

Fritillaria FLOWER MAP

Laurence Hill

Why do plant names keep changing?

Until recently plants that looked similar were grouped together in the same genus of family. On the face of it this seems like common sense but in reality there are many different evolutionary pathways. When different species grow in environments that are alike or occupy similar ecological niches they can undergo convergent evolution. This results in unrelated plants appearing alike and being grouped together taxonomically.

Genetic research has questioned these visual depictions and in turn taxonomists have reconsidered their classifications, often resulting in new relationships based on different morphological characters.

Tepal morphology has traditionally been an important character in classifying the genus *Fritillaria*. By arranging just the tepals in their generic order, with clusters shown vertically and more distant relationships horizontally, the pattern that emerges appears in part to lack order. This highlights the difficulty faced by taxonomists in unravelling nature's secrets.

So why do plant names keep changing? An improved understanding of the past helps build a better-informed present.

All tepals three times life-size (except where marked*)

