

# Cyclamen Notes

by

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# The Flowers of Atlantis?

By Wilhelm (Bill) Bischoff / member BC Council of Garden Clubs

If you can accept that the island called Santorini in the central Mediterranean, also known as Thira / Tera, is the original Island of Atlantis; if you also can agree that this Island had a terrific volcanic explosion more than 3,000 years ago, than I can share with you an equally fantastic botanical story with you.

That today's Thira is the remnant of an exploded volcano is quite evident when one looks at a map of this region of the Mediterranean. Located as part of the Aegean Islands, just north of Crete, it shows the unmistakable shape of a water filled volcanic caldera with a center-cone island.

Scientists have identified volcanic ash taken from the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea, close to the Lebanese coast, as originating from Thira. The time frame of some 3300 years ago also coincides with the beginning of a rather tumultuous time in this part of the ancient world, the end of the "Bronze Age". The possible cause of that could well have been a natural disaster, in the very heart of the ancient world as we know it.

Now that I have your attention and possibly have whetted your curiosity, let me introduce you to one of the small wonders of this very ancient world, the beautiful **Cyclamen**, all 22 species of them. As the cactus are native to the Americas, so are **Cyclamen** true children of the lands between northern Africa and southern Europe.

**Cyclamen** grow throughout the Mediterranean region, from the extreme west, on the Balearic Islands, north, to southern most France, on to northern Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Austria and the extreme southern mountains of Poland. From there, on to Greece, Turkey, Lebanon and Israel, all the Mediterranean islands and several locations in northern Africa. The most outlying growing areas are the south west coast of the Caspian Sea, in northern Iran and one location in Somalia (Horn of Africa).

When one looks at the area of distribution of **Cyclamen**, the island of Thira is located just about dead center of this area, a possible home of the original parent of all **Cyclamen**. Of course, this is pure speculation and very improbable. That **Cyclamen** grew on Thira before the disaster is highly probable. The plants that grow there now could be survivors of the original plant population or were reintroduced by people when they resettled the island. Studying **Cyclamen** is also a lesson in geography and ancient history, as several species are named for their locations, sometimes using ancient place names. Also, in several locations more than one species can grow.

That **Cyclamen** have flourished in this part of the world for a very long time is quite evident from the remarkable growing habits of these plants. So well adapted are they to the climate of their homes that they have become summer dormant for the most part. Summer dormancy is a rather difficult concept for gardeners of the Canadian west coast to accept. Yes, **Cyclamen** are without leaves and flowers for several weeks, every summer. To make up for this, they are ever-green throughout winter.

We here on the west coast of British Columbia, enjoy a climate that could be considered as medium Mediterranean as far as **Cyclamen** are concerned, warmer than their coldest northern growing areas and cooler than the rather hot islands and northern Africa. In the hottest growing areas, **Cyclamen** grow mostly at higher elevations where they at least enjoy cooler nights. Also our rather dry summers suites them well, as it duplicates the condition of their respective homes. To really make them feel welcome, use only the best draining mix. Lava rock, perlite, # 3 turkey grit (which can be used also as top-dressing), and very course compost. Most important, avoid having them stand in water for any length of time.

In succession, the different **Cyclamen** species will flower from mid January to mid December, with the occasional flower as late as Christmas of **Cyclamen purpurascens**. The dormancy period is a definite adaptation to the very dry and hot summer climate of the Mediterranean. Of the 22 recognized **Cyclamen** species, 18 are hardy enough to be considered out-door plants in western British Columbia. To successfully cultivate these plants, please familiarize yourself with their origin. Plants from north of the Alps withstand longer cold and wet conditions than plants from a hot and dry island.

Most **Cyclamen** are very shade tolerant, to the effect that they can be used to plant under trees and bushes, even under Rhododendron. They are also very pH tolerant, where in extreme cases, a small top-dressing of crushed oyster shells will correct an over acidic condition without harming nearby acid-loving plants. When grown in full sun, expect smaller leaves, but more distinct leaf patterns. Once established in a garden, these plants will surprise one by

where they decide to locate themselves. Just be careful when weeding, as not to rip the seedlings out.

