



# "THE CREVICE"

In memory of Eswyn

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Editor's Note: Here follow two interesting articles, both sent in for the Late Spring - Early Summer 2017 issue that never happened. Thank you, David & Ian. I really appreciate your patience in seeing these in print. And then a teaser for the Summer Issue.

**PLANT PORTRAIT - *Saxifraga oppositifolia***  
**by David Sellars, Surrey, B.C.**



We have often seen *Saxifraga oppositifolia* blooming profusely in the European Alps but it is a challenge to see it in flower in the mountains of North America. The plant is found at high elevations in exposed positions on north facing rock cliffs. Snow tends to blow off steep cliffs during winter storms and it flowers very early in the spring before snow has melted on the alpine meadows with access trails still snow covered.

We drove up the Beartooth Highway in Wyoming on June 30 and we were delighted to find large flowering cushions of *Saxifraga oppositifolia* on road cuts right beside the road at about 10,000 feet elevation. The *Saxifraga oppositifolia* (below) were growing in rock crevices on steep north facing cliffs





in shade from the midday sun. In exposed, sunny areas, plants that emerge right after snowmelt such as *Douglasia montana* were also in full flower.



*Douglasia montana*

*Saxifraga oppositifolia* probably does not enjoy a dry protective snow cover in the winter like many alpiners. This could explain why the plant is tolerant of wet winter conditions at sea level. The fact that *Saxifraga*

*oppositifolia* grows profusely in the wild at low elevations in the Arctic is another indication of its adaptability. However it may not suit warmer continental climates.

In the rock garden, *Saxifraga oppositifolia* needs to be moist and shaded from the hottest midday sun in addition to the usual alpine plant requirements of good drainage, gritty soil and a coarse stone mulch. The best position is in a north facing rock garden tucked below a large rock to provide partial shade.

The *Saxifraga oppositifolia* grown in rock gardens are forms from European populations. The North American *Saxifraga oppositifolia* has much tighter and harder cushions than the lax European plant. Many of us have tried to grow the North American *Saxifraga oppositifolia* without success. I suspect that the problem is that it gets too hot in the summer in our gardens.

(previously published in AGC-BC Bulletin v. 60:3, Summer 2017)

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## IRISES FLOWERING FOR THE FIRST TIME (June 2017)

By Ian E. Efford, Duncan, B.C.

Over the last week, my interest in all things botanical has been strengthened by the first time flowering of two plants in my garden. For well over twenty years I have been growing irises from seed. Most of these have been species, although there has always been a spattering of hybrid Siberians and Japanese. My interest has widened with experience and I have added some of the more difficult species. A couple of years ago I included some of the desert irises, particularly the **Junos**, with the particular objective of growing *Iris cycloglossa*, one of the rarest iris. This species is from the area south of Herat in western Afghanistan and has only been collected a couple of times in the wild in a relatively damp area in what is nominally a rocky desert. Only the most fool-hardy would mount an expedition to visit the location today!

I saw *I. cycloglossa* flowering at Kew a couple of years ago, an incident which, of course, further stimulated my interest. This week I was rewarded with one stem with two buds that opened in sequence. I see this as the peak of my iris growing! On the other hand, I have not yet tried **Oncocyclus** irises which are also desert irises and might be considered more beautiful and sometimes almost as rare.

**Juno** irises take time to germinate so patience is essential and they all require very well-drained and deep soil and completely dry conditions during the summer. Mine are out of the rain under the eaves of the house from June to September. Some Junos germinate fairly easily and I have a pot of *I. magnifica* with nearly 20 seedlings. The best time to transplant the seedlings is in early autumn when they are small bulblets. As they grow they add long, thick roots that must remain attached if the plant is to be transplanted. This is why a dry sandy growing medium is ideal as it does not cling to the plant and cause the roots to break off.



Seedling of *I. cycloglossa*



The second species to flower was a plant of *Iris tectorum*, commonly known as the Japanese roof iris although it is thought to have been introduced into Japan from China where it is widely distributed in the wild. "Roof" in this context arose because it was commonly found growing on the thatched roofs in Japanese villages.

This particular plant is interesting as it almost certainly reflects the wild form whereas some of the plants in cultivation reflect selection for plants with a more "attractive" appearance. In cultivation, the species is normally found in three colours - blue, purple and white. Some consider that a good specimen of this species can compete aesthetically with orchids. It is, however, much easier to grow as it will survive outdoors in any normal garden soil and in a rockery. It does drain the nutrients and should be give a boost of fertilizer or moved every couple of years.



*Iris tectorum* from China



*Iris tectorum* from cultivation, the purple form



*Iris tectorum* from cultivation, the white form

One reason for growing plants from seed is the unexpected results. Usually, these occur when genetic variation results in a flower that has a completely different colour or colour pattern. Another is the differences in growth of the new plants. I have a bed of 18-month old iris seedlings that have grown



from British Iris Society seeds. They all look fine although the *I. tectorum* plants are far larger than the other species in the seedling bed. What is particularly exciting, however, is a Siberian plant that is nearly 50cm tall and has two well-developed buds. All the other Siberians are only 15cm tall. This very vigorous plant will flower next week and I will be checking it early every morning to see if it has an exciting new flower.

Gardening always has its surprises and is never boring. Growing plants from seed just adds another dimension to the excitement.

Acknowledgements: I would like to thank Mike Miller and Peter Taggart for providing me with some of the plant material mentioned.

*P.S. Finally, it opened. This 18-month seedling is more than twice as tall as seedlings from the same package.*

*It is a Siberian from the hybrid "Reddy or Not" from the British Iris Society seed package 162. It was planted in spring 2016.*





## SOME NEW IRIS BLOOMS IN THE EDITOR'S GARDEN THIS SPRING 2018

Since we are considering irises, whether due to maturity of the young plants or good growing weather, this has been a good season for iris in my garden.

Both these were grown from Alplains seed:

*Iris tenuissima* - a California endemic:



*Iris innominata* - a native of California and Oregon:



**COMING IN THE SUMMER ISSUE:  
VISIT TO SHANE & DANY'S GARDENS IN CUMBERLAND,  
COURTENAY & COMOX**



Part of Shane's front garden



L: Snippet of Dany's home paradise, R: one of his creations at Comox Wharf