



The Scottish Rock Garden Club Alpine Garden Society Farrer Medal - Newcastle 2018 *Empodium flexile*



You never know which class will produce the best plant in one of our shows, nor do you know whether you will see it entered among several others of its kind in classes for plants of a specific species or genera.

I don't think many would expect to find the top plant in the Class for "3pans rockplant from any one continent", especially when the chosen continent is Africa.

Bob and Rannveig Wallis are renowned for producing fabulous pans of bulbs. Their Cyclamen plants, especially *C. graecum*s dominate the autumn shows. Without their entries the shows would be much diminished. However as we know they produce fabulous pans of many other bulbous plants. This time their fabulous ***Empodium flexile*** was shown along with *Cyclamen rohlfsianum* and *Oxalis speciosa*.

Empodium flexile is a member of the Hypoxidaceae. Although the flower does not look like a *Rhodohypoxis* it has ribbed leaves similar to *Hypoxis*.





Empodium flexile is native to Namaqualand in Southern Africa. It is an "arid region of Namibia and South Africa extending along the west coast over 1000Km and covering an area of 440,000 sq. Km it is divided by the lower courses of the Orange River into two parts." The smaller part which is in South Africa is Little Namaqualand. It is part of Northern Cape Province. It is a semi desert area close to the Kalahari Desert with hot summers, sparse rainfall and cold winters. It is famed for its floristic display in springtime. The area has the highest concentration of succulent plants in the world and is home to 3,500 endemic plant species.

The following info is from 'Operation Wildflower':- '*Empodium flexile*, colloquially known as *autumn star* or in Afrikaans as *ploegtydblommetjie* (little ploughing time flower), flowers after rain in autumn or winter, heralding the time for the farmer when ploughing should commence. The plant is a small perennial, a cormous geophyte growing annual leaves and flowers above ground. The species is distributed from Namaqualand to the Little Karoo. It grows in clay soils on stony flats



and slopes'. The picture above is from their web site and it shows *Empodium flexile* growing as a single plant in apparently 'inhospitable' ground.

We gardeners in the UK are lucky that we can provide the conditions to be able to grow from this and the many other areas of the world from which our plants come. With experts like Bob and Rannveig propagating and distributing species like this *Empodium* we can be reassured that there will be less pressure on the species in the wild while at the same time we can grow and appreciate them.

You see from the show pictures just how well they are growing *Empodium flexile*. Their Farrer Medal was well deserved. Well done Bob & Rannveig.

