

Getting Started on Showing Alpines

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As the summer comes to an end it seems like a strange time to be thinking of what to enter in the Show next year. However, as any experienced exhibitor will tell you, there is no point looking for Show plants in February – it is already too late. My first priority as Show Secretary is to encourage new exhibitors to show at least one plant in 2015 at the local and main shows, and hopefully at the Northern Group show too.

As mentioned in the newsletter, bulbs make ideal show plants. They are almost effortless to grow, and bulbs purchased now from a garden centre are guaranteed to flower in spring. Getting them just right for the day of the show is largely down to the timing of spring and a bit of good luck.

In an effort to encourage you all, I've compiled a list of bulbs that are available right now. The bulbs on list below are all available in Murphy & Wood Garden Centre (in Johnstown Road, Dun Laoghaire), but your own Garden Centre will have other selections. We've agreed with Murphy & Wood that if you present this email when you buy bulbs there, you will receive a 10% discount on the value of the bulbs purchased.

I've bought some bulbs from the list and some other plants easily obtainable as shown below. I'm going to grow these over the coming months as if I was intending to enter them in the Novice Section in 2015. Your challenge is to do something similar. We'll offer regular updates on what you need to be doing with these plants over the Winter (which will be almost nothing), so you will at all times know what to do.

| Plant | Available | Show Class(es)* |
|--|---|---|
| <i>Sempervivum tomentosum arachnoideum</i> | Woodies (€2.50) | 1 pan Sempervivum |
| <i>Sempervivum 'Bronco'</i> | Woodies (€2.50) | 1 pan Sempervivum |
| <i>Raoulia hookeri</i> | Woodies (€2.50) | 1 pan rock plant grown for foliage effect |
| <i>Primula denticulata rubra</i> | Murphy & Wood (€2.75) | 1 pan rock plant in flower, or 1 pan Primula |
| <i>Tulipa 'Pinocchio'</i> | Murphy & Wood (€5.00 for 10 – 5 per pot) | 1 pan rock plant in flower, or 1 pan bulb |
| <i>Narcissus 'Thalia'</i> | Murphy & Wood (€4.00 for 10 – 5 per pot) | 1 pan rock plant in flower, or 1 pan bulb |
| <i>Puschkinia libanotica</i> | Murphy & Wood (€2.00 for 10) | 1 pan rock plant in flower, or 1 pan bulb |
| <i>Crocus 'Barr's Purple'</i> | Murphy & Wood (€2.00 for 10) | 1 pan rock plant in flower, or 1 pan bulb (Local Show) |
| TOTAL | 10 potential show plants for €23.75 | |

*if you have never won a 'First' at an AGS Show, any plant in flower can be entered in the class for new exhibitors.

All these plants should be potted up into a standard alpine compost of equal parts John Innes no.3, coarse grit, and either peat, leaf-mould or Perlite. Make sure to put them into a pot that could be put on the show bench so that you don't need to do any repotting in Spring, particularly the bulbs, as repotting bulbs in growth is difficult without causing damage. For Sempervivums, I have a problem with blackbirds and magpies pulling them apart, seemingly just to annoy me. I'm going to fix the problem by putting some twigs sticking out of the pot to protect the plant. Unsightly maybe, but worth it.

For the Primula, it is easiest to plunge the pot somewhere in the garden. This will keep the roots at an even temperature and reduce the possibility of drying out. The Raoulia will come through the winter uncovered; however if you want to show it, it would be best to protect it from winter wet to avoid any die-back. As for the bulbs you just need to put them in the pot at 2 to 3 times their own depth and forget about them until growth appears in spring. I'll give you an update then on what to do.

Bulb List

Narcissus tazetta 'Minnow'

N. triandrus 'Thalia'

N. cyclamineus 'Jenny' (Local Show)

N. cyclamineus 'Jetfire' (Local Show)

Tulipa saxatilis 'Lilac Wonder'

T. clusiana var *chrysantha*

T. kaufmanniana 'Giuseppe Verdi'

T. greigii 'Pinocchio'

Puschkinia libanotica

Crocus tommasinianus 'Barr's Purple' (Local Show)

C. tommasinianus 'Ruby Giant' (Local Show)

Iris 'Katherine Hodgkin' (Local Show)

I. danfordiae

All of the above are available from Murphy & Wood at a 10% discount with this notice. Other bulbs to look out for are *Tulipa humilis* (Barbara O'Callaghan won best plant in the Novice Section with this 2 years ago), and *Ipheion* 'Alberto Castillo'.