

PLEIONE CULTURE - Monthly Calendar - (Applicable to Southern Victoria) By Max Akam

There are two sections in the Genus Pleione. (i.e. The Autumn Flowering OR two leaved species which require slightly different treatment to the main section which are Spring flowering and have only one leaf). This account will deal only with the Spring flowering section.

JUNE, JULY and AUGUST

At this time the bulbs of Pleione are dormant, so now is the time to purchase the bulbs of the most readily available species, *P. formosana*. There are a number of different clones of *P. formosana*. To name a few - *P. formosana* 'Pricei', *P. formosana* 'Serenity', *P. formosana* 'Oriental Jewel', *P. formosana* 'Clare' and *P. formosana* 'Polar Sun'. These last two are white flowered clones. The most common seen here in Melbourne is *P. formosana* 'Blush of Dawn'. When you buy your bulbs, try to get bulbs that are 3 to 4 cm in diameter. are a good green colour, or purplish black in some clones, and are not damaged in any way. They should also have at least one new growth enclosed in a brown sheath, visible on the side. Well grown bulbs can produce up to three(3) new growths from the base each season. If the old shrivelled bulb is still attached, separate it off carefully and trim the roots on the new bulbs back to about 4cm. These shortened roots will help to anchor the bulb in the mix as they tend to be forced up out of the mix as the new roots push down into the compost. Most people grow Pleiones in shallow containers at least 7cm deep, but I feel they do better in a deeper compost of about 10cm. deep. The shallower pans tend to dry out too quickly in our hot, dry summer.

The mix should be free draining so ...ensure there are plenty of drainage holes in the pans and that the compost is very open.

Many different open mixes can be used. I use a compost of 6 parts of 10mm bark with all fines sieved out. 1 part coarse gravel or perlite, 2 parts of sphagnum moss chopped into 6mm lengths. 2 parts of chopped up or well rotted oak or beech leaves. To each bucket of mix add 2 handfuls of poultry or sheep manure.

Fill the container up to within 25mm of the top, and then thoroughly soak the mixture to flush the fire out of the poultry manure as this manure can easily burn the tips of the tender new young roots as they commence to grow. After the mix has thoroughly drained, sprinkle on top with bone meal. Place the bulbs on top of this and fill around them to 3/4 of their depth with a finer mix of 3-5mm bark and very finely cut sphagnum moss in the proportion of 1 of bark to 1 of moss, To obtain this fine moss, rub it through a 3mm sieve. The bulbs can be planted as close as 1cm. to each other as they seem to grow better if planted close together. Give the mix another watering just to settle the finer mix around the bulbs and place the pan in a cool place, shaded by 70%.

In Melbourne, through July and August, pans can be left out in the weather so long as they have some shade cloth over them to protect them from severe frost and hail. They also need some snail bait sprinkled about them.

SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER

As the temperature rises to about 14° or 15° celsius and the days lengthen from 10 to 12 hours, the flower buds and new growths will commence to push up and ,once the buds are visible, move the pans under cover to protect the flowers. At this time new roots are also commencing to move and they will brown off and die if they are watered while they are warm.

Because pleione roots do not branch out. again if they are damaged, this would mean the loss of roots and of course the new growth. I only water by light misting at night as the day is cooling down. Just keep the mix very slightly moist at this time.

After the flowers have died, the leaves will commence to make rapid growth and this is the time to gradually increase the watering and weak fertilising. Because of the moss in the mix use an organic fertiliser such as very weak liquid manure.

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER

By late November or early December, the new growths will have developed well and the new bulbs will commence to swell at the base of the growing leaves. At this time, tiny new growths will become visible at the very base sides of these new swelling bulbs. They will be whitish to very pale green in colour. These are the commencement of next years flowers.

As we are now moving into our hot, dry summer period, it is advisable to try to keep the humidity up to prevent the pans from drying out. Water the pans heavily at night and continue feeding. The plants like to be misted at night.

Do NOT water during the hot daytime.

JANUARY, FEBRUARY and MARCH

During January and February, the new flower growths at the base of the forming bulbs will continue to grow up until they are 12-25MM. Also, tiny bulbils will form from the apex of the original bulb. There can be from 1 to 4 of these bulbils formed and they will continue to enlarge throughout this period. Some will form small roots. Be careful of these bulbils as they will knock off very easily. If so, let them lie on the surface of the mix 'til next season when they can be planted out and eventually form new flowering bulbs.

APRIL - MAY

In early April, the sheaths on the new flower shoots at the base of the still enlarging bulbs will commence to brown off. They are entering their dormant period and this brown sheath will protect the new shoot inside from the cold of winter.

The leaves of the plants will also commence to turn brown at the tips during April and this browning will continue until the leaves drop off in late April and early May.

Once the leaves drop, all watering can cease as the roots also will die about 2-3 weeks later. The bulbs are once again completely dormant. The old original bulb will have withered and if you are growing your plants outdoors just under shade cloth, it is not advisable to leave it to long before you lift the bulbs and separate off the old bulbs.

In winter conditions, rot can set into the withered bulb and travel into the newly formed growths.

If you so desire, the pans can be left undisturbed and grown on again the following year, and, as in nature, they will form a dense mass of bulbs and flowers. Under these circumstances however, it is very advisable to move pans under cover for the winter and just keep them almost dry, just misting now and again to stop the new bulbs from shrivelling

Keep the dormant bulbs in a very cool place as they seem to need a period of down to 3°C during winter to help flowering.

Well grown bulbs should double their weight in total bulb production each season. This applies particularly to *Pleione formosana*.