

International Rock Gardener



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October 2011



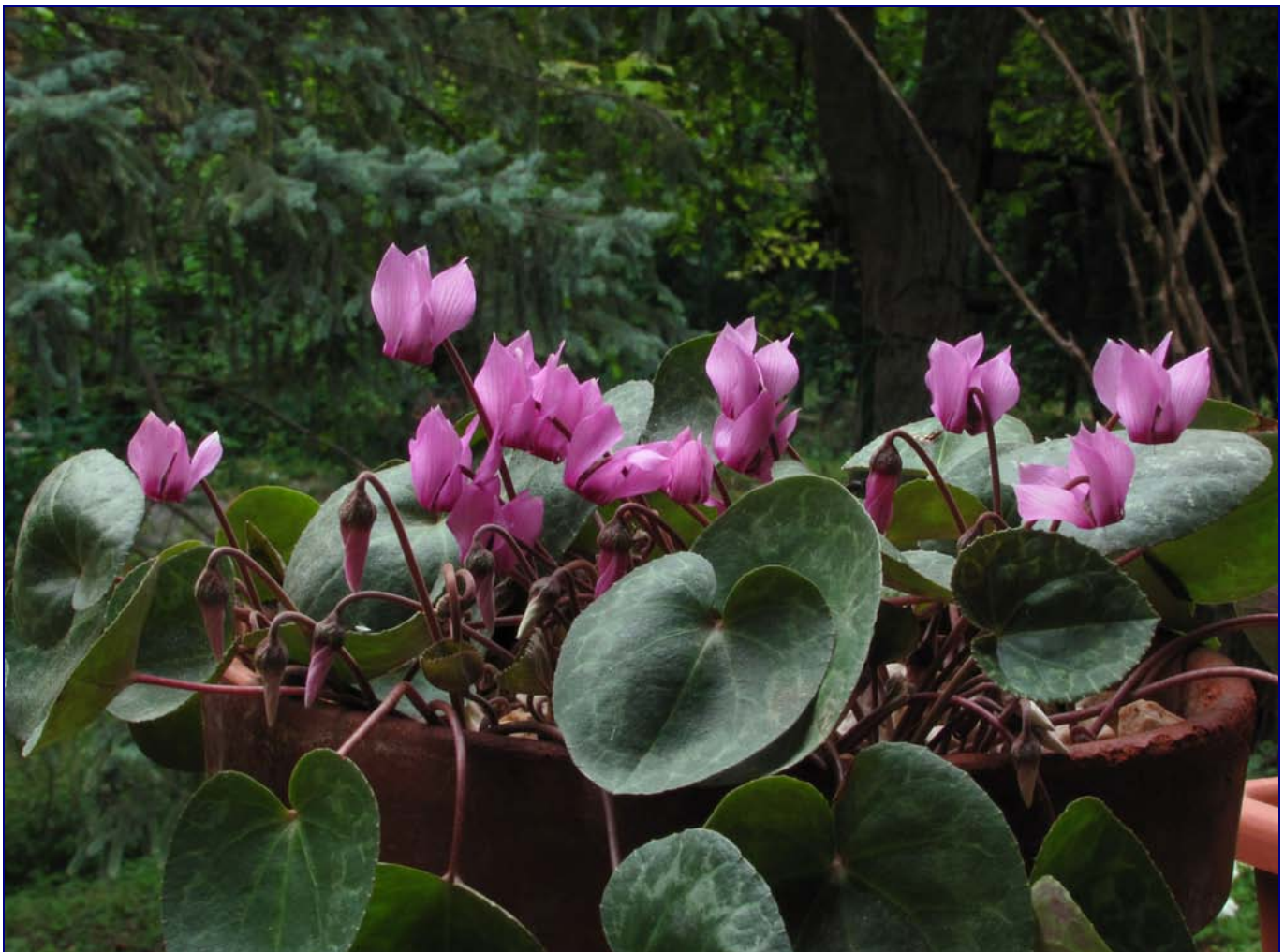
Autumn, or Fall as the north Americans call it, is now in its full glory in the UK, with the fiery colours of foliage and fruits giving a last hurrah of display before the strong winds strip the branches of the leaves, the birds gorge on the berries and our surroundings take on their winter form. After two difficult winters and a none too happy summer the Brits are somewhat anxious as to what lies ahead during the coming months. As gardeners we will of course, plough on regardless, with optimism in our hearts - and perhaps some more winter protection for our most precious plants. You might find this talk of winter to be rather premature, but last year the deep cold hit us in October and the memory lingers on: thank goodness for our friends in the southern hemisphere, who can share their summer joys with us!

