

# The Bulb Garden



~Gardening with Bulbs~

## Board of Directors

Nhu Nguyen, President  
[xeranthem@gmail.com](mailto:xeranthem@gmail.com)

John Wickham, Vice President [jwickham@sbcglobal.net](mailto:jwickham@sbcglobal.net)

Kathy Andersen, Secretary  
[ksa2006@verizon.net](mailto:ksa2006@verizon.net)

Arnold Trachtenberg, Treasurer  
[arnold140@verizon.net](mailto:arnold140@verizon.net)

Jane McGary, Membership  
[janemcgary@earthlink.net](mailto:janemcgary@earthlink.net)

Dell Sherk, BX Director  
[ds429@comcast.net](mailto:ds429@comcast.net)

Jennifer Hildebrand, Publications  
[theotherjen8@yahoo.com](mailto:theotherjen8@yahoo.com)

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## Bulbs in a Bioswale

Jane McGary

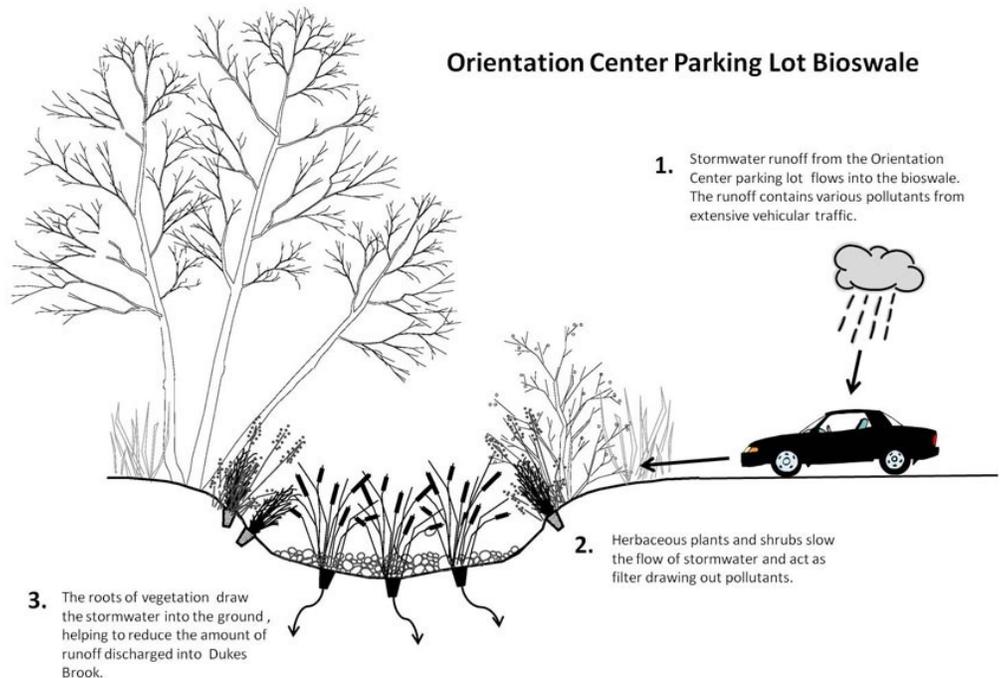
A fairly new term in gardening, “bioswale” denotes a space intended to absorb excess runoff from the surrounding areas, preventing the water from entering the urban stormwater system. This in turn helps keep potential pollutants such as petroleum products, pesticides, and herbicides out of nearby natural waters. Most bioswales are installed in public landscapes, but they may also feature in larger gardens. Creating one isn't simple. It helps to start with a natu-

ral low spot, but if none is present, as was the case on the property I moved to four years ago, you have to dig—a lot.

When I applied for a permit for my large “Mediterranean” bulb house, the county imposed several requirements (I talked them out of “must be constructed of the same materials as the dwelling”), including two features to control runoff: an 1100-gallon rainwater storage tank, and a “rain garden” or bioswale downslope from it. The bioswale was

*(continued to page six)*

**What is a bioswale?** This diagram from Duke Farms demonstrates the process in their orientation parking lot. The bioswale captures surface runoff water and naturally filters pollution and silt before the runoff enters the watershed. [https://www.geocaching.com/geocache/GC452H5\\_duke-farms-bioswale?guid=d0b1fb10-c8ba-4d84-9b4f-66c1ff4985a7](https://www.geocaching.com/geocache/GC452H5_duke-farms-bioswale?guid=d0b1fb10-c8ba-4d84-9b4f-66c1ff4985a7)



## Bulb Lawns and Meadows

*This article is a compendium of an in-depth PBS forum discussion about bulb lawns and meadows and is presented here in time for fall planting, which is really the best time to plant in the West. Various authors are quoted and are mentioned throughout the article. The emails can also be located on the PBS wiki.— Ed.*

For many, if not all of us, watering to achieve a green lawn in summer is either too expensive, too labor intensive or not of interest (i.e. we have better things to do). There are many options for us to explore, but sometimes a bit of compromise is necessary, for example, if some family members insist on their bit of green space, but there are a number of ways we can create a bulb lawn or meadow. Options can include drifts or “rough” areas set aside specifically for bulbs or a particular lawn or a larger space such as a meadow. Many of us have more than one lawn in the sense that there may be a front garden or yard, one or more side yards or a back yard, allowing us to experiment without totally ridding ourselves of that perfect bluegrass/fescue green requiring boring, routine labor to maintain.

Think how much more interesting a bulb lawn is through the seasons. It will have a period in late summer, if not watered much or at all, when it looks pretty weedy, but all grass lawns have periods like that sooner or later. Consider the variety of color, texture, prolonged blooming and contrast available, and the opportunity to plant even more of your favorite genera or to try some plants you have no room for elsewhere. Many of us would like to replicate what we see on trips to the mountains or foreign countries, and we can do it! Make up a basic list and start with a few bulbs at a time, then add more bit by bit. Some will thrive, some will be thugs, some will be marginal at best, and a few will do well for several years, then disappear. Just another planting opportunity!

If you want to start from the very beginning with bare soil, it is generally best to spray out weeds, rototill or disk the area, throw out handfuls of bulbs, then cover with turf as Diana Chapman mentions in one of her blogs. Or you can be considerably more casual, and throw seed here and there and wait. That casual approach results in a rather slow, hit or miss result. Another option several of us have chosen along with the seed sowing is to deliberately plant a few bulbs or low-growing perennials and add more as we think of new plants that might work or that we may observe in our travels.

The most important part of this whole process is to acknowledge that manicured perfection is not the required result, but certainly that often overlooked and frequently ignored virtue called “patience” is absolutely required. It will be necessary, depending on where you live, to deal with gophers, flooding in

winter (Diana Chapman in coastal northern California), voles especially if you don’t have dogs (such as Jane McGary’s Malamutes), cats (no explanation needed), overzealous spouses (who insist on mowing or mow too close), unwanted quackgrass, ivy, blackberries, etc. (Kathleen Sayce in coastal Washington), or one or more species that unexpectedly become serious or ineradicable pests such as *Ranunculus ficaria* or *Ornithogalum* species (Jim McKenney in Montgomery County, Maryland).

Quoting Diana Chapman, she suggests that to start a bulb meadow “If you want a neat lawn, then the best thing is early blooming, low growing species that will not grow knee-high, and that can be trimmed by the beginning of summer, which, of course, limits the species you can plant.” Then, as you become more comfortable with the results and the maintenance, expand your plant selection. Although you may discover as Kathleen Sayce did after reading Diana’s blog, “...that I was thinking too small, and way too manicured.”

Following is an informal list gleaned from the many suggestions during the forum discussion. This list includes bulbs and low-growing perennials that can fill in, cover, absorb excess moisture and otherwise protect those bulbs that prefer prolonged dry conditions. In essence, you will be replicating natural habitat to a degree, only in a more formal way. Some of the plants and bulbs suggested will be suitable in some situations and not others depending on your particular soils, rainfall, willingness to tolerate less than perfection, tolerance for cold and heat and so forth.

Some bulbs to try (and I use “bulbs” generically) include cyclamen, puschkinia, crocus (in particular *Crocus tommasinianus*), the smaller colchicums, the smaller less rampant oxalis, gagea, and *Adonis wolgensis* (Jane McGary’s suggestion). Dell Sherk, our Bulb Exchange coordinator, recommends *Puschkinia libanotica*, *Scilla siberica* ‘Spring Beauty’, and some reliable Muscari selections. Dell’s concern about some sources was what he rightfully called unreasonable prices for common bulbs and/or lack of such common crocus as *Crocus tommasinianus*, so please view the list of bulb sources on the PBS wiki. (<http://www.pacificbulbsociety.org/pbswiki/index.php/Sources>)

Nurserymen have, over the years, dealt with the frustration of growing and selling what the public wants... They often complain that if they grow more uncommon species, the stuff doesn’t sell. On the other hand, the public complains of the lack of these species, but when offered them, doesn’t buy enough to justify continued production – a Catch-22. Some specialist nurseries are getting better at solving this problem, but they have to go to greater lengths to educate the public and this takes time.

