

# A survey of *Digitalis* hybrids

GRAHAM RICE catalogues all known hybrids between *Digitalis* species and outlines their origins and ornamental qualities

IT IS PERHAPS SURPRISING that, until recently, the best known *Digitalis* hybrids were those created at the John Innes Horticultural Institution back in the 1920s and 1930s. Foxgloves are popular and easy perennials and biennials, with a wide range of heights, growth habits, and flower colours and markings.

With such variety in wild *Digitalis* species, many opportunities exist to create gardenworthy hybrids bringing together features from individual species.

## Early crosses

Earlier experiments claim to have yielded flowering hybrids between *D. grandiflora* and *Sinningia speciosa* (gloxinia), the first of which was discussed and illustrated in *The Botanic Garden* magazine (1834–35) as Campbells's hybrid foxglove. Alexander Campbell was curator of the Manchester Botanical and Horticultural Society's Garden. However, these two species are in different families. The claimed cross is highly unlikely and his plant was probably the result of inadvertent pollination by another *Digitalis*.

The first true *Digitalis* cross, between *D. purpurea* and *D. grandiflora*, was by CF Gartner in 1849, but his and most subsequent efforts produced sterile seedlings.

The first breakthrough came with the creation of two tetraploid hybrids at the John Innes Horticultural Institution. These were *D. × mertonensis* and *D. 'John Innes Tetra'* and have remained popular. Genetic incompatibilities between species have limited the success of hybrid pollinations, and difficulties in propagation have often prevented successful crosses becoming widely grown.

*Digitalis* Goldcrest ('Waldigone') was created by British breeder David Tristram in 2001

## Modern developments

With the recent popularity of the Illumination Series and an upsurge of introductions from Europe and North America, this is an appropriate time to survey *Digitalis* hybrids that have been created and grown over the years. Advances in tissue culture facilitate the propagation of plants that cannot be increased by traditional means and the development of sterile, seed-raised hybrids enables breeders to keep control of, and so earn valuable revenue from, seed-raised cultivars.

*Digitalis* are relatively appealing for non-professional breeders, and many hybrids have been developed by gardeners or small nurseries such as the short-lived, but very active, Europa Nursery. The flowers are large and easy to pollinate and each pollination produces a significant amount of seed – more than 300 per capsule in some cases. Also, the flowers are protandrous and, as the lowest flowers on the raceme open first, flowers producing ripe pollen and those with a receptive stigma can easily be distinguished.

## A breeding resource

Plants of many of the hybrids discussed here are no longer grown, but they were created once and can be created again. This account therefore provides a reservoir of ideas for current breeders. Information on the validity of hybrid binomials can be found in Wijnands & Belder (1980).

One group of plants that will be not discussed here, but which are surely of hybrid origin, are those that feature yellow-flowered individuals, such as Excelsior Group and Foxy Group, and yellow-flowered cultivars such as 'Primrose Carousel' that are usually listed under *D. purpurea*.

James Armitage, RHS horticultural taxonomist, has looked into this. I



*Digitalis x mertonensis*, known as strawberry foxglove, is an early hybrid dating from 1924

support his conclusion that with repeated backcrossing on to *D. purpurea*, all features of *D. lutea* except the yellow colour have slipped away. It therefore seems practical to continue to place them under *D. purpurea*.

## Breeders

The John Innes Institution led the way in breeding in the 1920s and 1930s. The short-lived Europa Nursery, run by Tim Branney and Adam Draper from about 1999 to 2004, introduced a number of ground-breaking hybrids although most are now lost. In recent years Charles Valin at Thompson & Morgan has created many impressive hybrids, both vegetatively propagated and seed-raised, with more on the way. The Dutch breeder Maarten van der Sar of Takii Europe has been active in developing foxgloves of all kinds, especially seed-raised cultivars.

There are several other breeders and we can look forward to seeing more introductions, including some described by their breeder as 'giant foxgloves', soon.

## ■ 'Ashdon Glory' (*D. x mertonensis* × *D. lutea*)

This was developed by Kevin Marsh

at Beeches Nursery, Essex, using the same parents as 'Glory of Roundway'. It was closer to *D. x mertonensis* with larger, baggier, deeper pink flowers but still with the smaller, puckered mouth of *D. lutea*. Fertile, in isolation it bred reasonably true, but the mother plant died and second generation plants were too variable for sale, and division was not viable.

