

## Crocuses are welcoming spring

*Simone Collet*



With their fresh colours, crocuses delight our meadows from the beginning of spring like

**The last snowfields have just disappeared and the ravishing corollas of crocuses are already appearing. These fragile stars with fresh colours are announcing spring.**

With their plain, variegated, striped or colour-gradient corollas, these cute little flowers are widespread in our latitudes. They are found in gardens, parks, lawns, rock gardens, or even in pots or planters on balconies and terraces as well as in the undergrowth, along paths and at the foot of trees.

Originating from a vast region of Europe ranging from the Alps to the Mediterranean Sea, crocuses belong to the family of Iridaceae, whose emblem is the royal iris.

### **A variety panel**

There are between 70 and 80 kinds of crocuses in the world and there are a large number of horticultural varieties. Their name comes from the Sanskrit *kunkumann* which became crocus in Greek, which means saffron.

The crocus variety *Crocus sativus* has been known for more than 3,500 years all over the world for the quality of its saffron, which has made the reputation of the producing village of Mund in Upper-Valais (Switzerland); it enjoys a label of origin. Saffron is the most expensive spice in the world. This is easily

understood if one considers that not less than 150 flowers are necessary to produce a single gram of saffron. But what an aromatic power!

One distinguishes the crocuses planted in autumn that bloom in spring and those planted in spring that blooms at the beginning of autumn (*Colchicum*). One of the late varieties of crocuses is indeed the famous colchicum celebrated in the nostalgic nursery rhyme: "Colchic in the meadows bloom, bloom... Colchic in the meadows, it is the end of summer".

However, most crocuses bloom in spring as soon as the snow melts. These early varieties are providential for starving bees and other pollinating insects after the long winter period. By offering them a first supply of pollen and nectar, they allow them to survive a critical period.

### **The plantation**

A place exposed to the sun or weakly shaded is suitable for planting. The crocuses like light but not moisture: as you can easily see, they open to the sun and close when it rains.

The bulbs, also called corms, will be placed at a depth of about 5 cm, if possible in groups of five to ten, separated from each other by about ten centimetres, in order to obtain a harmonious flowering. A simple well-drained garden soil, of which one will have worked the surface by incorporating sand, if needed, is perfectly suitable. If the bulbs are planted in pots or in a planter, the soil will consist of one third of top soil, one third of soil for planting and one third of sand. After planting, cover the soil, pack lightly and then water.

Consequently, crocuses will grow without any fuss and even naturally multiply from one year to another without need to intervene. During the cold season, however, it is good to ensure that the land is not too wet. Care should be taken not to cut the leaves until they are yellowed and wilted, to allow the plant to replenish its reserves after flowering. As for the faded flowers, they are, if possible, gradually eliminated.

### **Beware of predators!**

Crocuses are hardy plants that are valiantly resistant to disease and pests, but can do nothing against the **voracity** of some enemies. Gardeners, beware of mice, field mice and other rodents, which feed on young bulbs without mercy.



*Photos: Simone Collet*