

The Bulb Garden



~Gardening with Bulbs~

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The Art of Hand Watering

Robin Hansen

Robin Hansen lives in southwestern Oregon where she has a small specialty nursery focused on species Cyclamen, rock garden and native bulbs.

Some of the most peaceful and instructive times of day come as I water my plants by hand. As much art as science, the proper training in hand watering came first in horticultural school and then at the hands of professional growers and continued with personal experience.

If done properly, hand watering is a slow motion exercise which allows time to observe your plants, formulate some plans, and watch for problems such as insects, lack of fertilizer, need for repotting, and the necessity of moving plants to differ-

ent locations where they might grow better.

The necessity of watering plants which need individual regimes done by hand is not a process tolerant of procrastination, as I have found to my profound (and enduring) dismay. Lack of water slows growth, sets the plant back in its life cycle, or stops it, permanently. Trust me, I guarantee that plants in need of water in the garden or in pots wait for no man. They proceed to look from sad to dead in short order.

Yes, I know there are various options for watering your plants from drip irrigation to sprinklers to the neighborhood teenager while you are gone or another plant lover you

will discover has very different ideas about watering, most not necessarily conducive to plant survival over the two weeks of your vacation.

That said, I grow such a wide variety of plants with differing water needs that once organized in groups appropriate to their needs, they

Lever activated water shut-off valve



Continued on page 3

***Bessera elegans*, A Plant Portrait – Erika Schroedersecker**

Bessera is a monotypic genus from southwestern Mexico belonging to the family Asparagaceae*. The only species is *Bessera elegans*. It comes in the standard red form and the highly sought after purple form.

I have grown *Bessera* for probably 20 years. It's a very rewarding and drop-dead gorgeous bulb (actually a corm) and very easy to please. I initially bought the red coloured form from Garden Imports, a nursery just north of Toronto, Ontario which sadly is no longer in business. The purple form I acquired through Dylan Hannon of Dylan's Bulbs on eBay a few years ago.

Each spring in early May I replot the corms 6-8 cm (3 inches) deep as they offset quite readily. I use a well-drained mix consisting of concrete sand, compost and grit and throw some bone meal in. They require full sun and the heat spurs them into growth. They grow about 60 cm (24 inches) tall and their blooms dangle and wave in the breeze. The red flowers have a beautiful green coloured pollen while the purple has a striking teal coloured pollen. I fertilize with a tomato fertilizer which is very good for bulbs and/or a 15-30-15 NPK fertilizer. The purple form flowers before the red one beginning in mid-to late July. In autumn I reduce watering as the



plant shows signs that it wants to go dormant. I place the pots in a storage room with an average temperature from 10-15° C (50-60° F) and keep them bone dry. The hummingbirds enjoy visiting the pendant blooms of the red one. I haven't yet seen them on the purple flowers though it may be possible.

This is such a worthwhile bulb to grow with such a long blooming period from mid- to late July to as late as early October.

Additional information for growing from seed: Sow no more than 1/8 to 1/4 inch deep in light, well-drained starting mix in a warm area indoors.



Once in growth keep moist but not soaking. As with many bulb seedlings, keep in growth through the summer and allow to go dormant, then store as above.

Both photos left: *Bessera elegans*, red form. Above: *Bessera elegans*, purple form. Photos: Erika Schroedersecker.

Editor's Note: Some place *Bessera* in Themidaceae.

See also:

<https://www.pacificbulbsociety.org/pbswiki/index.php/Bessera>

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The Art of Hand Watering *cont'd*

then proceed to wander into other groups, gradually (or quickly) upsetting all attempts to avoid rot, disease, death or any other of Mother Nature's attempts to do the right thing.

Cyclamen, for example, if allowed to dry out in pots might feel firm enough, but when you attempt to resuscitate them promptly rot; this is one of numerous examples why putting off watering is insane. Then you might also consider how much you paid for a rare and special plant if you are looking for an excuse to wait until tomorrow morning, or Saturday when it's only Thursday. Don't do it, carry your snack or your wine with you, but get to work. A slow motion chore of this kind is not only important to the plants, it's also necessary for contemplation and relaxation, in other words - your mental health. We gardeners know that plants maintain our emotional and mental equilibrium when nothing else does.