## ■ 'Butterfingers' (*D. davisiana* × *D. purpurea* f. *albiflora*)

Created by Bob Brown of Cotswold Garden Flowers nursery, Worcestershire, and introduced by him in 1996, this looks like a short (75cm), stocky form of *D. purpurea* f. *albiflora* with its ghostly spotted white flowers tightly packed on the stem and opening from yellow buds.

In 1999 Europa Nursery introduced three unnamed crosses derived from 'Butterfingers' (with *D. ferruginea*, *D. laevigata* and *D. obscura*) but their commercial availability was fleeting.

## ■ 'Callisto' (John Innes Tetra' × *D. purpurea*)

Introduced by Europa Nursery in 2001, but available only briefly, they believed it to be the best of their hybrids. It was said to be perennial and have multiple stems, densely packed with large flowers of cherry red externally, aging to deep pink, and pale primrose yellow internally speckled with tiny crimson spots and faintly netted with gold veins.

## ■ *D. canariensis* × *D. obscura*

Considered, when it was listed without a description by Europa Nursery in 1999, as an intergeneric cross with what was then known as *Isoplexis canariensis*.

## ■ *D. x coutinhoi* (*D. purpurea* × *D. thapsi*)

This plant has rarely been in

cultivation but is known in the wild from the Tagus River basin, in Portugal. A plant entered as '*Digitalis thapsi* dark-flowered' to a recent *Digitalis* RHS trial was probably this hybrid. It resembles a better branched *D. purpurea* with a more open look to the racemes due to the longer pedicels inherited from *D. thapsi*. In the trial it flowered for a long time and narrowly missed out on an AGM.

■ *D. × ditellae* (*D. ferruginea* × *D. lutea* subsp. *australis*)

■ **Dobbie's hybrids**

The result of crossing *D. × fucata* Lutz hybrids with *D. purpurea* 'Giant Shirley', these were vigorous with large, white flowers spotted in chocolate. They were developed by Dobbie & Co, what was then a Scottish seed company.

■ **'Dropmore Yellow'**

Raised by Frank Skinner of Manitoba, Canada, in the 1920s or 1930s, Graham Stuart Thomas, in *Perennial Garden Plants* includes it under *D. × mertonensis*. Skinner (1966) reported that it was a cross between *D. ambigua* and *D. orientalis*, both now synonyms of *D. grandiflora*.

■ *D. dubia* × *D. grandiflora*

Created by BH Buxton in 1932 at the John Innes Horticultural Institution (Buxton & Dark 1934), the flowers were pale pink with a tinge of yellow, somewhat longer than either of the parents, but not so broad, and sterile. The reciprocal cross was less successful and yielded little seed.

■ *D. dubia* × *D. purpurea*

Also created at the John Innes Horticultural Institution (Buxton & Dark 1934), large quantities of fertile seed were produced from this and



*Digitalis* 'Dropmore Yellow'

Graham Rice / Gardenphoto.com

the reciprocal cross. The resulting plants were intermediate between the parents although rather hairy and tending to early maturity (as in *D. dubia*) but closer to *D. purpurea* in height. Plants resulting from the reciprocal cross tended towards *D. purpurea*. All were sterile.

■ **'Electrum' (John Innes Tetra)**  
× *D. purpurea* f. *albiflora*

Introduced by Europa Nursery in 1999 and available for just one year, this was a large (1.2m), vigorous plant bearing large, square flowers of pale creamy primrose, variously marked with yellow and brown.

■ *D. ferruginea*  
× *D. grandiflora*

Listed without a description by Europa Nursery in 1999 and then by Blackwater Plants from 1999 to 2002.

■ *D. × fucata* (*D. lutea* × *D. purpurea*)

Warren (1924) experimented on this hybrid in Natal, obtaining fertile backcrosses. The hybrid occurs occasionally in the wild where the ranges of the parents overlap. It seems likely that *D. lutea* is the origin of the yellow colouring seen in many

mixtures and groups sold under the name *D. purpurea*.

