At the time of writing (March 1989), the Kirstenbosch Cyrtanthus collection comprises thirty named species and two as yet unidentified species, plus twenty-three F1 (first generation) hybrids. Most of the species are maintained as pot subjects in the bulb nursery, being unsuitable for cultivation in the garden itself due to the excessively wet winters.

It is hoped that in the near future, an experimental area will be set aside in the bulb nursery exclusively for the cultivation of those Cyrtanthus species dependent on the effect of fire for successful flowering, as well as for several other fire-related geophytes like Aristea biflora, Lachenalia montana and Pillansia templemannii.

The Kirstenbosch Collection

Cyrtanthus brachyscyphus: Previously known as C. parviflorus, this bright little species is one of the easiest to grow. The flowers vary in shades of red and orange. It is usually evergreen and does best if left to form thick clumps. Less water is required in winter and the bulbs should be planted with the necks at, or just above ground level. The main flowering period is in spring and summer, but sporadic blooms may occur throughout the year. Potential: container and garden subject.

Cyrtanthus breviflora: The bright yellow flowers of this extremely variable species always command attention. It is usually dormant in winter but may occasionally remain evergreen. It flowers mainly in spring and summer, but sporadic blooms may appear throughout the year. The bulbs should be planted with the necks at ground level. Only the very robust forms of this species are suited to garden culture. Potential: container and garden subject.
**Cytanthus clavatus**: This dwarf, cream or pale pink-flowered species is dormant in winter and does not require any compost in the growing medium. The flowering period is in summer and the bulbs should be planted with the necks just above ground level. Potential: container subject.

**Cytanthus elatus**: Previously known as *Vallota speciosa* and *C. purpureus*, amongst other names, this is one of the most striking members of the genus. Those usually cultivated are the scarlet forms, but there are some equally lovely, but rare pink forms. The complaint is often heard that this species flowers very erratically in cultivation, but some forms are just naturally more floriferous than others. The form usually cultivated by gardeners reproduces vegetatively at an alarmingly rapid rate — the clumps become overcrowded very quickly, and if they are not lifted, separated and replanted on a fairly regular basis, flowering ceases almost completely. I have found that this species prefers quite a sunny spot, and not a full shade position. *C. elatus* is a rather variable plant as regards leaf form and flower size. This is an evergreen species flowering mainly in summer, and the bulbs should be planted with the necks just above soil level. Potential: container subject; garden subject; cutflower.

**Cytanthus epiphyticus**: A very attractive species with pendulous reddish-orange flowers. It flowers in mid-summer, is dormant in winter and requires plenty of compost and good drainage. The bulbs grow with the necks fully exposed. Potential: container subject.

**Cytanthus eucallus**: This floriferous, orange-flowered species deserves wide horticultural attention. It is evergreen, multiplies quickly and requires a shaded position. The bulbs grow with the necks fully exposed and very little compost is required in the growing medium. It flowers in summer. Potential: container subject.

**Cytanthus falcatus**: A beautiful, trouble-free plant. The “shepherd’s crook” inflorescence emerges without warning in late spring and early summer, and is soon followed by the broad, bright green foliage. This is a remarkably tough species which easily withstands moisture during its winter dormant period. The large bulbs should be planted with at least one-third exposed above ground. Potential: container subject; garden subject.

**Cytanthus galpinii**: This dwarf, pink or orange-flowered plant resembles *C. sanguineus* and is very floriferous. It requires minimal compost and rather infrequent watering. It is dormant in winter and flowers in August and September. The bulbs grow with the necks at soil level. Potential: container subject.

**Cytanthus guthrieae**: Few adjectives adequately describe the beauty of this extremely rare species. Fortunately it is not too difficult to grow and with constant attention to avoid over-watering, it flowers faithfully every year in March and April. It is usually dormant.
in summer but may occasionally be evergreen. No compost is required in the growing medium and the bulbs grow with the necks just above soil level. The bright red flowers reflect a golden sheen in sunlight. Potential: container subject.

**Cytanthus herrei**: The decorative evergreen, glaucous foliage is the main attraction of this species. It requires a lightly shaded position and very infrequent watering throughout the year. The huge bulbs should be planted with the neck and about two-thirds of the bulb above ground level. The umbels of greenish-orange, pendulous flowers appear rather erratically in late summer. Potential: container subject.

