



Crocosmia

We compare the latest varieties and Best Buys to find the most exotic clumps of colour

What we tested for

- **Flowering** Duration and impact
- **Foliage** Impact and shape of plants
- **Seed heads** Whether spent flowers fell away and seed heads were attractive
- **Pests and diseases** Susceptibility to problems

Vibrant and eye-catching, crocosmias convey exotic colour without being difficult to grow, but they're not lovers of hot, dry places, and their South African origins mean they really need moist soil during the summer to flower well. Since it's rare to get a truly dry British summer, that means

they tend to suit our climate very well and can form into large and impressive clumps in a variety of fiery colours. We last looked at them in 2003 and knew that the crocosmia world had moved on a bit since then, so we wanted to know how the newcomers would compare to our existing Best Buys.

What we did

Our list of 26 varieties included the Best Buys from our previous trial (Mar 03) which were C. 'Emberglow', C. 'Lucifer', C. 'Severn Sunrise' and C. 'Spitfire', alongside a range of newer varieties and popular varieties that we haven't tested before.

We planted three potted plants of each variety 10cm deep

at our Capel Manor trial garden in north London, and at the Winter Gardens in Glasgow Green Park. Plants were assessed regularly for the criteria listed above over the course of two summers. Data in the table is taken

from the second year, when plants were mature. Deep planting is often recommended to help with hardiness, so three extra plants of two varieties were planted more shallowly than the trial plants at just below soil level to

see what effect that would have. We also bought three varieties as bags of dry corms from a garden centre, to compare how well they established and flowered, compared with the pot-grown plants that were supplied for the rest of the trial.

Crocosmias in the north and south

The winter of 2012-13 was extremely wet in north London, not particularly wet in Scotland and unusually mild everywhere with very little frost. Consequently, there were no problems with hardiness at either garden and only one variety (C. 'Red King') fared much

worse in Scotland than at Capel Manor. Overall, the flowering period started a week or two later in Glasgow than in north London and was shorter overall, and clumps were generally smaller after two years in Glasgow. Red spider mite, which caused



considerable trouble in north London, didn't appear at all in Glasgow, where the majority of plants were very healthy.

Best Buys These had striking good looks, grew strongly and healthily, and had a long flowering period

C. 'Emberglow'

Statuesque plants

Proving that it deserved its Best Buy status last time, this was one of the best plants in this trial, too. The elegant flower heads were held with poise above vigorous clumps of broad leaves, lasted well, and although the colour was strong, we didn't think it was as gaudy as some crocosmias. It grew quickly into very big clumps, so it would need to be planted where there's room for it to spread.

Height x spread: 135 x 80cm
Peak flowering: Jul-Aug
Price: £8.50
Where to buy: Burncoose Nurseries



BEST BUY

BEST BUY



C. 'Prince of Orange'

Attractive seed heads

This new variety combined attractive clumps of narrow leaves with pretty, long-lasting flowers that developed a pink hue as they matured. The stems were straight and even the seed heads, which on some plants were large and ugly, were small and quite attractive in their own right. This was another quick-spreading plant that would need some room, but would deserve its space as it looked good for a long time.

Height x spread: 120 x 90cm
Peak flowering: Jul-Aug
Price: £5
Where to buy: Trecanna Nursery



C. ‘Saracen’
Long flowering

The dark-leaved varieties are reputed to be less hardy, but the mild winter meant that wasn’t really put to the test during our trial, and ‘Saracen’ flourished, even in Glasgow. The bronze colouring of the leaves and stems, which made a dramatic contrast to the flowers, was carried through to the backs of the petals and the striking display kept going for longer than almost any other in the trial.

Height x spread: 90 x 75cm
Peak flowering: Jul-Sep
Price: £4
Where to buy: Trecanna Nursery



C. ‘Severn Sunrise’
Ideal for small gardens

This previous Best Buy variety made attractively shaped clumps over which the short, but bright, jolly flowers were held in a perky way. Although flowers were on the small side, there were plenty of them and they gave a great display. Plants were daintier than the majority in the trial and, although they grew strongly, they didn’t spread in the way that many did, so would be easier in smaller gardens.

Height x spread: 100 x 70cm
Peak flowering: Jul-Aug
Price: £5
Where to buy: Trecanna Nursery

Recommended

These were also good-looking plants that flowered well, but they had one or two drawbacks compared with Best Buys



C. x crocosmiiflora
‘Emily McKenzie’
Late flowering

This is probably one of the most recognisable varieties, deserving its reputation as its arching flower heads and outward-facing flowers show off the distinctive flower markings very well. It was one of the last to come into flower, with a big flush of blooms on sturdy stems that almost covered the leaves with their fiery display, but it was relatively short-lived, compared with our Best Buys.

Height x spread: 90 x 55cm
Peak flowering: Aug-Sep
Price: £5
Where to buy: Beth Chatto Nursery



C. ‘Tamar Glow’
Well-displayed flowers

The long, arching flower heads of this new variety, bred by the owner of specialist crocosmia grower Trecanna Nursery in Cornwall, looked good in bud and flower, and still looked attractive when the petals had dropped. They were one of the longest-lasting as well, but overall the clumps weren’t as dense as many varieties and the broad leaves had a slightly untidy look that meant we didn’t rate it more highly.