● *D. × fucata* 'Aurora' (*D. lutea* × *D. purpurea* 'Suttons Apricot')

Introduced by Europa Nursery in 1999, as *D. × purpurascens* 'Aurora', but available only briefly. The flowers were clear primrose yellow within and flesh-pink without. Plants were sterile but sufficiently vigorous to be propagated by division.

● *D. × fucata* **Foxy Series**

This name has been given to a series of three hybrids raised by Barry Fretwell, best known for Clematis breeding, at his Peveril Nursery in Devon and introduced by nearby Churchill's Nursery. Originally they were named 'Claire', 'Miranda' and 'Victoria' after the daughters of John and Jane Henry who ran Churchill's Nursery.

Later, Fretwell passed plants to David West of Fromefield Nurseries and Plants To Plant who, unaware of their earlier names, arranged for them to be tissue-cultured under the names 'Foxy Apricot' ('Miranda'), 'Foxy Pink' ('Claire') and 'Foxy Purple' ('Victoria'). Choosing to



*Digitalis* × *fucata* 'Victoria'  
(syn. Foxy Purple)

David West



*Digitalis* × *fucata* Lutz hybrid

Eise Katherine Kohnen / RWS Herbarium

name these three hybrids Foxy was unfortunate. The name Foxy Group had already been well established for a seed-raised mixture of short, first-year-flowering forms of *D. purpurea*. It is uncertain when the original names were published but the Foxy names are probably illegitimate because the name was already in use for the related plants, and also because they were not the originator's preferred names.

All three of these sterile, repeat-flowering, long-lived perennials feature glossy, dark green foliage and 60cm, one-sided spikes of small flowers that are delicately spotted in the throat. 'Claire' ('Foxy Pink') is pink on the outside, primrose within and not self-cleaning. 'Miranda' ('Foxy Apricot') is pale primrose-peach. 'Victoria' ('Foxy Purple') is dark pink outside, paler pink within and self-cleans well.

#### ● *D. × fucata* Lutz hybrids

Derived from a chance hybrid (Mottet 1919), seedlings were selected over four generations by Lutz and commercialized in the 1920s. Variable, the flowers were described as having shades of pink, salmon and cream. They were entered into the 1954 RHS trial of *Digitalis* but no award was given.

#### ● *D. × fucata* 'Mother of Pearl'

A self-sown seedling arising in the New Zealand garden of Derrick Rooney in the mid 1990s (Rooney 2007), this has small, bluish pink flowers fading to cream in hot weather. It was reliably perennial for at least 10 years.

#### ● *D. × fucata* 'Pink Chapel'

Reliably perennial, and about 1.2m tall, this narrow, dark green, almost evergreen, basal leaves. From May to August it produces apricot-pink flowers with flared creamy mouths spaced all around the stem.

#### ● *D. × fucata* 'Red Skin'

Developed by Ray Brown at Plant World Seeds, Devon, this fertile hybrid has drifted towards *D. lutea* over generations and is in need of reselecting. The flowers are basically yellow, streaked red on the top, pale yellow and rather hairy within, and with a pattern of dark reticulations.

#### *D. × fulva* (*D. ferruginea* × *D. grandiflora*)

Often quoted as *D. grandiflora* × *D. purpurea*, whose correct name is *D. × mertoniensis*, most references

relate to this. Bob Brown described the true *D. × fulva* as like a poor *D. viridiflora*.

#### ■ 'Glory of Roundway' (*D. × mertoniensis* × *D. lutea*)

This attractive and popular, relatively long-lived perennial features branched racemes of sterile dusky pink flowers, flared at the mouth to reveal the paler, sometimes creamy primrose, lightly but distinctly spotted throat. The slightly greyish foliage makes vigorous clumps which can be divided with difficulty although tissue culture has given this plant a wide circulation. It arose as an 80cm, self-sown seedling in the garden of John and Sarah Phillips at Home Covert near Roundway, Devizes. Popular with bees, it produces nectar but no pollen.

