

LACHENALIAS OF THE EASTERN CAPE

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The genus *Lachenalia* is confined to southern Africa and consists of a little over 100 species, the majority of which occur in the winter rainfall region of the Western Cape fynbos. A few species extend from this region into the western parts of the Eastern Cape and one even occurs as far north-east as the Free State. Although the genus is a well known horticultural subject, the Eastern Cape species are mostly unknown in cultivation, and they are generally represented by only a few, rather old herbarium specimens. Eight species occur here, two of which are endemic to the province. Seven species have been introduced into the horticultural trade (all except *L. youngii*) and *L. latimerae* is illustrated here for the first time.

Lachenalia algoensis

By far the largest species in the province, *L. algoensis* reaches 300 mm in height with one or two leaves. The erect flowers vary in colour from pale yellow to pale green. The form from Port Elizabeth is the most striking with purple markings on the peduncle (the main axis of the inflorescence). In the Eastern Cape it ranges from the Knysna District in the west to the Bushman's River in the east, always near the coast in sand soils. The type locality and centre of distribution is Port Elizabeth. The short-lived flowers appear from June to September but most often in August.



Lachenalia bowkeri

L. bowkeri is very variable in size ranging from 50 mm to 200 mm but is usually closer to 100 mm tall. The flowers are sometimes sweetly scented, varying from white to pale green or very pale purple to purple becoming darker with age and sometimes faintly speckled with blue. Two distinct forms occur: the Fish River form is pale purple and the Port Elizabeth form is green and larger and easiest to grow. This species is virtually confined to the Eastern Cape, with only two known collections from the Western Cape. The majority of collections are from the Albany District, with others from the Alexandria and Port Elizabeth districts. Populations are small and localised and plants occur singly or in small groups of two or three in arid areas where plants are often found in silty loams. The flowering period is June to August. (See cover illustration).

Lachenalia campanulata

L. campanulata is usually about 110 mm tall, depending on the amount of shade, with unscented spreading flowers ranging from pure white to red, darkening soon afterwards to purple. There are usually two leaves, occasionally only one. The peduncle is sometimes attractively speckled with red. *L. campanulata* is confined to the mountains of the interior of the Eastern Cape from Graaf Reinet in the west to Matatiele in the east at altitudes from 1 200 to 2 400 m on steep, open slopes. They grow in large numbers, often along wet seep areas. The flowering period is November and December. [Illustrated in *Herbertia* 53 (1998)].

Lachenalia convallarioides

L. convallarioides is approximately 135 mm high, and has a rather lax inflorescence of bell shaped flowers, which are pale pink to white in colour. *L. convallarioides* is rare and is presently only known from a single site in the Albany District near Grahamstown where it grows in sandy soil below a rocky outcrop of Witteberg Quartzite, and historically from a single collection in 1856 from the Mount Arthur Range near Cala. Its long-term survival is uncertain due to active invasion of alien plants only meters from this site. The flowering period is August to October. [Illustrated in *Herbertia* 53 (1998)].

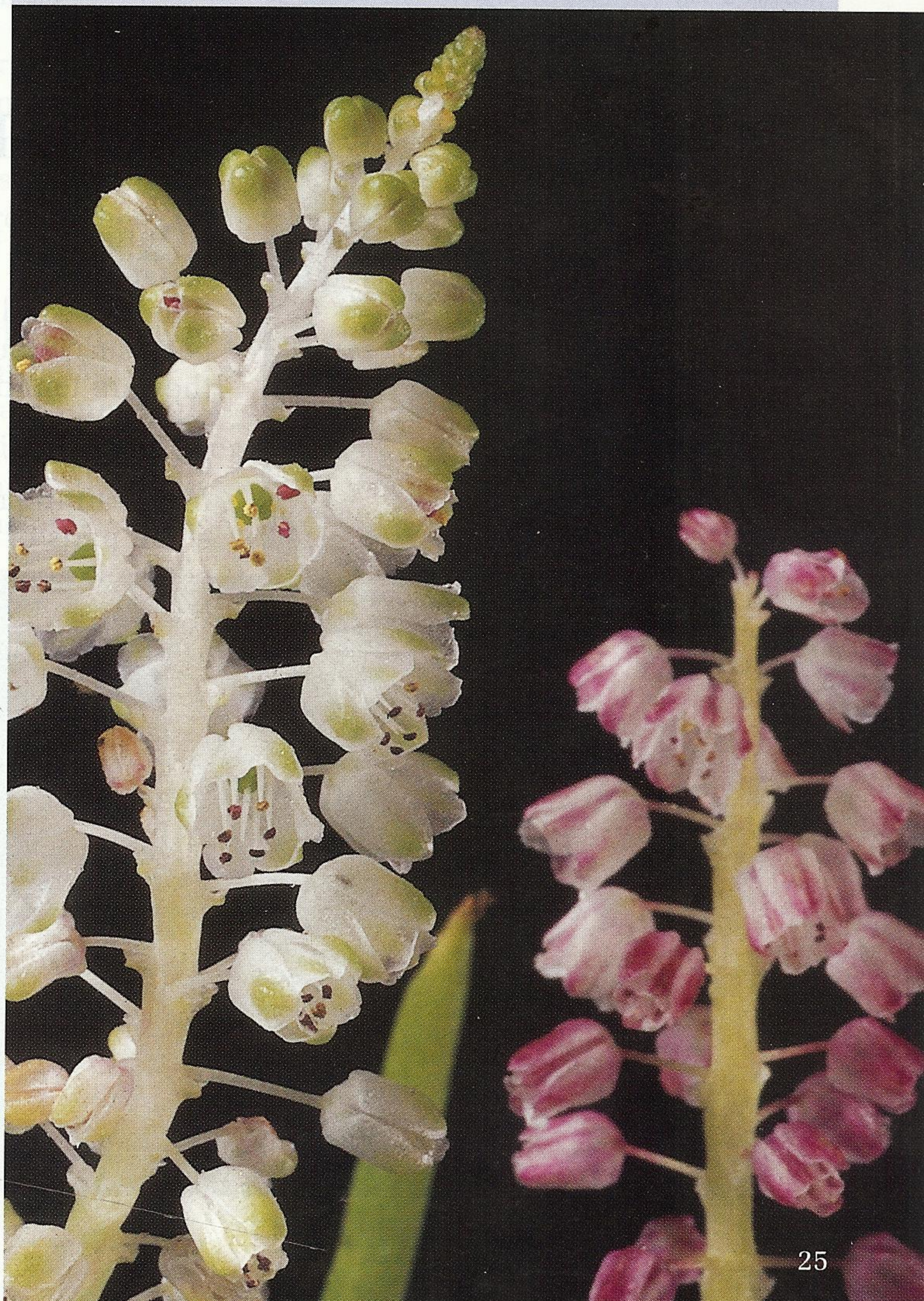
Opposite page. *Lachenalia campanulata*.

