

# Wisley's Alpine Log

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Spring is rushing towards us putting an end (at last!) to the cold of the rather extreme winter we have just had. The change from very cold to much milder conditions has triggered a rush of growth and flower with many things flowering a little earlier than usual. The result is that the Alpine House is looking fabulous, filled with colour and spectacle.





One particular favourite of mine in here just now is *Iris reticulata* 'Blue Ice', a relatively new cultivar of this popular group of Irises:



*Cyclamen* have been an important part of our display for some time. *C. alpinum* has been much in evidence. We grow a range of forms with flowers varying from very pale to quite dark rose. Here are a couple of examples:







Of course *Cyclamen coum* has also been much in evidence at this time of year. This is a part of our collection:





Five years ago I sowed seed of the rare *Fritillaria chitralensis* and this year they are attempting to flower for the first time:



Of course these bulbs are not fully mature yet and in future years the stems should be much taller with more flowers per stem. It is also not unusual when first trying to flower for bulbs to produce small and/or malformed flowers. One of these bulbs did this:





Another *Fritillaria* amongst the first to flower this year was the American *F. pudica*:



One bulb outside that has looked wonderful this year is *Leucojum vernum*:





Many logs ago I wrote about a plant from Turkey with that fabulous name, *Tchihatchewia isatidea*. We grew this from seed collected in Turkey by Jim & Jenny Archibald, at Ezurum, NW of Askale at 2000m. There it occurs on steep, loose, eroded shale slopes. I previously noted that it has a large tap root and needs a deep pot. I grow it successfully in pure Seramis with regular liquid feeding. They don't like disturbance – prick out as soon as practical into their final pots & then don't move again. Further experience has shown that in our climate at least it is extremely susceptible to botrytis through the winter. Plants regularly lose their central growing point:



This is what *Tchihatchewia isatidea* should look like

On this one the centre has rotted due to *Botrytis*.



The good news is that if you cut this rotted bit away the plant often survives and produces several new growing points – you can already see signs of this around the centre of the rotting plant if you look carefully. Each one of these will flower to produce a great display. One other point is that seed seems to *need* a very cold winter (well below freezing) in order for the seed to germinate really well. So this last winter has resulted in lots of good seedlings for the future.



When one of the Wisley cats, Tommy, died a couple of years ago we planted a *Daphne bholua* 'Limpsfield' in his memory. This cultivar has deep pink/purple buds that open to a paler pink and has the usual magnificent scent that this species exudes:



*Daphne bholua* 'Limpsfield'

To finish this week, a couple of other plants outside – a lovely clump of *Crocus tommasinianus* and the emerging buds of *Ypsilandra thibetica* with its fabulous blue stamens:

