



CLIVIAS ON DISPLAY IN THE UNIQUE 'PUFF ADDER' AT BABYLONSTOREN.

CLIVIA COUP

The garden at Babylonstoren is a wonderful place to be at any time of the year, but in spring and early summer it has a special glow when its thousands of clivias come into bloom

text LAURIAN BROWN photography LAR LESLIE

BABYLONSTOREN is one of the Cape's oldest estates, reborn now as a luxurious country retreat with a formal fruit and vegetable garden that has had the world entranced since its unveiling in 2010. But it also has another, completely different horticultural delight to explore.

When Karen Roos commissioned medieval garden expert Patrice Taravella to design the eight acres of formal garden, *clivias* were not part of the plan – until Hans Roos offered his magnificent collection of 7 000 plants as a gift to his sister. Karen found a perfect home for them along the stream that flows on the southern edge of the main garden, where they now flourish in the shade of old oaks and wild olives.

In 2012, Babylonstoren was able to acquire another *clivia* collection, created by Capetonian Mick Dower and regarded by *clivia* devotees as one of the best in the world. It includes all six species and many unusual hybrids selected and bred by Dower over many years.

This collection is all in pots and is displayed in the most elegant and original of shade houses – a slatted 70m-long tunnel of balau wood and steel that snakes through the eucalyptus along

the stream bank. Designed by Patrice and engineered by estate manager Terry de Waal, it is known (a little alarmingly) as "the Puff Adder".

"It eliminates about 40% of sunlight but allows a free flow of air, creating ideal conditions in which *clivias* can thrive," explains head gardener Liesl van der Walt.

"The plants are all in plastic pots that are light to move around. For the display in the Puff Adder we put the plastic pots into terracotta pots. Once flowering is over, they go back into the nursery. We then put one of our other collections, such as berries, in the Puff Adder for display."

This long meander creates a double delight for visitors, who are able to enjoy both the impact of mass planting under the trees and then the detailed beauty of individual plants close up. Many of the hybrids are best enjoyed as pot subjects and it's also the best way to study the differences among the species.

Breeders focus not only on flower form and colour, but also on the foliage. The darker green, shorter and more robust leaves are particularly attractive and make a superb foil for the flowers, enhancing their luminosity.



LIESL VAN DER WALT ON CLIVIA CARE AT BABYLONSTOREN

- Our soil mix in pots is a bark mixed with some Bounce Back fertiliser.
- We water only during summer when the plants are dry. Unfortunately we do not have control over winter rains.

- Clumps in the pots are lifted and divided every two to three years to make sure there is good ventilation between plants. They are then replanted in fresh bark medium.
- At the moment we are not collecting seed,

because our main focus is on flower display. The old flower heads are cut off so that all the plant's energy goes into making flowers, not seeds.



CLIVIAS ARE NOT ONLY GORGEOUS BUT ARE ALSO EASY TO GROW.



HYBRIDS HAVE FLOWERS IN EVERY SHADE FROM PALE YELLOW TO DEEP RED.



COLLECTING CLIVIAS IS A WORLDWIDE OBSESSION.

THE CLIVIA CLAN

There are at present six recorded species of *clivia*, all of which are endemic to South Africa. All possess different characteristics and there are natural variations of form and colour within each species on which breeders draw to develop ever more spectacular, adaptable and varied plants.

- *Clivia miniata* is the best known and loved and the only species with erect flower stems and open trumpet flowers, creating a showy, round flower head.

Native to the eastern regions of South Africa, *C. miniata* grows in large colonies in the partial shade of forests and coastal bush. It flowers from August to mid-November. All the others have pendant, tubular flowers in various shades of pale apricot to deep orange, usually tipped with green.

- *Clivia caulescens* is native to the forests of the northeastern escarpment and grows in light shade on the forest floor or tree trunks. Its pendant flower heads are borne on stems up to 1500mm tall from September to November.

- *Clivia gardenii* grows no more than a metre tall in deep shade in the forests of KwaZulu-Natal and is probably the most drought

tolerant of the species. It flowers from early April to mid-July.

- *Clivia nobilis* was the first species recorded in 1828 and named after Lady Clive. It grows in the dune forests of the Eastern Cape in sandy or shaly areas and blooms from July to early December.

- *Clivia mirabilis* was recorded as recently as 2002. Discovered in Namaqualand, it grows in completely different conditions to other species on canyon walls, in virtually no shade and extremes of temperature. It produces beautiful heads of pendant flowers from late October to late November.

- *Clivia robusta* was long considered a form of *C. gardenii*, but genetic analysis determined it as a distinct species in 2004. It grows in sandy acidic soils along streams and in marshes in the Transkei and KwaZulu-Natal. *C. robusta* blooms from March to mid-July, producing pendant flower heads on 1500mm stems.

- For more information visit babylonstoren.com as well as cliviaregister.com, pacificbulbsociety.org and shieldsgardens.com.

GROWING TIPS

Now is an excellent time to sow clivia seed. Make sure that the berries are absolutely ripe and rich red. Remove as much of the flesh as possible and plant in a large seed tray or pot in a sandy seedling mix, with half the seed exposed above the soil. Keep damp, not wet.



THOUSANDS OF CLIVIAS BLOOM ALONG THE STREAM AT BABYLONSTOREN.

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