Cover picture: Autumn patchwork, photo JIY

---Plant portrait---

Cyclamen purpurascens in our “Garden” and in the Wild by Kata Jozsa Zoltan in Hungary.

I often tell my friends that I have no favourite plant(s) - all alpine plants are my favourites. Well, this is not really true. *Cyclamen purpurascens* is one of my special favourites here in [our garden, which is a balcony](#). Not only because of its tiny beauty, lovely scent and midsummer flowering, but also for its hardiness and toughness. It bravely tolerates our increasingly hot summers here in Budapest.



Three or four years ago a kind SRGC member from Austria sent me some mature tubers and many seedlings. Sadly, Hans Höller has since passed away but his memory and generosity lives on with his many friends and his gifts are cherished. They are all thriving, some in a 20 cm pot (above) and others in troughs on our balcony (next page) and they flower profusely every year.

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I grow them in humus-rich soil with some peat, dolomite grit and also pine needles, and during summer give them potassium-rich liquid fertilizer, not regularly, only at random intervals. In winter the clay pot is plunged in dry peat or pine needles and left outside under the roof, getting some snow but not the rain.

We sometimes have long hard frosts when their leaves become like dull green rags but recover in no time when the temperature rises. In early spring they get a lot of sunshine before noon. In summer they are shaded by a lime tree (*Tilia platyphyllos*) also grown in a pot.

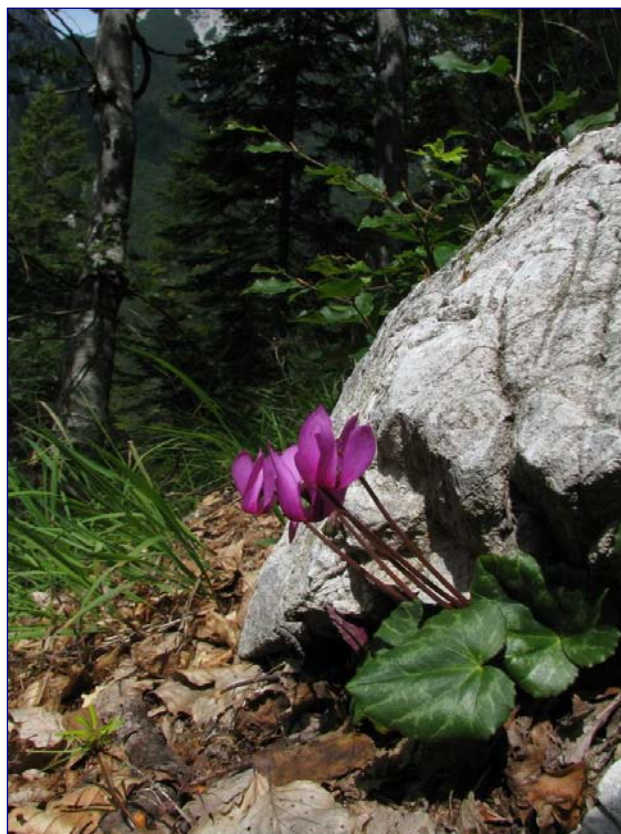
Until this year I had seen *Cyclamen purpurascens* only once in the wild, near the [Plitvice lakes](#) in Croatia. It was a long time ago and I was not yet so interested in growing them. But this July we met this plant again in the [Julian Alps in Slovenia](#). We spent a week there with the specific aim of seeing *Campanula zoysii*. *Cyclamen purpurascens* was an unexpected gift from mother Nature. It grew literally everywhere, not only in the woods but also in meadows, beside the roads and in rock crevices. There were usually one or two flowers on each plant, but one could see them everywhere growing like weeds, tolerating every condition. Or perhaps not **everywhere**? That western part of the Julian Alps has a high rainfall and the region is full of streams and huge waterfalls so the air is moist and cool not only in the woods but also in the sunny meadows. The rocks are mainly limestone and dolomite. I suppose this prevents total leaching of soils in the mixed beech and pine forests. The *Cyclamen* grew mostly on steep slopes covered with leaf mould but also between rocks in gritty soil as the following three photos show (below and next page).



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We even found one living on a decaying log (left)

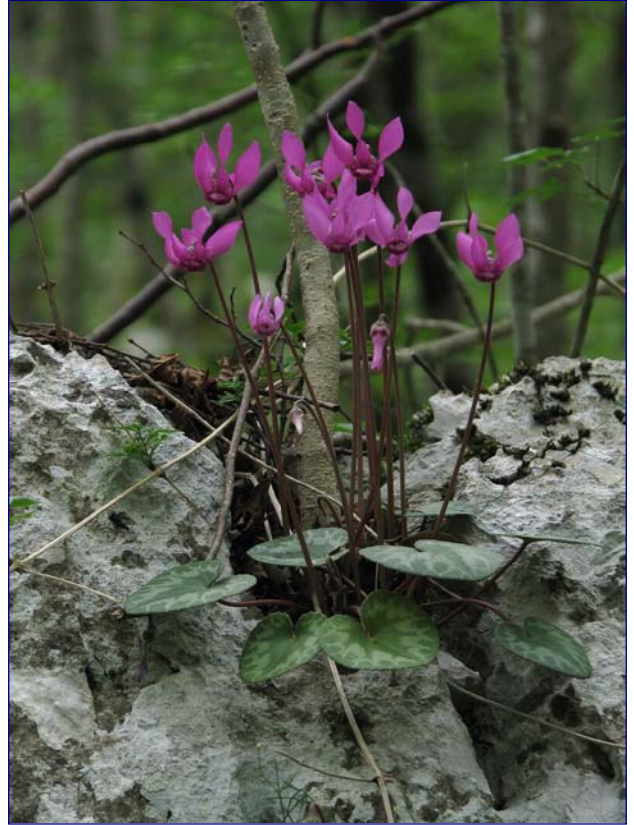


They were thriving in deep shade as much as in full sun, but in sunny places their tubers were well nestled below rocks. The plants growing in full sun had leaves almost without markings and flowers of much deeper colour.

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The photo left, and the one lower right, on previous page, show the plainer foliage and deeper colour of the plants in sun.



Right: The most flowers we spotted on a single plant were more than ten blooming on a plant growing in a crevice of a huge boulder, in light shade.

Below: Many other specimens were found in rock fissures.

The greatest surprise for us was the number of plants found in vertical buttresses near the motorways.



[I can warmly recommend the Trenta valley](#) and the mountain slopes around the Triglav, Slovenia for those who would like to see this little gem in abundance in the wild.

Garden photos by Kata Jozsa Zoltan, photos in the wild by Ferenc Zoltan.

---International Rock Gardener--- ---Mountains in the Garden---

An outcrop of igneous rock by “McPavlis”

There are many ways to place irregular igneous rocks together to form a natural outcrop in the garden. My example is a rock garden in Eastern Bohemia (Czechia), near Polish border, which was built by the well-weathered Czech master of rocks, Josef J. Halda (born 1943). Josef has landscaped, constructed and planted many rock gardens in the USA during last 25 years but only a few in his homeland.

The rock garden introduced here for IRG readers has an older part with a pond and a new, different version added in 2011. The newest rock work is the initiative of the owner, Mr. Zdeněk Čančara, who asked Josef Halda to create a tall section with its highest point reaching an elevation of three metres above the garden turf.

The old rock garden was constructed from massive local rock boulders (nice stones showing signs of metamorphosis) having a general tilt of layers about 40°. This is a highland country (part of the Eagle Mountains) and very deep frosts have, in some places, changed the angle of the artificial tilt, making the angle flatter by sinking heavy layers into ground. With this angle the maximum height of outcrop is about one and half metres above the garden.

Using large boulders of course limits the number of crevices, but the effect of natural landscaping is considerable. The return of the layers back into the ground is well executed.

If more layers are sandwiched together forming a cliff (see the eastern view of the older rock garden, below) the rock garden will have some crevices without access to water (too dry for many plants) and a good root run is impossible there for many alpinists.

