

Evaluating Clivia Crosses

by [Matt Mattus](#) | [Posted on February 7, 2013](#)



Selected Clivia x Cyrtanthiflora Group crosses, long, tubular blossoms from crosses made between two distinct species of Clivia – *C. miniata*, the common spring – blooming species, and *C. caulescens*, a fall blooming species. Once removed from the plant and set against their kin, the differences can be amazing.



I will assume that most of you are familiar with the typical large-flowers orange Clivia (*C. miniata*) and it's many selections one sees sold, often for exorbitant prices in plant catalogues (especially if they are yellow flowered forms), but there are six of so

distinct species of this amaryllis relative available, and many, many crosses between the species. I encourage you to seek them out on Internet sites, Yahoo groups and on eBay (be careful though with Chinese sellers!), for even seeds of these more unusual forms will grow easily into flowering sized plants within 4 or 5 years – yeah, it's an investment in time and sometimes money, but so worth it.

Right now, you probably are thinking “Heck, I’ve had a clivia for 6 years and it has yet to bloom- what am I doing wrong?”. The truth is, when I kept clivia indoors, I too enjoyed their long, leathery dark green leaves and ease of care, but often found that getting them to bloom, at least on time in March, was challenging. Those of you who live in warmer areas, such as southern California where one can grow these South African natives outdoors, are wondering “what do you mean? Ours bloom every year, on time?”.

Simply said, clivia respond to two things – daylength, day and night temperatures. The idea that they need no water is not true, although it rarely will hurt them, it is doubtful that it will stimulate flowering. Once we moved out clivia outside into the greenhouse, where they experience the sun rising and setting each day, they bloom on a schedule, and they have never missed a year – which leads me to advise that if you cannot get your clivia to bloom, that you should move it to a cool, if not unheated room, where there are not lamps after the sun sets. My plants are wet year round, but I don't advise that you ever keep your plants wet in the winter, for rot can occur. I will say, take your plants outside for the summer and place them in a shady place, so that they can enjoy the rain, and then forget about them until fall. Indoors, place plants under a bright window in the winter (sun is OK in the winter, if not essential), and be wary of throwing off their schedule with light after hours.



A dark pinkish orange form with 4-inch-long blossoms.

If you want to try getting some of these more unusual forms, you can breed your own, for clivia are easy-peasy from seeds. The berries will ripen over a years time, and once soft, you can squish out the large seeds (they look like macadamia nuts), sow them, and in a month or so, a root will emerge and you are off. Clivia are sturdy plants, slow growing – only a leaf or two a year, and plants will begin blooming after 4 or 5 years.

You don't have to be Luther Burbank to practice breeding your own plants, and the genus Clivia offer an easy and fun way to experiment with amateur genetics and flower breeding. For the past 15 years I've been working on the genus Clivia – not really in a serious way (although it may look like it to some), as I don't keep records nor really name any of my crosses, but the results have been found and really interesting to watch bloom. I am an amateur plant breeder, only dabbling here and there with a paint brush, but the results are just as impressive, I believe as the serious breeders get.



Clivia x Cyrtanthiflora Group, lighter because this plant was being grown in a darker setting, under the benches.

Ten years ago, Clivia were very expensive, almost prohibitively so, with some plants selling for over \$1000 US. Today, with eBay and seed exchanges on-line, obtaining an interesting Clivia cross is much easier. Sure, there are expensive clones, and since all good clones can only be properly propagated by division (as micropropagation has remained problematic), the finest forms will remain costly and rare. Most of my plants are either my crosses, or those made in Japan by Mr. Nakamura, whom we visited ten years ago. As many of you know, we once have over a thousand plants. Thankfully, I've been able to cull the collection down to about

200 plants (without Joe even knowing that the boring orange forms get tossed into to dumpster each year).



The trick to crossing spring flowered species with autumnal blooming species? Save the pollens in empty vitamin capsules in the freezer. A little home cryogenetics never hurt anyone.

I try to photograph all of them, as the naked eye seems to miss many of the nuances in each flower. I am amazed at how different each flower can be. Just check out the differences in this week's installation of mid-season blooming plants. These slender, tubular flowers are a form known as Cyrtanthiflora Group, or Clivia x Cyrtanthiflora, and they are the result of crossing autumnal blooming species such as *C. gardenii*, *C. caulescens* and *C. nobilis* with the more common orange wide petaled forms of *C. miniata*. I find it interesting that these clivia bloom halfway between the autumn blooming species (*C. caulescens*) and the spring blooming species, mainly, *C. miniata*.



