"THE CREVICE"

In memory of Eswyn

Journal of the

Alpine Gardeners of Central Vancouver Island

http://alpinegardenersofcvi.wordpress.com/

Issue # 26 February 2014

FROM THE EDITOR: February 17th - A few rays are getting into my rock garden now that the sun is rising above the trees, and things are looking up now that the Polar Vortex has moved off, bringing much needed rain – with a few curveballs! There are buds galore especially on the *Saxifraga*. Fingers crossed that the sleet/snow freeze yesterday afternoon did no damage. Today I went out to ready the chickadee nest box for occupancy and there was a thin sheet of ice over the open areas of the garden. The north garden, still in deep shade, is another story. Icy yes, but a good number of *Cyclamen coum* and *Galanthus* are in bloom, as well as the unfazed *Jasminum nudiflorum*.

Happily June and Kirsten have more exposure to the sun and have sent in some lovely photos. Please see the What's New in My Garden section.

I wish you all a glorious onset of spring.
Valerie Melanson, Melanson.valerie@gmail.com

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FROM THE BOTANIC GARDENS

A sign of spring at "The Botanics", RBG Edinburgh – photo by James Salomons, February 3rd

GOOD DESIGN at B.G. HOF

Remarks by Zdeněk Zvolánek, photo by Christopher Ruby

Professional gardener, Christopher Ruby, from German Botanical Garden of Hof sent me a photo last year of the brand new crevice bed he built in BG Hof. I am glad that he manifested the idea that a large rock garden can be formed with three or more parallel outcrops separated with flat meadows or screes.

The result is not so heavy as with one huge outcrop and there is better access to the parts of the crevice bed. The ground is just sand without top dressing of grit.

(For further information on the gardens at Hof, check out: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Botanischer_Garten_der_Stadt_Hof and links there.)

Eswyn's Alpine & Rock Garden Report
by Karen Unruh

In the Nov./Dec. 2012 issue of "The Crevice" we wrote a short reflection on the concern we have for creating plant signs in this public garden that identify the plants, yet remain secure. We wanted the plant information accessible to the public but not in a way that persons would pick up the signs to read the information and perhaps not replace the signs

securely. We have come to the garden to find our narrow white or green plastic signs left on the surface of the garden. And it has been suggested that deer may be checking out the sign as a possible munchable. We recognized that our present signing is basically for us to know the plants in the garden and where they have been placed, but we need to do better for the public. We asked for your help.

Several people sent replies to Valerie, "The Crevice" editor, somw before this appeal, and she has passed these along to us. We thank you for these replies and will use them to help us come up with a satisfactory solution to our problem.

Paul Cumbleton, Team Leader (now retired) of the Alpine Section, RHS Wisley, sent a picture with the engraved label on hard plastic, which was then riveted to a metal stem for insertion. They have a label engraver on site. They still have the issue of people pulling out the signs to read, or to get out of the way for a photograph, and then leave the sign lying when it is difficult to replace in stony ground. And children can step on the beds and break the signs. Some beds have a plant map to help but not all beds. So this sign route, he says, will still have the need to replace signs.

Todd Boland, Curator of the Alpine Collection at the MUN Botanical Garden, wrote that they use small metal tags, 2" X4" for the alpines. They are black with the names lasered in silver (we just purchased our own metal-laser label maker for a small fortune). These are attached to metal stakes 12" long, 6" driven into the ground. For larger plants they use a 4" x 6" tag, again on metal stakes. He says they are locked at night so vandalism has not been a problem for the tags, although they have had break-ins and had money stolen from the wishing well.

Brent Hine, Head of the Alpine Section of the UBC Botanical Garden, sent a picture showing a black metal tag with white lettering attached to a metal stake which is pounded into the gravel bed.

