

Flowering Cape Bulbs from the UC Irvine Arboretum

These specimens are from the UC Irvine Arboretum's collection of "Cape Bulbs." The UC Irvine Arboretum is a botanical garden developed and managed by the School of Biological Sciences. It contains areas planted with floras adapted to climates similar to those of Southern California including a large collection of plants native to South Africa.

Along the western margin of southern Africa lies a relatively narrow expanse of land encompassing the south-western Cape and Namaqualand. It is here that one of the richest, most diverse and colorful bulbous floras in the world has evolved. Sandwiched between the blistering plains of the Karoo and the icy waters of the South Atlantic, the whole region experiences a Mediterranean-type climate where hot, dry summers alternate with mild winters when the rains fall and growth begins.

Some of the bulbous inhabitants of the Cape have been domesticated and 'improved' to such an extent that genera like *Freesia*, *Gladiolus*, *Ixia* and *Lachenalia* in their cultivated forms are far removed from their country cousins in the veld. These have been the standard bearers that have gone out into the world's gardens where they are now established as familiar items in horticultural commerce. Others are not well known outside their natural habitats. These two flowering Cape bulbs from the family *Iridaceae* are part of the UC Irvine Arboretum's collection.

Hesperantha have a small fibrous-covered corm with a flattened base. Four to five deciduous leaves grow in two ranks up to 10 cm, partly sheathing the stem. Blossoms form on a lax spike. Flowers display a slender perianth tube with spreading petals in white, pink, purple or yellow, some with blotches, and some with darker color on the reverse side of the petals. The fruit is a capsule of small, brown seeds.



Hesperantha vaginata

Hesperantha vaginata, grows in heavy clay soils. Its blossoms may form simple or branched arrangements with one to four flowers on a spike rising up to 18 cm. Flowers are golden yellow and distinctively marked with black or dark brown. They flower in August/September, opening in mid-afternoon and closing at dusk. They can be found in Nieuwoudtville and Calvinia.



Babiana rubrocyanea

Babiana have deep-seated corms which are thickly covered with fibrous tunics. Stems and leaves are usually hairy. Deciduous leaves form in two ranks, usually strongly ribbed or pleated. Flowers are often fragrant and colorful, with long slender perianth tubes with equal or unequal petals. The three lower petals are variously marked or blotched. Fruit is a capsule of shiny, hard seeds.

Babiana rubrocyanea has common names, like winecups, winecup babiana, red and blue babiana, kelkiewyn, and rooibloubobbejaantjie. This distinctive species grows in gravelly clay soils at low altitudes. Leaves are five to seven and velvety, extending up to 12 cm. Up to ten blossoms may form on a simple or branched spike, rising up to 20 cm. Flowers are deep cornflower-blue, usually with a crimson center. It flowers in August/September and is distributed throughout Piketberg to Paarl and Stellenbosch.

Source: *Spring and Winter Flowering Bulbs of the Cape* by Barbara Jeppe, Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1989