If I've now reinforced the necessity of watering when you should, good, and now it's time for some essential techniques to guarantee your plants will continue to reinforce your plant lust, i.e. not die.

First the tools - a water faucet that, as you get older or less able, makes it easier to turn on. Faucet handles vary from the old-fashioned hard-to-turn brass handles to lovely wheels easy to grasp. Cities now are increasingly requiring specific faucets with internal anti-siphon or backflow prevention devices. When you have the plumber come raise your faucets so you can easily reach them, have him use these new devices. (He may be required to install them regardless.) Some of you may be using a liquid fertilizer as you water, and your water department will thank you for preventing any chemicals from going back into the municipal water supply.

Next, the hoses and water breakers. But before I talk about hoses, etc., you will realize as you continue that I don't talk about watering cans, because that involves a completely separate discussion. Just so you know, I have six, with roses and without. They never, ever have anything but water in them because the dog and cat, and occasionally deer, drink from them daily. And unfortunately, good quality, well-

balanced, durable watering cans are very difficult to find any more. So, we'll save that discussion for another day.

Hoses full of water are heavy, especially those fifty or one hundred feet in length, but do not buy the cheaper hoses. They don't hold up, but crack, pinhole and generally don't withstand the 3/4 ton truck loaded with gravel backing over them from time to time because a certain party didn't want to get out and move the hose. I've recently, at the suggestion of my cousin who has multiple sclerosis, bought a new type of very flexible lightweight hose called Zero-G. Several other brands that are lightweight have also become available, but this one which I've had for about two months and while excellent for dragging around, already has some holes in it from an unknown cause. I love the hose and will put up with that because even the leaks dribble - they don't shoot into the air, getting your dinner dress wet when you remember at the last minute that two pots on the deck were missed and they're drooping.

My favorite brand of standard commercial-grade hose is Gilmour, a company that makes many garden-related products. These hoses are tough as I've had some for 30 years. But I coil them and store them in winter although they are very UV-resistant. They have brass fittings and last and last, plus repair kits are readily available and easy to use.

The most important part of your watering gear will be your watering nozzles or water breakers. Either plastic or aluminum is fine, but consider weight because it can be tiring if you have

regular hose and aluminum nozzles and you're dragging them around. What's between the nozzle and the hose is what makes watering so much easier and here you have several choices, a plastic or brass shut-off valve or lever-activated or one-touch, high flow shut-off valves. I have all three and they work well, but consider your needs before buying. Plastic shut-offs are lightweight but the internal valve starts leaking sooner than later. Brass shut-offs are heavy but last a long time. The lever-activated shut-offs allow you to water an individual pot, shut the water, move



Water faucet with backflow device built in. Faucet handle is cushioned.

The Art of Hand Watering *cont'd*

the nozzle to the next pot and water.

In water-deprived areas of the country the lever-activated shut-off is by far the best for conserving water and keeping the water bill lower. Each time you use it and stop the water between each pot, you're using less water and it may seem that you're not saving much, but over time, it's much better for conserving our most precious resource. If you have a water ban but are allowed to water specific plants, this is the one to use. I have also a one-touch high-flow shut-off valve; it is not my favorite, although the lever-activated shut-off can be a problem for those with less strength in their hands or carpal tunnel syndrome, etc. It's a matter of preference and how much hand watering you do.

Let's talk about watering techniques. You didn't know there were any? Oh, my, it's time to learn new tricks! So there are various techniques from wafting a small drizzle over succulents to thoroughly soaking a five-gallon pot with a root-bound rhododendron in it, to watering a few plants in the border or rock garden. The point is to give each plant in the ground or in pots what it needs, no more and no less to optimize growth, and this means a regular schedule based on your current weather. You might water plants in one area one day and others another day. Your own preferences and personal schedule will dictate the frequency of watering. However, do not, for instance, water lightly every day. It may prevent wilting, but plants will not develop the deep roots they need by such shallow watering, and for some bulbs and other plants that need drying off, you run the risk of rotting them.

