

Evening meeting- New and unusual bulbs.

John Amand of Clamp Hill Nursery, Stanmore www.thetulipgarden.com gave us another interesting talk on tulips and other bulbs. His company has set up a foundation in the Himalayas to grow bulbs, providing local employment. A particular speciality is Arisaema, with *A. Sikokianum* being a stunning example of the “Cuckoo pint” like flowers, with striking smoky purple base, snow white cup and prominent spadix. They are perennial woodland plants and as they are grown in the Himalaya, they are hardy here. They would make an unusual addition to your planting. Another speciality is the large flowered *Cardiocrinum*, or giant Yunnan Lily, which produces white, pink and purple lily-like flowers. Bulbs grown in the Himalayan nurseries are shipped in containers all over the world.

Amand’s is famous for their miniature Iris. “Catherine Hodgkin” was once rare, but there are now 3.5 million per year being sold. The commercial growers do not even consider it worthwhile until they have at least half a million bulbs of a particular species available. Bulbs must be built up and be reliable in flowering and virus free before they are commercially viable. Selective breeding in recent years means that there are now many more colours available in the miniature iris, although predominantly blue, with Iris “Palm Spring” being a particularly vibrant colour. Iris “Sunshine” is bright yellow and “Splish Splash” is an attractive yellow and white splashed variety.

Stocks of *Fritillaria* are being built up and breeders are now producing new colours. *Fritillaria* “White Bells” is a good variety, and “Green Dreams” makes a beautiful flower for arrangements. “Twin Towers” is almost black in contrast. *Fritillaria Imperialis* have been around since the 1600s and *F. Raddeana* is a pale lemon with prolific flowering. Sadly, these have a rather unpleasant “foxy” smell which breeders are trying to eradicate. To increase the bulbs, they are cut through to the base and planted, forming bulblets which are then grown on. If you are growing *Imperialis*, a layer of straw over them in the winter keeps them warm and more likely to flower. Bulbs in commercial fields are lifted and cleaned by hand to prevent bruising.

Alliums have been trialled at Wisley this year, and “Purple Rain” was awarded an AGM. Late flowering alliums are now available, and seed heads make interesting arrangements, but should be removed to allow the bulb to bulk up. “Metallic Sheen” was a most unusual shimmering variety in deep purple. In cold store Allium flowers can be kept for two months. Erythroniums are also being bred in new colours, and “Sundisc” is vivid yellow, “Joanna” is pale cream and can grow to 9ft high, while “White Beauty” is exactly that. Cyclamen too come in new shades, so look out for dark purple “Red Sky”.

Tulips are clearly John’s passion and “Suncatcher” was a striking yellow with orange tips. *Cypripedium* or Lady’s Slipper orchids are beautiful and hardy to -30C. Just don’t over water them. Eremurus, or Foxtail lilies, do not like competition for space and are temperamental. (*I’ve tried several times and always failed. Ed*)

Colchicum “Water Lily” is a glorious lilac double that would be a real talking point. John’s talk was a fascinating as ever, and if there was one take home point, it was to plant at sufficient depth. The wearing of clogs may or may not increase your success!