Plant of the Month - December

by Allan Carr

Blandfordia grandiflora   **Christmas bells**

Pronunciation: bland-FORD-ee-a   grand-ee-FLOR-a   BLANDFORDIACEAE

Derivation: *Blandfordia*, after George Spencer Churchill, Marquis of Blandford; *grandiflora*, from the Latin, *grandis* – large and *flos floris* – a flower.

Red flowers

Yellow flowers

Orange flowers

The genus name Blandfordia was chosen by the English botanist Sir James Edward Smith in 1804, based on specimens supplied from Port Jackson by the Colonial Surgeon, John White. Apparently, Smith was so impressed by the specimens (*B. nobilis*, a species found on the heathlands south of Sydney) that he decided to commemorate a worthy patron of horticulture, George Spencer Churchill, the Marquis of Blandford who owned an extensive estate near Reading, England. *B. grandiflora* was named by Robert Brown in 1810 from specimens he had collected near the Hunter River. There are 4 species, on the east coast of mainland Australia and Tasmania.

Description: This plant is a rare tufted perennial herb occurring in damp sandy or peaty soils in coastal areas from Fraser Island in Qld to the Hawkesbury River area in NSW.

Leaves crowded at the plant base are green and grass-like to 70 cm x 5 mm with rough margins often thickened but flat.

Flowers are tubular, bell-shaped, red or orange-red, 60 mm long with yellow tips and are borne in loose *racemes of 3 to 10 on spikes to 80 cm in November and December. There is also a form with all yellow flowers (as in the centre photo above).

Fruits are vertical, pointed *capsules to 60 mm long.

This species was previously known as *B. flammea* and is now rare in Queensland due to past flower collection and advancing housing developments in their favoured habitat of the wallum country. All 4 species of Blandfordia were extensively grown in Great Britain in the nineteenth century as a greenhouse and conservatory plants.

*raceme = an unbranched flower stem with flowers on stalks

*capsule = a dry fruit   Fruits