You are most likely familiar with the Supermarket **Cyclamen**, which looks like a shooting-star flower, with the flower pedals bent back and up-ward. The leaves of these plants are very beautifully marked, where no one plant seems to have the same pattern. This is **Cyclamen persicum**, and is not hardy as an outdoor plant. As the name might imply, its home is not in Persia / Iran; rather it originates in north-western Syria and eastern Turkey. These supermarket plants are highly cultivated and inbred, which resulted in gorgeous plants but which are rather susceptible to disease, making home-cultivation difficult. Until you get more familiar with this species of **Cyclamen**, treat them as cut flowers. Their “wild” brethren are vastly different and are very resistant to pests and disease. **Cyclamen persicum** is not reliably hardy even in mild BC, therefore pot-culture is advised. Potted plants of this species can be put into direct sun where you can enjoy their beauty year-round, except for the coldest weeks of the winter. One thing you will enjoy is their almost infinite leaf coloration and patterns. The flowers too offer a good variation of colors.

Most **Cyclamen** are very long-lived plants, therefore it is advisable to seed or plant them where you would disturb them the least. Remember to mark the spot well, as not to dig where they rest during the summer. Seedlings and young plants transplant easily, just about any time, as long as care is taken not to damage the corm and the roots. Any injury can be treated with fungicide such as garden sulfur. Let the damaged area dry for several days and replant.

One can decide to grow these plants because of the almost endless leaf colorations and patterns. I suggest your garden is not large enough to hold them all. The flowers seem all to look alike, except when examined a bit closer. There are both color and shape variations. In fact these differences are one of the keys to identifying different species. The flowering time is also used to place the individual species in its place within the genus. To top it all, several species are very scented. Individual flowers will stay in bloom for more than eight weeks, especially the early blooming kind. When insects are not available for pollination, especially for the species that bloom in the colder times of the year, **Cyclamen** are self pollinating. After the flower is fertilized, the flower stem starts to coil, placing the pod on the ground near the center of the plant. There the seeds take all summer to ripen. Keep an eye on these little coils, and when the seed capsule opens, be fast, otherwise the ants will carry the seeds throughout your garden. Ants eat the sugary coating of the seeds, without doing harm. Don't be surprised when you see seedlings come up anywhere in your garden. There is yet another surprise. Seeds, when taken from a selfseeding pod, will not yield uniform plants, rather, many leaf color variances can be expected. One more reason to seed all available seeds, and wait and wait - oh the suspense!

To be a bit technical, **Cyclamen** are “dicots”, that is plants that germinate with two seed leaves, so the botanists say. **Cyclamen** have two seed leaves, where one only shows above ground. Each seed leaf is a new plant. Bought or harvested seed should be sown as soon as possible, and covered with some two inches of grit, because they prefer to germinate in the dark. Remember to mark the spot well, as some seeds take up to three years to germinate.

**Cyclamen** are mildly poisonous plants, where every part of the plant contains poison. The underground corms, in their native locations are only eaten by pigs. Here in BC, very little damage is apparent throughout the year. Weevils will occasionally take a bite out of a leaf and their larvae will damage part of a corm. Usually **Cyclamen** take care of themselves. During the summer slugs might attack some seed pods; a bit of slug bait will quickly correct their errors. Leaves which have been damaged by either accident or frost might succumb to a fungus attack. Removing these damaged parts or dusting with garden sulfur will overcome this problem.