First, watering in pots: The basic procedure is to fill the pot to the brim, let the water sink in and do it again. Depending on the time of year, the weather forecast, the soil mix you're using

and the requirements of the plant itself, or if you've procrastinated when I told you not to, you may repeat this process another time or two.

Small pots will need more frequent but less water. You don't want them flooded and rotting, right? Let me give you some examples of how I water certain plants and then it's your turn. You will live and you will learn - gardeners are good at this - that's why we're gardeners.

Say I have a flat of dormant cyclamen. I'll pour the water on without filling the pots to the brim, and I'll do it twice even in hot weather, but I'll do it every two or three days. Cyclamen need a minimal amount of dampness when they're dormant to mimic their native habitat which is to be buried down a few inches where there's a bit more moisture and it's cooler. Don't forget that quite a few bulbs in pots need little or some summer watering when dormant. My *Cyclamen rolfianum* in pots haven't been watered for weeks and the tubers are still rock hard. This tuber grows among rocks in Algeria in northern Africa which gets very little if any rainfall, hence the dry period.

Now for a perennial in a four-inch pot or a gallon pot. Those I will fill to the brim twice or three times. If potting soil is one or two years old, it will absorb water well. If it's older it breaks down and doesn't absorb well; then it's time to repot. Good quality potting soil (do not use garden soil) usually has a wetting agent which allows the mix to absorb water more easily. I will water the same for larger pots, and I will perhaps not repot as often but I will remove the top few inches of soil and replace with fresh mix. Amazing what a difference a fresh bit of mix makes!

If you procrastinate in spite of everything, be prepared to water frequently and deeply several days in a row. You can't see into the soil without



One-touch high-flow shut-off valve.

New Board Members—an Introduction

The Board of the Pacific Bulb Society is happy to welcome three new members, Lee Poulsen of California, Johannes Ulrich Urban of Portugal, and Martin Bohnet of Germany, making the PBS board truly international.

Lee Poulsen lives in the Pasadena area of Southern California, which is an inland coastal valley. He became interested in fruit trees in high school, tearing out all his parents' trees to replant with fruit and nut-bearing varieties. His research into those that would survive and produce in Austin, Texas led to an interest in weather and climate which led to joining societies of like-minded people. During graduate school, unable to have a vegetable garden, he **had** to grow **something!** In pots, of course, where the northern California climate allowed many unusual varieties. This was followed by a move to Southern California, and to a visit to the Los Angeles County Arboretum where he discovered all kinds of flowers and a man named Charles Hardman who led him to the International Bulb Society. This society was just starting a bulb exchange, so he ordered a few bulbs which led to so many bulbs he hasn't the time he'd like to care for them. His wife suggest a nursery or a botanical garden but his permanent bulb lust along with another condition known as Travel Virus requires periodic treatment involving hiding checkbook and credit cards. In his spare time, he messes around with satellites or is it the other way round?

Johannes Ulrich Urban, best known as Uli, is a retired pediatrician who moved in 2017 with his partner to Portugal, exchanging northern gardening habits for a chance to learn new skills in a much drier, hotter climate. Widely traveled and speaking a number of languages fluently, he has been infatuated with plants since a child. He says his mother kept telling him the story that at a certain age he refused to eat if his darling cactus was not standing beside his plate (in its pot), and he says this attitude has only gradually changed since (but probably not by much).

Uli's plant collections consist of a main emphasis on geophytes, but also non-geophytic Araceae, gesneriads, cacti (especially epiphytic ones), Salvia, aquatic plants, fruit-bearing plants and some orchids, among many others. But, he can hardly resist any interesting or beautiful plants. He welcomes visitors to his garden with prior arrangement. He will also

stay busy assisting Martin with the EU Seed and Bulb Exchange.