#### ■ Goldcrest ('Waldigone') (*D. obscura* × *D. grandiflora*)

Above neat, glossy evergreen leaves this short, upright, densely bushy plant flowers in June and July. With up to 10 flower stems per plant, each crowded raceme is lined with up to 30 peachy yellow, bell-shaped flowers with orange and red tints and faint reddish reticulations in the throat. It was created in 2001 by plant breeder David Tristram.

#### ■ 'Hill Grounds' (*D. lanata* × *D. ferruginea* or *D. purpurea*)

With a long flowering season from May to November, the flowers are cream on the outside, streaked and speckled in reddish purple, and primrose yellow inside with a reticulated pattern and white reticulated lip. It was found by Janet Cropley who suspected *D. ferruginea* as the second parent and named for her garden by Bob Brown, who suspects the second parent is *D. purpurea*, which



Judy White / GardenPhotos.com

seems more likely.

Cropley also discovered a *D. lutea* × *D. × mertonensis* hybrid which was sent to White Flower Farm in Connecticut but did not survive.

■ **‘John Innes Tetra’**

(*D. grandiflora* × *D. lanata*)

This is a robust, fertile, tetraploid form of a hybrid raised at the John Innes Horticultural Institution in 1926. It combines the flower shape of *D. grandiflora* with the markings of *D. lanata* to provide white-lipped flowers which are yellow outside and in with darker veins, and with reddish tints on top of the flowers.

■ **Knee High Series**

Three dwarf, sterile cultivars make up the most recent series from Charles Valin at Thompson & Morgan, initially in three colours. At 50–60cm they are shorter than the similar ‘Lucas’ and ‘Martina’ and well-branched with many side shoots and a long flowering season.

- **‘Knee High Blush’** has pale lavender-pink flowers with white throats spotted in purple.

- **‘Knee High Hot Pink’** has purplish pink flowers, the white throats densely marked in large and small spots.

- **‘Knee High Cream’** has primrose buds that open to pure white flowers with beige spots in the throat.

■ ***D. laevigata* subsp. *laevigata***

× *D. obscura*

Listed as available from Europa Nursery in the 1999 and 2000 editions of the *RHS Plant Finder*, but not catalogued.

■ ***D. lanata* × ‘John Innes Tetra’**

Listed in the past by B&T World Seeds and described as a biennial to 80cm with bronze flowers.



*Digitalis* ‘Knee High Blush’ (Knee High Series)

Thompson & Morgan

■ **‘Lucas’**

One of two, sterile, seed-raised hybrids, the other is ‘Martina’, developed by Dutch breeder Maarten van der Sar. Well-branched plants reach about 70cm, the flowers on the side shoots opening at the same time as those on the main spike. The leaves are relatively small and the flowers vivid purplish pink, contrasting with the white interior. It was named for the breeder’s son.



*Digitalis* ‘John Innes Tetra’

Carol Sheppard / RHS

■ ***D. lutea* × *D. × mertonensis***

The John Innes Horticultural Institution reported their work with this cross in 1934. They made the cross both ways, raising nine strong, sterile seedlings in which *D. lutea* was dominant. Plants with *D. lutea* as the seed parent tended to have short flowers without red tints, plants with *D. × mertonensis* as the seed parent tended to have larger flowers with some red tints.

■ ***D. × macedonica***

(*D. viridiflora* × *D. laevigata* subsp. *graeca*)

This was originally regarded as a wild species when named (Heywood 1951) from a herbarium specimen collected in 1937 by EK Balls and W Balfour Gorlay in Macedonia, Greece. It was soon suspected that it was a hybrid and this was confirmed at Europa Nursery around 1999 when the cross was re-made and the resulting plants matched the type description. The reciprocal cross failed. The nursery described it as a perennial to 90cm with marked, copper-bronze tubular flowers and leaves intermediate between the parents, being broadly strap-shaped and lightly toothed. The leaves and stems were both stained dark red at the base.

■ **‘Martina’**

One of two, sterile, seed-raised hybrids, the other is ‘Lucas’, developed by Dutch breeder Maarten van der Sar. With dark, 1m stems and slightly silvered leaves, the flower spikes are longer and more slender than those of ‘Lucas’. The flowers are a more definite pink and with crimson spots on a creamy throat that become white as the flowers mature. It was named for the breeder’s wife and he especially recommends it as a border plant.