Considering next January, wouldn't it be a welcome surprise to see some of these Mediterranean jewels beautifying your garden with scented flowers, and continue to do so for many a January to come. Only to be followed by other species throughout their growing season. Especially after a winter storm, nothing will lift your heart and spirit faster than to see these little garden amethysts glowing, above a blanket of glistening fresh snow. No matter what your plans are, to buy plants or to just broadcast seeds at random in to your garden, you will be more than justly rewarded for your efforts. In time you might want to know more about these charming little garden wonders. There is help - just join the **Cyclamen Society** and as a bonus they will send you every year free seeds, where the value of the seeds just about equals the cost of the yearly membership

The web site is at: [www.cyclamen.com](http://www.cyclamen.com).

# Cyclamen Blooming Times

## Winter ( December - March )

**coum** / *extremely hardy*

**elegans** / ( formerly coum ) north Iran, south shore, Caspian Sea / *hardy*

**libanoticum** / *hardy in sheltered areas*

**persicum** ( in the wild ) *not hardy*

**pseudibericum** / *hardy*

**peloponnesiacum** ( syn. repandum ) / in February / *tender - hardy*

**alpinum** ( syn. trochopteranthum ) *hardy*

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## Spring ( March - June )

**balearicum** / from Balearic Islands & southern France / *tender - hardy*

**creticum** / from the island of Crete / *tender - hardy*

**parviflorum** ( occasionally earlier ) small flowered / *hardy*

**repandum** / from southern Europe / *hardy*

**rhodium** / ( related to peloponnesiacum ) from the island of Rhodes – semi hardy

**peloponnesiacum** ( syn. repandum ), *tender - hardy*

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## Summer - Autumn ( July - November )

**africanum (bl)** from 2 places in north Africa / *not hardy*

**cilicium** / from south Anatolia ( Turkey ), historic name / *hardy*

**colchicum** / purpurascens related / from western Caucasus / *hardy*

**cyprum (bl)** from the island of Cyprus / *tender - hardy*

**graecum (bl)** from mainland Greece & islands / *tender - hardy*

**hederifolium (bl)** ivy leafed / *extremely hardy*

**intaminatum** / from south Anatolia ( Turkey ), *hardy*

**mirabile** / from south Anatolia ( Turkey ), *hardy*

**persicum var. autumnale** / Israel, south of Hebron, *not hardy*

**purpurascens (bl)** / northern most growing / *hardy*

**rohlfsianum (bl)** from north Africa / *not hardy*

**somalense** / from eastern Somalia; the horn of Africa / *not hard*

(bl), basal lobe on flower; note: they all flower in late summer & fall.

**Slide presentations are available; call Bill Bischoff: 604-589-6134**

# Cyclamen

## Species, Subspecies, Formas & Varieties In alphabetical order

**africanum** / non

**alpinum** ( syn. trochopteranthum ); forma alpinum; forma leucanthum

**balericum** / non

**cilicium**, forma cilicium; forma album

**colchicum** / non

**coum** , subsp. coum, forma coum; forma albissimum; forma pallidum; subsp. caucasicum

**creticum**, forma creticum; forma pallide-roseum

**cyprium** / non

**elegans** ( syn. coum ) / non

**graecum**, subsp. graecum, forma album; subsp. candicum; subsp. anaticum

**hederifolium**, subsp. hederifolium, forma hederifolium; forma albiflorum. subsp. confusum

**intaminatum** / non

**libanoticum** / non

**mirabile**, forma mirabile; forma niveum

**parviflorum**, subsp. parviflorum; subsp. subalpinum

**peloponnesiacum**, subsp. peloponnesiacum, forma peloponnesiacum; forma albiflorum  
subsp. vividum; subsp. rhodense

**persicum**, var. persicum, forma persicum; forma albidum, forma roseum; forma rubrum  
var. autumnalis; forma punicum

**pseudibericum**, forma pseudibericum; forma roseum

**purpurascens**, forma purpurascens, forma album; forma carmineolineatum

**repandum**, var. repandum, forma repandum; forma album

**rohlfianum** / non

**somalense** / non

# Cyclamen species

**Cyclamen alpinum, syn. C. trochopteranum** is a species in the C. coum group from southwestern Turkey where it grows in rocky areas, deciduous woodlands, and scrub. Flowers occur in spring and vary from pinkish carmine to white with a darker stain around the mouth. The petals are twisted, like a ship's propeller. The leaves are rounded or heart shaped with shallow toothing and silver green markings. This Cyclamen will thrive in a sunny rock-garden.

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**Cyclamen africanum** is very similar to *Cyclamen hederifolium* in appearance, but is one of the least hardy species, whereas *C. hederifolium* is one of the most hardy. It is from North Africa. It blooms in the fall sometimes with leaves and sometimes not. It has pale pink to deep pink flowers with auricles and the flowers arise erect from the tuber. Each petal has a basal purple or crimson magenta V-shaped blotch. It requires a dry summer dormancy, with watering commencing in late summer to fall and continuing through the growing season, and protection from the frost.

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**Cyclamen balearicum** is a species in the repandum complex from the Balearic Islands and south eastern France where it grows in shaded or semi-shaded places, in pinewoods and scrub land. It blooms in spring and has small white fragrant flowers with pale pink veins and leaves that are less lobed than *C. repandum*, with a more grey and marbled pattern. Some of the leaves are silvery grey or silver.

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**Cyclamen cilicium** is a species in the cilicium group that blooms in autumn. It grows from tubers that root from the base. Leaves are unlobed and the pink and white flowers are without auricles. It is easy to grow and flowers prolifically. It is endemic to south eastern Turkey where it grows in the shade and may receive some moisture while dormant during the long, hot summers.

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**Cyclamen colchicum** is found in a limited region of the Caucasus Mountains in woodland on dolomitic limestone. It was once thought to be a subspecies of *Cyclamen purpurascens*, but it has thicker and more leathery leaves with veins sunk into the leaf surface and a finely toothed horny margin which gives it a beaded effect. It has carmine-pink flowers which appear from July to October with the leaves.

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**Cyclamen coum** is one of the hardier species and one of the easiest to grow. It flowers in early winter or spring and is from the mountains of Bulgaria, Turkey and Lebanon, usually in shaded places. Leaf color can be shiny green or silvery or have silvery-green zones as in the leaves pictured below.

**Cyclamen coum ssp. coum** has kidney-shaped to rounded leaves with untoothed or slightly toothed margins. Flowers are small with white eyes at the base of the petals.

**Cyclamen coum ssp. coum forma albissimum** has pure white flowers without any markings. Collected in Israel at the 'Golan Heights', has plain, unmarked leaves.

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**Cyclamen creticum** is a native of Crete where it is found in open rocky places or under bushes. Heart-shaped leaves are toothed and dark green splashed with silvery markings and flowers are usually white or occasionally pale pink and fragrant. This species is tender and blooms in the spring..

**Cyclamen creticum forma pallide-roseum** is the name used for pink-flowered forms of this species.

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**Cyclamen cyprium** is an autumn flowering species with white fragrant flowers from Cyprus where it grows mostly in mountain woodland. It has corky tubers that root only from the base. The leaves are lobed and olive green marked or splashed with grey, green or pewter. The thin small flowers are auricled with a purple or magenta “M”-shaped mark at the base of each petal.

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**Cyclamen elegans syn. Cyclamen coum ssp elegans** is a species in its own right, but closely related to *C. coum*. It has heart-shaped leaves that are marbled above usually with a hastate pattern. Both the leaves and the larger flowers are much more pointed than other *Cyclamen coum*. The flowers are mid pink with a darker pink blotch. It is from Northern Iran where it grows in forests at low elevations, near the Caspian Sea. It is rare in cultivation and probably less hardy.

