” a lot in reference to the Cape flora – it is actually very hard to pick out favourites as they nearly all seem to qualify! Sticking with the white theme for a moment though, *Bulbinella graminifolia* stands out for its elegance. Like a diminutive pure white poker it catches the eye from a distance and is one of those plants that when seen in the flesh,

most people ask where they can get one (the answer to which is that it is easy from seed, sometimes available from the South African suppliers. Or perhaps talk to me very nicely....!)



Most Bulbinellas are quite large plants, but this one rarely attains more than 60cm and is suitable for a pot of modest proportions.

It likes plenty of water whilst in growth and, unlike many South African bulbs, it also likes a little moisture during dormancy to help stop the fleshy storage roots from desiccating. Strictly it is not a bulb as it grows from a compact rhizome.



The second Cape bulb I wanted to show is altogether more gaudy but no less beautiful for it. I have never been a fan of the larger, hybrid Gladiolus of the Dame Edna persuasion, but some of the small wild species are exquisite. This one is *Gladiolus alatus*:



The flowers are only around 4 to 5 cm across on plants that only grow to about 20cm tall. It occurs from the northwest to south-western Cape, extending eastwards too in the southern parts of its range. It flowers at the very end of its growing season and quickly dies down as the flowers fade, unless it has set seed when it stays green for a little longer until the pods are mature.

Finally this week, *Calochortus*. I am a great fan of this genus, especially those with the very hairy flowers that I am about to show you, but confess I don't find them easy to grow. We have them in an unheated glasshouse which normally is fine, but this past winter when it got down to minus 8 centigrade inside the house, several species suffered though the only actual death was a pot of small seedlings. This first picture is *Calochortus coeruleus*:





There is a possibility that this is actually a form of *C. tolmei*. The two species are easily confused and the descriptions I consulted didn't do much to help me decide the actual identity. Either way, a most attractive plant. Another hairy one with a wonderful colour came from Diana Chapman of Telos Rare Bulbs. She describes this simply as possibly a new species, related to *C. tolmei*:



A closer view shows the intricate detail of the hairy flower:

