

IT LOVES ME, IT LOVES ME NOT

Judy Pollitt

Some time ago, as Programme Secretary for the Spetchley Gardeners' Society, I arranged a tour of the gardens at Spetchley Park, led by the late Mr John Berkeley and Miss Juliet Berkeley. It was early June, and I was fascinated to see spreads of a bright red tulip, about 12 inches tall, with green/bronze outer petals. On enquiring, I was told that this was *Tulipa sprengeri*, the latest-flowering tulip of all, and that they would only grow for you if they liked you. Well, they obviously liked the Berkeley family and I wanted them to like me too.

T. sprengeri was originally discovered growing near Amasya on the 'Pontic coast' in northwest Turkey, but is now believed to be extinct in the wild. Introduced into Europe in 1892 by Muehlendorff, a German botanist living in the Amasya region, it is now widely grown in cultivation. It is named after Carl Sprenger, a German nurseryman whose Naples-based business, Damman and Company, first marketed the bulb.



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Tulipa sprengeri is a lively addition to the spring border

T. sprengeri is frost hardy down to -10°C but, like many bulbs, it demands good drainage, especially through the winter months. An added bonus is that it will happily grow in grass. It can be grown from seed at any time of the year, but the seed needs to be frosted in order to germinate.

Armed with this information, and having been presented with some seed, I set about growing them myself. The germination rate was good and they are still growing slowly in pots, but have yet to produce a flower. It seems they can take up to 4 - 5 years to flower. I live in hope.

Last year I was given some bulbs, potted singly. I stood the pots in position around the garden, only to find when I went to plant them out the next day that the squirrels had paid a visit and devoured them all. *T. sprengeri* have contractile roots, i.e. they pull themselves down in to the soil and can be quite difficult to dig up. I did not feel I could ask the kind donor for more. A request in the Worcestershire Group Newsletter, however, produced bulbs from two members. All have bloomed and, thanks to their generosity, I was able to enjoy the sight of their shiny green leaves

and lovely star-shaped flowers for almost three weeks.

As the flowers died away, copiously filled seeds pods formed. I managed to save most of the seed for autumn sowing but some has been allowed to fall to the ground, which will hopefully germinate naturally. Love, love me do!



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The papery seedpod of *T. sprengeri*

❧ *First published in the Worcestershire Group Newsletter, Autumn 2018* ❧