

Wisley's Alpine Log

By Paul Cumbleton

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With spring being our busiest period I didn't manage to get this log out at the usual time, so apologies. The change to somewhat warmer weather has brought a sudden rush of growth and flowering. Outside, the *Erythronium* have been particularly good this year, such as this clump of *E. californicum* 'White Beauty':



In recent years the *Fritillaria meleagris* on the meadow have been slowly increasing in numbers by self seeding. Last year we decided to speed up this increase by planting an additional 1000 bulbs. When you buy these they come as dried bulbs which *meleagris* does not like and you can expect a significant number not to come up. However, on this occasion I was pleased because I estimate almost half did survive and flower which is a lot more than I had anticipated. They have been a great hit with our visitors.

Also looking good right now out on the rock garden is *Gentiana acaulis* 'Rannoch', a large and richly coloured form that seems to flower reliably:



In one of the troughs *Saxifraga* 'Stansfieldii' is providing an eye-catching display:





Lachenalia liliiflora

We grow several of the smaller species of *Lachenalia* and in the Alpine House we currently have a selection of these out on display. They tend to be among the latest of the winter-growing South African bulbs to flower for us before the summer dormancy.

We plant our *Lachenalia* crowded together in their pots – they seem to like growing close together and they give a better display too.



Lachenalia mathewsii

The yellow-flowered *L. mathewsii* was once thought to be extinct in the wild until a new population was found in 1983. It remains endangered, but is thankfully well established in cultivation both in South Africa and in collections all over the world. Whenever we in the UK see a specific name of “mathewsii” we tend to think of our well-known botanist Brian Mathew. However, *Lachenalia mathewsii* has no connection here, being named after J.W. Mathews, the first Curator of Kirstenbosch Botanic Garden.



Lachenalia zeyheri

Lachenalia zeyheri is also critically endangered in the wild, known from only 3 sites. As with so many of these endangered plants, it is habitat loss due to either urban development or farming that underlies much of their dwindling distributions.

Androsace villosa is currently in full bloom. I love the way the flowers develop a pink eye as they age.



Many of the smaller *Allium* make good pot subjects, particularly those with few, wide leaves and almost sessile balls of flowers nestled in them. This is just one example, *Allium eburzense* (or something closely affiliated to it):



The South American *Leucocoryne* are among my favourite bulbous plants and these are currently at the height of their flowering. The one most commonly seen is *L. purpurea*. This is a somewhat variable species. This one is a selection usually sold under the name "Andes":



This is *Leucocoryne ixioides*, probably the selection known as "Blue Ocean". I would not rely too much on any name you get *Leucocoryne* species under. They are often wrongly named and many hybrids also exist.

Leucocoryne vittata is my favourite in the genus. This too can be variable, with the degree of striping and intensity and shade of the colours all changeable.



I haven't always found *Leucocoryne* easy to grow, but they seem to now be doing a lot better for me. A few keys to success seem to be:

- Plant deeply in long pots (they will otherwise waste energy pulling themselves deeper)
- Keep VERY WARM and dry during their summer dormancy but much cooler while in growth
- They seem to benefit from regular feeding, but don't overdo it

One problem when obtaining *Leucocoryne* bulbs is that in the UK at least they are often sold in garden centres at the wrong time of year. *Leucocoryne* are winter-growing but the Dutch producers seem to ignore this and sell them for spring planting/summer flowering. If you buy such bulbs they will emerge at the wrong time (if they emerge at all) and have a short growing season, making small new bulbs. They will then usually try to come up next at their right time in the autumn. It may then take two or more seasons of growth to get them back up to flowering size. Remember, these bulbs are winter growing – you should start them off around September, grow them through the winter and then they will flower about now (April into May). They then die down for summer. If possible, get bulbs from a source where they are already on this cycle – or grow them from seed sown also in September, so that they start life already at the right timing. Gladly, they grow easily from seed.

One or two more things in flower to finish with. This is the hybrid *Lewisia pygmaea* x *Lewisia rediviva*:



This is a great plant, inheriting the best of both parents. I treat it just like a *rediviva*.

A plant I first saw in the wild in Utah, USA, and always wanted to grow is *Polemonium viscosum*:



To end, back outside and the sheets of *Anemone blanda* that adorn the wooded area at the western end of the rock garden:

