

## *Gardening in Dunblane, Scotland and Auckland, New Zealand*

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My interest in Natural History started at an early age, with my mother writing in my baby book that age two I was fascinated by ants and could watch them for “hours”. This was encouraged by my grandmother, who used to read chapters from her copy of “The Look About You Nature Study” book by Thomas W. Hoare, teacher of Nature Study to the Falkirk School Board, she received as a school prize in Leeds Girls Modern School in 1910. Little did I know then would I spend 30 years teaching in Falkirk. I accompanied my grandmother on many walks in the countryside round Huddersfield where she lived and the place of my birth, and watched her collect wildflowers, which she pressed. I still have this collection in three exercise books dating from 1931 until her death in 1971. It was always a treat visiting her.

30 I moved to Dunblane in 1976, but only started serious gardening when I bought a house with a nice corner plot in 1987. Unusual plants fascinated me, so I looked for unusual ones. Dunblane is quite a mild, damp climate, so I tried many without success. Around about then my parents moved to Blair Drummond, near Stirling. Their property adjoined a section of planted pine forest and had hundreds of square metres of snowdrops, *Galanthus nivalis*, many of which were the double form. I dug up some and planted them in the borders of my fledgling garden. I then discovered the Scottish Rock Garden Club had a flourishing Dunblane Group with one of my colleagues, Ian Steel bringing me some unusual rock garden plants. I was hooked! I started collecting snowdrop varieties and species, ending up with over a hundred different types. They thrived in the beds and borders I created as my garden.

As my garden progressed, I purchased a large greenhouse in which to grow Mediterranean bulbs, especially tender autumn flowering Narcissus spp. and small orchids such as *Ophrys* spp. I remember seeing tiny white Narcissus growing near the beach in Ibiza on an October holiday in 1991. I had limited success as summers were just not hot enough to stimulate flowering. They would flower one year and fail the next, or I would just have a pot full of leaves. Another genus of orchid that had grabbed my attention was *Cypripedium*. I had collected the Brooke Bond Wildflower cards in the 1960s and had seen the British rarity *C. calceolus* on one of the cards. This fabled orchid



Cypripedium Sabine  
Cypripedium calceolus

was found in my native county of Yorkshire but was now reduced to one heavily guarded plant due to indiscriminate collectors digging plants up to take home. I discovered that orchid growers were now growing these very successfully from seed sown in sterile flasks of agar. Species and hybrids were now available for the amateur to purchase. Alas, keeping them happy is quite a skill and I had one or two failures. Fortunately, Dunblane has a very mild climate which suits growing these plants, either in specially prepared beds or large pots. They require very good drainage with little organic material but must never dry out. They require several weeks of temperatures below 4°C and summers that are not too hot. When I finally had to sell my collection, some of the plants, which started as single noses, had become clumps of, in the case of *Cypripedium* 'Emil', sixty. Hybrids are much more vigorous than species, and one, *C.* 'Sabine', I grew from a de-flasked seedling. The flowers were huge. They were bomb-proof, surviving temperatures well below -10°C in pots on the patio. It had huge flowers. I did manage to buy three clones of European forms of *C. calceolus*. They did well and looked amazing in the rockery.

Another genus I grew well was *Trillium*. *T. grandiflorum* grew particularly well, and I had several clumps, including the pink *T. grandiflorum* 'Roseum', doubles like 'Snowbunting' and 'flore pleno' and a particularly nice pink double called 'Jenny Rhodes'. I have tried Trilliums in Auckland, but they have all failed.

In January 2011, with 2 feet of snow on



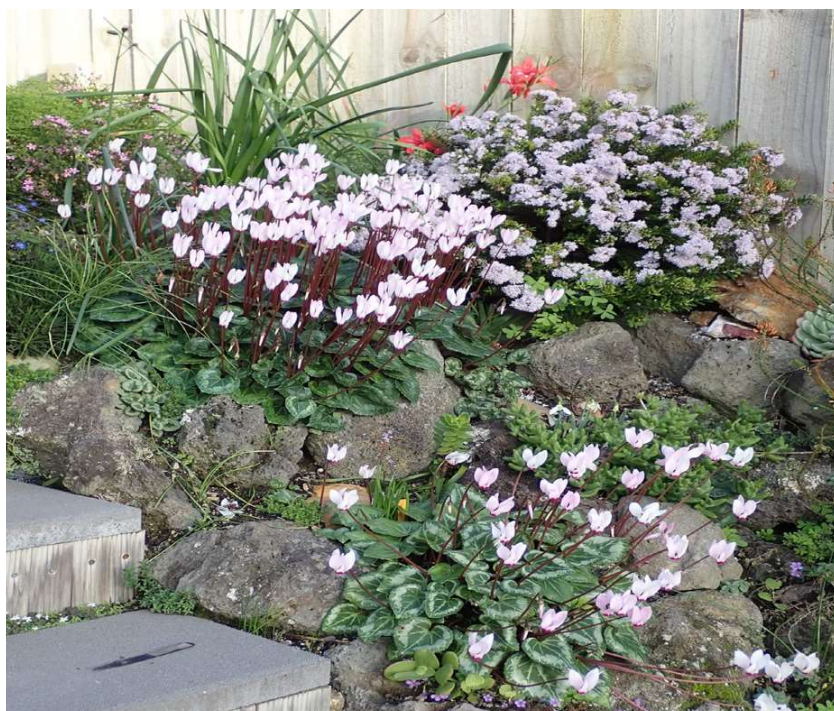


the ground which had been there since early November, we moved to Auckland. It would be over 5 years before we moved into our own property, so to begin with I grew plants in four-inch pots along the south wall of our rental property. Generous friends sent seeds from the UK and friends in New Zealand gave me some bulbs. I tried snowdrops, but although the seeds germinate and grew, it was six years before the first flowered. Auckland seemed to be too mild, so I switched to the Mediterranean bulbs I had failed with in Dunblane. These grew like Topsy, and I am now flowering autumn flowering *Narcissus* spp. like *tazetta*, *papyraceus*, *viridiflorus*, *deficiens* and *obsoletus*. I was also very fortunate to be sent a huge bundle of hybrid *Narcissus tazetta* seeds by the late Bill Welch “The Bulb Baron”, from California, some from his ‘Autumn Colors’ range and smaller *tazetta* hybrids from Lawrence Trevanion in Australia. Growing daffodils from seed needs patience as it can take six or more years for them to flower, but these are now flowering from late summer onwards. I have also acquired some more exotic bulbs like *Paramongaia weberbaueri* and the blue *Worsleya procera*. I have not flowered the latter, but the former is like a daffodil on steroids, with flowers some 20 cm across.

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**Top:** *Narcissus obsoletus*  
**Middle:** *N. tazetta* ex ‘Autumn Colors’ seed  
**Above:** *Paramongaia weberbaueri*

I am still trying to grow Mediterranean bulbs, but since turning seventy in January I am cutting back.



**Left:** *Cyclamen persicum*, two varieties- ex Rhodes (top) and ex Lebanon, Hans Joschko seed (below)

Many of them bring back memories of October holidays, like my clumps of *Sternbergia lutea* which remind me of the swathes of them near the monastery at the top of Pantokrator in Corfu, or *Pancratium maritimum*, which grew

at the back of many of the Mediterranean beaches we visited, or *Cyclamen hederifolium*, which grew in the woods on Corfu and Zakyntos in the Greek Ionian Islands. I find that I struggle with keeping up with weeds in pots, so these are growing in sandy beds in the garden. Recently I have been given some special irises which require long hot dry summers and very free draining medium. I have built a raised bench with a high shelf I can put the pots on during the summer. I am hoping that cutting back I will be able to keep on top of the repotting after a dry summer and have fewer losses. This year I was surprised by a flower on a single snowdrop grown from seed of *Galanthus* 'Spindlestone Surprise' (shown below), which I had been sent from the UK and sown in 2014. Nine years for the first flower! This is what makes this hobby so worthwhile. I love it. Each season begins with anticipation, some surprises and, inevitably, some disappointments when one pot you have nurtured for years fails.

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I must thank several people who have been very generous to me, supplying bulbs, seeds and free expert advice: Bill Dijk, Lesley Cox, Dave Toole. What they have provided me has kick started my collection and given me so much pleasure.

