

Potje-potting a *Freesia grandiflora*.

There is nothing cold about this gorgeous winter-flowering wildflower!

I find something immensely appealing in this slender, fragile wildflower emerging gracefully from the bowl of a fire-forged iron potjie pot!

How it got here:

With foraging monkeys on the prowl, the patio seemed to be the safest place for this still-in-a-bag bulb where it sat alongside the potjie pot until lunch time when logic hit; pot + plant = pot plant! In inspiration-speak, stylish, fresh, creative even with the little effort that was required; just pick it up and put back down again. Although, as the iron pot is without drainage holes, I squeezed one more step into this creative endeavour and planted the *Freesia* into a plastic container to lift out when watering. I will plant it out into the garden when it is dormant in summer.

Freesia grandiflora, the Large Red Iris, is a resident of thicket, deciduous and rocky woodland in the summer rainfall region, where there is little else to compete with on a bare winter and autumn ground. Against this dry backdrop, the bright red flowers stand out like a lighthouse beacon. I've seen this species twice recently; in the coastal sand forest in Mtunzini up the North Coast, and the Umdoni Forest in Pennington, down the KZN South Coast. In both habitats, the plants were growing in the bright light beneath a thin or bare canopy.

It is a semi-deciduous bulb with bright green leaves 50 cm high, long, flat and growing in a fan-shape from the centre point. Thin but sturdy branching stems grow from the centre, with large, 40 cm flowers crowding at the tips. Colour is bright red to scarlet, with a darker red blotch at the base of the tepals (when the petals and sepals of a flower are almost identical in appearance). Bright orange seeds follow on from the flowers. This hardy *Freesia* is a beautiful garden plant, having no need to be plucked out of the ground and protected from the cold weather – though bushpig do favour the corms. In their natural setting the *Freesia* grows in small colonies, and, in the garden, will eventually form a lovely massed display if left in place through the years.

Plant this water wise bulb in semi- to light shade, in loamy soil. Mulch well to keep soils around them moist. Cut leaves down to ground level only once they have fully died back.

Provincial distribution: Gauteng, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, North West Province, Swaziland and Mozambique to Zambia and southern Tanzania.