Close-up photos allow one to examine details such as anthers that extend beyond the petals, or greenish tips on petals.



Evaluating crosses gets difficult, especially when one does not have room to keep them all. This orange sherbet coloured clivia has a solid throat) with no green.



A darker orange form of *Clivia x cyrtanthiflora*

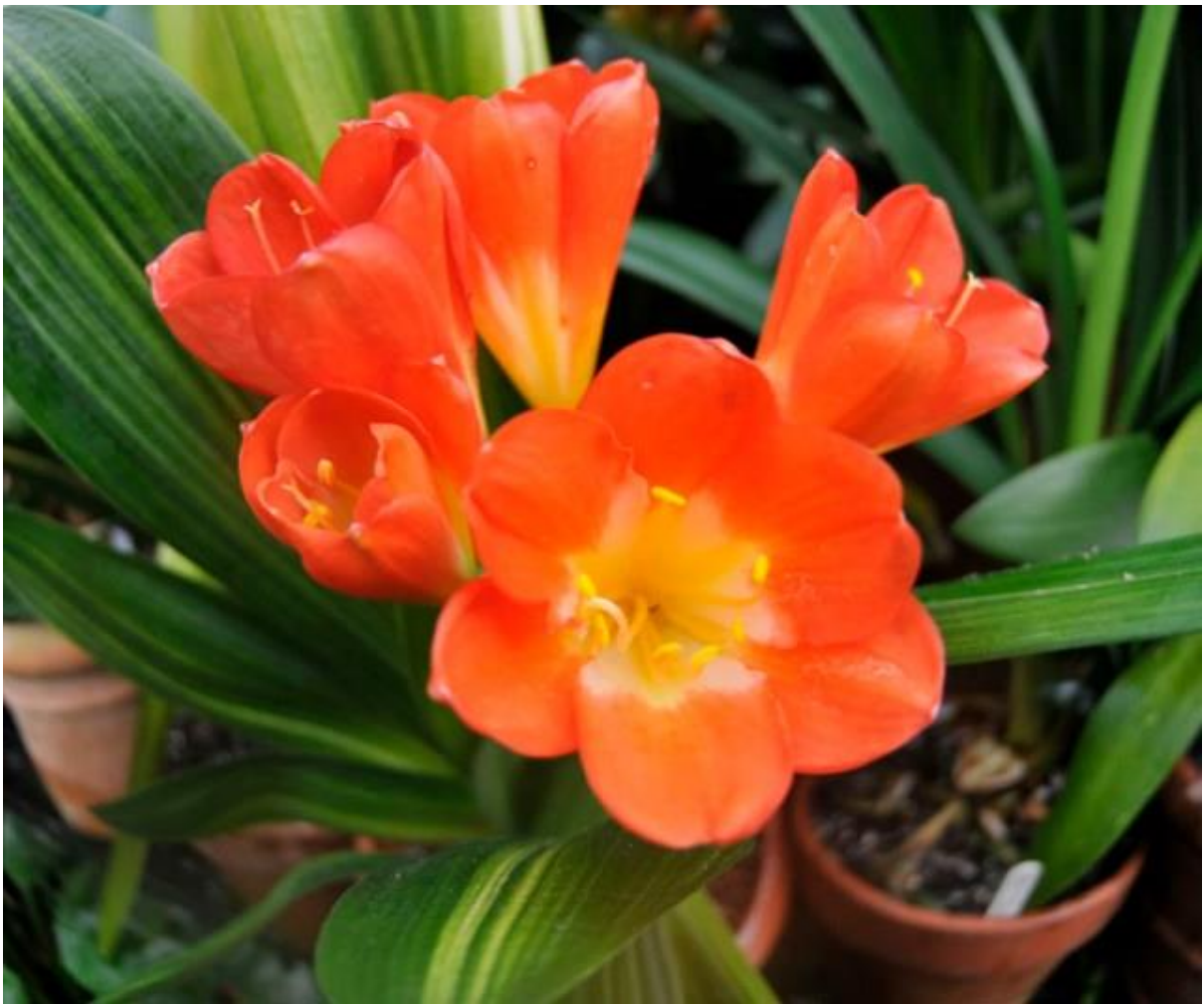


This plant is gigantic, in a 36-inch pot, the flowers are almost as thin as pencils, and very red in the winter sun.