Martin Bohnet, otherwise known as Garak, was born in Göppingen near Stuttgart (southern Germany). After completing school and his alternative service in residential care for the elderly, he graduated with the German equivalent of a Master of Engineering in chemistry. He has worked since as a catalyst testing expert in the automotive sector. In 2012 he settled down with his partner in his hometown, finally acquiring a garden of his own. Soon after, he joined PBS and has contributed both content and functionality to the PBS wiki. In addition to his board position he is now PBS' assistant exchange director in charge of the EU Seed and Bulb Exchange.

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Foreground: *Scilla peruviana*. Photo: Johannes-Ulrich Urban. Taken in Portugal.

Scilla peruviana, native to the Iberian Peninsula, Italy and northwest Africa in spite of its name (It is not from Peru as the name would indicate.) is a lovely almost iridescent blue-purple bulb, happy to do without summer water, and tolerant of being pot-bound. About 12 inches with large strappy wide leaves, the flower heads are equally large and showy. This *Scilla* is likely hardy only to Zone 7 (with protection). It would perhaps keep its leaves if watered regularly but should be planted where it can gracefully retire for the summer. The leaves may be cut back once they are thoroughly dry, not before.

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The Art of Hand Watering *cont'd*

digging, but in large pots the soil dries out and is difficult to rewet. Just pull the root ball out and you'll see what I mean. My favorite and most effective trick is to keep the most needy pots in a tray where the water doesn't drain out. *Darmera peltata* and *Lysichiton* are good examples.

For watering in the border, save a few tuna cans or cat food cans and distribute them on top of the ground in the areas you need to water. Then water the individual plants, allowing several seconds or more to each one; watch how much each can fills up. Better to give half an inch, work your way down the row and do it again. This allows the water to soak in better without running off. Your goal is to give each plant about an inch. If there are plants you don't need to water because they're drought-resistant, ignore them. Focus on those that need the water, especially if they've only been in the ground a year or two. If newly planted, they are vulnerable to lack of water until they develop better and deeper root systems. Right now I have a sad-looking four-foot dogwood, planted last summer and carefully watered until the rains came. but I haven't watered it this summer and it finally had to shout in no uncertain terms to get my attention. I hope I can save it.

That's it. Practice makes perfect and as you hand water properly, keep in mind that the potting soil you use has a major effect on how you water, as does where you live and what kind of weather you have. You may find that moving pots to areas that get lots of light but afternoon shade may help reduce water needs without impairing a plant's performance. Experiment and you'll be surprised. Remember - I said hand watering is as much art as science, and gardeners are, above all, artists.

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Mary Sue Ittner Bulb Grants

The Pacific Bulb Society Board has chosen two recipients of the Mary Sue Ittner Bulb Grant for Bulb Studies for 2020. Grant recipients are members of PBS and are expected to write an article for *The Bulb Garden* on studies for which they receive the grants.

Molly Carney is a PhD candidate in archaeology at Washington State University, Pullman. Her dissertation looks at the geophyte foods that were integral parts of Northwest Indigenous diets. She has been working with several Washington State tribes for the last six years on projects related to ethnobotany and cultural history. In working most closely with the Kalispel Tribe who have some of the largest camas fields, she has discovered that many of their traditional

Large field of *Camassia* with (most likely) *Toxicoscordion micranthum* or Death Camas. Coos County, Oregon.



earth oven recipes have been lost due to colonialism, and that many traditional camas management practices have been forgotten.

Her dissertation seeks to establish some of these lost recipes and practices and her grant award will fund two radiocarbon dates to further understand changes in management practices across time. Her hypothesis is that archaeological camas bulbs found in sites throughout the Northwest may exhibit signs of intensive management or stewardship based upon preliminary results indicating people intensively managed camas fields by selective harvesting of sexually mature bulbs.

Carney is a novice gardener, having grown vegetables for several years; she is slowly

Bulb Grants *cont'd*

moving towards flowers and says she's looking forward to the end of graduate school with the hope that she can expand her bulb collection beyond Pacific Northwest ethnobotanical natives and tulips.

