

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 09-24-03 What's Up) , ©2005

One of my favorite all-around plants is *Crocoshmia* also known as *Montbretia*. It's most commonly used botanical name is *Crocoshmia crocosmiiflora* (*Montbretia*). You'll see it on plant tags and labels as *C. x crocosmiiflora* followed by its variety name in single quotes. These wonderfully long blooming beauties grow from corms (but are often called bulbs). The corms are quite small for the size of the plant. Each corm has a dent in the root growing side of the plant and a peak where the plant will emerge. Look for corms in the spring and potted up, already growing plants from about July through October at our local nurseries.

Nils Sundquist of Sundquist Nursery 360-779-6343 has a varied selection of *Crocoshmia* available. Sundquist sells much more than *Crocoshmia* and is a fantastic resource for a plethora of native plants too. His nursery open houses are always the same weekends as the Heronswood open houses. Nils will also open his Nursery for tours and purchases for groups of ten or more by appointment. His plants are also available at local nurseries, during Bainbridge in Bloom and at the Rhododendron Species Garden. His Nursery also features displays of incredible water-wise plantings.

Crocoshmia are available in shades of red, coral, apricot, orange, red-orange, bright yellow and lemon yellow. There's even a variety so pale it appears creamy white. Leaves are pointed emerging from the corms in clumps of Vs. Some catalogues describe the leaves as "saber-shaped." Leaves can be two to four feet tall depending on the variety. The stems are long and curved with blossoms marching up both sides. Flowers are six petalled tubes and stars. The leaves and flowers look good when dry and dead too. The flowers eventually fall off leaving green bead-shaped seeds along the stems. Golden-red-brown stems and seedpods are quite attractive in dried arrangements. *Crocoshmia* also attract butterflies and hummingbirds. These sturdy, attractive plants thrive in both full sun and partial shade. Additionally, they won't mind droughts but will stand wet feet too.

The name is derived from the Greek word *krokos* for saffron and *osme* for smell. Supposedly the dried flowers smell like saffron when soaked in water. The plants look great planted in drifts or sweeps along a bank or hillside. I have a clump of *Crocoshmia* 'Lucifer' growing under several cedar and a hemlock on the north side of the house along a path. The intense red flowers look almost luminous in the shade. I love to walk by and fondle them. One of my favorite *Crocoshmia* is an old fashioned variety with orange flowers and a yellow throat. It might be 'Emily McKenzie.' There is also a variety called *C. x crocosmiiflora* 'Jackanapes' in red with yellow centers. Last year I purchased *C. x crocosmiiflora* 'Star of the East' from Nils and the flowers have six-broad petals with apricot blooms. I couldn't resist it.

As the *Crocoshmia* start to fade away in gardens *Schizostylis* (also called Kafir lily, crimson flag or scarlet river lily) begins to come into its prime. This rhizomaceous plant sometimes blooms nearly all winter long. Blooms come in shades of both scarlet and coral pink. The plant multiplies quite rapidly and will fill in any nook or cranny

delightfully. The leaves pop up in early spring and just keep growing, adding texture and interest until the stems emerge and become covered in scarlet or coral pink long-lasting blossoms. If the blooms never emerged you might mistake the plant for a clump of interesting grasses. If you like predictability this plant might frustrate you. You'll never be able to determine from year to year when it will bloom. But when it does, you'll feel it was worth the wait.

Last but not least on the list of fall must-have plants is asters. If a friend offers to share his or her asters quickly accept the offer. Be careful though asters can take over your garden. Just divide them up every year and pass them along to other friends. Asters come in white, pink, every shade of lavender, purple and maroon imaginable and also nearly crimson. Asters bloom profusely and are one of the few plants flowering this time of year. They're perfect in cut bouquets and grow well in shade or sun. Charlotte Recknagle planted clumps of purple asters all along the edge of her lawn forming a hedge of color contrasting against the edge of rows of fir trees. The effect is appealing and striking.

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