

## Chloranthus Seeds & Cuttings

We are now at the start of June 2016 and it seems a good time to offer an update on my experiences with propagating **chloranthus** and let me start with the seed from my "**Domino**" plant which I harvested in mid-September 2015 when the seed pods only had to be touched to release them from the plant. As I said previously, the harvest was massive. Seed is easy to handle and remove from the pods and, when fresh, it has a light green colour which progressively darkens to black over a couple of days when the seed is left exposed to the air. I took freshly harvested seed and immediately surface-sowed one portion on seed compost then covered the seed with a fine dusting of compost. The other portion of seed was thoroughly washed 3 times in tap water using a bowl and a fine tea strainer and then similarly surface sown in two trays - one tray was put in the fridge for 6 weeks and the other was put alongside the unwashed seed in a greenhouse where ultimately all 3 seed trays spent the winter, exposed to daylight. It should be noted that the greenhouse was not artificially heated in the winter months but temperatures only dipped briefly below zero on a couple of occasions. Around mid-March, both trays of washed seed gave a germination that was effectively 100% while germination of the unwashed seed remained at zero and I've now discarded the seed tray. These results demonstrate that **chloranthus sessilifolius** plants are self-fertile and tempt one to conclude that seeds are coated with a germination inhibitor which the washing removed and that extra cold stratification in a fridge is not necessary. However, one cannot definitively conclude that some sort of cold/winter period is not helpful to germination because the greenhouse was unheated. Seedlings were large enough to transplant into pots by early April. There have been no problems although it is still impossible to access to what degree the extra-dark colouration of the parent "**Domino**" plant is present in the seedlings although it is definitely present.

Vegetative propagation is the only way to ensure that one obtains a clone of a variant such as "**Domino**" but experiences on splitting an existing plant are reported to have a high mortality rate ([Bob Brown, Cotswold Garden Flowers](#)). In early April I therefore decided to try taking cuttings of my plant and took off 5 outside stems by carefully probing down to the root and removing stems at this juncture. I put the stems into a proprietary potting compost in a pot which was subsequently enclosed in a plastic bag to ensure a high humidity until the cuttings were rooted after about 3 weeks. (The standard trick of watching for signs of new leaf growth as an indication that roots are forming failed for me and I will return to this again later in my story. That said, it was very easy to see signs that the cuttings were "flagging" when the bag was removed to

ensure that any bacterial or fungal rot was absent and stems remained firm and erect after 3 weeks.) I will only proceed to re-pot these cuttings once signs of growth are present.

## Plant identity

Earlier in my saga I commented on my other efforts to obtain **Chloranthus** species and in particular 3 cuttings of what was stated to be **Chloranthus fortunei** ([Kleine Plantage, Eenum, Netherlands](#)). These 3 plants basically sat in their pots not growing very much and were over-wintered in a greenhouse at temperatures no lower than around 5 deg C and only dropped their leaves in February; new growth started fairly soon and I re-potted them. To cut a long story short, they don't appear to be in any hurry to develop into substantial plants in the way that recent plant introductions such as **Begonia grandis** or **Impatiens omeiana** do. My other source of **Chloranthus fortunei** from tissue culture ([Kwaliteitsplanten.nl, Netherlands](#)) initially served to deepen the taxonomic question of the correct identity of what I'm growing here. As I said earlier, these plants developed robustly from seedlings and had to be re-potted in the Autumn. They were over-wintered alongside the other **Chloranthus** cuttings and lost their foliage about the same time. They are forming healthy looking plants BUT they lack any of the dark pigmentation present in the other **Chloranthus**. The mystery is resolved when one views the plants from above as in the accompanying photograph.



**Chloranthus fortunei (left) & Chloranthus sessilifolius (right)**

The plant with the darker pigmentation lacks stems at the base of the leaves while the other has short but distinct stems. In short, the pigmented plant is

**Chloranthus sessilifolius** and the green variant is indeed probably **Chloranthus fortunei**. I use the term "probably" because I'm not a trained botanist, let alone, taxonomist but the comments on pigmentation are in accord with data presented in [Flora of China](#).

The decorative value of **Chloranthus sessilifolius** is clearly enhanced by the dark foliage colour which contrasts well with the white flowers and this is maximised in selections such as "**Domino**". Propagation of the sort is easy from seed . An open question remains on the subsequent rate of plant development which in cuttings seems to be slow.

Author John Ramsbotham June 2016