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**Cyclamen graecum**. This interesting and charming autumn-flowering species forms an entity of its own, with several characters that are unique to the genus. The species *Cyclamen graecum* is grown for its autumn flowers as well as for its handsome and often striking foliage, which comes in a great range of patterning and colouring. It is native to southern Greece, the Greek Islands, southern Turkey and Cyprus and blooms from September to November and has pale to deep pink flowers with 3 magenta pencil-line streaks at the base of each petal and auricles around the mouth. The tuber is globose and corky and fleshy roots come from the center underside. *Cyclamen* leaves change even in the same season (but also from season to season as the plant matures). The populations of **C. graecum** on the Mani Peninsula in the Peloponnese region of southern Greece are notable for large flowers and leaves and strong coloration. As an interesting BTW, Mr. Christopher Grey-Wilson mentioned in his *Cyclamen* book that in the Autumn of 1992 he was in the company of Jack Elliott whilst leading a Field Studies Council expedition to the Peloponnese. The previous day he said they had been remarking that the pure white *C. graecum* seemed to be extremely scarce, and that it must be pure luck to come upon one. The following day, on the outskirts of Gythion, the first and only white *C. graecum* was spotted, but they never saw another one like it in the following ten days, search as they might.

**Cyclamen graecum ssp. anatolicum** is found in Turkey, Rhodes, and Cyprus. It has leaves with beaded and lobed margins, sweetly scented white to pink flowers with poorly developed auricles and a basal blotch that is more solid and does not usually extend along the veins..

**Cyclamen graecum ssp. candidum** is from the White Mountains of Western Crete. It has smaller white, sometimes flushed with pale pink, flowers above compact dark, pointed foliage that is often intricately marbled and reddish purple or crimson beneath.

**Cyclamen graecum ssp. graecum** is found on mainland Greece and some of the Islands. It has ovate leaves that are green or grey-green and pink flowers with well-developed auricles that are mostly unscented and marked with a basal blotch that extends along the veins. Its flowers appear above, or before the wonderfully patterned leaves.

**Cyclamen graecum ssp. graecum forma album** This beautiful white flowered form of *Cyclamen graecum*, is an exquisite plant, and as easy to grow as the normal pink ones. A good plant can produce in excess of 100 blooms and is a truly arresting sight in full flower. This rare white flowered plant was only found in 1980 in the Greek Peloponnese. It has been stated that this particular species requires a long summer baking in order to perform well and a warm, secluded and sheltered site should be chosen.

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**Cyclamen hederifolium** is one that is most easily grown. It is easy to grow in sun or semi-shade and is one of the hardier species. Its flowers are produced in late summer to autumn just before the leaves. Photos one, two and three are by Arnold Trachtenberg. Photo four is by Angelo Porcelli, taken in habitat in Apulia, Italy. Photos five, six and seven illustrate some of the wonderful leaf patterns of this species, illustrations of fabulous foliage taken by Bill Dijk.

**Cyclamen hederifolium var. confusum** is a tetraploid variety which occurs in the southern extremities of the species range. This variety has bright green leaves with a poorly defined hastate pattern that are shallowly lobed with obscure marginal teeth.

**Cyclamen hederifolium var. poli** is a rarely seen form or variety of this very variable species. Its sagittate leaves are the main feature, and it is reported to have scented flowers, too. First records of this curious variant were made in the early nineteenth century by Michele Tenore and other Italian botanists. It was formally named by Stefano Delle Chiaje, (1794-1860), whose name is spelled Delle Chiaie in modern Italian. Funny, at that age someone speculated it was a hybrid with *Arum italicum* !

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**Cyclamen intaminatum** comes from western Turkey, where it grows mostly in deciduous woodland sites. It is one of the smaller species so is usually grown as a container plant, even though it is winter-hardy down to at least 20 degrees F. The plants shown were grown from seed and are four years old from sowing. These plants have plain green leaves, but marbled leaves are also known.

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**Cyclamen libanoticum** comes from a very small area in Lebanon. Its affinities within the genus *Cyclamen* are open to debate. This is the first bloom on a batch grown from seed (February 2005). Photo one by Jim Shields. The second photo is by John Lonsdale

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**Cyclamen mirabile** is an autumn blooming species very similar to *Cyclamen cilicium*. It is found in woodland and hilly rocky places in southwest Turkey. It has pale to deep pink flowers with toothed petal lobes and a stain around the mouth. The heart-shaped leaves, which appear about the same time as the flowers have a hastate pattern in grey-green, cream or silver and scalloped margins. Sometimes the new leaves are flushed pink.

