

Scientific name: *Galanthus elwesii* 'Paradise Giant'

Galanthus elwesii is named for Henry John Elwes (1846-1922). His first garden was created at Miserden, Gloucestershire in 1871 and it is here that he first grew *Galanthus elwesii*. In 1891 he inherited the family seat at Colesbourne Park and here amassed what was considered to be the best collection of bulbous plants in the world. To this day Colesbourne Park is renowned as one of the best places to see large groups of choice snowdrops.

Galanthus elwesii 'Paradise Giant' made its horticultural debut at the 1993 RHS Spring Show. It was then made available for purchase by Cees Stapel of the Paradise Centre, Lamarsh, Bures, Suffolk, in their 1994 catalogue.

Family: Amaryllidaceae

Common Name: Elwes's Snowdrop, Greater Snowdrop. The generic name *Galanthus* is from the Greek *gala* (milk) and *anthos* (flower), and was given to the genus by Carl Linnaeus in 1735.

Native Habitat: *Galanthus elwesii* grows in woods, scrub, banks and rocky meadows from east and southeast Europe, extending into west Turkey.

Cultivars: *Galanthus elwesii* is extremely variable with plants ranging in size from minuscule to enormous, and showing a great deal of variation in the flower shapes and markings. It is from these plants in their native habitats and their garden descendants that the huge range (approximately 100) of named cultivars has resulted. Currently there are six divisions of *G. elwesii* with 26 subdivisions, validating the range of novelties in flower formation and colour combinations.

Hardiness Zone: Zones 4-7

Exposure: Snowdrops perform best if they are free from over-bearing neighbours that might out-compete them for nutrients and light.

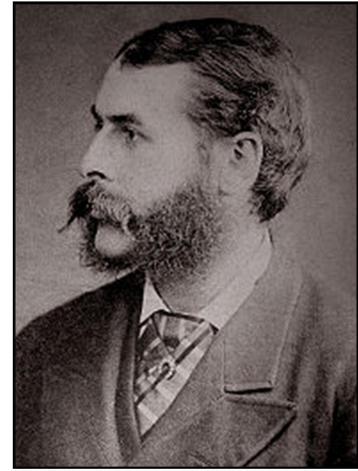
Form: Bulbous perennial

Soil Requirements: Easily grown in well-drained soil, although they do not like very acidic or very alkaline soils, and will not survive long in perpetually wet soil.

Growth Rate: When happy, *Galanthus* multiplies freely. We received one precious bulb from Hitch Lyman of The Temple Nursery in fall 1998. This treasure has spent its life in a pot in our Pit House plunged in a sand bed, too dear to plant out. After several re-pots we now have 23 clumps in the pot. Now it is time to put a few outdoors.

Height: Our pot of *Galanthus elwesii* 'Paradise Giant' grown under glass is approximately eight inches tall.

Leaf: *G. elwesii* 'Paradise Giant' often produces three leaves from a single bulb. The greyish green leaves measure $\frac{3}{4}$ inch in width and $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length. There is a conspicuous mid-rib running along the entire length of both surfaces of the leaf, and appears most prominently towards the outer base.



Henry John Elwes (1846-1922)



Galanthus in the wild



Galanthus elwesii 'Paradise Giant'



Flower: In *Galanthus* the inflorescence (flowering part of the plant) consists of a single scape (stalk), spathe, pedicel and flower.

Galanthus elwesii 'Paradise Giant' has a leafless scape, eight inches in height, ending in a 1¼ inch spathe which encloses a single flower-bud. The spathe is composed of two bract-like spathe valves that are connected by a translucent membrane. This membrane is broken through as the bud matures. The flower is erect at first but quickly becomes pendant and hangs freely on a one-inch slender pedicel.