Height x spread: 80 x 70cm
Peak flowering: Jul-Sep
Price: £7.50
Where to buy: Trecanna Nursery



C. x crocosmiiflora
‘George Davison’
Mass of blooms

One of two yellow varieties that stood out surprisingly well among a sea of strong colour. Its lime-green leaves showed the flowers off nicely. Well-shaped and fast spreading, the clumps were covered with masses of flowers for most of the second half of summer. We had problems with spider mite in London that caused rust-coloured streaky marks on leaves and it was noticeably affected in late summer.

Height x spread: 100 x 100cm
Peak flowering: Jul-Aug
Price: £8
Where to buy: Crocus



C. ‘Lucifer’
Early flowering

These were the tallest plants in our trial, with upright stems that hold the vibrantly coloured flowers well above the foliage and show them off to great effect. The seed heads that were left when flowering had finished retained some of the elegance of the flower heads, too. C. ‘Lucifer’ was a Best Buy in our previous trial in 2003, but its size and the speed at which it spreads would make it difficult to grow in a smaller garden.

Height x spread: 120 x 100cm
Peak flowering: Jul
Price: £8
Where to buy: Crocus



C. x crocosmiiflora
‘Buttercup’
Elegant plants

These daintier, paler-coloured plants provided some light relief, and might be easier to match up with other plants than some of the hotter crocosmias. Their simple, elegant charms made them popular at both sites. In north London, they grew and flowered as well as any of the Best Buys, but in Glasgow, they had a slightly shorter flowering period than the best varieties.

Height x spread: 85 x 100cm
Peak flowering: Aug-Sep
Price: £4
Where to buy: Trecanna Nursery

How to grow

Planting

Plant in spring when corms are starting to grow. Plant 5-12cm deep in well-drained but moisture-retentive soil in sun or part shade. Deeper planting (10-12cm) could help to protect corms in frost-prone areas or in soil that dries out in summer. However, our trial plants were planted at 10cm with three extra plants of C. 'Lucifer' and C. 'Spitfire' just under the soil level at both trial gardens. We saw no difference in growth or flowering of the

more shallow plants in the summer, though the winter had been mild. We suspect that planting deeply may not be so crucial in good conditions.

Caring for your plants

Mulch with well-rotted organic matter in autumn, especially in frost-prone areas. Leave dead leaves for winter protection and cut away in spring, taking care of new shoots. Feed in spring with Vitax Q4 or a general fertiliser to aid flowering. If plants fail to flower, overcrowding is



likely. Lift and divide clumps every three to four years in autumn, while soil is still warm.

Pests and diseases

Red spider mites can infect crocosmias. First signs are mottled leaves and very fine webbing, but later rusty-brown streaks appear. In severe cases, leaves can dry up completely and it can kill plants. Spray with a suitable insecticide at the first signs.

Are bagged corms any good?

It's often cheaper to buy bags of dried crocosmia corms at the supermarket or garden centre, but is their quality as good as the potted plants? We bought corms of C. 'Emily McKenzie', C. 'Lucifer' and a bag of unnamed corms. The 'Lucifer' corms grew and flowered almost as well as the potted plants, but 'Emily McKenzie' didn't grow at all, and only a few of the unnamed corms came up and flowered. Check very carefully before buying bagged corms that they are still firm, or pay the extra for potted plants.



CROCOSMIAS ON TEST							
SPECIFICATION	WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE						OVERALL SCORE
	FLOWERING PERIOD	FLOWER IMPACT	FOLIAGE IMPACT	SEED HEADS	WORTHINESS	PESTS AND DISEASES	
'EMBERGLOW' Red	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
'PRINCE OF ORANGE' Orange	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
'SARACEN' Red	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
'SEVERN SUNRISE' Orange/yellow	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
'BUTTERCUP' Yellow	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★
'EMILY MCKENZIE' Orange/red	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★
'GEORGE DAVISON' Yellow	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★
'LUCIFER' Red	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★
'TAMAR GLOW' Orange	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★
'BABYLON' Orange	★★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★
'CARMINE BRILLIANT' Red	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★
'CASTLE WARD LATE' Red/Orange	★★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★
'CORNISH COPPER' Orange	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★
'DUSKY MAIDEN' Orange	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★
'ELLENBANK FIRECREST' Yellow/red	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★
'HELLFIRE' Red	★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★
'HONEY ANGELS' Yellow	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★
'LIMPOPO' Apricot orange	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★
MASONIORUM Orange/red	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★
'OKAVANGO' Salmon/orange	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★
'PAUL'S BEST YELLOW' Yellow	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★	★★★
'SOLFATARE' Yellow	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★
'TAMAR PEACE' Yellow/orange	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★
'ZEAL TAN' Red	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★
'RED KING' Red	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★	★★	★★
'SPITFIRE' Red	★★★★	★★	★★	★★	★★★	★★★	★★

USING THE TABLE The more stars the better. Best Buys are highlighted in red, recommended varieties in blue. **SCORE** Ignores price and is based on: flowering period 20%, flower impact 30%, foliage impact 15%, seed heads 10%, garden worthiness 10%, pests and diseases 15%. Garden worthiness is a subjective opinion