*(continued to page four)*

## Bulb Lawns and Meadows (cont'd)

Paddy Tobin's blog on the Irish Garden Plant Society webpage details his year-long experiment with a bulb lawn (<https://igpsblogs.wordpress.com/tag/crocus-in-grass/>). We can follow the evolution through his pictures:



Tobin began by spreading hay over a wide swath in his garden. After it had dried a sufficient area, he collected it and planted his bulbs. The Crocus appeared first, and were soon joined, then outnumbered, by *Galanthus nivalis*.



He estimates that he and his wife planted several thousand snowdrops.



Next came the *Frittilaria meleagris*; Tobin planted a small number, but they soon expanded their numbers by self-seeding. Thanks to Tobin for sharing his photos with us!

## Bulb Lawns and Meadows (cont'd)

(continued from page two)

Makiko Goto-Wideman in California suggests calochortus, blue bonnets (Lupinus species), and native grasses, plus she has had good luck with *Narcissus 'Hawera'*. Jim Waddick says that he has planted hundreds of *Anemone blanda*, blue and mixed shades and suggests 'White Splendor' as well. I know that *Anemone nemerosa* does extremely well for me with some shade, so that would also be worth trying. He goes on to suggest Chionodoxa, but says *Tulipa sylvestris* may be a bit weedy, and Ipheion barely holds its own in his Missouri garden. He adds that *Allium*



Alpine meadows in Oregon's Cascade Mountains; *Camassia quamash* on right. Photos by Robin Hansen.

'Jeanine' stays very small and does not make large clumps, likewise *Geranium tuberosum*.

Jim does recommend checking with local garden centers (unless, like me, there are none, so remote is Coos County), and I've learned a lot from just observing what's growing in peoples' gardens and in nature. He also mentions that prices may be more reasonable in season and that some non-mainline sources may be even more so. I would also suggest checking local stores that carry seasonal bulbs inexpensively. Locally, Fred Meyer and BiMart carry them in their garden sections, as do the farm and garden supply stores. I've had some surprise finds but accept that occasionally items are misnamed or may not grow well.

Travis Owen in southern Oregon suggests an early bloomer such as *Crocus sieberi* which works for him, and he is happy to have even common plants. He has had success with *Prunella vulgaris* as a good groundcover with some irrigation, as have I. For me

*Prunella* needs no water and learns to grow low when mowed. He comments that "The best weed control is other plants.", and also uses California poppies which grow wild without summer water in much of southwestern Oregon and California. Bea says that if memory serves her right, Christopher Lloyd had a bulb meadow of sorts (thanks to his mother) and goes on to say that he grew Camassias among other things, and then she mentions a spouse who is obsessed with mowing...

Anna Szymacha-Zwolinska in Poland says her optimal lawn bulb is *Corydalis solida*, and says its vegetative period is so short and that it withers before the first mowing; while not cheap, *Corydalis* produces many seeds. A low-growing native sedge, *Carex pansa*, and an even lower-growing *C. brevicaulis* that is golden-green, along with clumps of heath grass are grown by Kathleen Sayce in coastal Washington. She lists several widely spreading plants in her garden that she calls weeds such as lotus, aster, sea thrift (*Armeria* species), wild strawberry (*Fragaria chilensis*, *F. vesca* and others), sorrel, *Prunella vulgaris*,



Glecoma, dandelions, hairy cats' ear, hawkweed, English daisy, Douglas aster and an occasional Centaurea, along with bulbs such as Narcissus, *Hyacinthoides x massartina*, small patches of Ixia, Homeria (a yellow-flowered Watsonia) and cyclamen. Some of these I would welcome; others such as dandelion and hairy cats' ear are not welcome but impossible to eradicate completely.

Species Ornithogalum have been recommended with the exception of *O. umbellatum*, also known as  
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## Bulb Lawns and Meadows (cont'd)

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Star of Bethlehem, although it is not necessarily a pest in all areas. In Jane McGary's lawn in the Portland area, she has *O. orthophyllum*, which she describes as having a flat rosette of leaves and flowering stems only a few centimeters tall. Other short growing ones include *O. fimbriatum*, which is very early in her climate, although she suspects it's not very hardy (She is in Zone 7.). She says it comes very easily from seed, has bright white flowers, and would be considered to be in habitat similar to its native area.

For those areas where it can grow, the clumping buffalo grass and some of the native fescues are among the low-water, low-growing grasses appropriate for a bulb lawn or meadow. Others use the mixed and low-growing varieties of thyme. I have several varieties of thyme in my rock garden; I'm astounded that I've never tried them before!

Martin in Baden Wurtemberg, Germany uses *Crocus tommasinianus* and *C. chrysanthus*, as well as *Crocus sieberi*, *Eranthis hyemalis*, *Galanthus nivalis*, *Chionodoxus forbesii*, *Scilla sibirica*, *Leucojum vernalis* and a few Muscari. For him, most Narcissus fade away if planted in grass, with only a handful of *Narcissus* 'Rip Van Winkle' keeping their ground. He has found that *Corydalis cava*, a local native, colonizes well. *Allium ursinum* colonizes places with more shadow and *Allium schoenoprasum* likes sun. *Ixia* dies away in about three years in his flower beds, so he has not tried them elsewhere, but wonders if he should try *Liatrix* or camas in his rather heavy Zone 7 soil.

Some last suggestions via Diana Chapman (from a customer in England who has them in his meadow) are *Hemerocallis*, *Anemone blanda* and *A. pavonina*, *Dodecatheon* (probably needs high shade in much of the U.S.), *Pasithea caerulea* (a monocot native to Peru and Chile), *Narcissus*, *Tulipa*, *Triteleia*, *Dichelostemma*, *Sparaxis*, *Homeria*, *Ixia*, *Tigridia*, *Moraea*, *Muscari*, *Fritillaria*, *Erythronium*, *Ornithogalum*, *Camassia*, *Tecophilaea*, *Romulea* and *Iris*. He doesn't mow until late June or July and, of course, lives in Zone 8 or 9, so some of these are not likely to be appropriate, too tall, not hardy, etc. for a lot of us. Then again, why do we as gardeners persist if not infected with "zonal denial"?

Once you've planted your bulb lawn or meadow, there's not a lot left to do until June or July of each year, perhaps occasional watering and removal of truly obnoxious weeds, some seed collection if desired, perhaps a small burn of top growth as Diana Chapman's customer does in August or September, weather and the authorities permitting, to improve growth and flowering, and a few photos from year to year to record which plants are doing better than others or, maybe, to pat yourself on the back at the genius of the whole scheme. We will ignore any neighborly comments that are not truly constructive, chalking them up to jealousy... and as Jane McGary says "If you want 'our' kind of garden, avoid gated communities."

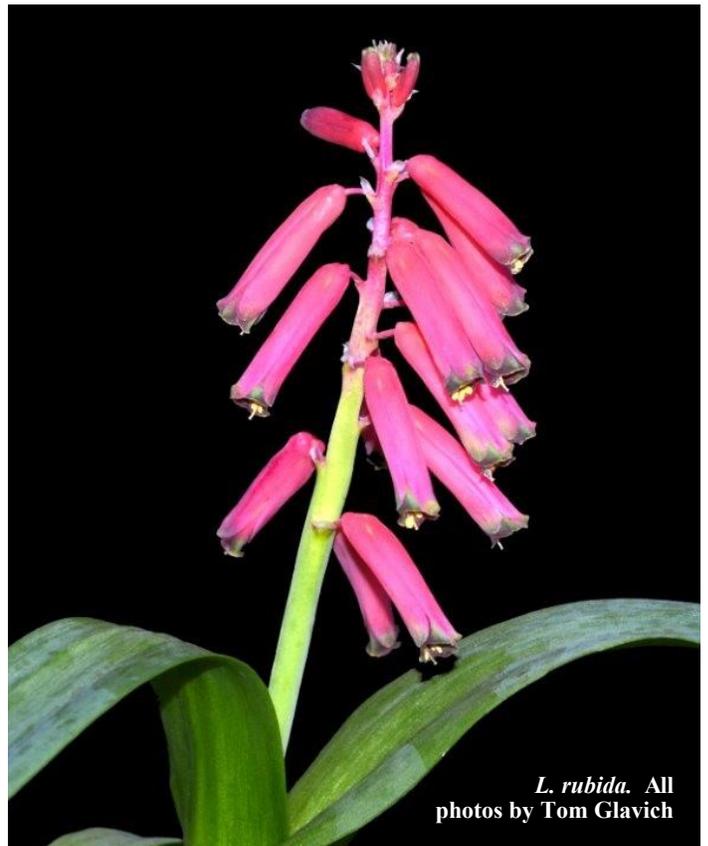
## Fuss-Free Lachenalia

Tom Glavich

*Tom Glavich has been a member of PBS since its inception. He is a long-time member of the Southern California Hemerocallis and Amaryllis Society and a member of the Cactus and Succulent Society of America. He is a frequent contributor to the CSSA Journal and gives presentations on succulent and bulbous culture throughout California. He owns (or is owned by) Skyview Succulents, a backyard nursery. He maintains a website at [www.skyviewsucculents.com](http://www.skyviewsucculents.com) and an occasional blog at <http://skyviewsucculents.blogspot.com/>.* — Ed.

Lachenalias hold a special place in the hearts of many bulb growers. They offer everything one could ask for from a bulb. Most of the species are easy to grow, while a few offer special challenges. They are small, allowing a representative collection to be kept on a windowsill or a small table. They are summer dormant, requiring no care at all even during an extended summer vacation. They are tolerant of neglect in winter with almost all taking at least some frost with no signs of distress. Most species readily offset and make seed which allows some of the best to be available inexpensively and nearly for free if you subscribe to the PBS Bulb Exchange.

Lachenalia have a long flowering season stretching from November to June (in California). One of the first to bloom is *Lachenalia rubida*, often flowering in early  
(continued to page eight)



*L. rubida*. All photos by Tom Glavich

## Bulbs in a Bioswale (cont'd)

(continued from page one)  
dug out mechanically to four feet (1.3 m) and refilled with a series of layers of different materials, including loam and pea gravel, put down in depths and in an order prescribed by the county, including round gravel, composted bark, and a portion of the removed soil. The rest of the soil was mounded to form a curving berm at the downslope edge of the swale, as well as another berm that supports some screening shrubs at the edge of the lot.

Downslope from the swale's berm is my "bulb lawn," composed of rough grass and weeds (partially controlled) and planted with many turf-tolerant bulbs. No runoff now occurs from this area, and I have never seen standing water in the bioswale, even in this past winter's torrential rains.

The county helpfully provided a list of "suitable" plants for the bioswale, almost none of which I'd allow in a garden. Instead I installed some that I felt would tolerate the seasonal damp (the wet season here in western Oregon is October through May) and have some ornamental value.

I'm still struggling with the planting because it's very difficult to control weeds in this feature,



Among those bulbs that Jane identifies as common for bioswales are *Camassia quamash* (above; photo by Mary Sue Ittner) and *leichtlinii*, *Fritillaria meleagris* and *camschatcensis* (right; photo by Σ64) and *Veratrum californicum* (below; photo by Nhu Nguyen).



which has been invaded by clover and spreading grasses. I'm thinking of a major overhaul during the low point of vegetation growth (August), lifting the perennials for

later replanting and using herbicide on the grass and clover. At present I just cut them down. Organic

mulches are forbidden in the bioswale, but I think a deep mulch of quarter-ten gravel might help with weed removal.

Of course I wanted some bulbs in the bioswale. Gardeners who struggle to keep their bulbs dry enough in summer may be shocked at this, but western North America is kind to us in providing moisture at the right time. In fact, visiting other bulb-rich regions in spring shows us that many geophytes are flowering in soil saturated by rain or snowmelt. In addition, some genera include species that specialize in damp sites.

A good example is *Fritillaria meleagris*, which populates seasonally damp or even inundated meadows; it flourishes in the bioswale. In Spain you'll see *Oncostemma* [*Scilla*] *peruviana* in roadside ditches, and its tall, deep blue spikes are prominent here too. In spite of the sunny exposure, I planted some lily of the valley (*Convallaria majalis*), which is spreading well  
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## Bulbs in a Bioswale (cont'd)

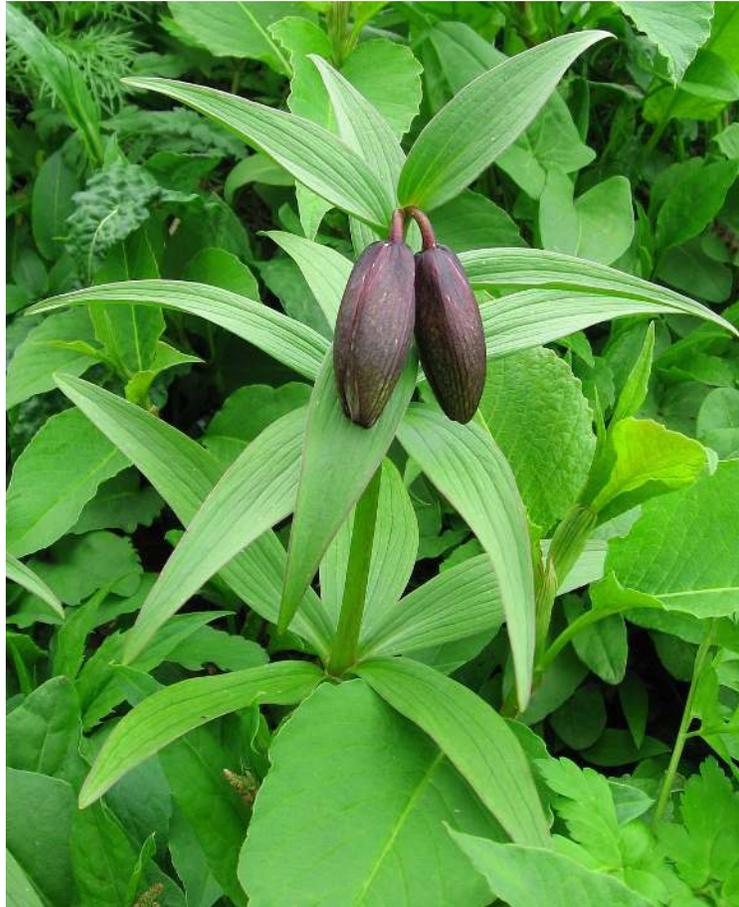
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and providing plenty of cut flowers.

Recommended plants are largely regional natives, and I ignored most of them because they would be too invasive, but I planted plenty of *Camassia quamash* and *C. leichtlinii*. They seed readily and make a good show in early spring, before their early dormancy. Just outside our region, but still western North American, is *Fritillaria camschatcensis*. I added some bulbs originating from a southeastern Alaskan population. They're struggling a bit against the competition, but increasing and flowering, though at less height than seen in the wild. Their lavish production of "rice grain" bulblets will allow establishing more plants in more controlled parts of the garden where their need for moisture can be met. A seldom-grown California geophyte, *Hastingsia alba*, is very happy here, despite having grown previously on a very dry berm in my former garden.

I wanted to try *Narcissus poeticus* here, but it didn't flourish. I'll see how *Narcissus jonquilla*, presently enjoying a problem wet spot elsewhere, will like it. Certain irises were obvious choices. The species *Iris ensata* (ancestor of the Japanese iris) is too massive already. Some Siberian irises arrived in bad condition from a nursery (no longer patronized), and are just now recovering. One hybrid Japanese iris flowered well this spring, but I'm sure it would like more summer water. The Louisiana irises would need far too much summer moisture, and they don't flower well, if at all, in this region. I do run a sprinkler once a week on the area, breaking another bioswale rule but preserving some favorite plants.

The retaining berm at the low end of the swale, composed of a mixture of clay and gravel, is proving a good home for geophytes. *Crocus boryi* surprised me by increasing very well (it is probably at the limit of its winter hardiness here). *Dodecatheon* species are taking hold and even self-sowing. *Lilium columbianum* is in flower as I write in early June, and *Fritillaria affinis* came earlier. Imitating its natural habitat, the lily's base is shaded by the spreading

branches of the pink-flowering Japanese willow *Salix chaenomeloides*, a great source of late-winter material for flower arranging. The berm gets sadly bare in summer, so I've added a prostrate rosemary and will find some other plants through which the bulbs' flowers can emerge.



From this four-year experience, I can offer some tentative recommendations on bioswales for the curatorial gardener. (1) Edit your plant list carefully to exclude deep-rooted, invasive perennials; my biggest mistake so far has been *Asclepias speciosa*. (2) Control invading grasses and clovers immediately so they don't get a foothold and become ineradicable. (3) Add a deep gravel mulch on the surface to facilitate weeding and maintain moisture in the dry season. (4) A berm around part of the swale both takes care of excavated soil and provides another specialized habitat. (5) Experiment with bulbs! You may be happily surprised.

*The following is a brief list of guides to explaining and building bioswales or rain gardens. Your local civil authority may have one more appropriate to your local area. As Jane mentions, the plant list may not be especially helpful, but as gardeners you have much more experience and better access to information about plants most suitable for your gardens.*

— Ed.

[http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/nrcs144p2\\_029251.pdf](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/nrcs144p2_029251.pdf) a two-page summary of what a bioswale is with brief comments on maintenance and reasons for building one

<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/bes/article/188636>

<https://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/HWY/GEOENVIRONMENTAL/docs/Hydraulics/Hydraulics%>

<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/bes/article/474026>

## Fuss-Free Lachenalia (cont'd)

(continued from page five)

December, and in some years even as early as Thanksgiving. Like most Lachenalia the blooms are long-lasting and a single bulb can easily be in bloom for two weeks or more. Following closely

behind is *Lachenalia reflexa*, blooming in January and February. After the first two there is a rush of blooming Lachenalia with the order differing from year to year.

*Lachenalia mutabilis* is one of the easiest to acquire and to grow and has long stems of pseudo flowers that stick above the true flowers as a signal to potential pollinators of the nectaries below.

Most Lachenalia come from the Cape Province of South Africa, although a few species extend the range to the North and East. The part of Cape Province where most of the Lachenalia grow is a winter rainfall region, with a temperate climate, rare freezes and moderate temperatures. Habitat soil types vary considerably from clays to quartz pans to sand; however most have a low organic content and are "poor" soils. Lachenalia grow

with other bulbs, members of the Asteraceae family and members of the Aizoaceae (ice plants), and are part of the general succulent and bulbous flora of springtime in the Cape Province.

