



# Gleanings

a monthly newsletter from The Gesneriad Society, Inc.

(articles and photos selected from Chapter newsletters, our journal GESNERIADS, and original sources)

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Welcome to the sixth issue of **Gleanings**! This issue of **Gleanings** includes an article and photos from Ruth Coulson on hybridising *Sinningias* and an article about dividing *Sinningia* tubers from Dale Martens. Thanks also to Alan LaVergne for providing the information on *Sinningia richii* 'Robson Lopes'.

Hope you enjoy **Gleanings**. Mel Grice, Editor

*Sinningia richii* has been around a long time, but only in a white-flowered form. Since its point of origin was misreported as Mexico, few people looked for it in Brazil, the home of most other *Sinningias*. However, Robson Lopes did go looking. Not only did he find it, he also came across a form of *Sinningia richii* with yellow flowers.

*Sinningia aggregata* and *Sinningia amambayensis* have yellow-flowered forms. I have not seen them, so I can't compare their yellows with this one. The cream-colored flowers of *Sinningia conspicua* are sometimes overgenerously described as yellow.

The genuine yellow of *Sinningia richii* 'Robson Lopes' is a great addition to the *Sinningia* repertoire and a promising asset in the hybridizer's kit. Plants raised from this seed show some variation in flower size, color intensity, and spotting (some have red spots on the exterior of the flower).

Unfortunately, *Sinningia richii* is a difficult plant to grow for many of us. Mildew is the most serious obstacle, and the yellow-flowered form is just as vulnerable as the normal one. For more details, laments, and pictures, consult *Sinningia* & Friends, at

<http://www.burwur.net/sinns/4ricMain.htm>

Comments and photo provided by Alan LaVergne



*Sinningia richii* 'Robson Lopes'

# Hybridising with Sinningias

Ruth Coulson <[mrcoulson@iprimus.com.au](mailto:mrcoulson@iprimus.com.au)>  
Balcolyn, Australia

My main gesneriad interest is the middle-sized and larger Sinningias. Although I was growing some earlier, I became really interested around 1990 when I was given some seedlings of *Sinningia iarae*.



Selection of hybrids flowering in the shade house

This species was so easy to grow, so responsive and had such abundant flowers that I was inspired to acquire more of the genus. It was only a short step from there to collecting and then hybridising. A friend started that particular ball rolling by crossing *Sinningia iarae* with *Sinningia cardinalis*, *Sinningia cardinalis* 'Innocent' and *Sinningia cardinalis* 'Skydiver'.

The resulting plants all looked the same. The growth habit was tall and upright, with each stem displaying a large quantity of flowers well above the leaves. This was a modified version of the *Sinningia iarae* species itself, but the flowers were all in an apricot/orange. So I began to wonder if it would be possible to cross it with other species to extend the colour range. I envisioned a whole race of Sinningias in a colour range that included not just the reddish pink of *Sinningia iarae* and the apricot/orange of these hybrids, but a pure rich pink, a light pink, a strong red, lavender, yellow, and a pure crystalline white. And that, of course being in plants with what I viewed as the desirable qualities of the initial hybrids – strength, heavy flowering which repeated over a long period, and durability in a garden situation. The introduction of these other species has of course led to a modification of the growing habit, but not, I believe, to the value of the plants.

My early hybrids all featured *Sinningia iarae* since it is such a good performer for me. The results were all rather large plants. I grow many of these plants in a shade house. The “overflow plants” grow right outdoors, often planted in the garden. I am fortunate that they mostly seem to be quite happy in the climatic conditions here. They will grow and flower in almost full sunshine, in semi-shade and sometimes in heavy shade. Their dormancy is very short. They are quite resistant to damage from heat and drying wind.



Above an unnamed white-flowered hybrid involving *Sinningia cardinalis* 'Skydiver', *Sinningia macropoda*, and *Sinningia iarae*.

Right *Sinningia* 'Fantasia', a hybrid made some years ago, but only recently named. *Sinningia conspicua* is one of the parents.



So, have I achieved my goal? Well, not yet. I have plants of a similar growth habit with flowers in all the possible shades of orange, pink through to red and white. There are also some with beautiful flowers, but not with the desirable toughness for garden growing.



This hybrid has *Sinningia iarae*, *Sinningia cardinalis*, *Sinningia cardinalis* 'Skydiver', *Sinningia macropoda*, *Sinningia bulbosa* and *Sinningia conspicua* in its background.

In addition to *Sinningia iarae* and all the forms of *Sinningia cardinalis*, I have used *Sinningia conspicua*, *Sinningia eumorpha* and its hybrids, *Sinningia glazioviana*, *Sinningia macropoda*, *Sinningia lineata*, *Sinningia leucotricha*, *Sinningia bulbosa*, *Sinningia globulosa* and *Sinningia nivalis*. All of these seemed to me to have some qualities I wanted: colour or size of flower, growth and flowering habit and suitable flowering season. Despite crossing back to *Sinningia conspicua* repeatedly, I have not achieved a yellow flower on this kind of plant. Perhaps that will be around the corner next year.

While looking for stunning plants, I have still come up with what I think are some stunning flowers. Along the way I became distracted by going after calyx-double and peloric flowers. I am still looking for really good large peloric flowers but am still pondering the value of calyx-doubles for outdoor growing. While the calyx-double flowers are more long lasting and showy, they require being hand "dead-headed" where the singles are self-grooming to some extent. Many calyx-double peloric flowers don't survive too well in overhead watering or rain, although they make splendid pot plants in protected cultivation.