Graham Walters, Alpine Nursery and Davies Alpine House, Hardy Display Section, RBG Kew sent several pictures and this description:
"Our situation is different to yours, but here are my thoughts so far.
On our rock garden the plastic engraved labels are attached to aluminium stands with short screws. We also have another type where the labels are slid into horizontal runners at the top of the label stands with the runners being crimped to make them less stealable. Both types could be stolen of course but at least in our alpine house (I don't look after the rock garden) they very rarely go missing. In the alpine house our security measure is to have cut down (so at least the accession number is left) cheap bendy self printed plastic labels buried

in the pots so that if someone switches labels around or steals the label we know what the plant is.
As for maps, all accessions at Kew have a location code on our database that locates them to a bed or general area which is fine as a security backup as long as there are not different accessions of the same taxon in the same area. If I were you, I would bury some sort of identifying tag alongside each plant.
Surely it's better to have the plant name on a label next to the plant rather than making people have to walk back to a map. Depending on the risk of theft and cost and ease of production of labels it might be best to take the attitude that 'we'll just replace labels that go missing'. I've been thinking about a similar problem in our alpine house where I want to get rid of our interpretation panels which are very difficult to change to a different plant, for simpler encapsulated self printed ones which would then be attached to the panel support with some sort of simple fixing. This could mean that the public could take the interpretation with them as a memento but would be much easier for us."

Bernie Guyader, a member of our Alpine Gardeners of Central Vancouver Island, at our last meeting shared the last system that Graham is writing about. For a public Rhododendron Garden in Courtenay they use self-printed accessible maps located so that the public can take a copy and see the names of the rhododendrons as they wander through the garden. The individual shrubs are not labeled with a garden label. As the maps are self-printed, they can be updated when changes are made in the garden.

RECENT AGCVI MEETINGS

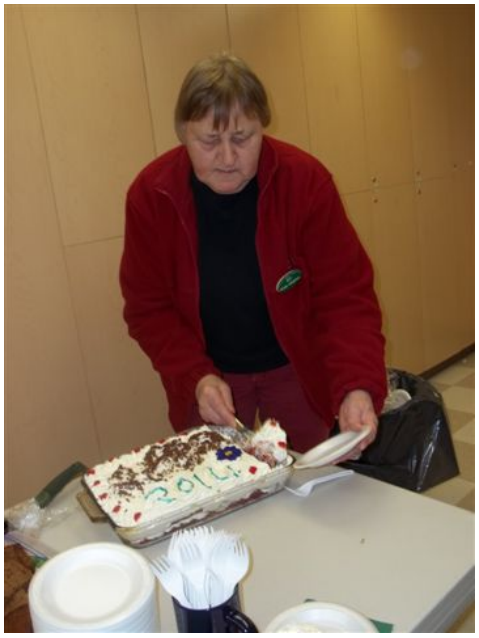
JANUARY 27th REGULAR MEETING, at Shelly Rd. Centre

photos by Kirsten Juergensen & June Strandberg

Barb Lemoine presented June Strandberg with gifts and a card signed by the members, in heartfelt appreciation of all June's hard work as our Special Interest Group Chairperson and now Society President. June supported Eswyn Lyster from the group founding in 2006 until Eswyn's passing in 2009. Since then June has been instrumental in the founding of Eswyn's Alpine and Rock Garden at Nanoose, thus finding a home for many of Eswyn's plants. She has taught and encouraged so many of us, and hence the group has developed and grown. A big thank you from all of us to Barb for organizing this appreciation for June.

L to R: The Presentation - Barb Lemoine, Barbara Kulla, June Strandberg

Also at the meeting:



L: Kirsten Juergensen dishing up her celebratory cake. R: She interpreted our logo in chocolate shavings. A primula stood in for the saxifrage. The luscious insides were reminiscent of a Black Forest Cake sans kirsch.

SEEDY SATURDAY – FEBRUARY 1ST

Louise Cotterill co-ordinated and anchored a very successful first appearance by the AGCVI at Qualicum Beach's Seedy Saturday. The club owes Louise a very big thank you for bringing it all together.

June Strandberg & Marion Summerer had the first shift

L: the seed rack,
R: Bloodroot thanks to Bernie Guyader and Lavender Sachets thanks to Kirsten Juergensen

Mike Miller's tufa garden in a dish

L: Karen Unruh & Barbara Kulla and R: Mike Miller & Jo Graham assist customers

THE ACGVI'S NEXT MEETING

The Alpine Gardeners of Central Vancouver Island

present

Dr. Hans Roemer

to speak on

"Growing Bulbs on the Dry Side of Vancouver Island".

