

***Alophia drummondii*, a deep South Irid**

By Rodney Barton

Alophia drummondii [R. C. Foster] is a lovely and interesting irid that is native to Eastern Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Southern Arkansas and Southern Mississippi. Common names for it include Purple pleat-leaf and pine or pinewood lily. The plants grow from a small, shallow bulb and form loose colonies in sandy soils in lightly wooded areas. The leaves are mostly basal and are pleated. They are winter dormant and flower from May unto fall.

The flowers resemble *Tigridia*, with a cupped center, rounded outer segments and narrow inner segments. The margins of the inner segments curl tightly inward. Both inner and outer segments are velvety purple to red-purple at the margins and yellowish, spotted red-brown in the center. Unlike *Tigridia*, the flowers are secund (face the side). Several flowers are formed at the terminal, opening in succession and lasting only a day.

In East Texas (according to Ajilvsgi), *A. drummondii* is found predominantly in a plant association called the 'long leaf/blue stem uplands' which are open park-like areas. These are scatted slopes, hills, ridge tops and low mounds dominated by long leaf pine (*Pinus palustris*) and sometimes short leaf pine (*P. echinata*) with an understory of small trees, shrubs and grasses primarily bluestem or *Andropogon* ssp. Ajilvsgi describes them as "semi-shaded" (by all levels of the canopy including the grasses). The soils are acid and well-drained. The soils are composed of medium to coarse-grained sand up to several feet thick over a substrate of clay!

A. drummondii germinates easily, with no special treatment of the seed required. (Seeds are usually offered in the SIGNA seed exchange). However, I have not found it as easy to maintain. After five years, I have only three bulbs from over a dozen seedlings. These had been potted in mixture of garden soil, sand and peat. The pot was sunk into in a raised bed on the eastern side of the house so that they received morning sun and afternoon shade. They bloomed their third season but did not bloom the next two years. The lack of bloom may have been due to unusually dry weather those years. Carol Ballard, who lives in the heart of their range in East Texas, says they sometimes "just take a year off". This spring I repotted the bulbs in a 50:50 mix of sand and potting soil and placed in the same location. I kept them well watered and was rewarded with a long succession of blooms.

The genus *Alophia* (Greek for "without a crest") consists of five species. *A. drummondii* is the most northern of the genus and the only species found in the US. It is named for its discoverer, Scottish botanist Thomas Drummond. Clive Innes lists a total of 13 synonyms for *A. drummondii*. The incorrect synonym *Eustylis purpurea* is commonly used in Texas wildflower books. To add to the confusion many of these same books follow Correll and Johnston and misapply *Alophia drummondii* to *Herbertia lahue*. *H. lahue* is another irid native to Texas and Louisiana that is quite distinct having blue flowers with no yellow color, narrow outer segments and greatly reduced inner segments. Being a Texas wildflower enthusiast, it took some time for me to sort out the accepted names for these two plants but I'm glad that I now know the difference. The other four species of *Alophia* are all found in Central and South America. A lot of revision has taken place over the past 20 years with several other species are no longer considered to be in the genus having been transferred to *Herbertia* and other genera. *A. drummondii* itself was transferred to *Alophia* from *Herbertia* once enough work was done by botanists both in the field and in the herbarium.

References:

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