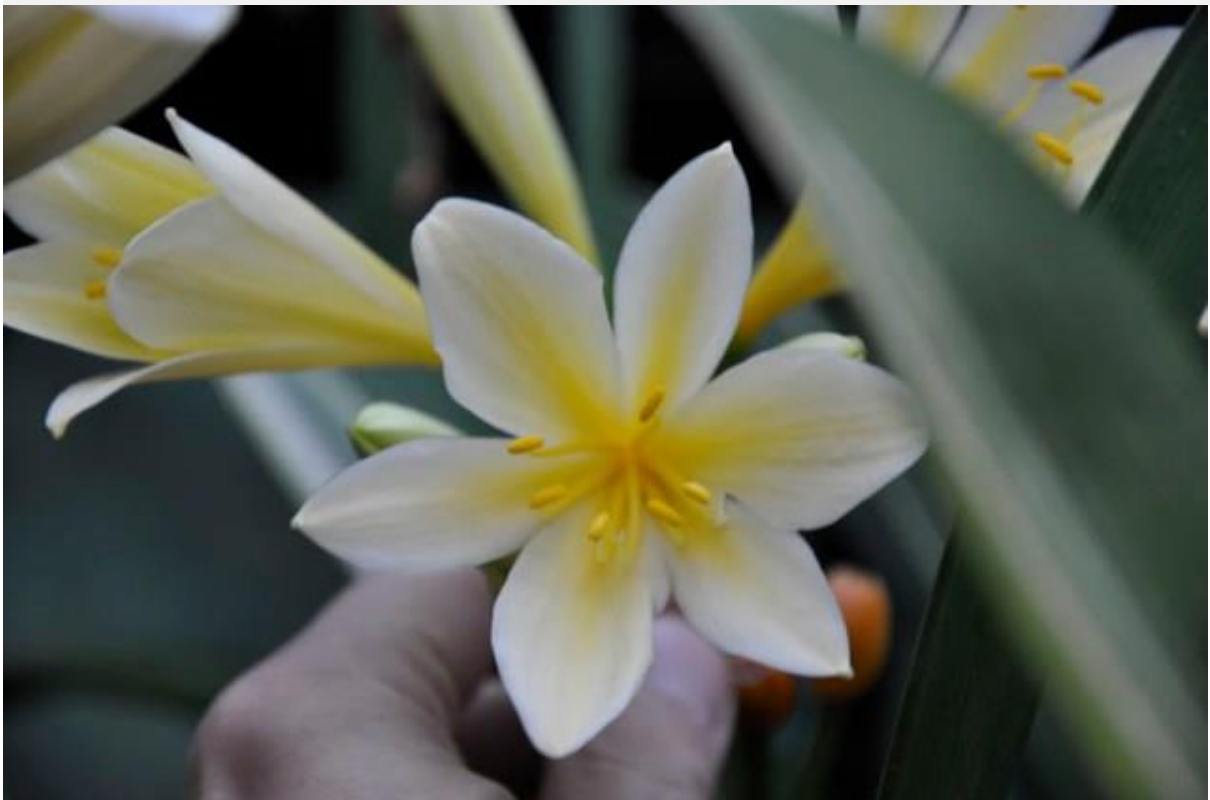


A lovely yellow throated flower reminiscent of some 19th Century varieties.

Here are a few of last year's crosses blooming, worth looking at again, as when they bloomed all together, It was difficult to identify what was different between the forms. Now, with a clear mind, I can see amazing and significant differences. Some of these, I feel, are worth naming and perhaps introducing. But I really have no idea how to do that, and really, will anyone care besides me? Still, with some catalogues selling 'named' clones for \$750. I still believe that many of these are far nicer.



An ordinary looking flower, but nice variegated foliage and did I mention that this is a dwarf plant with very wide leaves, with some as wide as 5 inches.



This is it – the most expensive clivia (valuable, I mean), that I own. It's yellow and variegated. Did I mention that it is fragrant too? Last time I checked, variegated yellow clivia's were selling for \$1500.



My finest yellow, an un-named seedling we call Lady Margaret. The flowers have an widespread, each one wider than 5 inches, and the head is enormous, nearly a foot in diameter. Best of all, this clone is as fragrant as an Easter Lily.