Monday, February 24th, 2014, 1-3 p.m. (doors open 12:30), Lions Room, QB Civic Centre, 747 Jones Street. $5 at door includes entry in prize draw & coffee/tea

Dr. Roemer will speak about the bulbs that are happy with our local climate on SE Vancouver Island. He will emphasize species (or 'botanical') bulbs and those that are small enough to fit rock gardens or containers in a cold frame or alpine house. He has selected the species he grows on the basis of their home climate and will briefly demonstrate this selection process with maps and climate diagrams. He will show many members of the genus *Crocus, Narcissus, Fritillaria* and *Tulipa*, as well as those of smaller groups and will discuss their needs and favorite garden habitats.

Born and raised in southern Germany, Hans apprenticed in horticulture and studied landscape architecture & landscape ecology. He earned a PhD in plant ecology from the University of Victoria in 1972. He worked in conservation with the provincial Ecological Reserves Program & Provincial Park System. Since retiring in 2002, he has been working as a botanical consultant, mainly in rare plant inventories and monitoring. A member of the Vancouver Island Rock and Alpine Garden Society for over 30 years, he has led many club outings to the mountains of Vancouver Island & northern Washington State. Most of his gardening is with bulbs and other drought-tolerant plants. He is a contributor to a new book on alpine plants of the Pacific Northwest (Pojar & MacKinnon 2013).

More info? Valerie at 250-594-4423 or Melanson.valerie@gmail.com

Photos by Hans Roemer:
L: *Calochortus tolmiei*
R: *Crocus oreocreticus*

PLANT PORTRAIT

GREAT PULSATILLA – *Pulsatilla grandis*

By **Zdeněk Zvolánek** , Beauty Slope, Czech Karst

Well, dear islanders, I must introduce you to the earliest *Pulsatilla* from my southern slope garden. It is a Central European limestone karst dweller, *Pulsatilla grandis.* This species occupies small areas in Southern Austria (Styria), Moravia, Slovakia and Hungaria where it has its headquarters.

Pulsatilla grandis

It is a plant from open, sunny, southern, slightly alkaline slopes, sometimes in open grassland (an association with mycorhizza of grasses). Easy propagation is by fresh ripe seed. Root cuttings are possible with skillful hands (green thumbs). Now, in early February I see one plant with nice hairy buds.

Pulsatilla grandis f. *alba*

My brother, Luděk, lifted for himself my only white form (probably lost it in his cool Czech-Moravian highland). It is bad luck, because it was a dear plant which the late Joyce Carruthers obtained from Austrian plantsman, Fritz Kummert.

Disasters are present even in God loving gardens, because of his clever cause and effect rules (invented for our education and progress). Yes, my own mistake was watering with our too alkaline and chlorine content tap water. I killed a lovely bluish (so called ´Budapest Strain´) specimen, which was a gift from Irish plantsman, Harold McBride.

Pulsatilla grandis 'Budapest Strain'

Now Poor ZZ has a strong urge to explore the Slovakia Karst National Reservation to have a peep for unusual colours, including ones with a sky blue shine.

Pulsatilla grandis 'Irska'

LORI PROSS RECOMMENDS THIS INTERNET SITE FOR INFO ON SEED SOWING:

If you go to the following, you will find a good handout on sowing seed:
http://www.agardenforthehouse.com/2012/11/winter-sowing-101-6/

Crevice trough with *Penstemon acaulis*

Another Tug on Those Shoestrings: Tighter! Tighter!

By Kenton Seth

Anyone who has been involved with construction of a crevice garden becomes distinctly aware & starts to inquire and think more about, crevice size. And someone who has planted in a crevice garden is intimately aware of this. I personally believe that tighter is better. Our Czech friends have said that tighter crevices make our plants smaller and more long-lived. My brief experience agrees. Many folks find working with extremely tight crevices to be difficult if prohibitive, a real turnoff. I am heartbroken and distressed to think of

someone having a bad experience with tight crevices because of inadequate tools or insufficient instructions!

