Lachenalia Breeding

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(Translation provided by Helen Marriott of Australia.)

I became interested in Lachenalia over 50 years ago. I was in my late teens when I checked all the pages on bulbs in a horticultural reference book (that was published in Japan for the first time), and there I read an article on Lachenalia breeding. The article/section was written prior to World War I by a horticultural specialist, Mr. Omi Hirose, and I enjoyed reading it. The author wrote about Lachenalia breeding being rare and without parallel in the world. He also introduced some techniques for breeding using mixed pollen. (This breeder also bred Nerine and he thought that his breeding outcomes were probably the best in the world, exceeding breeders in the United Kingdom at the time, but he died during the war.)

At the time when I read about Lachenalia, these bulbs were extremely rare in Japan. I was concentrating on breeding Gladiolus and when my first Gladiolus flowered, I sent cut flowers to a flower exhibition in Tokyo. There I met a Gladiolus breeder and learned that he also had Lachenalia. He only had L. aurea and L. pendula but I strongly requested him to let me have some of his Lachenalia. However, he only sent me seed and these were shiny black and very small. Perhaps it was because I was a beginner, but in the end none of those seed germinated.

A few years later I was able to purchase bulbs of both L. aurea and L. pendula, and eventually I was able to obtain bulbs from the Van Tubergen Company in Holland of L. contaminata, L. mutabilis and L. tricolour. At first I started breeding these bulbs by crossing them together. Some years later I was able to buy species seed from the South African Botanical Society.

Lachenalia has almost 80 species and among these there are many different colour varieties and flower shapes. Some are upright, others are pendulous or half erect, and some are fragrant. They also bloom over
about one-half of the year, from November until the beginning of May in the Northern Hemisphere. The leaves also possess many different characteristics, including cylindrical shapes, broad leaves, pustules on the leaves, and variegated purplish leaves. When we consider all the possible variations in these characteristics, *Lachenalia* breeding can involve an infinite number of combinations.

At the beginning of my breeding I focused upon the breadth of the flowering season, and I saved the pollen of the early flowering varieties in the refrigerator to cross with those which flowered later. However, then I discovered that when the flowers bloomed from March onwards, they tended to be overpowered by other colourful flowers, so now I am concentrating on breeding *Lachenalia* which flower before February.

Any sort of breeding is acceptable for the amateur hobbyist, but from a business point of view, it is necessary to think about various developments, such as breeding the dwarf type as pot plants on the one hand, and ones with long flowering stems for the cut flower market on the other hand. Whether they are dwarf or tall plants, during the long period from the beginning of the growth period until flowering, *Lachenalia* have a real attraction because their array of exquisite leaves and buds makes them look really fresh, unlike any other bulb.

In the case of potted plants, after we despatch them for sale, we have to propagate them again. So now I’m interested in pursuing hybrids to sell as cut flowers instead, and I want to develop a long flowering stem that is over 20 cm tall.

*Lachenalia* is still only a minor bulb, and it is not expensive as a cut flower in Japan, but while breeding them I can continue to propagate them and so continue hybridization of them. *Lachenalia* is one of the few bulbs that flowers in mid winter, and if it’s protected from becoming frozen, it is easy to grow. Furthermore, there is a rare sky blue colour that is not found in other bulbs, and they also have a nice fragrance. *Lachenalia* thus give me inspiration with regard to their future breeding potential.
Fig. 1. Growing area for Lachenalia and other bulbs.
Fig. 2. Lachenalia aurea x Lachenalia tricolor hybrid.
Fig. 3. *Lachenalia carnosa* x *Lachenalia quodricolor* hybrid.
Fig. 4. *Lachenalia roodii* x *Lachenalia rubida* hybrid.
Fig. 5. Lachenalia 'Haru no Kane'.

Fig. 6. Lachenalia aurea x Lachenalia tricolor hybrid.

Fig. 7. Lachenalia 'November Fantasy'.

Fig. 8. Lachenalia tricolor.
Fig. 9. Lachenalia breeding room.

Fig. 10. Lachenalia breeding room.

Fig. 11. Breeding stock of Lachenalia species.

Fig. 12. Lachenalia hybrids.

Fig. 13. Lachenalia ‘Haru no Enbi’. (L. vanzyniae x L. tricolor)

Fig. 14. Lachenalia vanzyniae x Lachenalia viridiflora hybrid.

Fig. 15. Lachenalia ‘November Blue’.

Fig. 16. Lachenalia ‘Yuki Boushi’.
Fig. 17. Lachenalia viridiflora x Lachenalia rubida hybrid.

Fig. 18. Lachenalia viridiflora hybrid.

Fig. 19. Lachenalia glaucina x Lachenalia viridiflora hybrid.

Fig. 20. Lachenalia 'Haru no Hiyori'.

Fig. 21. Lachenalia aurea x Lachenalia tricolor hybrid.

Fig. 22. (Lachenalia alba x Lachenalia bulbifera) x (Lachenalia aurea x Lachenalia reflexa) complex hybrid.

Fig. 23. Lachenalia arbustnotae x Lachenalia tricophyra hybrid.

Fig. 24. Sample of Lachenalia as cut flowers.