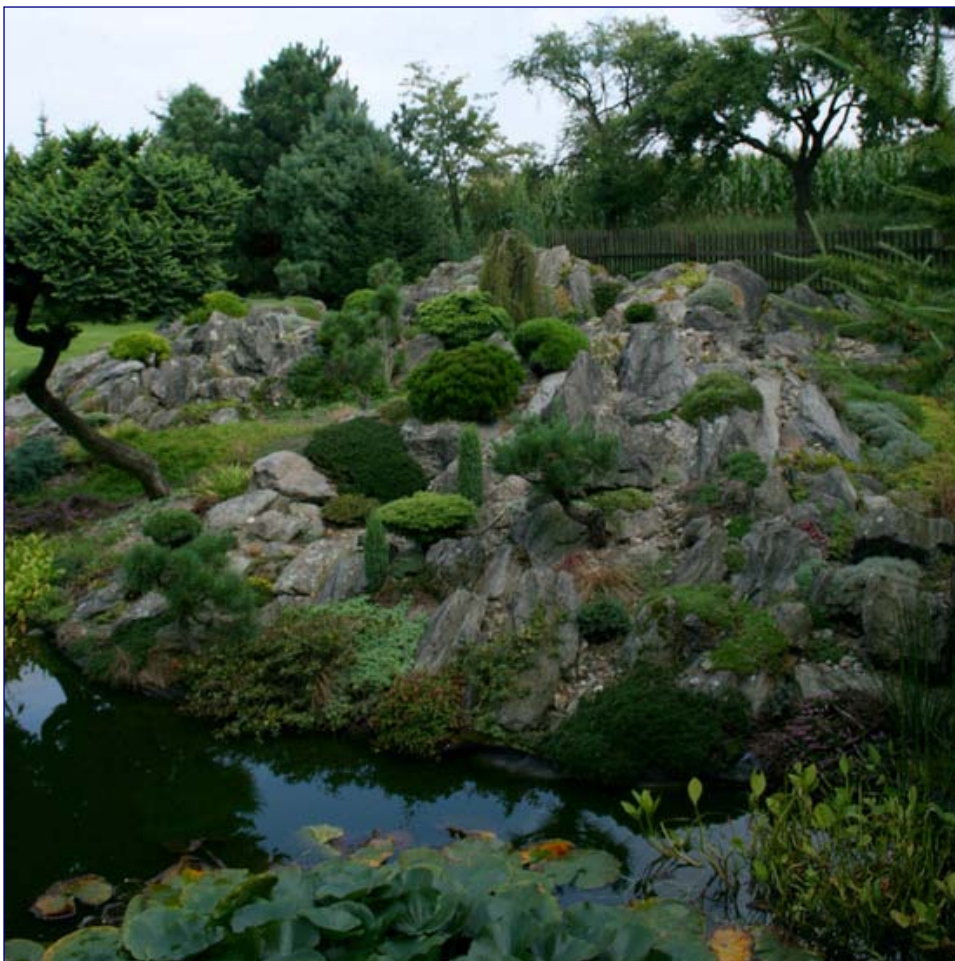


Some people may make the criticism that this planting has too many “dwarf” conifers, but the top dressing is excellent (the chippings and slivers are from the same stone) and the garden is not too “busy”. Mr. Čančara grows lovely *Lewisia tweedyi* there without special winter protection, including a dozen *Lewisia tweedyi*.

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Western exposure of old rock work



Compact southern ridge of old section above the pond.

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Left: Steep layers of side walls of the older outcrop.

Below: Josef Halda in Macedonia 2011



This large new outcrop needed different construction tactics. The owner prepared a raised area (after digging a space for an sunken alpine house with the help of machinery) and this was the base for the rock work. Josef Halda told me that he had a particular conception for the construction here.



Northern exposure of new area, with Josef Halda (JJH) and Josef Jurášek (JJ)
Here we see some layering of the boulders and how they are smoothly connected. We can also see the very pleasing natural returns of the outcrop to the ground but the rest of the outcrop is wild rock work, painting a picture of a field of boulders or the front of a moraine made by a glacier. There is no natural weathering (the logical action of long term erosion) of the new big outcrop and one might think

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about a more careful combination of igneous rocks into one mass or trying a method of artificial layering using the rules for the sedimentary crevice garden with vertical setting of the layers to gain greater height. It is a matter of discussion between opinionated people with different tastes.



