

# Wisley's Alpine Log

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With the weather continuing cold and often wet, we try to balance our time between outdoor tidying of the rock garden in the better interludes and indoor potting. At this time of year, the amounts of potting start to increase after the winter break. Two particular collections we do now are the *Rhodohypoxis* and the evergreen *Lewisia*. Unfortunately our *Rhodohypoxis* collection had a large problem with mice last year. Chris, who tends this collection, trapped many, but not before they had consumed a considerable number. We have bought some new stock this year and also plan to give them a new home which may be a little safer. It is well worth the effort as *Rhodohypoxis* are such rewarding plants, providing a wonderful splash of colour in late spring and early summer. This is my collection at home flowering in May last year:



At this time of year they are just starting to think about growing again and it is a good time to re-pot them. At home I use plastic pots which I find easier to manage than clay as they like plenty of moisture in the growing season. At Wisley we use clay pots which look better for display but need more frequent attention to watering. For the potting media we use a mix of equal parts John Innes compost no. 2, peat, perlite and grit. The peat is there to make the mix a little acidic, reflecting their wild habitat, though Chris Birchall of Tale Valley Nursery (holders of the national collection of *Rhodohypoxis*) says this is not absolutely essential despite what most of the literature says. Given plenty of water in the growing season and the occasional high potash feed, they are very easy and accommodating bulbs to grow.



The evergreen lewisias, cultivated at Wisley by Anita, usually tell you it is time to re-pot them by getting some fresh new growth in the centre of the rosettes. This new growth is bright, glossy green compared to the dull older leaves so is easily seen. When you spot it, you know it is time to get on with the potting. Here is an example:



Our mix for these lewisias is 2 parts John Innes No. 2, 1 part perlite and 1 part peat. This year we are trying some with composted bark replacing the peat fraction, as part of our efforts to reduce peat usage to a minimum. They seem to do better when not over-potted so we choose a pot size only just big enough for the roots. This does give one problem when re-potting (from clay pots) in that the pots are very full of root and it can be difficult to remove the plant from the old pot. A knife run round the edge, as Anita is doing here, can help:





Germinating seeds are always exciting to see and some of the *Fritillaria* sown last September have been germinating recently. I was particularly pleased to see these:



These are from a cross I did deliberately between *Fritillaria rhodocanakis* ssp. *argolica* and the American species *Fritillaria pluriflora*. I wasn't at all sure if the American species would cross with the European, but this one at least seems to have done something. Also germinating recently was a straight species, *F. bithynica*:





Staying with *Fritillaria*, I showed a couple of logs ago an early flowering *Fritillaria striata*. This was the first time I had flowered this species from seed. As more flowers opened, it became obvious that there was quite a bit of variation in the seedlings regarding the amount of striations that give the species its name. Some had quite a lot, giving the flowers an overall appearance of being pink from a distance, while another was almost pure white with no striations. Others were somewhere in between these two extremes. All were lovely, and all had the sweet scent that marks this species out from most of its brethren in the genus. Here are the well-marked and the white ones:





Many of the reticulate Irises have been flowering recently and one that particularly caught my eye was this one:



The almost jet-black falls are really striking. This particular *I. reticulata* is a form that came to us with the collection number JJM2 04-190, collected by A&J Mayr from a site in Iran.

The *Cyclamen* still attract attention. This is our stock of forms of *C. alpinum*:





The *Saxifraga* collection is beginning to come into its own, with cushions covered in flowers of many shades now competing with the bulbs to attract your attention. Here is just a selection:



Above: *Saxifraga* 'Allendale Billows'  
Below: *Saxifraga* Frederik Chopin







Above: Saxifraga 'Paul Rubens'  
Below: Saxifraga 'Mother of Pearl'







Above: Saxifraga 'Bertramka'  
Below: Saxifraga 'Wheatley Rose'