Digitalis 'Martina'

Tim Sandhill / RHS

### ■ *D. × mertonensis*

#### (*D. grandiflora* × *D. purpurea*)

Known colloquially as strawberry foxglove, this hybrid was the subject of much work by BH Buxton and a succession of colleagues at the John Innes Horticultural Institution. He first succeeded with this cross in 1924 (Buxton & Newton 1928), raising 50 seedlings with *D. purpurea* as the seed parent, but none with *D. grandiflora* (known then as *D. ambigua*) as the seed parent. Self-pollination of one of the seedlings yielded 96 flowering plants identical to their parent of which 75% were highly fertile. Genetic analysis revealed that the fertile plants were tetraploid as a result of chromosome doubling, and came true from seed, while the sterile plants were triploids.

It performs well in many gardens, although not always on clay soil, and is never long-lived.

● *D. × mertonensis* 'Raspberry Rose' Awarded an AGM after the 1992 RHS trial, it was described then as: 'Cream flushed with strong purplish pink, throat moderate purplish red speckled with cream'. This does seem distinct from the usual form of *D. × mertonensis*. It was developed by K Sahin Zaden, now part of Takii Europe, but is no longer listed.

● *D. × mertonensis* 'Raspberry Rose' is unlikely to be a distinct cultivar as the term 'raspberry rose' is often used as a description for the flower colour of the hybrid.

● *D. × mertonensis* 'Strawberry Fayre' is probably not distinct from the typical hybrid.

● *D. × mertonensis* 'Strawberry Summer' has vivid purplish-raspberry coloured flowers heavily speckled with large and small crimson spots, each ringed in white. The origin is uncertain; it is possibly a backcross of *D. purpurea* on to *D. × mertonensis*.

● *D. × mertonensis* 'Summer King' is noted by Jelitto Seeds as a synonym of *D. × mertonensis*, but very pale-flowered plants are sometimes seen under this name. It was described in the recent RHS trial as multi-stemmed with flowers held well on the spike and self-cleaning.

### ■ *D. × mertonensis* × *D. obscura*

Reported on by Buxton & Dark (1934), they doubted the identity of their plants of *D. obscura*. They raised



Digitalis 'Polkadot Petra'

Thompson &amp; Morgan

14 seedlings but all died before flowering.

### ■ *D. × mertonensis*

#### × *D. purpurea*

Buxton & Dark (1934) reported that this backcross produced sterile, triploid offspring. A further backcross with *D. purpurea* produced mostly plants that were small-flowered and weak.

### ■ *D. nervosa* × *D. purpurea*

This was described by Bob Brown as a perennial to 1.3m with candelabra flowerheads in June and July with small, red-stained, off-yellow flowers.

### ■ Polkadot Series

This a series of six seed-raised, sterile, long-flowering hybrids developed by Charles Valin at Thompson & Morgan from selections of *D. purpurea*, *D. × mertonensis* and 'John Innes Tetra'. All tend to have rectangular mouths to their flowers and reach about 90cm in height.

● 'Polkadot Pandora' has reddish orange buds opening to flattened peachy flowers with upturned lips and faintly spotted apricot throats.

● 'Polkadot Penny' has apricot-pink flowers with crimson-centred gold spots in the throat.

● 'Polkadot Petra' (syn. 'Leopard Skin') has hairy stems, foliage and flowers, the last being strawberry pink on the outside and cream, heavily speckled with crimson, within.

● 'Polkadot Pippa' has raspberry-pink buds with upturned lips, opening raspberry pink on the outside and pale yellow and lightly speckled within.

● 'Polkadot Polly' has apricot buds opening to flattened, peachy flowers with a few dark speckles in the throat.

● 'Polkadot Princess' has ▶

crowded racemes of rich, purplish pink flowers patterned with crimson-centred gold spots in the throat. It is perhaps the most robust of the series.

■ *D. × rhodopaea* (*D. lanata* × *D. viridiflora*)

■ ‘Smyles’ (*D. lutea* × *D. thapsi*)

Developed by Ed Bowen at Opus Plants in Rhode Island, USA, by crossing the two most reliably perennial species, he reports that the flowers are almost the size of *D. purpurea*. The buds are vivid yellow and open to rosy pink flowers which tend to cream on the outside. It is reminiscent of ‘Glory of Roundway’, but with much larger flowers. Smyles is the nickname of Bowen’s son, Myles.