Above: *Gentiana lawrencei* in a crevice

Below: Southern exposure



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The origin of the term 'crevice garden' (by Mr. Ota Vydra in the Interim Conference in Boulder, Colorado, in 1986) was used for compact rock work with igneous stones and this new outcrop offers good narrow crevices with different aspects and quick surface (sheet) drainage. The plants are happy there and the planting shows the good taste of the owner Zdeněk Čančara.



Western aspect of new outcrop

The excavation of a new large pond is completed and the owner is looking for new cheaper stones, so one day this garden in the small village of Provoz will have a large rock garden with many outcrops

made in different styles and will attract a stream of visitors on the road to the natural rock garden of the late Jaromír Grulich and the trough garden of Josef Halda and Jarmila Haldová in Sedloňov.



Left:
Sempervivum arachnoideum
nestling in the top of the highest boulder.

---International Rock Gardener--- ---Gardens in the Mountains---

Durmitor in August 2011 by Prague PEPiPEDIA; namely Pepe Jurášek (JJ), Pepe Halda (JJH) and Pepe Zvolánek (ZZ), pictures by ZZ



Durmitor is a large massif in the [Dinaric Mountains of Montenegro](#), in the Balkan Peninsula, quite distant from airports and dense crowds of tourists, so on some peaks there is still some feeling of quiet pilgrimage.

Bustling activity can be found in the popular centre of Žabljak, which is growing like a mushroom and still expecting more visitors.

For our test of the local flora we selected Mt. Prutaš, a peak 2393m high, which is at the western side of the Durmitor mountain range with good view towards the massif of Maglič at the boundary with Bosnia.

Mt. Prutaš (left) is a distinctly bold feature formed from dolomitic limestone and 'marbles' with unusual vertically folded thick strata.

Access is easy with an asphalt road connecting the town of Žabljak with a long dam on the Piva River (this place has the best dwarf forms of [Daphne malyana](#) and [Saxifraga marginata](#) decorating vertical limestone cliffs).

We pitched our three small tents at the foot of Mt. Prutaš and admired its large body in the moonlight.



[Durmitor is a National Park](#) so we were very careful not to behave like the local cows and sheep which were near our tents, slowly and steadily killing the environment.

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Sareni Pasove in the Durmitor

The hike to the summit of Mt. Prutaš is well marked with red and white signs and there is only one unpleasant narrow part in the highest section where it is better not to look down to the deep chasm of the northern corrie. The vistas from the top are superb, showing the geologic drama of the ridge with Mt. Bobotov Kuk, 2522m (the highest peak of Durmitor) and the rich folding layers of Sareni Pasove.



The ridge with Bobotov Kuk

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Our hike was to climb the western side of the peak, with many unpleasant screes, some isolated boulders with desirable miniatures and a more comfortable saddle at an altitude of 2200m.

The last part goes through steep northern rocks with plenty of nice crevices and cool-loving plants. The summit is large and flat, surrounded by alpine meadows.

Left: *Edraianthus* at the summit

The rocks of Prutaš were nicely decorated with dark green *Pinus mugo* and our first greetings in the warmer lower places were from the lilac inflorescences of *Scabiosa canescens*, a 15-20 cm tall perennial plant.

Right: *Scabiosa canescens*

Many plants were identified from their leaves alone: *Primula halleri*, Soldanellas, tiny tufts of *Draba aizoides*, hard cushions of *Saxifraga marginata*, *S. oppositifolia*, *S. paniculata* and *S. moschata*.

We saw small yellow *Ranunculus montanus*, white *Heliosperma alpestre* (a synonym of *Silene alpestris* Jacq.) and pretty *Silene parnassica* with pure white flowers of good size and plenty of dark *Nigritella nigra*, the Black Vanilla Orchid.

A very refreshing sight were the tufts of *Dianthus sylvestris*, a variety with larger light pink flowers on 15-20 cm high stems vibrating in warm wind. *Dianthus minutiflorus* had minute rosy flowers on tiny stems and *Dianthus pinifolius* was also seen.

All the vegetation looked fresh and suggested a good annual precipitation. *Androsace villosa* occupied south facing crevices at 2000m, *Aubrieta columnae* var. *croatica* was happy in the highest crevices in the tundra-like summit together with pale pink *Armeria rumelica* and *Jovibarba heuffelii* (a form with olive green rosettes).