Bryan MacNeill is a graduate of the University of South Florida and is now a PhD student in the Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Alabama. He is focused on the pollination biology and evolution of the genus *Polianthes*, a genus of endemic Mexican geophytes and will integrate phylogenomic approaches to study morphological trait evolution and genomic adaptations within this group. His grant will enable him to build a phylogeny for *Polianthes*. He says that little is known about the evolutionary history of this genus and a molecular phylogeny does not exist.

This phylogeny will be used to confirm or reject current *Polianthes* subgenera as well as provide a phylogenetic framework for evolutionary studies. He is currently training undergraduate researchers at the University of Alabama by introducing them to the field of molecular plant systematics with the intent to demonstrate the utility of combining tradi-



Polianthes geminiflora, one of several species growing in Mexico. Copyright Mary Sue Ittner.

tional herbarium-based morphometrics with phylogenomics to exhibit the value that herbaria offer taxonomic, systematic and evolutionary genomics research in the post-genomic age. He intends to teach and conduct research in plant ecology and evolutionary biology on completion of his degree.

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Long-time (Plant) Companions

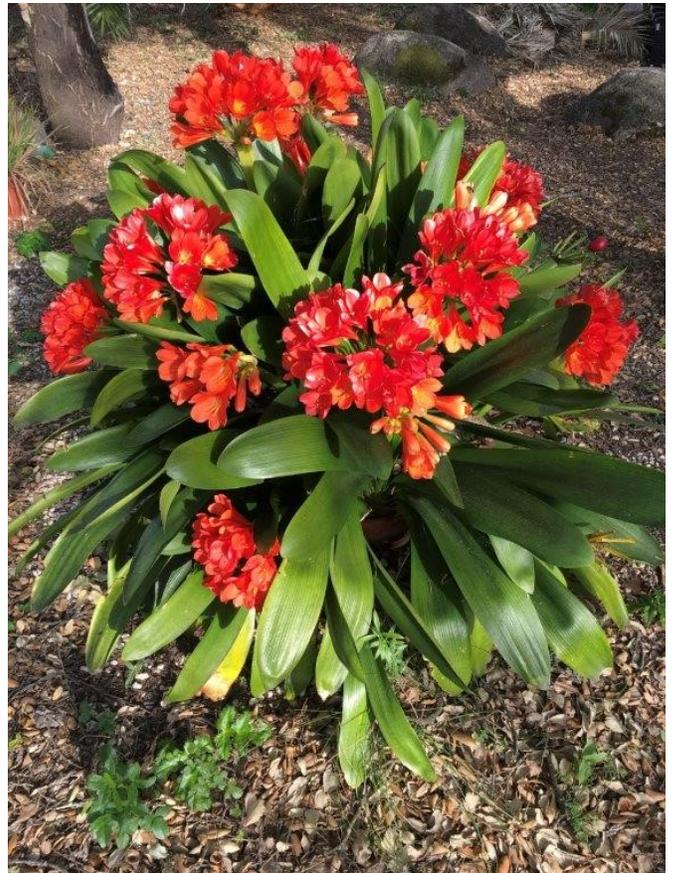
by Johannes Ulrich Urban

Looking at my garden photographs, I realize that there are the same plants in my pictures over and over again... Why?

They are my long-time companions and have become some kind of friends. Most, if not all, have a history and can tell a story.

They may not be the rarest of bulbs; but they are nevertheless valuable, and after all, they are good performers year after year. And maybe, for the novice grower of bulbs, this might be an inspiration for where to start. My love for plants, and bulbs especially, started in childhood which was a long time before the internet era and in some cases it was much more difficult to find these plants than it is today.

Let me start with the oldest plant in my collection. It is a huge *Clivia miniata* of the so-called Belgian strain with broad leaves and large bright orange flowers. It lives in a very large and heavy clay pot. I have never counted the number of crowns but there must be at least twenty of them, crowded together.



Clivia miniata, 100 years old. Photo: Johannes Ulrich Urban.