■ ‘Spice Island’ (John Innes Tetra) × *D. laevigata*)

This cultivar has long, crowded spikes to 75cm in height on wiry, dark red stems. These have white-lipped, rusty apricot flowers, each with a reticulation of mustard coloured veins towards the back of the throat. The flowers are sterile and open from June to September. It was selected in 1998 from seedlings derived from a 1995 cross by Heather Wilson of Stroud, Gloucestershire.

■ *D. × ujbelyi* (*D. lanata* × *D. lutea*)

■ *D. × valinii* (*D. canariensis* × *D. purpurea*)

The name recognises the work of Thompson & Morgan plant breeder Charles Valin in creating this hybrid and the Illumination Series (Armitage 2015). His work was preceded by the University of Reading in the late 1990s, but they did not consider their hybrids to be



*Digitalis* ‘Spice Island’

Carol Sheppard / RHS



*Digitalis × valinii* ‘Berry Canary’

Walters Gardens



*Digitalis × valinii* Foxlight Plum Gold (‘Takfoplgø’)

Ball Horticultural Company

of horticultural value.

Currently there are three series available, or becoming available. As well as Illumination Series there is Foxlight Series, developed by Maarten van der Sar, and ‘Berry Canary’ from Hans Hansen at Walters Gardens in Michigan, USA.

In North America cultivars of this hybrid are marketed under the pseudogeneric name of *Digiplexis*. This unhelpful approach, implying that one parent, *D. canariensis*, is still an *Isoplexis*, hyperbolizes a breeding achievement which needs no over-exaggeration. Also, the fact that *Digiplexis* has been trademarked by Cultivaris North America prevents its use as a generic name.

Plants of *D. × valinii* so far introduced are intermediate between the parents. They are only slightly woody at the base, or not woody at all, with flowers held more or less horizontally and all round the stem. The tube of each flower is split into four segments to less than half way, with the lower lip longer than the others. The flowers seem exceptionally attractive to bees.

● *D. × valinii* ‘Berry Canary’

The pink flowers are almost entirely creamy inside and speckled, with a narrow pink edge. Shorter, at 60cm, than most other selections of *D. × valinii* it is more suitable for containers. It is the first selection of *D. × valinii* from Hans Hansen.

● *D. × valinii* Foxlight Series

These are sometimes thoughtlessly listed under ‘*D. × hybrida*’, even in US Plant Patents, under the quaint supposition that any interspecific hybrid must automatically be named ‘*× hybrida*’. They were developed by Maarten van der Sar and distributed worldwide by Ball Horticultural Company. Three cultivars have been released, all about 60cm high, so shorter than the Illumination Series. Commercial



Thompson &amp; Morgan



Thompson &amp; Morgan

propagation is by cuttings and they do not require vernalization for first-year flowering. Said to be hardier than the Illumination Series, this has not been independently confirmed. Development ceased in 2007 but they are only now becoming available.

- *D. x valinii* **Foxlight Ruby Glow** ('Takforugl') The deep pink flowers have an orange lower lip and few speckles, like a shorter, darker form of Illumination Flame. It is popular with bees.

- *D. x valinii* **Foxlight Plum Gold** ('Takfopngo') The rather short flowers are dark pink on the outside and mostly dark pink inside with a heavily speckled orange throat.

- *D. x valinii* **Foxlight Rose Ivory** ('Takforoiv') The pink flowers have a heavily speckled, pale apricot throat, edged in gold at the sides.

- *D. x valinii* **Illumination Series**

This pioneering series was created by Charles Valin. Six cultivars have been introduced but some have been discontinued. The breeding program began in 2006 and the first to be introduced was Illumination Pink, becoming Chelsea Plant of the Year in 2012. They all reach 60–90cm in

height, branch well at the base, and from June to November produce self-supporting racemes of sterile, flared flowers that are unusually attractive to bees, including honeybees which are otherwise uncommon visitors to foxgloves. Commercial propagation is by tissue culture.