Astragalus spathulatus and *Echinocereus triglochidiatus* f. *inermis*
in a man-made sandstone crevice.

Tight is good - as any Dandelion in a crack in asphalt or concrete will tell you. Folks with established gardens with impossibly tight crevices or simple naturally-cracking stone do observe that many saxatile plants self-sow into these incredibly tight, perhaps even prior-to invisible, spaces. The effect that makes a rock garden a special environment is pushed to an extreme in the crevice garden - and a tight crevice is taking that push to its full extent. (This effect is the separation and polarization of the local climate of roots zone versus above-ground-plant zone, to put it fairly technically.) Granted, there is a place in the crevice garden where a space can be left open (as long as it is architecturally sound) to accommodate the roots of larger container-grown dwarf conifers or Daphnes, say, because it is pretty much impossible or improbable to receive such a plant as a seedling or seed.

So how do we do it? I truly love to learn Crevice-Gardeners' preferred tools, since it is a fairly obscure hobby where most folks have been left to their own devices and personal inventiveness. Stephanie Ferguson in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, uses an old butter-knife. Inspired by her crevice garden, Linda Meyer in Denver, Colorado, USA, uses a flat-head screwdriver. I've been using a charming British tool I bought at Wisley designed for small bulbs: a wooden-handled "Widger" from Burgon & Ball. The traditional handle-free metal widger works, too, but is easier to lose and harder to grip. Tools not to be ignored are chopsticks, barbeque skewers, old table forks, and bamboo rods.

It is possible to squeeze a plant from a standard "two-and a quarter inch" pot into a 1 cm gap. First, the plant is bare-rooted.

Astragalus amphioxys (grown beautifully by Sunscapes Rareplant Nursery)
with roots which surpass the pot, with widger.

This can be done by shaking or washing the potting mix off. Then, a hole is dug to accommodate this root taper, which may be deeper than the pot was. Digging probably means scooping/scraping aside the top-dressing gravel/chips, then piling up the excavated soil very close to the hole, perhaps on a nearby stone. Then, the plant is lowered (or side-shoved in the case of vertical crevices) into the hole, the crown held at the foreseen level of replaced gravel/chips. Part of the soil is pushed back into the hole, which is watered in. The water lubricates and perfectly settles the soil intimately against the roots and without air pockets. The rest of the soil is replaced, and watered in again in this way, and the gravel/chips are replaced as well, snugly.


Eriogonum being watered in and dressed with mix and mulch

Alternately, two sandwich-like stones (this idea comes from Vojtěch Holubec) are removed from the rockery, the bare plant roots are thinly spread (like butter!) with soil mix, the rock-sandwich closed, and returned.

Tighter crevices yet require whatever problem-solving you enjoy playing with. There is a certain satisfaction in planting in ridiculously tight crevices - but three things must be achieved - the plant crown must be flush or close with the rocks, the roots must be as deep as possible (if they are bunched up in a coil or knot at the top of the crack, they are unlikely to penetrate towards moisture before the plant dies) and the roots must be in close contact with something - rock or soil, and not open to air or close to the surface.

One trick is to approach a wedge-shaped crevice laterally, from the wide side, sliding the plant sideways into the tight crack, leaving the wider side for soil and tool-space. This wedge can be filled with a small stone rather than gravel for surface.

Bare-rooting certainly is more initial shock to the plant than traditionally planted, with some of its container mix. Admittedly, a few plants are known to truly hate root disturbance, but no one is planting cucurbits and Nasturtium in their crevice gardens! But this shock is gotten over quickly. Every plant has a different root-hair cycle, but the textbook average is two days. That means that within *two days*, your bare-root planted babies are, in a sense, established. A plant can go without root hairs for a time, and being forced to re-grow them and "tap" into the soil/sand you painstakingly engineered in your garden will increase your plant's success rate greatly.

In my dry climate of Western Colorado, USA, temperatures over 40C with 15% humidity is normal by June, so the whole year is sunnier and drier than our friends near the coasts and in

Europe. This planting technique begs us to cover our new transplants. Through a lot of unofficial and unscientific trials, I find that one week covered by shade cloth or parasol or temporarily-leaning-slab-stone is enough to let new plants get a "foothold."