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At the lower elevation were rosettes of *Sempervivum kosaninii* (common in the Dinaric Mts.) with dark brown reddish tips and longer offsets. *Linum capitatum* (Balkan yellow flax) with unripened seed was part of the short grassy meadows under the summit.



Every higher peak in Montenegro and Bosnia offers dwarf white flowering shrubs of Clusius' Cinquefoil - *Potentilla clusiana* (left).

It is always a chasmophyte growing in tiny cracks and chinks of the white rocks. It has a very showy companion in the deciduous *Arctous alpina*, with carmine red foliage in September and October.

Campanula cochlearifolia in full bloom was a poor relative to the aristocracy of two local species of *Edraianthus* showing their large flowers. Our expedition was focussed on the [genus *Edraianthus*](#) and we were quite excited at Mt. Prutaš, because the relatively unknown *Edraianthus pulevicii* beckoned to us in the north-west exposures but only between an altitude of 1800-2000m.

It seems to us that a German study of *Edraianthus* offers incorrect information that *E. pulevicii* grows only above an elevation of 2400m in Durmitor.



[Edraianthus pulevicii](#) (left) (named after Montenegrin botanist Prof. Vukič Pulevič) is morphologically similar to *E. serpyllifolius* (senso strictu), having spatulate leaves. *Edraianthus pulevicii* differs from *E. serpyllifolius* (senso strictu) in having distinctly crenate as well as much longer and broader basal and cauline leaves, with

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indumentum on the upper side, hairs on the leaf margin and leaf surface orientated towards the leaf base, broader and longer bracts, and revolute calyx lobes reflexed at the apex. [A new systematic treatment](#) (validly described in Systematic Botany 34(3):602-608. 2009) is supported by chloroplast DNA sequence data and AFLP fingerprinting data.



Edraianthus pulevicii in seed (left) and on Mt. Prutaš

We did not know on our early August 2011 hike, that Mt. Prutaš is the type locality of this chasmophyte, *E. pulevicii*. Plants in crevices were happily setting seed but a few specimens still showed their relatively large blue-violet flowers and quite long and broad spatulate leaves in shady northern exposures.

Only a few plants were seen in the same place with *E. montenegrinus* showing signs of possible hybridization between two species. At the area above the saddle, towards the summit, we photographed many stunning tufts of *Edraianthus montenegrinus* subsp. *durmitoreus*.

All plants had stems with large single (solitary) flowers and short lanceolate linear-lanceolate leaves.



Edraianthus montenegrinus subsp. *durmitoreus*.

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This subalpine and alpine plant grows in crevices, on open stony tundra fields or in association with short grasses.

Left: *Edraianthus montenegrinus* subsp. *durmitoreus*.

A few plants at lower altitude (1800m) had more flowers arranged in terminal clusters. There is an unsatisfactory situation with the proper naming of this beautiful and horticulturally distinct taxon and its relatives from the Balkan summits, which is thrown in to the big bag of *Edraianthus graminifolius* by western herbarium botanists. We follow the name proposed by the late local Montenegrin botanist R. Lakušić.

The flora of another alpine peak of the Durmitor range is similar to Mt. Prutaš.

Below:

E. montenegrinus subsp. *durmitoreus* with flowers arranged in terminal clusters.



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---World of Bulbs---

Colchicum : candidates for any garden? by Margaret Young, photos by SRGC Forumists.

There has been comment on the colchicum photo from Hagen Engelmann, (a German landscape architect) shown in IRG 20, August 2011) and it seems there is interest in these charming plants which do not seem too well known in some areas. Here is a selection of photographs of Colchicum, often called “autumn crocuses” or even “naked ladies” from Hagen and some other SRGC Forumists.



Colchicums in the sun, photo [Hagen Engelmann](#)

These members of the lily family may have some claim to the name of “naked lady”, with the elegant flowers rising from the ground before the leaves appear but “crocuses” they are *not*. There *are* autumn-flowering varieties of the genus *Crocus* and these can be seen and enjoyed both in the Bulb Log and in the SRGC Forum.

My subject here, the colchicums, are larger and more robust creatures, capable of giving a truly spectacular show of flower in the garden from August through to October. This is a time of year when many gardens are looking somewhat tired and the freshness of these often large and showy goblets springing unexpectedly to life in this transitional season is a boon.



