



Ipheion 'Alberto Castillo' leaves



I have been told by some people from the far south of England that Ipheion 'Alberto Castillo' is not hardy. I cannot accept that as we have grown it in various situations in the open garden for almost twenty years now without any problems. The leaves first appear around October and survive all through the winter without any damage from the cold and frosts. This picture shows the leaves today, undamaged, after what we are being told has been the coldest winter in forty years with temperatures down as low as -14C in our garden. It has many large white flowers in the spring and seed is set most years which has resulted in a number of self sown seedlings around the parent plant..

In front of the Ipheion you will see a small group of Crocus that have also self seeded. Most have turned out yellow with a purple bronze exterior but one is a sort of puce colour with the same dark markings. This is the joy of not being over vigorous in collecting all your garden seed and allowing plants to self seed around the garden.

Self sown Crocus



Crocus herbertii and Crocus korolkowii seedling

In the foreground is the bright egg yolk yellow *Crocus gargaricus* ssp *herbertii*, now elevated to species status and should be called *Crocus herbertii*, runs around by stolons. However I want to show you the dark *Crocus korolkowii* type behind that self seeded in a gravel path a number of years ago. Once it had reached flowering size I decided it was very attractive and worth moving to reduce the danger of it getting trampled on so I replanted it into a humus bed where it is now clumping up nicely.



Crocus 'Janis Ruksans'

Last week I showed you a single flower on my pot of *Crocus* 'Janis Ruksans' and thought that I would have to wait for a year to get more flowers. I was wrong. One day of bright sunshine encouraged the other buds to spring into life and I now have a pot full of the lovely flowers. It is very satisfactory to see, by first forcing the single corm to break down with bad treatment, that good cultivation and feeding has built them back up to flowering size within two years.



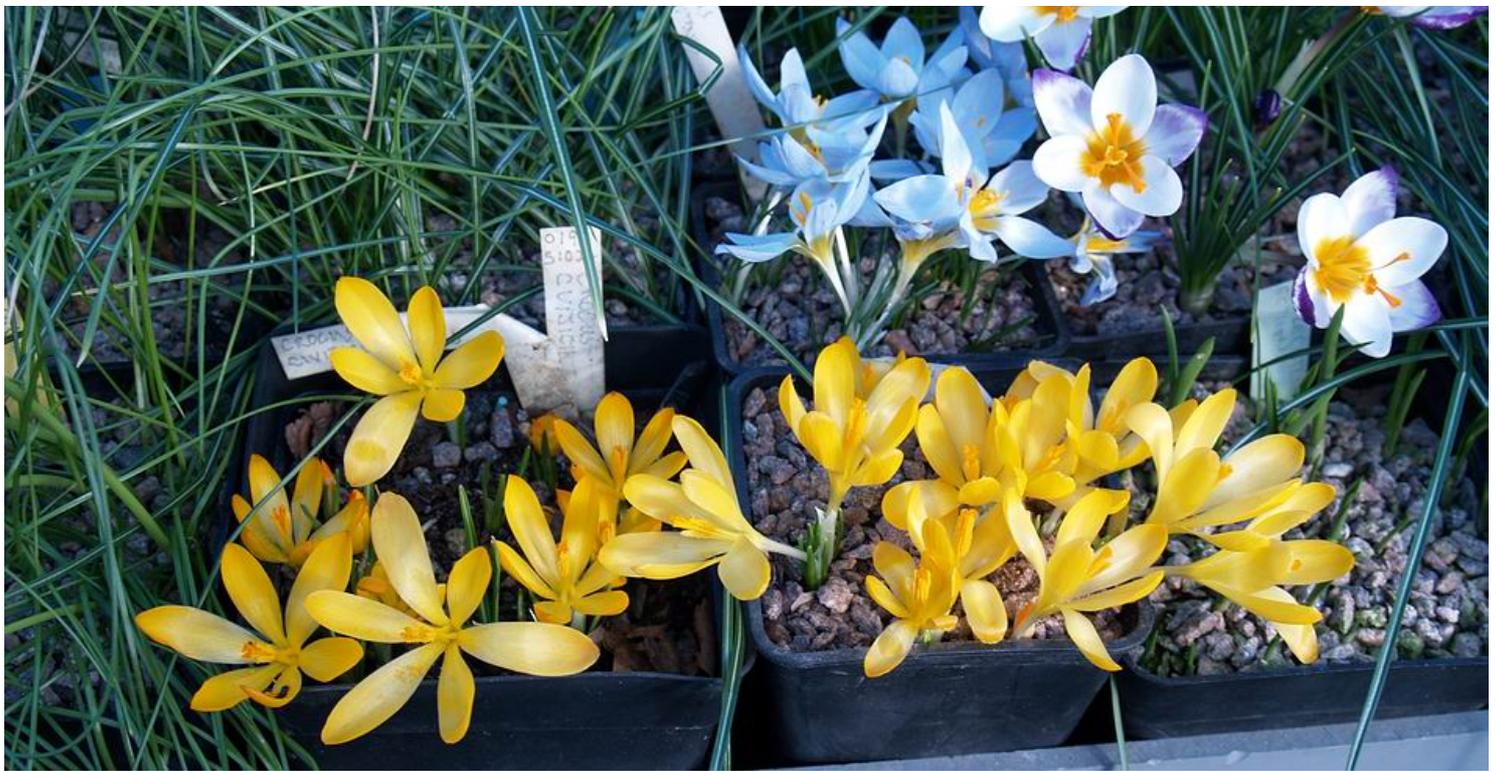
Crocus 'Fuscotinctus'

