

# The Collecting Mania

October 1999 by Joan Sargent

Does having one variety of Lily of the Valley (*Convallaria majalis*) seem enough to you? If not, then you are a collector. Variety *Rosea* has a rather wishy-washy pink bell, takes longer to get established and to me isn't quite so fragrant. Several others sound tempting, there's *Albistriata* with white striped leaves and *Flore Plena* with double flowers.

It's the same with *Galanthus*, the snowdrop. A new book is coming out all about them and right now you may be happy with *Nivalis*, but my favorite is *Elwesii*, the giant snowdrop. It's earlier, taller, with a large flower and more likely to stay put. *Nivalis* seems to prefer coming up in the middle of my Peonies than in the perfect spot I want it in. *Caucasicus* has greyer leaves and must be hearty coming from the steppes of Russia, but I don't know if I prefer green or grey leaves coming up through the snow. This year I am trying *Iksariae* var. *latifolius* with broader, glossier green leaves. There is a yellow one that I have never seen and some that bloom in the fall. As I don't have to have them all, I am not a *Galanthophile*.

My love affair with *Fritillaria* is winding down. Vita Sackville-West of Sissinghurst had this to say about my favorite, *Meleagris*: "a sinister little flower, sinister in its mournful color of decay." It comes in a mixture which usually includes some white, the bells are quite large, the stems long enough for cutting and it does seem to live and increase with me, it's also quite inexpensive and easy to find, I love it. Many others behaved like expensive annuals, the one I think I will give another chance to is *Fritillaria persica*. This grows about 2 feet and has nice blue-green strappy foliage, it has dark plum bells and although I don't seem to have the flower anymore, I do like the leaves.

One way to get a good start with pink Lily of the Valley and with snowdrops is to join the Lee Garden volunteers, they give them away every spring and that's by far the best way to get them going in your garden.

*Joan Sargent, a longtime member and master gardener who passed away in August 2012; wrote many gardening columns through the years for our newsletters. We are reprinting them again- this time with photos researched on the internet. There is Joan's Garden an area planted in her memory at*



The pink Lily of the Valley, *Convallaria rosea*, above and to the right.



Below are *Galanthus elwesii*, one of the first flowers to pop up during or after snows in the early spring. It naturalizes. There is a double flower variety as well.



Far left are *Fritillaria meleagris*, known as Checkered Lily Bells, Snake's Head, or Guinea Hen Flower-always a cheerful surprise when they pop up. This species is suitable for growing in a damp meadow or open woodland, and is great for naturalizing in lawn. *Fritillaria meleagris* prefers moist soil in full sun to light shade, and cool, damp summers. At left, is the Persian *Fritillaria persica*, very dramatic color and show.