**Cyclamen mirabile 'Tilebarn Nicholas'**, a selection from Peter Moore, has leaves with a green tree shaped center surrounded by a silver band. The young leaves have a pink tinge that fades with time.

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**Cyclamen peloponnesiacum syn. Cyclamen repandum ssp. peloponnesiacum** from the Peloponnesian Peninsula of southern Greece has silver splashed leaves or sometimes speckled leaves and pink flowers with a deeper carmine- base. It is one of the last species to break dormancy for me, sometimes not until March. The leaves are heart shaped. It self seeds freely. Grow it in a sunny location.

**Cyclamen persicum** is the species used for all the large-flowers cultivars that are available for purchase. It is from the eastern Mediterranean where it grows in open rocky areas and in scrub. It blooms in winter or early spring with fragrant plain white, white with a carmine mouth, or pinkish carmine flowers. Leaves are variable.

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**Cyclamen pseudibericum** is a very attractive species from Turkey. It has purplish carmine large fragrant flowers with a dark stain around the mouth and a white rim. The heart shaped leaves have toothed margins and sometimes are beautifully marked with silver and green.

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**Cyclamen purpurascens** is the only evergreen Cyclamen. It is native to mountain woods and rocky places in the eastern Alps. Flowers appear from late summer to late autumn and are pale to deep carmine and do not have auricles around the mouth. It is nicely scented, but not as easy to grow and flower as some of the other species. It benefits from being kept cool and not allowed to dry out in summer, being planted deeply, and being well mulched. I have to watch my plants for mites which hasn't been much of a problem with the other species I grow. The first photo was taken by Mary Sue Ittner and the second by Hans Joschko. He wrote: These plants grow without any problems in my garden from many different locations: Lake Lugano (Italy), Lake Garda (Italy), the woods near Vienna (Austria), Savoyen (France), Istria (Croatia), and Lake Plitvice (Croatia). Photos three, four and five are by John Lonsdale.

**Cyclamen purpurascens** forma album is a white form that has only been found in the wild a few times over the years. Photo by Hans Joschko who writes: "I have two of this really rare plant, and I hope that it multiplies well in the future."

**Cyclamen purpurascens** forma carmineolineatum named by P.A.H. Hendrikx in 2000 is a new form that closely resembles C. purpurascens forma album Grey-Wilson. It is distinguished from the latter by the presence of a distinct carmine zone around the mouth. Photo from Hans Joschko who writes: "I have found only one plant of this type in a large population of Cyclamen purpurascens in the French Alps (Savoyen) opposite Mt. Blanc."

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**Cyclamen repandum**, a species from southern Europe is one of the last species to break dormancy for me, sometimes not until March. The leaves are heart shaped with a narrow and deep sinus making them almost triangular. They are angled and lobed and often toothed. Flowers often appear with or soon after the leaves and are white to pale or deep pink, often with a pink or purplish red zone around the mouth, or carmine magenta or reddish purple. Petals are sometimes twisted.

**Cyclamen repandum** ssp. repandum grows in dappled shade in leaf litter, rock crevices, or at the bases of trees. Leaves are green with a grey-green or silver hastate pattern, but without flecking. Flowers are carmine-pink or carmine-magenta. Grown from seed not designated by subspecies, this plant seems to fit the description for this subspecies.

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**Cyclamen rohlfsianum** is the most tender species, originating in Libya. It is autumn flowering and has large lobed leaves that are usually wider than long and are deep green with silver patterns. The flowers are distinctive as they have a protruding cone of stamens. The tubers are large and uneven and the flower stalks coiled from the base upwards as in C. graecum.

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