NEW - EU Seed and Bulb Exchange

The worldwide pandemic has created a number of problems for the Pacific Bulb Society. We have been unable to mail journals to some overseas members and have consequently made them available as a download on the PBS website. Many countries have placed moratoriums on some or all types of mail, preventing PBS members from receiving seeds or bulbs from the exchange. New regulations if not already in place will prevent European Union member countries and the U.K. from receiving seeds or bulbs without a phytosanitary certificate provided by the sending country.

There has been a major slowing of timely delivery of mail through the U.S. Post Office, apparently due in part to politicization of this agency. All of this has occurred at a time when PBS has a new exchange director so that in addition to taking on seed and bulb exchange responsibilities, Luminita Vollmer is also having to deal with considerable disruption of mailings. Fortunately, at least for EU member states, Johannes Ulrich Urban and Martin Bohnet have stepped forward with a proposal to start an additional seed and bulb exchange to include the 27 member states.

Up to this time, EU members were mostly able to receive seed but not bulbs. Ultimately, the PBS Board has approved the formation of a EU seed and bulb exchange which has the same basic rules as the current Exchange originating in the U.S. Only fully paid members of the Society can participate. If you are not sure of your status, you can contact the membership secretary Jane McGary janemcgary@earthlink.net or the treasurer Arnold Trachtenberg Arnold140@verizon.net. Hopefully this will provide an incentive to those EU members who have until now been frustrated with the whole process.

The Pacific Bulb Society is a non-profit U.S. corporation whose mandate is to educate, support research and share information about bulbs. Due to more and more regulations governing the exchange worldwide of seeds, plants and bulbs, PBS has had to become more flexible and creative in order to provide its members with these opportunities. The single most important part of our organization is to promote education and preservation of rare, uncommon or rarely availa-

ble plants considered to be “bulbs”. Even the most common bulbs we can think of such as snowdrops and species *Narcissus* are very often not available except occasionally from specialty nurseries. As well, environmental pressures due to human interference are causing precipitous losses of even the most common bulbs, and destroyed habitat prevents us from saving plants that have yet to be discovered or well-documented.

The PBS seed and bulb exchange is a major effort to share bulbs that otherwise might be lost and members are encouraged to donate their excess plants and seeds for distribution. To support donations, the PBS Board will credit your postage costs to send donations towards your purchase of seed and/or bulbs from both the U.S. and EU exchanges.

While members outside the U.S. can, within limits, continue to participate in the U.S. exchange, participation in the EU exchange is limited to members having a postal address in EU countries (and the U.K. only for year 2020). If you have not ordered before, please contact either Luminita Vollmer pbslv.exchange@gmail.com or Uli Urban johannes-ulrich-urban@t-online.de or Martin Bohnet garak@code-garak.de. Uli Urban speaks and writes English, German, and French and is able to communicate in basic Spanish and Portuguese.

The U.S. exchange occurs multiple times a year so watch for announcements on the PBS List. Luminita sends out a request for donations which is then followed by an availability list. The EU exchange will have two distributions per year of seed and bulbs, one in autumn for winter and spring-growing bulbs and one in spring for summer-growing bulbs. Again, these announcements will all be made on the PBS List so if you do not as yet participate in this discussion group, go to the Pacific Bulb Society website, click on List at the top of the page, then click on Subscribe.

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PBS Board Meeting—Minutes, May 17, 2020

Present: President and Editor Robin Hansen, Secretary Kathryn Andersen, Treasurer Arnold Trachtenberg, Directors Jane McGary and Luminita Vollmer.

President Hansen called the meeting to order at 12:05 p.m. EDT.

January 19, 2019 Meeting: The minutes were approved as distributed.

Treasurer's Report: Trachtenberg reported a UBS balance of \$32,769.14, a decrease in value because of lower income from BX/SX. He praised work of former BX/SX Director Dell Sherk and hoped we could return to former incomes. He is sending Vollmer copies of spread sheets used by Sherk.

Membership: McGary said that 316 members have renewed.