Lachenalia cultivars and selected color forms have been selected

and horticulturalists realized that most of the species were variable, with populations only a few miles apart varying in color, shape, leaf texture and size. Whenever collection data for a seed source is known, it should be preserved with the plant. Given the frequent movement of plants from one species to

another the locality data may be the most important piece of information.

Cultivation requirements for nearly all Lachenalia are the same. The plants prefer a porous, quick-draining potting medium and will do well in pure pumice or pumice mixed with any commercial potting mix. Coarse perlite will do nearly as well if pumice is not available. They want a dry summer



*L. reflexa*



*L. mutabilis*



*L. aloides*



*L. aloides yellow form*

and grown for many years. Two pictures show the most common form of *Lachenalia aloides* with red to purple tips. There is often a bit off-green showing near the stem which leads to a variety of names, mostly *Lachenalia aloides* var. *tricolor* or var. *quadricolor*. Next to it is a pure yellow form, received and grown without a name. Other color forms are also in cultivation. As Lachenalia collections have grown with time, growers

rest, not needing any water, but preferring shade and protection from extreme heat. Occasional very light dampening of the potting medium during the summer will help prevent desiccation in dry climates and give the bulbs an early start in fall.

Lachenalia growing in potting mixes with little or no organic matter, or growing in small pots, need frequent fertilization during the growing season. Best results can be obtained by starting fertilization as

(continued to page ten)

## Board of Directors Meeting, July 2016

Your board of directors met on July 17, 2016. All were present and accounted for!

Treasurer Arnold Trachtenberg reported that the treasury remains healthy. We awarded three Mary Sue Ittner Awards for geophytic research this year. One recipient did not respond after repeated attempts to contact him, so the check has been destroyed. Trachtenberg will be moving PBS's account from Fidelity to USB.

BX/SX Director Dell Sherk reported that the BX is running well, and Karl Church's help with packing is much appreciated. If anyone would like to volunteer to help out with the SX they should let us know!

Robin Hansen continues to work hard to keep us on an appropriate timeline for our publications. She has articles gathered for the new *Bulb Garden*. Jennifer Hildebrand reported that we will need to reconsider our approach to the membership directory—perhaps new database software would be helpful. Trachtenberg confirmed that he will send a copy of the file to President Nhu Nguyen for archiving.

Membership Director Jane McGary reported that our membership stands at 274. Each year it is fairly common for about one-third of our members to not renew. She also reported that she receives inquiries on the website asking how to join and what PBS does.

Nguyen reported that he and the web and wiki team are working to convert the wiki to a database electronically. They are tagging new entries to allow for better navigation.

We adjourned and set our next meeting time.



## Treasurer's Report, 2nd Quarter 2016

<b>BALANCE 3/31/16</b>	<b>\$39,657.78</b>
<b>U.S. Members</b>	<b>\$580.00</b>
<b>Overseas Members</b>	<b>\$625.00</b>
<b>Contributions</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>
<b>BX Receipts</b>	<b>\$2,698.53</b>
<b>Investment results</b>	<b>\$305.31</b>
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>\$4,208.84</b>
<b>BX/SX Postage</b>	<b>(\$1,373.65)</b>
<b>BX/SX Supplies</b>	<b>(166.85)</b>
<b>BX/SX Support Staff</b>	<b>(\$0.00)</b>
<b>Board Conference Calls</b>	<b>(\$76.12)</b>
<b>Treasurer's Supplies</b>	<b>(\$66.85)</b>
<b>Publications</b>	<b>(\$0.00)</b>
<b>PayPal Expense</b>	<b>(\$157.97)</b>
<b>Postage</b>	<b>(\$162.79)</b>
<b>Bulb Garden editing</b>	<b>(\$500.00)</b>
<b>Mary Sue Ittner Grant</b>	<b>(\$1050.00)</b>
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>(\$3,554.23)</b>
<b>BALANCE</b>	<b>\$40,312.39</b>



**It may not be spring ... but it is still time to renew!**  
**We appreciate your support—we would hate to lose you!**

Please *CHECK YOUR MEMBERSHIP STATUS* by looking at the mailing label on this issue of *The Bulb Garden*.

Renewing is easy. You can renew **ONLINE** (\$20 U.S., \$25 international) via PayPal. Just use the button on our membership page, <http://www.pacificbulbsociety.org/membership.html>.

**You can also mail in your renewal.** Please direct it to Arnold Trachtenberg, 140 Lakeview Avenue, Leonia NJ 07605

Whether renewing online or by mail, please contact Jane McGary ([janemcgary@earthlink.net](mailto:janemcgary@earthlink.net)) if any of your contact information has changed.