An odd thing has happened along the way. While I don't mind large showy plants, I have found over the last few years that my hybrids have become smaller and more compact. *Sinningia* 'Golden Trumpets', my best ever peloric-flowered hybrid, is an example. It grows only around 200 mm (8 inches) tall, and would, I think, be good under lights. Selfing of this plant has so far produced others that behave similarly, not all with such desirable flowers.

Those duplicate and unwanted seedlings have done well in the garden. They seem to need the garden bed to be well drained which is hardly a surprise. If a wide colour range of plants of this kind could be achieved, I feel they would have great garden merit in a warm climate like mine.



*Sinningia* 'Golden Trumpets'

My present project is to actually try some of the best of the hybrids as a grouping in the garden. I planted seeds of suitable crosses last summer and the resulting plants are just breaking dormancy again now in late winter. They will be mature enough to plant out in a month or so. I will be interested to see how well they look massed together. I suspect my main difficulty will be in keeping caterpillars, snails, and birds at bay.



*Sinningia* 'Melody' is a strong growing and heavily flowering calyx-double plant.



*Sinningia* 'Wildfire' — one of my first peloric hybrids, is a very heavy flowering and sturdy plant suitable for garden use.



Crossing *Sinningia iarae* with a calyx-double *Sinningia cardinalis* type plant produces some truly stunning plants.



This hairy peloric-flowering plant has *Sinningia globulosa* in its background.

Photos courtesy of Ruth Coulson



Both the peloric and calyx-double forms of flower are combined here.



*Sinningia* 'Dancing' is a complex hybrid that enjoys growing in sun.

# Dividing Sinningia Tubers

Dale Martens <dalemartens@mchsi.com>  
Sherrard, Illinois, USA

What I'm about to say is from my own experiments and others may have had different experiences. You have to make sure there are a couple of different growth areas on the Sinningia tuber. See the photo showing two areas of new sprouts on one tuber. Cut between those with a sharp knife. Some people let a callus form on the cut areas



by leaving it out in the open on a shelf for a while, but I don't because often the little sprouts wilt terribly, particularly on micro or miniature Sinningias. I plant them immediately with moist perlite on the wound area.



What surprises me is how large those micro-miniature Sinningia tubers can get! Often, I see there are partial formations of tubers with sprouts, but checking them later, they haven't formed anything that can be separated except with a knife. So when there is a large bump area with a sprout, I can remove that (if what is removed will be at least the size of a pea) and place it in very moist perlite in an enclosed container. I put moist perlite around the base of the

sprout, too. The thing is, you need some of that old rough outer "skin" area in order for it to work. I'm not sure what that's called, but if it were a potato I'd call it the peel. The roots come out of the top layer or "skin". So when you cut the tuber, make sure you get plenty of skin layer area on at least one side of the sprout, but it's best if there is skin surrounding the sprout.

In the past, I've cut up a gigantic *Sinningia* tuber to experiment. The roots came from the skin not from the starchy callus area. The last photo I included is a miniature *Sinningia* that had no roots coming out of the starchy callused area when I checked it a couple of months later. The roots were coming out on the side with the original outer skin intact.

I happen to love to eat raw potatoes without putting salt on them, so I tasted a *Sinningia* tuber. Not tasty at all. Not sweet either. I'm sure a lawyer would say I have to announce, "**Don't try this at home**" because you may have an allergic reaction! I taste various gesneriad nectar quite a bit out of curiosity, but wasn't allowed to announce that in my AV Magazine Gesneri-Advice column years ago because it was suggested someone might have an allergic reaction... and I agreed to omit that. Therefore, you're at your own peril eating tubers and tasting nectar! I understand some gesneriads are considered hallucinogenic and some are used for medicinal purposes, so do think twice before smoking, eating, or tasting any of them. I happen to be allergic to a specific *Nautilocalyx* and broke out in blisters on my fingers. A friend in Sweden alerted me since she gave me seeds from her plant. She asked if I had any reaction to touching the plant and I said I got blisters. She did, too. I gave a friend *Primulina tabacum* and he got blisters.



Adapted and reprinted with permission (original post on Gesneriphiles Internet Discussion Group.)  
Photos courtesy of Dale Martens



*Sinningia richii* (white form)  
grown by Mel Grice

**From the editor —**

The fall shows will soon be here and I can't visit all of them. Please continue sending photos and articles. If you have suggestions, comments, or items for possible inclusion in future issues, please feel free to contact me at

[editor.gleanings@gesneriadsociety.org](mailto:editor.gleanings@gesneriadsociety.org)

Mel

Consultants Peter Shalit  
Jeanne Katzenstein

Internet Julie Mavity-Hudson  
Communications Paul Susi

Newsletter Mel Grice  
Editor 2019 Crosswind Ct.  
Englewood, OH  
45322 USA

[editor.gleanings@gesneriadsociety.org](mailto:editor.gleanings@gesneriadsociety.org)

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Paul Susi, Development Chairperson  
117-01 Park Lane South, Apt. C1A, Kew Gardens, NY 11418  
For additional information, contact: <development@gesneriadsociety.org>.

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The Gesneriad Society Membership Secretary, Bob Clark,  
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