Hippeastrum Project: McGary reported that they have revised the Spanish original which means reformatting. The authors wants duplicate tables back which she had removed. There are now three authors: one original, one deceased and a helper. The new Spanish version is from Meerow's work. Trachtenberg will be in contact.

Liability Policy: Trachtenberg reported that insurance companies were not working (due to pandemic).

BX/SX: Vollmer reported that she had received lots of seeds from McGary. She found that many people did not follow instructions. She will send out another mailing. She sought guidance in dealing with members from overseas. \$300 was received from seed sales after deducting mailing charges. After learning of shipping costs, a member from Canada declined to order.

Mary Sue Ittner Award: The following two applications were received from PhD students: Trachtenberg moved to approve grants. Seconded by Vollmer

Molly Carney from Washington State University to look for signs of intensive management in archaeological camas (*Camassia*) bulb fields in Washington and Oregon using radiocarbon data. Requested \$606.30. Granted \$610.

Bryan MacNeill from the University of Alabama to build a phylogeny for *Polianthes* to determine whether the genus can be split into two distinct genera.

Total requested \$1500. Granted \$500.

Pacific Bulb Society Policies for Fiscal Management Revisions by Robin Hansen Jan. 16, 2020:

Moved by Trachtenberg and seconded by Vollmer that this document be sent to Board Members for comment and review and that a vote then be taken in two weeks for their adoption. Motion passed.

Consideration of an additional Board Member
Vollmer moved to invite Johannes Ulrich Urban to join the Board. Seconded by McGary. Motion passed electing him to the Board.

Notifications:

Michael Homick is scanning in *Herbertia* and will put a link on our website.

Trachtenberg is replacing John Wickham as Agent of Record.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathryn S. Andersen,
PBS Secretary

Next Meeting: Sunday, August 23, 12 noon EDT

Saunders' Gladiolus Book Coming Next Spring



Gladiolus buckerveldii, a South African species. Photo Copyright Rachel Saunders.

We have received word from Fiona Ross who undertook publication of Rachel Saunders' book on species *Gladiolus* that she handed the book over to the publishers in late August where it is in early design process, then goes for checking. It is booked in for printing next year, likely sometime in spring.

Long-time (Plant) Companions cont'd

Still, every year there is about the same number of inflorescences. It comes from my partner's side of the family who live in Alsace, France. He inherited it from two aunts who in turn got it from their parents. The two ladies always had this *Clivia* as far as memory reaches. Always in a big clay pot, always flowering beautifully. The history of this particular plant can be traced back for about 100 years. This *Clivia* survived at least two wars, so it could talk about good times and bad times, neglect and happiness, different regimes and even languages, bright summers in the garden and dark cellars in winter...it moved countless times from one house to the other, recently even from one country to another. Now it lives in Portugal, waiting for an appropriate first class position in dappled shade waiting to be freed at last from its century old clay prison... We will need a hammer to break the pot, so tightly pot-bound it is.

There is another *Clivia miniata* with narrower leaves and slightly smaller flowers, a young offset which originally stems from yet another huge plant coveted by my grandmother. But that would be a story on its own...

Another favorite bulb (tuber botanically speaking) since childhood is *Zantedeschia aethiopica*. I have always been attracted by its large lush leaves and the flawless flowers of timeless elegance. Many even have a faint pleasant scent, some a sourer note. Learning from my love of reading 19th century gardening books, it was very common as a houseplant in those days when apartments were not heated the way we are used to nowadays. But many rooms were kept cool or even cold in winter so it would flourish and flower. Much later I discovered that Arum "lilies" are hardy in England and Western France and could not believe my eyes when I saw huge clumps in flower, almost as tall as I am. Still later I learned that they *can* behave like weeds in suitable climates and are very adaptable to differing watering regimes. I vividly remember when I was a young school boy, there were several very well grown plants in the bright and cool entrance hall, looked after by the caretaker of the school. I was too shy to ask for an offset because we were all a bit scared of him in those days... but I discovered that during the summer holidays the big pots spent their vacation in a shady corner in the school garden, neglected to some ex-

tent and going half dormant. So one day I sneaked in with a fast-beating heart and managed to pinch a tiny offset. The offspring of this tiny piece is still with me. In my new Portuguese garden *Zantedeschia* grows easily without summer



Zantedeschia aethiopica. Photo: Johannes Ulrich Urban.

irrigation and goes fully dormant this way. However one clump of the variety 'Glencoe' gets water and is superb all year, connecting me back to my childhood.

