

An Interview with Gonda Grammet



BrugUSA: Hi Gonda, thank you for making some time for us! Let's start with where you live and what plant hardiness zone.

Gonda: I live in Belgium, a small country in Europe, the plant hardiness zone is 8.

BrugUSA: When does your season start?

Gonda: The sprouting of the new branches starts in March, so that the plants can go into the greenhouse at the end of April and come out into the open air around May 15th. The flowering peak is around August and September, some species still bloom in October. They are taken to their wintering place in November.

BrugUSA: What are average temperatures during the growing season?

Gonda: April and May tend to average between 5.5°C – 17.7°C (42°F – 65°F), June/July/August 12.7°C – 29.2°C (55°F – 85°F), September 10.1°C – 20.9°C (50°F – 70°F), October 9.4°C – 15.9°C (49°F – 60°F) and November 3.1°C – 9.7°C (37°F – 49°F).



BrugUSA: Have you always been a gardener, Gonda?

Gonda: My parents grew vegetables for the household. My mother was very busy with flowers, so that has been in my blood since childhood. When I was 18 years old, I decided to study in that direction too and became an engineer in agriculture and food. When I had my own home, it was therefore quite normal that I also created a vegetable garden and a flower garden.

BrugUSA: What are some of your other passions, Gonda?

Gonda: My biggest passion is the breeding of Ko Shamo's (a Japanese breed of chickens), especially the development of new colors in these animals, as I did when I still had fancy pigeons. Ko Shamo and brugmansia go together very well, as the Ko Shamos are allowed to walk around and remove the weeds between the pots of brugmansias.

BrugUSA: How long have you been growing brugs?

Gonda: I bought my first brugmansia in 2010.

BrugUSA: Do you grow warm and cold group varieties, Gonda?

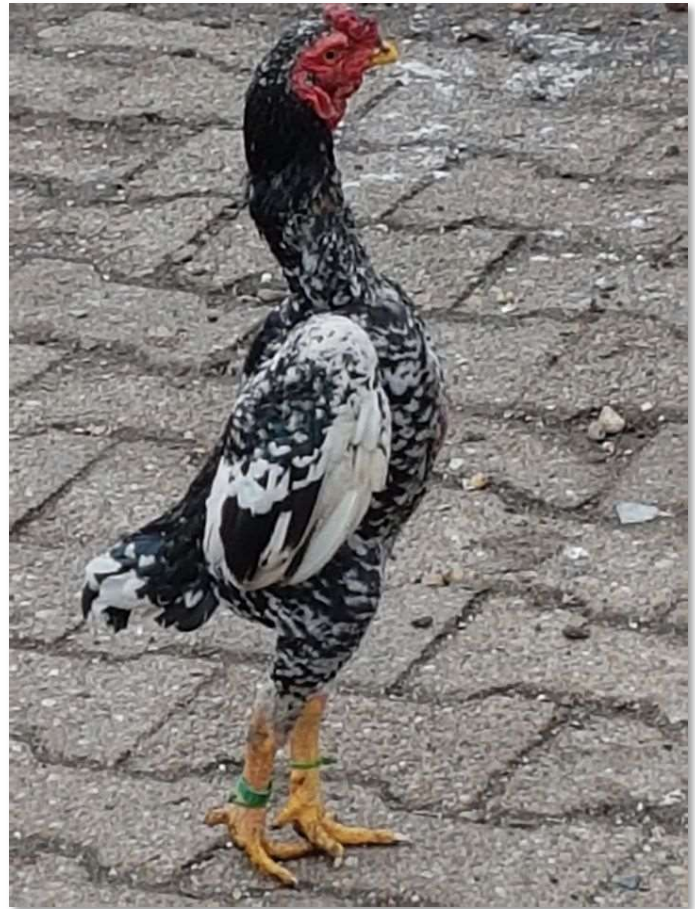
Gonda: Several years ago, I also had the cold group. A lot of tomatoes are grown in my region and since tomatoes and brugmansia belong to the same family of the Solanaceae, I was particularly concerned about the viruses that occur with the tomatoes. Since I have experienced that the cold group is more susceptible to these viruses, my decision was made quickly. Because I did not want to use chemical



products for my vegetables, I certainly did not want to use them with my brugmansias. Although there are very beautiful brugmansias in the cold group, I destroyed them.

BrugUSA: How did you get started with brugs?

Gonda: I once bought a small plant in a discount store. Because I liked the plant so much, I started searching the internet and was introduced to a few hobbyists.



BrugUSA: Were you successful with brugs at the beginning or did they come up with a bit of a learning curve for you?

Gonda: As with everything, you have to go through a learning process. Very quickly I discovered via the internet that there was more, that BGI was there, and others. I read a lot on the internet in the first few years and had bought the brug-bible "HUANDUJ Brugmansia" very quickly. I discovered early on that a well-known name in my collection was not written as it should be, that there are brugmansias with wrong names in the world. I also learned that there were many unreliable people making the brugmansia world unsafe. For example, these individuals sold plants with diseases. Perhaps they could not recognize the disease, or they did not want to know the disease. Fortunately, I had my background in study and occupation and combined with the problems of import and export, I thought to myself, why shouldn't we try to make them



too? As a result, I began to study the sowing of brugmansia. As a geneticist, I soon discovered that brugmansias really do not follow the guidelines of genetics, making the seeding process into a new variety even more interesting. My only regret is that I wish I had discovered this world 50 years earlier.

BrugUSA: What lessons have you learned along the way?

Gonda: Check every brugmansia for flower color and name. When taking pictures, also check that the picture shows the actual colors of the flower and doesn't exaggerate them. Be careful when purchasing new brugmansia and quarantine anything new. Check the brugmansia plants for insects and viruses every week. Give enough water and fertilizer. Learning is knowing, so writing everything in a notebook or in Excel has been a big help.

BrugUSA: How many brugs do you estimate you have, Gonda?

Gonda: 150.

BrugUSA: That's quite a collection! Do you grow your brugs in the ground or in pots during the season?

Gonda: The older plants remain in pots above ground, and the seedlings go into pots with extra openings that I bury into the ground. I try to use as few black pots as possible because a black color attracts the sun, and the heat of the sun is not good for the roots.



BrugUSA: What do you use for soil in your pots?

Gonda: I add pot shards to the bottom of the pots so that the excess water can easily leave. I buy my soil from a professional flower grower who has the soil specially made for him. I also add vermiculite because vermiculite has the ability to absorb water and return it when needed.



BrugUSA: I know you live in a colder area and have to bring your plants in for the winter, how do you prepare them and where do you keep them?

Gonda: They are kept in the same pots they are in while outside. The seedlings are taken from the garden in a pot, with the excess roots that grow out of the holes cut off. In preparation for winter storage, I reduce and change the composition of the fertilizer and do this during the last two weeks. I only cut the very fine ends of the stems off of the plants and I remove the leaves as much as possible, because fallen leaves can always rot and cause mold. Each plant is then treated with Neem oil and finally, a thick layer of white sand is added to each pot. In the spring, the mourning fly can wake up and the flies cannot get through the layer of sand, so the infestation dies out rather quickly. The

brugmansias are stored in a room that has an average temperature of 5°C (41°F) naturally, so there is no need for heating. Young cuttings made in that year are kept in a warmer room with the necessary growth light.

BrugUSA: Do you have a greenhouse?

Gonda: I have three smaller greenhouses which are only used to get the plants accustomed to the outside temperature during the transition from winter to spring.

BrugUSA: Do you fertilize your brugs, Gonda?



Gonda: When potting the cuttings, I use Peters Professional 10-52-10 twice, then I switch to 20-20-20. The moment the plants go outside, I use 12-12-36. The 20-20-20 promotes length growth and the 12-12-36 promotes the number of flowers and the quality of the flowers (e.g. they do not fall off easily with stormy weather).

BrugUSA: How do you root your cuttings?

Gonda: From experience, I have learned that I make the best cuttings in the period from spring to the end of July. As a result, I have very good young plants that can survive the winter. I let



the cuttings take root in water, either in a pot of water or in a cloner. It is rare that I put a cutting in the ground without roots, only if the cutting does not start rooting in water will I put it in the ground.

BrugUSA: What aspect of the brug hobby do you enjoy the most?

Gonda: Discovering the first flower of a seedling and enjoying all the flowers in high summer evenings.

BrugUSA: What do you think is the biggest key to growing a beautiful brug?

Gonda: Ensure that you grow healthy plants which are resistant to bacteria and viruses.

BrugUSA: Have you done any hybridizing?

Gonda: Because I'm not that young anymore (+70), I wanted to save time by purchasing seeds. Afterwards, I started pollinating myself and that came with ups and downs including the buds falling off in severe storms. My first self-fertilized cross is Ice Cream x (Joli x Phenomenal).

BrugUSA: Care to share any hybridizing "secrets" with us? Do you think you can improve your chances of getting desired results by following certain rules?



Gonda: I definitely want to share secrets because when I started years ago, I wanted to discover the genetics. I could only do that by going back to the crossings of the past (e.g. I take crossing A, the father is B and the mother is C). By going further in the history of father and mother, one could gain more insight. Unfortunately, in most cases their history cannot be found on BGI. That is why I say, if I had only started brugmansia growing 50 years ago, I could have had more information. To get a lesson from the past, passing on this data should be a must for any hybridizer.

BrugUSA: I agree, Gonda, it certainly is frustrating that some hybridizers refuse to share that information. Do you have specific goals that you are trying to achieve with your crosses?

Gonda: What I especially want to achieve is to grow very beautiful flowers that are mainly resistant to all possible diseases and insects.

BrugUSA: Wouldn't that be wonderful! What varieties have you been the seedling parent of?

Gonda: De Terlenen, Intensely Forged, Geteflower and GG Treesje. De Terlenen is my favorite because she was the first and is a very strong plant, a very solid plant that is easy to root, resistant to all insects and she is so extremely beautiful.

BrugUSA: Any other thoughts you want to share regarding this wonderful hobby, Gonda?

Gonda: Above all, learn to enjoy the brugmansias. Take your time to enjoy yourself in a time where everyone has too little time.

BrugUSA: Sounds like excellent advice, Gonda. Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts with us.