**Thanks again for your continued support of the Pacific Bulb Society!**

## Fuss-Free Lachenalia (cont'd)

(continued from page eight)

soon as the first green appears and stopping as soon as the first yellow tips appear marking the end of the growing season. A balanced fertilizer will do fine. These are not fussy plants.

Larger bulbs (greater than 1/2-inch diameter) can be safely removed from the potting mix and stored in a cool dry location. Lachenalia are happy in surprisingly small pots. Many species will grow, flower and offset in 2¼-inch rose pots, needing repotting and separation every second or third year. When planted in slightly larger pots leaf growth is stronger, blooms are better and offsets

appear more quickly and in greater numbers. An example of the display of offsetting bulbs is in the picture of *Lachenalia latimerae*; started as a single seed, it has filled many 3½-inch pots. Several color forms of this species are in cultivation. One seed batch may cover the range from nearly white to nearly light pink.

Propagation is easy as most species offset readily. Offsets are often separated at the beginning of the growing season and potted on but will do well when separated at any time. The anthers and stigma are exposed or nearly so in most species, as shown in the picture of *Lachenalia stayneri*, making pollination (and hybridization) an easy task. A small brush will transfer pollen from one plant to another. The flowers are attractive to hummingbirds and bees so random pollination will take place if multiple species are in flower and not protected. Many species are self-fertile.

Seeds are readily available for most species and can be started as with any winter growing plant. The author has had great success with a commercial seed starting mix and perlite mixed half and half. Seeds are

started in 2½-inch pots, and placed under florescent lights in an unheated garage. The individual pots are placed in plastic bags and the potting mix is wet. Seeds are placed on top of the potting mix and a very light dusting of either roofing gravel or bird gravel (*Ed.*: chicken grit) is put on the mix. The top dressing should be so thin that you can see the potting mix and the seeds can see the florescent light. Seedlings germinate best when the daytime temperature is in the mid-80s and the night time temperature is in the mid-50s (Fahrenheit). Lachenalia germinate quickly compared to many bulbs; seedlings appear after a week or

two. Smoke treatment is not required and appears to make no difference in germination success or rate.

Lachenalia hybrids, though made for many years, are poorly documented. They appear on bulb price lists for a year or two and then vanish, sometimes to reappear a few years later. Some of the more interesting Lachenalia hybrids have come from Komoriya Nursery in Japan, a well-known purveyor of interesting *Hippeastrum* and *Nerine* on eBay. Like other Lachenalia hybrids their appearance on a sales list is ephemeral at best. Two examples are shown, *Lachenalia* 'Haru no Nigore',

which like many Lachenalia has better and more interesting colors in bud than in flower, and *Lachenalia* 'The Nocturne' which is unusual in form and color. Both appear to be primary hybrids between two species. We can hope for even more interesting hybrids from several growers in the future. Lachenalia may eventually follow the path of *Cyclamen*, *Tulips* and *Haworthias* into ever more exotic shapes and colors. Depending on your taste, this may or may not be a good thing.



*L. latimerae*



*L. 'Haru No Nigore'*



*L. stayneri*



*L. 'The Nocturne'*

(continued to next page)

## Fuss-Free Lachenalia (cont'd)

(continued from previous page)

Most of the photos accompanying this article concentrate on the fully open flowers. The true connoisseur of these wonderful plants realizes that the colors are most intense and fully saturated just prior to the flowers' opening. The picture of *Lachenalia viridiflora* with the spectacular flower color is accompanied by well spotted leaves. The spotting helps make the plants more cryptic to passing herbivores, and fades as the flowers open and the plant becomes more obvious. *Lachenalia* 'Haro no Yume' has spectacular leaves, every bit as good as its interesting flower. The leaves of *Lachenalia carnososa* have the intense patterns and pustulate leaves often seen in Massonia.

The pictures with this article are a small sampling of the wonderful flowers and leaves of this genus. The colors of species are intense, different from clone to clone, and a fantastic gift from a plant that is easy to grow and requires minimal maintenance.

*L. viridiflora*



*L. carnososa*



*L. 'Haro No Yume'*

## Gardening with Bulbs



**Fritillaria meleagris** are excellent bulbs for a bioswale or for a bulb lawn! Read more inside. Photo by Robin Hansen.

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*The Bulb Garden* © 2016

*The Bulb Garden* is the newsletter of the Pacific Bulb Society (PBS). It is published, if enough articles are submitted, around the third week of each quarter and is available to PBS members. This newsletter provides gardening or bulb related articles, news of interest to members, and announcements of the PBS organization.

Editor: Robin Hansen, [robin@hansennursery.com](mailto:robin@hansennursery.com)  
Co-Editor: Jennifer Hildebrand

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