Another 19th century favorite of bourgeois households was *Hippeastrum aulicum*, one of the most robust of its genus (German literature speaks of *Hippeastrum robustum* or *Hippeastrum aulicum* var *robustum*). In the 1960s, 70s and 80s it was impossible to find in Germany; two wars, changing fashions and different lifestyles had taken their toll. Until, that is, I came to the Hannover Botanical Garden for the very first time one winter. Here was this enormous tub full of bulbs in full flower, a heart-stopping sight. I stood and admired for a long time. And no... the *Zantedeschia* story was not repeated. A gardener turned up and I spoke to him about this magnificent plant. When I realized that he was a nice and friendly person (as most gardeners are...), I

Long-time (Plant) Companions *cont'd*

took the courage to ask if he could spare an offset, explaining that I had been looking for this beauty for a very long time. An offset??? was his answer. "Please come with me." So I followed him behind the scenes and there were even more flowering *aulicum*s, smaller and bigger ones. He gave me a whole plant... I could not believe it. Many years later I moved to the Hannover area and tried to meet this gardener again, to find out that in fact he was the head gardener of the glasshouses. He did not remember the *Hippeastrum* story but we still became friends. And *Hippeastrum aulicum* is with me today, now in the open ground in dappled shade. It has since produced countless offsets and many seedlings which were given away as freely as I had received it.

There is another plant, not a bulb, though... which has always been in our family as far back as I can remember: *Monstera deliciosa*. I add it here, off topic for a bulb magazine, because it stands for my personal relationship to plants. My mother kept telling me that as soon as I could walk, I would go to the big pot of our plant and would start to dig in its compost with my fingers. Not sure how tidy the surroundings looked after that. Apparently I had at sometime decided that our plant was "ill" and had to dig even deeper. The big specimen did not seem to suffer from my "treatments". Every new leaf was welcomed with a fascination only a child can feel, but some of this feeling is still there when I see the complex leaves unfurling.

Does it come as a surprise that I now am a fanatic of *Monstera* and *Philodendron*, but am trying to keep that jungle at bay?

When I had my large lean-to greenhouse in my former garden in Germany, a whole wall was quickly covered by a cutting of the same family plant. It grew so well that I had to hack off wheelbarrows full of leaves and shoots every year. Here in Portugal *Monstera* is hardy outside and grows in most gardens. I got some cuttings which grow ever so fast; they now cover a section of the old stone wall greeting everybody at the entrance of the garden.

ΩΩΩ



Monstera deliciosa. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.



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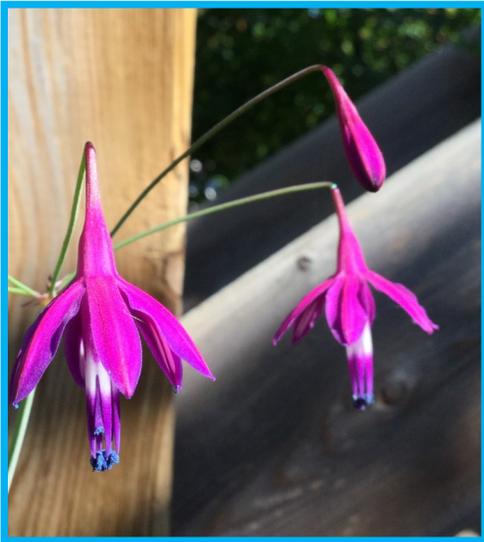
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Gardening with Bulbs



Bessera elegans, purple form. Photo: Erika Schroedersecker.

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