

***Galanthus bursanus* – a rewarding garden plant**

I was quite shocked. I was reading about a new snowdrop species in the Kew Bulletin in spring 2019 when it dawned on me: what I'd been cultivating as "autumn-flowering *Galanthus plicatus*" for a few years was in fact *Galanthus bursanus*.

Later I found out that this snowdrop has been known amongst specialists for some time. And, inevitably, seed spread across Europe and North America. So now - though still rare - it is possible to acquire cultivated *G. bursanus*. For those interested in the story and the scientific background to this fascinating snowdrop, I recommend the YouTube film "*Galanthus bursanus*" by Tom Mitchell.

Not everyone is keen on autumn-flowering snowdrops. They seem to be fickle in some environments, requiring good drainage and summer warmth to really thrive. And – like other early flowering snowdrops – extreme cold (without snow) can damage their leaves. You have to choose a location in your garden where trees don't drop huge leaves on the delicate flowers or where profuse perennials hide them. But they are delightful and really lift your spirits when the days get shorter and most other plants in the garden appear to shut down for winter. I have a number of *G. reginae-olgae* and *G. peshmenii* in my garden, planted amidst low ground cover. However, it is *G. bursanus* that I find most fascinating. There are a number of reasons for this:-

Some clones of *G. bursanus* are incredibly prolific, producing huge numbers of daughter bulbs when the location is favourable. As there are still many insects around when it blooms, seed is also set readily. Thus, you quickly get big clumps of this attractive snowdrop. In fact, I think this species has the makings of a "landscape snowdrop"; a snowdrop that can be used to make an impression in large plantings.

Another endearing feature of *G. bursanus* is the amount of variation: the size and shape of the flowers differ greatly. The inner markings vary as well and there are even *G. bursanus* with green tipped outer segments, twin or poculiform flowers. Inevitably, there are now a few (still very expensive) named cultivars around.

G. bursanus is very floriferous and blooms for a very long time. There is always more than one scape per bulb; sometimes there seem to be as many as four or five. But this is difficult to see, as the leaves appear later than the flowers, so there may be a cluster of bulbs producing scapes. The primary scape is always taller than those popping up later. In some clones, the flowers appear spaced over a very long period of time – probably an excellent strategy to counteract adverse conditions. This may be a feature unique to *G. bursanus*. I have seen bulbs (or clusters of bulbs) producing flowers over a period of two months, from late autumn through into January, with wintry spells in between.

With all the difficulties connected with swapping and trading snowdrops across British borders, it may take a little time – but I'm sure *G. bursanus* will be available in the UK in the future. Give it a home in your garden, and I'm sure you'll be as delighted with this snowdrop as I am.

Anne Repnow



A group of G. bursanus in the autumn sunlight



G. bursanus with twin flowers



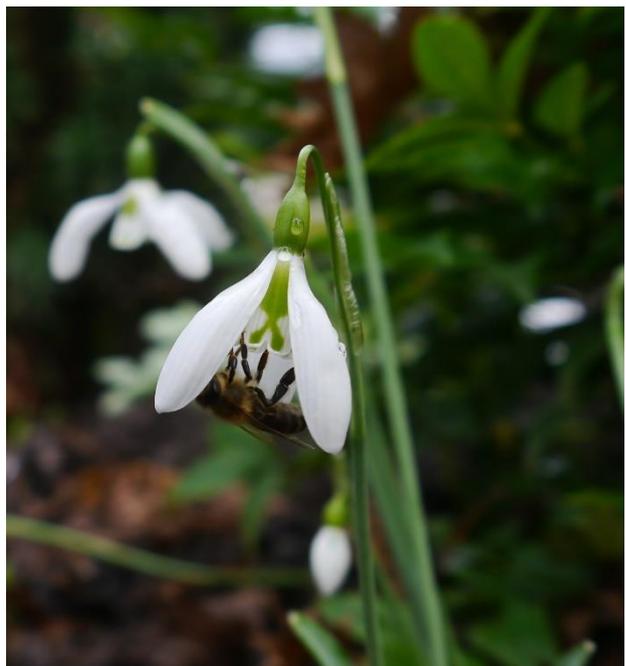
G. bursanus 'Alpha Elhaz' with very slim outer segments



Pleated outer segments picked out by the low autumn sun



G. bursanus with slightly green tipped outer segments



A bee visiting a G. bursanus with inner segments marked with a goldfish-cracker pattern