

Clivia in California

FORVER SURPRISING THE GREEN INDUSTRY

By Randy Baldwin, San Marcos Growers, Photography by James Comstock



Find more Clivia information at the San Marcos Growers website at www.smgrowers.com/info/clivia.asp and in the excellent book "Clivias" by Harold Koopowitz with photography by James Comstock (Timber Press, 2002).

Clivia collage showing the wide color range (above)
'Victorian Peach' (left)
Clivia caulescens (below)



a person, the correct pronunciation should follow that of the surname of the Clive family, making the name Clí-via ("klive-ee-ah") correct, although universally, the pronunciation using a softer "i" became more common. The common name found in literature has long been the Afrikaner (European South African settlers) name "kaffir lily." We now recognize that this is a derogatory racial slur—we suggest that you refer to the plants simply as "clivia."

Clivia are perennials with the herbaceous parts emerging from fleshy underground stems (rhizomes). They have two leathery ranked leaves and flowers borne in an umbel on top of a stout flat peduncle. There are currently five described species in the genus and of these, only *Clivia miniata* is common in horticulture. Its large flowering heads of orange trumpet shaped flowers in late winter and early spring have become a staple in the



Since the 1820s, when the first plants of *Clivia nobilis* made their way to England from South Africa, this group of plants with their beautiful pastel colored flowers and dark green, strap shaped leaves has drawn the attention of plant collectors and gardeners.

After some initial confusion (they were originally thought to be a new species of *Agapanthus*), the plant was correctly identified as being a new genus in the Amaryllis family (Amaryllidaceae). This new genus of plants was given the name *Clivia* by John Lindley to honor Lady Charlotte Florentia Clive, the Duchess of Northumberland, at whose estate the first *Clivia nobilis* brought to England bloomed. Since the name commemorates

California shade garden. Most recently, there has been increased interest in *Clivia miniata* because of the expanded range of colors and flower forms that are becoming more commonly available. Nurseries are producing plants with flowers in a range of yellows, apricots and deep orange-red. There are even plants with variegated foliage, both with orange or yellow flowers, making their way from the collector's corner into the retail marketplace. Some showy *Clivia miniata* cultivars are likely to remain expensive and mostly for the collector, but others such as 'Victorian Peach', 'Solomone Hybrids', 'San Marcos Yellow' and Flame ('Monya') represent a range of new colors now available from California growers.

In addition to the *Clivia miniata* selections, there are several other species, such as the pendant flowering *Clivia nobilis*, *Clivia caulescens* and *Clivia gardenii* that are becoming more readily available. Breeders working with several different species are also producing great new intergeneric hybrids that merge the favorable qualities of several species. These hybrids promise to bring new flower forms and extended bloom period as well as exciting new colors. In 2003, a new species, *Clivia mirabilis*, was discovered growing along dry canyon walls in Namaqualand in the Western Cape of South Africa. The specific epithet “*mirabilis*” means astonishing or miraculous to reflect the surprising discovery of this new species. For plant collectors and breeders, the discovery of another species, especially one such as this, that grows in full sun and is remarkably drought tolerant, promises the potential for even more extraordinary new hybrids and an even greater interest in *Clivia* breeding.

Clivia Culture All species of *clivia*, except the newly discovered *Clivia mirabilis*, come from forests in the eastern region of South Africa where they receive summer rainfall and grow in the thick layer of decomposing organic matter lying on top of the soil. While impossible to alter the timing of our



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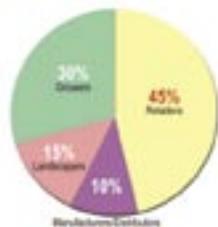
Clivia ‘Flame’ (above) and ‘Cinderalla’ (left)



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seasonal rainfall, these plants are at their best in situations that somewhat mimic the conditions that occur in their native habitat.

Climatic Considerations Clivia are known to tolerate temperatures in the lower 20° Fahrenheit, given some overhead protection; however they are best grown in mild climates where only an occasional night dips below freezing. Flowering is also enhanced when plants experience cool nighttime temperatures in fall; for this reason they are not a good choice

in more tropical regions or in year round heated greenhouses. In colder climates, clivia should be brought indoors prior to the first frost and enjoyed in a bright room where they make excellent indoor flowering plants.

Light Clivia should be kept sheltered from the burning rays of the sun. They prefer bright shade but will tolerate early morning or late afternoon direct sun. If grown in too dim of light, plants will remain healthy but will not bloom as prolifically. Too much direct sunlight will result in sun scalded foliage.

Soil The roots of clivia require the oxygen found in a loose, well drained soil. While they can often be found growing on heavier soils, their roots are then usually limited to the mulch layer lying on top of the soil. In some climates, growers advocate only growing clivia in containers with particularly sharp drainage. In California, where large mass plantings of clivia are commonly found thriving, this plant can also be easily grown in the ground. To accomplish this, provide a well drained soil, or at least a good substrate of amended topsoil for the roots and rhizomes to grow into, and then irrigate appropriately.

Irrigation The fact that clivia's natural habitat is in the leaf litter of the shaded forest floor partly explains why some of the best mass plantings of clivia in Southern California can be found under large live oaks. This combination might seem odd as the watering requirements of these plants seems incongruous but Clivia miniata, with its succulent water retaining roots, has proven quite adaptable to the Mediterranean climate found in California. In these conditions, clivia grows well on winter rainfall and only occasional supplemental summer irrigation. In a more typical garden setting and in containers, more frequent irrigation and an annual application of a balanced slow release fertilizer will be beneficial and promote heavier flowering. In addition, some gardeners have observed better flowering when plants are well irrigated in spring and summer then purposely kept drier in late summer and fall. **PRO**



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