Although originally described as fully hardy, having survived the 2010–11 winter in the heavy soil of an open Suffolk field, this assessment has proved over-optimistic. Some North American nurseries market these as 'temp-perennials'.

Nomenclature is confused by the fact that different cultivars have been sold under the same trade designation, the style of the cultivar names has varied, and cultivar names have been changed, so priority is sometimes unclear.

- *D. x valinii* **Illumination Apricot** ('Harkstead Apricot') 'Harkstead Apricot' proved unacceptably unstable in tissue culture and the trade designation was transferred to 'Tmdg1301'.

- *D. x valinii* **Illumination Apricot** ('Tmdg1301') Orange tipped,



Thompson &amp; Morgan

pinkish buds open to pale orange flowers with speckled, primrose-yellow throats.

- *D. x valinii* **Illumination Chelsea Gold** ('Harkstead Apricot') Orange buds open to peachy orange flowers, darker on the outside and paler on the inside with a few spots in the throat. This trade designation was used mainly in the UK and is no longer in use by the breeder, but is still seen. Plants in the trade have now been replaced by 'Tmdg1301'.

- *D. x valinii* **Illumination Cherry Brandy** A trade designation applied by Volmary GmbH to 'Tmdg1204'. Illumination Ruby Slippers is preferred by the breeder.

- *D. x valinii* **Illumination Copper** ('Tmdg1401', syn. 'Tomdigcopper') With almost no orange or gold in its colouring, this is almost entirely copper-coloured but darker on the outside. It was not considered commercially viable.

- *D. x valinii* **Illumination Flame** ('Harkstead Flame', 'Dg09-4') Similar to Illumination Pink, this is deeper in colour with purplish pink flowers and a speckled, pale cream interior shading to orange at the edges and with a boldly bicoloured, ➤

orange-pink lip. The name 'Harkstead Flame' has priority in the UK, in North America 'Dg09-4' has priority.

● *D. × valinii* **Illumination Harsh Pink** ('Harkstead Flame', syn. 'Tomdigharpink') This plant is now sold as Illumination Flame.

● *D. × valinii* **Illumination Pink** ('Tmdgfp001') The first of the series, and winner of the Chelsea Plant of the Year award in 2012, this was first sold as Illumination. The flowers are pink on the outside with a speckled, pale cream throat edged in pink and with a hazy golden zone between. It self-cleans well.

● *D.* **Illumination Raspberry** ('Harkstead Red') A hybrid originally named Illumination Raspberry ('Harkstead Red') was a cross with *D. chalcantiba* rather than *D. canariensis*. The hybrid was later withdrawn and the Illumination Raspberry trade designation was briefly transferred to 'Tmdg1204'. 'Tmdg1204' later received its current trade designation of Ruby Slippers.

● *D. × valinii* **Illumination Raspberry** ('Tmdg1204') 'Tmdg1204' was sold for a short time



*Digitalis × valinii* Illumination Raspberry ('Harkstead Red')

Thompson & Morgan



*Digitalis* Vesuvius Group

Johnnie / GardenPhotos.com

under this name.

● *D. × valinii* **Illumination Rose** A trade designation applied by Volmary GmbH to 'Tmdgfp001'. Illumination Pink is preferred by the breeder.

● *D. × valinii* **Illumination Ruby Slippers** ('Tmdg1204') Purple stems carry purple-tinted green bracts and calyces with spotted, orange-throated, purplish raspberry flowers.

■ *D. × velenovskiyana* (*D. grandiflora* × *D. lanata*) 'John Innes Tetra' would seem to belong here, but further clarification is needed.

■ **Vesuvius Group** (*D. dubia* × *D. purpurea* subsp. *heywoodii*) The narrow, pendulous flowers are rosy pink on the outside, white with speckles on the inside, and held in open racemes. The branches of flowers are said to resemble a volcano erupting.

### Conclusion

I hope that this survey will inform current and future breeders and perhaps lead to some of the better lost hybrids being created again. It seems likely that any two *Digitalis* species can be crossed, and many of these hybrids will themselves cross with other species. Many exciting new *Digitalis* introductions lie ahead.

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