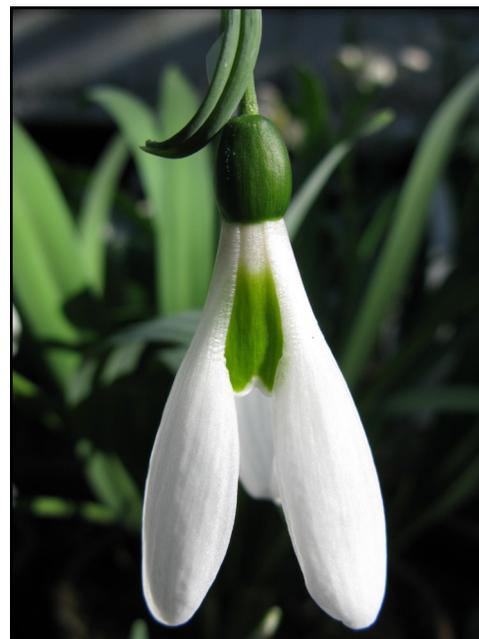
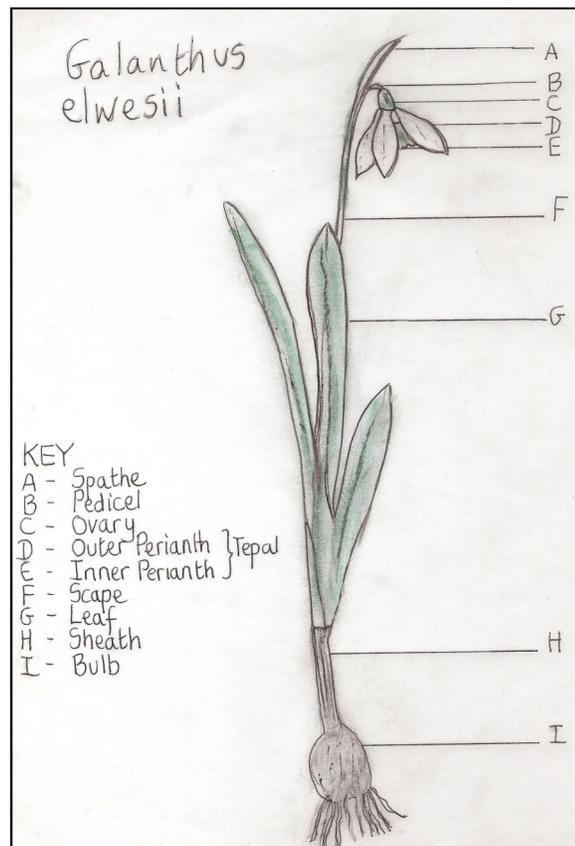
Each flower is composed of six petal-like perianth segments (tepals). The perianth segments are arranged in two whorls of three, in alternate inner and outer whorls, and are attached to the plump, green ovary. The outer segments are rather bowl-shaped, measuring one inch long and ½ to ¾ inch wide. The inner segments are ½ inch in length with a central notch. Their markings are green and cover ⅔ of the segment, outlining the notch at the bottom with a blurry notch at the top, somewhat resembling a vague, fat H-shape.

There are six stamens with yellow anthers and are shorter than the inner perianth segments and form a ring around the style. The style is cylindrical, slender and slightly longer than the anthers. At the base of the style and stamens is the nectary, which is barely visible to the naked eye. The ovary is inferior and consists of three locules (chambers) which contain the ovules/seeds.

Fruit: The fruit of *Galanthus* is a capsule, spherical to ellipsoid, green to glaucescent. Despite its succulent appearance, the fruit splits into three when mature, revealing the whitish seeds which turn pale to dark brown when ripe.

Propagation: Division is the easiest way to grow and maintain the health of your collection. *Galanthus* like to be divided and will multiply more readily if the clumps are regularly divided. Traditionally this is done "in the green," when the plant is in full growth. However, the current trend is to lift and divide as soon as the leaves begin to die back or when the bulbs are dormant. This is the time to remove the small offset bulbs from the parent, replanting each bulb individually at the same level as before, in holes sufficiently wide to prevent congestion. We prefer to divide our *Galanthus* at the end of their growing cycle, when the withered leaves are still visible. Other methods to increase your collection include growing from seed and twin-scaling.

We love to grow our *Galanthus* collection in the cool Pit House. Under glass, they are protected from the ravages of uncertain spring weather, ensuring the blooms remain in perfect condition longer. The flowers are easy to view at eye level, and we can easily monitor the collection and marvel at their intricacies. Let us not forget the joy they bring us in the doldrums of winter. Snowdrops truly are the harbingers of spring!





A Galanthophile's candy store



Stonecrop Galanthophiles

What is a Galanthophile?

A "Galanthophile" is a serious collector of Snowdrops. Each year, during February UK collectors of Snowdrops hold open days for fellow collectors to come in and look at the flowers. Come rain, snow or shine Galanthophiles will kneel down to look at the smallest differences in each species or named variety.



The cult flower of the moment is the snowdrop, which addicts travel for miles in freezing dark to admire, kneeling in frost and snow to worship the minuscule variations in white and green, with perhaps a dash of yellow, of spur and pendant and cups.

Jane Brown (1999)
The Pursuit of Paradise - A Social History of Gardens and Gardening



**Cecily Mary Barker
(1895-1973)**

THE SONG of THE SNOWDROP FAIRY

Deep sleeps the Winter,
Cold, wet, and grey;
Surely all the world is dead;
Spring is far away.
It is not dead, for lo,
The Fair Maids of February
Stand in the snow!

Cecily Mary Barker