Colchicum montanum
(formerly *Merendera montana*) in the bulb meadow of Franz Hadacek in Vienna.

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One would think that a plant able to provide so extravagant a show at such a useful time would be universally lauded but the colchicum is, instead, much-maligned. It is said that the leaves are large (not always true) and liable to flop over, swamping smaller neighbours. This complaint makes me wonder why, then, there is such a clamour for hostas? Surely they, too, have large, floppy leaves? Granted, hosta leaves can be many different colours, while colchicums tend to confine themselves to leaves of the bright-green, shiny variety but their numerous flowers are so striking that this must be their major plus-point.



Colchicum autumnale 'Alboplenum' and C. 'Waterlily' photos [Dr. Dimitri Zubov](#) in Ukraine

There is something delightful about the sight of a fine colony of colchicum flowers, especially near the fabled blue of asiatic gentians or peeping from a carpet of fallen maple leaves. I would not deny that colchicum flowers *may* be knocked over in very bad weather but even when "down" they are far from "out", the flowers will still retain shape and colour when beaten flat. In fact, the flowers do last for more weeks than might be expected from such seemingly fragile blooms. Slug attacks notwithstanding!



Another view of Hagen and Karla Engelmann's garden - colchicum sharing space with hostas.

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We find that by mid-June the leaves of most types have died down, ready to be cleared away, in time for the flowers which can begin to appear as early as August. It is vital not to cut down the foliage too early as you will weaken the plant for future years. It is a sensible precaution not to plant them too close to any smaller plants which would resent being covered by the colchicum leaves. A clearance of about 30cm is generally more than enough.

Colchicum enjoy plenty of water early in their season, in a spot that is drier after the leaves have developed. That being said, we prefer to plant colchicums as close as we can manage to the base of trees or a hedge. Such a spot tends to be pretty dry all the year. It seems to suit them well enough here in Aberdeen, in NE Scotland.

By the time we are trimming the hedges, after the nesting birds have fledged, the colchicum foliage will likely be over and no harm will be done by walking in the area while the hedge is cut. The tidy hedge will then be a neat background to the flowers. It is usually easy enough to make planting holes through hedge roots though it can be a little more bother to make deep enough holes to accommodate the corms (which can, in some varieties, be as large a Granny Smith apple) between tree roots.

It is worth taking time to get as deep a planting position as you can. If you can get the corms ([often called "bulbs"](#)) down to at least 20cm you will be rewarded by better flowers. As the spring crocus varieties make such excellent companions to colchicums, it is a good idea to plant these at the same time. Not so deep for the crocus, around 8-10cm will do for them. This combination will give you a pretty spring display before the colchicum leaves are full size. The crocus leaves will extend alongside them without harm. A feed of potash-rich fertiliser when the leaves are in growth will be of benefit. It should only be necessary to lift and split clumps every four to five years. Hardly high maintenance! I have concentrated on the merits of the autumn-flowering Colchicums, species and hybrids, suitable for general garden use either in a border or planted in a meadow, as demonstrated by these photos from Franz Hadacek.



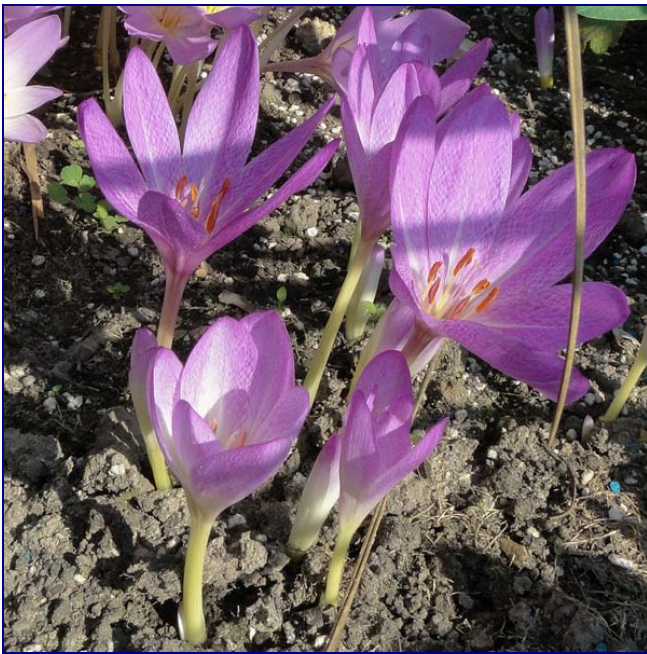
Left: *C. tenorei* (a synonym of *C. cilicicum*) and below: *C. autumnale album* photos Franz Hadacek



