

Tips From Trecanna



Trecanna Nursery is a family-run plant nursery owned by Mark & Karen Wash and set on Cornish slopes of the Tamar Valley, specialising in Crocosmias and other South African plants, Sempervivums, unusual bulbs and perennials. Each month Mark will write a feature on some of his very favourite plants.

Trecanna Nursery is open from Wednesday to Saturday throughout the year, from 10am to 5pm. A good range of bulbs is available throughout this month plus some innovative garden gifts for Christmas. It is located approx. 2 miles north of Gunnislake. Follow the brown tourist signs from opposite the Donkey Park on the A390, Callington to Gunnislake road. Tel: 01822 834680. Email: mark@trecanna.com Talks to garden clubs & societies.

‘Autumns Last Glories’

I must admit, late Autumn is not my favourite time of year. Whilst there are spectacular tones of red and gold amongst the trees and shrubs that make us stop and stare, the shortening days and general feeling that most plants are on the retreat rather than showing signs of fresh life does not lift my spirits quite as much as the other seasons.

Of course, a great many plants are hugely active at this time of year, dispersing their seeds often in berries, fruits or nuts. Either that or they are developing new growth buds shoots ready for next spring but most of this is going on below ground level and out of sight of our eyes.

So it can be a real joy to see a few plants in the garden that have made it their business to buck the trend and put on a show for all to see at a time of year when they certainly won't get lost in the crowd. This month I've picked just a couple of our favourites on the nursery that often take their colour well into November – make a note of them as every garden will benefit from their welcome colour.

Nerines

As you will know, I'm rather hooked on bulbs so my first offering comes from this collection of plants. Nerines are bulbs that originate in South Africa growing in sunny places where the soil is often little more than sand. They hide beneath the soil in the hot dry summer months and take advantage of the winter rains the burst into growth, often flowering first, then producing strap-type leaves. In the UK this means flowers from

September to November depending upon the variety. The flowers have narrow petals that are soft-pink to strong-pink, or white and are held in clusters on strong stems. The only really hardy species is *Nerine bowdenii* and this fabulous plant produces bright pink blooms with narrow petals on stems that are 12-18" (30-45cm) high – grow it at the base of a sunny wall in sandy soil with the neck of the bulb just above the surface. You can buy them as dry bulbs in the spring but I have found them much better to establish if planted as a growing plant at this time of year.

Other varieties tend to need more protection and are excellent grown in clay or plastic pots filled with compost mixed with 50% fine sand. Keep them in a cool greenhouse, conservatory or an open porch and you will be rewarded with beautiful flowers that seem to get better and better as the nights get shorter. Try the pure white *Nerine 'Virgo'*, the delicate pale-pink *Nerine undulata* (sometimes sold as *crispa*), or the bicolored white & pink *Nerine 'November Cheer'*. Beware - Once you've tried some, you'll become hooked!

Beautiful Toads

For something that brings Autumn beauty to the garden and is most definitely unusual, the oddly named *Tricyrtis* or *Toad Lily* is well worth considering. It produces upright hairy stems and short leaves with attractive markings. From mid Autumn they bear most unusual upright facing flowers. The flowers are really quite hard to describe – there are six outer petals, three of which have little bulges at their bases that are often overlooked. Inside this there is an elegant arrangement of enlarged and prominent stigmas and anthers in colours that most often mimic the petals. These are flowers that you really need to get close to if you wish to appreciate their beauty.

They come from the Far East and grow in moist well-drained soil with some shelter to avoid damage by early winter weather. They are fully hardy but do appreciate a winter mulch of bark – just avoid full sun. My favourites include *Tricyrtis formosona* (purple spots on white petals) or *Tricyrtis 'Purple Beauty'* (deep purple spots on pale mauve petals).

There are many other plants that brighten our Autumn borders but I'll save these for another day.

Next month – Christmas ideas for gardeners.

Happy Gardening!

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