Seeds, of course, are a completely valid way to do it. Or completely ideal. Nothing beats an in-situ and perfectly developed plant with perfect root system and perfect crown level. Again, chips and gravel are advised to at once discourage bird and bug predation of your precious seed as well as prevent it from washing away.

I do notice that tightly planted plants not only indeed develop into nice, tight, buns better than their counterparts in open soil, but their initial survival is better. The more effort put into getting the bottom of the roots as deep as possible, the better. I feel that tight crevices do not dry out as fast, given the lingering moisture under large stones, so faulty establishment watering or other problems are mitigated. It also gives us a chance to mimic our inspirational muses in nature: vertical cliff-faces and rock-hugging darlings. Tight-crevice siting allows us, too, to take advantage of microclimates that only rock-surfaces (and not generally plants) get to enjoy. These might be drier (snowless or rain-shedding) north-aspects, warmer south-aspects, or more dramatic presentation to visitors, especially the resident one that goes out every morning with her cup of coffee.

Do encourage your friends to put down the hand-trowel, pick up a butter knife, and get cozy with your rocks.

About Kenton Seth:

Kenton will be coming to visit us for our May meeting when he will talk on "Hunting Wildflowers of the Wild West" - more on that in coming issues of "The Crevice". In the meantime he has sent along the following to introduce himself:

"Bio details: I'm 27, a Western Colorado Native living in my hometown of Grand Junction, freelance Gardener/Landscaper currently specializing in native/un-irrigated landscapes and crevice gardens, and lucky to draw on the rich knowledge of Colorado horticulturists. I like to cross-country ski, travel, play the fiddle, and have dinners with friends in the winter. My blog on under-documented plant things is kentonjseth.blogspot.com, and you are welcome to put my e-mail in the "Crevice". I could stand to learn something from its readers. (ineedacupoftea@gmail.com)

Blood type B, or something! I'm friends with Gordon Mackay of Alba Plants. He and I go adventuring when he lectures in Colorado."

One more photo from Kenton:

Tight-crevice planted Sand Dropseed (*Sporobolus cryptandra*) and Spineless Claret Cups (*Echinocereus triglochidiatus* f. *inerme*) as well as *Penstemon caespitosus* and *Eriogonum ovalifolium*.

WHAT'S NEW IN MY GARDEN – KIRSTEN JUERGENSEN

At the end of January, Kirsten took these fine photos:

a fine *Helleborus*

and Winter Jasmine – *Jasminum nudiflorum*

WHAT'S NEW IN MY GARDEN – JUNE STRANDBERG


L: *Saxifraga* 'Bohunka', R: *Saxifraga* 'Dana'


L: *Saxifraga burseriana,* R: *Saxifraga* 'F.L. Vek'


L: *Narcissus* 'Minicycla', R: *Galanthus* & *Eranthis*


Snowdrops – during the big freeze & recovered – Phew!

SNIPPETS:

Recent Interesting Plant Portraits on UBC Botanical Garden's "Plant of the Day" email blast:

http://www.botanicalgarden.ubc.ca/potd/2014/01/nemophila-maculata.php
--An annual flower endemic to foothills of Sierra Nevada in California – The Five Spot.
http://www.botanicalgarden.ubc.ca/potd/2014/02/coreopsis-rosea.php
--An endangered plant from Nova Scotia and the eastern seaboard living at UBC Botanical Garden's E. H. Lohbrunner Alpine Garden.

Margot Moser has been mining the Royal Horticultural Society's Website and has found an interesting paper from 2004 on the **Use of Limestone in Horticulture**, called "Grikes, Runnels and Clints". The slant is British but the conservation issues are valid anywhere and food for thought for all alpine and rock gardeners. Go to:
http://www.rhs.org.uk/Gardening/Sustainable-gardening/pdfs/c_and_e_limestone

How Do You Say that Latin Name?
Audio sites:
Howjsay.com
Finegardening.com/hearlatin

For a written pronunciation guide: http://davesgarden.com/guides/botanary/