I got some small cormlets labelled *Crocus chrysanthus* var *fuscotinctus* a few years ago at the Discussion Weekend Small Bulb Group exchange and they are also now flowering sized. It is a pretty crocus which is most likely a hybrid between *Crocus biflorus* and *Crocus chrysanthus*. It is one of the many *Crocus* that I grow in pots that would be equally happy outside in the open garden. As soon as my 7cm pot is full I will plant some into the garden but I will always retain a few in a pot so I can enjoy them under glass on a sunny days like today when the outside temperature even struggles to reach 3C.



Crocus malyi

Crocus malyi is another excellent garden plant but again it is worth keeping a small pot full under glass to extend the period of pleasure that these beautiful flowers bring. In the garden the first *Crocus malyi* also opened today when the sunshine hit it for a few hours before it was plunged back into shade.



Crocus cvijicii

I grow most of my *Crocus cvijicii* in pots in an outside frame where they can remain cool and moist all through the summer but I do bring some into the bulb house when they are in flower to help the pollination and seed fertilisation process. As there are not many insects around just now I pollinate all the *Crocus* with a paint brush.



Crocus cvijicii

This pot shows the intensity of colour this species has. It is very difficult in some weather conditions to know when to water the bulbs. Generally I like to give them a good soaking on a bright sunny day such as we have been having but as our night time temperatures are still well below freezing I have been putting it off for as long as I can. The problem is that the bulbs are much more susceptible to damage from freezing when the compost is very wet and they are turgid so it is a tricky decision. I am also very aware that I want to start adding the potassium supplement with the next watering to help the bulbs build up for next year. I will delay until I see evidence, such as the leaves and stems flopping over and the flowers starting to shrivel through lack of water then I will have to water.



Newly germinating bulb seeds

Watering newly germinating bulb seedlings is slightly different – the same basic rule outlined above applies but you have to realise that the young seedlings have not got the same ability to withstand being dry for any length of time. Their roots do not penetrate far into the compost and they have not built up much of a reserve in the form of a bulb yet so I do have to water them on good days. I always water them early as soon as the sun hits the bulb house and raises the temperature above freezing so that the surplus water drains away before night fall. One good watering will last the seedlings for around two weeks in our conditions at this time of year. This only applies to the pots of seedling that are in the bulb houses – other pots are still in open frames and they do not need me to water them at all as nature does that for me – I only have to watch out for slugs and snails.