Above left. *Lachenalia algoensis*.

Above right. *Lachenalia bowkeri*.

Below. *Lachenalia convallarioides*.

Photos: D. Weeks.





Above. *Lachenalia latimerae*.
Below. The extremely rare *Lachenalia convallarioides*, found only in the Grahamstown area, is not too difficult to cultivate.

Photos: D. Weeks.



Lachenalia latimerae

L. latimerae is usually about 200 mm high but can be up to 300 mm in deep shade where the stems lie on the ground. The bell shaped perianth is pale pink to lilac. *L. latimerae* is found in the Kouga Mountains near Patensie in the Eastern Cape and it has also been collected at the Cango Caves near Oudtshoorn in the Western Cape at altitudes of 320 to 1 000 m. Populations are very localized and are situated on steep south-facing slopes in humus rich soil. The flowering period is from July to September. This species occupies a similar niche to that of *L. convallarioides* with which it appears to have some affinity.

The remaining three species, *Lachenalia karoocica*, *L. perryae* and *L. youngii* are not illustrated here but *L. youngii* can be seen in *The Lachenalia Handbook* by G.D. Duncan (1988) and the other two in *Bothalia* 26 (1996) and *Herbertia* 53 (1998). *L. youngii* is found in the mountains of the south-eastern part of the Western Cape and extends into the Eastern Cape near Humansdorp. *L. perryae* is a Western Cape species with a single isolated record from Kommadagga in the Eastern Cape. *L. karoocica* is known from the northern parts of the Eastern Cape just south of the Orange River. ♀

Further reading

- Dold, T. 1994. *Lachenalia convallarioides* – An 'extinct' species rediscovered in Grahamstown. *The Naturalist* 38(3), 29-30.
Dold, T. & Phillipson, P.B. 1998. A revision of *Lachenalia* (Hyacinthaceae) in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. *Bothalia* 28 (2), (in press).
Duncan, G. D. 1988. The *Lachenalia Handbook*. *Annals of Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens* 17. National Botanical Institute, Cape Town.
Duncan, G. D. 1996. Four new species and one new subspecies of *Lachenalia* (Hyacinthaceae) from arid areas of South Africa. *Bothalia* 26 (1), 1-9.
Duncan, G. D. 1998. Notes on the genus *Lachenalia*. *Herbertia* 53, 40-48.

About the authors

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CULTIVATING LACHENALIA

Cultivating the Eastern Cape species of *Lachenalia* in a typically sandy potting mix has been successful even though they are found in a variety of soil types ranging from dune sands to clay. We grow all species in a free-draining mix made up of equal parts of fine river sand, coarse industrial sand, garden loam and sieved compost to which a pinch of bonemeal is added.

As our species come from extreme habitats, the watering regimes followed are species specific. *L. algoensis* is very easily grown in pots with plants being stored in a cool, dry place for the summer period. Certainly the most beautiful of the species dealt with here, *L. convallarioides* is not difficult to grow as long as its small bulbs receive sufficient moisture when actively growing followed by a

short summer rest and enough light to prevent plants from becoming 'lanky'. This species can be maintained evergreen by keeping the plants moist, but a short rest is recommended. *L. convallarioides* responds well to moisture and is capable of remaining evergreen while bulbs subjected to extreme or prolonged summer dormancy often skip a full growing season. *L. bowkeri* can be difficult to cultivate, as the small bulbs are sensitive to both over watering and prolonged summer dormancy, which results in some bulbs failing to re-sprout. With this in mind, they are best grown under cover, sparingly watered and given only a short mid-summer rest. *L. campanulata* is easy and rewarding to grow and although it prefers a summer rest, plants can remain evergreen with careful watering. ♀