**Cytanthus dodgesianus**: This floriferous, cream-flowered species is one of the easiest Cytanthus species to grow. It requires minimal amounts of compost in the growing medium, and is dormant in winter. It flowers in mid-summer and the necks of the bulbs should be planted just below soil level. Potential: container subject.

**Cytanthus mackenii**: Probably the most easily grown of all the species. Numerous colour forms exist, and all are delightfully scented. This species is particularly ornamental when different colour forms are grown together in the same container. It likes to remain undisturbed for many years and the bulbs grow with the necks above soil level. Potential: container subject; garden subject; cutflower.

**Cytanthus montanus**: One of the most striking species, producing orange umbels in February and March. This plant requires very infrequent watering — there is nothing quite so irretrievable as a bulb of C. montanus once it has started to rot! It is usually evergreen but needs to be almost bone-dry in winter. The bulbs should be planted with about two-thirds of the bulb exposed above ground level. Potential: container subject; cutflower.

**Cytanthus obliquus**: In flower, this stately plant is impressive in every way: its twisted evergreen, glaucous foliage combines magnificently with the sturdy peduncle or stalk of pendulous, yellow, red and green flowers. It prefers a full sun position with at least two-thirds of the large bulb exposed above ground. It requires much less water in winter and blooms in spring and summer. Potential: container subject; cutflower.

**Cytanthus obrienii**: An evergreen species with red, pendulous flowers. It is fairly attractive and quite a tough plant, preferring to stay in the same position for many years. The bulbs should be planted with their necks just above ground level. It flowers mainly in spring, but sporadic blooms may appear throughout the year. Potential: container subject; garden subject.

**Cytanthus sanguineus**: Ideally suited to cultivation, this variable, very floriferous species is evergreen and blooms in mid-summer. Flower colour varies from bright pink to orange-red and deep red; well grown bulbs often produce two stems each. It requires much less water in winter and must have some shade otherwise plants become stunted. The bulbs should be planted with the necks fully exposed. This species is particularly suitable for hanging baskets. Potential: container subject.

**Cytanthus smithiae**: A deciduous, summer-growing plant with very attractive “corkscrew” foliage. The inflorescences appear promptly in early summer together with the new foliage. This is quite an easy species to grow provided it is kept absolutely dry in winter, and watered rather infrequently in summer. The striped, white or pale pink flowers are rather short-lived. The bulbs grow with the necks just below soil level. Potential: container subject.

**Cytanthus spiralis**: My favourite species. It is very rare in the wild, and one of the most difficult members to cultivate successfully over an extended period. It is usually evergreen in cultivation but needs to be kept almost bone-dry in summer, and given very infrequent waterings in winter. Coarse river sand or gravel must be incorporated into the growing medium and no compost is required. The bulbs should be planted at least half-exposed. The flowering period is mid-summer. Potential: container subject.

**Cytanthus staedensis**: This rare, floriferous plant deserves wide horticultural attention. Its bright, orange-red flowers with their distinctive, dilated perianth tubes are carried on long peduncles or stalks, making it an ideal cutflower. No compost is required in the growing medium which should be kept rather dry in winter. This species prefers a sunny aspect and tends to be evergreen in cultivation. The bulbs should be planted with the necks just below soil level. Potential: container subject; cutflower.

**Availability**

Very few Cytanthus species or hybrids are available from general nurseries. Specialist bulb nurseries such as those advertised in Veld & Flora carry a far wider selection, and a number of species are usually made available at the Botanical Society’s Annual Plant Sale.

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**About the Author**

Graham Duncan, a specialist in the cultivation of bulbs, is a prolific writer in his field. Not only has he written articles for Veld & Flora, Flowering Plants of Africa and the Indigenous Bulb Growers Association of South Africa, but he has also made valuable contributions to The Lichenidae Handbook (Annals of Kirstenbosch Gardens 17) and Spring and Winter Flowering Bulbs of the Cape (1989) by B. J. Jeppe (Oxford University Press). He also co-authored, with N. M. du Plessis, the recent Bulbous Plants of Southern Africa (1989, Taalberg). Graham has been a horticulturist at Kirstenbosch Botanic Gardens for 11 years.