EC FERTILISER	
NPK FERTILISER SOLUTION 4-4-12	
with magnesium and micro-nutrients	
NITROGEN (N) Total	4.00%
of which ureic nitrogen	2.6%
of which ammoniacal nitrogen	1.4%
Water-soluble PHOSPHORUS PENTOXIDE (P ₂ O ₅)	4.0% (1.7% P)
Water-soluble POTASSIUM OXIDE (K ₂ O)	12.0% (10.0% K)
Water-soluble Magnesium Oxide (MgO)	0.01%
With micro-nutrients	

Every time I water the pots of seedlings I give them a dilute liquid feed. I use a tomato type fertiliser with a low nitrogen content and a high potassium content NPK 4-4-12 and dilute it to about half or even a quarter of the recommended strength. This low level of nitrogen is required by the young seedlings to help them build cells but it is not high enough to encourage them to get overgrown and too soft.

Later in the season I will switch over to giving them some of the potassium powder that I use for the mature bulbs.



Jumble of Narcissus

Many pots of Narcissus are in full flower just now as the early spring flowering hoop petticoat forms reach their peak.



Narcissus romieuxii ex JCA805

This is a pot of *Narcissus romieuxii* ex JCA805 and you will notice that the flower in the lower centre has a lobed corona similar to the cultivar 'Joy Bishop'; these do appear from time to time in seed raised from this excellent line of Narcissus.



Narcissus romieuxii JWB 8913

Narcissus romieuxii JWB 8913 is a John Blanchard introduction and is the deepest yellow form of this species that I grow.



Narcissus bulbocodium

It is very difficult to tell the difference between some forms of Narcissus romieuxii and N. bulbocodium just by looking at the flower. I often have to check the section of the leaves to confirm what species I have and that is not always conclusive either.



Narcissus bulbocodium x romieuxii

I have a number of pots raised from seedlings that have sown themselves into the sand plunge which I am sure are hybrids between *Narcissus bulbocodium* and *N.romieuxii*. They are increasing well and are very attractive plants.



Narcissus 'Don Stead'

The Narcissus in the foreground is a hybrid between *Narcissus bulbocodium* and *Narcissus romieuxii* it is the cultivar 'Don Stead'.

It is a very distinctive wee daffodil that will increase well when it finds the growing condition to its liking.

Like all bulbs there is sometime a very fine line between getting the growing conditions just right and losing the bulbs to rot or some other condition.

So often the sudden change from good conditions to bad conditions is caused by a sudden change in the weather when dry bright conditions are suddenly replaced by mild humid conditions.



Removing dead flowers

One job that is always essential is the removal of dead flowers before they become infected by grey mould in cold damp conditions. I do this by holding the flower and plucking upwards. I do not use a knife, scissors or even my finger nails to cut the stem as that can lead to cross infection of any latent virus between plants.



Narcissus stems with mould

Sometimes just the dead remains of the flower come away some time the whole stem as this picture shows but that does not matter as long as I stop the mould growing down the stem where it can infect other stems, the leaves and even go into the bulb. These Narcissus that I am removing the flowers from are the ones that have been flowering all through the winter and because it has been so cold no seed has been fertilised this year. I hope that the sunny days we are having currently will provide sufficient warmth to allow the Narcissus and Crocus that are flowering to be successfully fertilised.



Narcissus albidus occidentalis

It is always a great highlight for me when *Narcissus albidus occidentalis* flowers as it is such a perfectly formed flower with a beautiful scent to add to my pleasure.

I will finish off with some pictures showing a few of the other bulb genera that I grow in pots.



Cyclamen coum



Galanthus 'Mighty Atom'

Yes OK, I admit it there are a few snowdrops but I have to leave you with what are the real stars of the show in today's sunshine: the Crocus.