There are, of course, a great many other autumn and spring-flowering species too, which tend to be smaller and more suited to planting in an alpine house or in a rock garden setting. My purpose here, however, is to blow the trumpet of the autumn varieties. The forms you may expect to see most often for sale will tend to be the larger, showiest hybrids which are, happily, the best garden varieties.

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Many of these originated in Holland around 1900 to 1905 when a grower in Haarlem bred hybrids between *C.c. speciosum bornmuelleri* or *giganteum* and *C. bowlesianum*, from Greece. In the 1930s in England, many forms of *C. speciosum* were raised and these along with the Dutch forms, are among the most popular, even today. Recently good selections have been made in Germany. Some species of *Colchicum* have been known in cultivation since the 16th Century and of course their use by poisoners and herbalists is well-known. The drug derived from *Colchicum*, colchicine, is both a very dangerous poison, often used to induce polyploidy in plants, and a useful tool for medicine. There is much talk nowadays of the dangers of plant toxins, often unnecessarily alarmist, in my view. The other common name of "Meadow Saffron" for *colchicum* is misleading in that one should exercise a proper caution in handling all parts of this plant, and certainly not ingest any part.



C. 'Violet Queen' and *C. 'Lilac Wonder'* photos Hagen Engelmann

Back to the joys of our naked ladies... You can choose flowers with a clear colour or tessellated, i.e. checked with an overlay of darker markings. Most of the autumn-flowering types come in a colour range of palest pink, through lilacs and rosy-purples to deep ruby shades and white. Look out for such varieties as 'Violet Queen'; 'Lilac Wonder'; 'Nancy Lindsay'; 'Ruby Giant' and the double, 'Waterlily'. They are all good! While the larger hybrid varieties are the most readily available from garden centres, it is very worthwhile to make the effort to search out other more unusual species and forms in the lists of Specialist nurseries.



C. agrippinum and two forms of *C. variegatum* photos Hagen Engelmann

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To start off your colchicum season as early as August, try *C. agrippinum*. Known from illustrations by Redoute from 1808, this excellent garden plant has one to four starry flowers, per corm, of rosy lilac with anthers of pinkish-purple about 5cm deep by 8cm wide on a tube of 12cm. This is not a very leafy plant so good among smaller shrubs and border plants. Its leaves are shiny green only 30cm long and just 2-3cm wide. The similar *C. variegatum* has more greyish-green spreading leaves, with flatter flowers.



C. autumnale 'Atropurpureum' flowers in October and has dark tubes to the deep pink-purple flowers, pale styles and purple tipped leaves. This colchicum has the cleanest lines, the most elegant of the genus. *C. autumnale album* is one of the very best.

Altogether more substantial, equally striking and all good garden plants, are the forms of *C. speciosum* such as *C. speciosum* 'Atrorubens', (seen left, photo Hagen Engelmann).

Colchicum x byzantinum which has been in cultivation since late in the 16th Century grows wild in Transylvania and around Istanbul. The leaves in spring can be more than 30cm long and about 12cm wide and are ribbed along their length. This apparent excess of foliage is balanced by the floriferousness of the plant.

Many deep lilac-pink flowers about 15cm long with a span of 8cm are borne in September and

October. My own favourite is quite rare, but a real charmer; *C. byzantinum album*, now going by the name 'Innocence' The dazzling white flowers, and stigmas are gracefully outlined at the tips with royal purple. Exquisite!



C. byzantinum album, with some *C. byzantinum* in the pink variety, photo Diane Clement.

Colchicums grow over a very wide area in the wild, from Britain (in theory, though I have yet to

meet anyone who claims to have seen a really "wild" one in the UK!) across Europe to N.W. India and Afghanistan and as far south as N. Africa, Iran and Iraq. With such an impressive natural distribution, this fabulous range of plants deserves to be grown in just about any garden.

M.Y.