

"THE CREVICE"

In memory of Eswyn
Newsletter of
The Alpine & Rock Garden Special Interest Group
of the
Qualicum Beach Garden Club

Issue # 3

January 2012

From the Editor:

1. Time to watch your mailbox for seeds from the AGS, SRGC and AGCBC and get those needing OT = outdoor treatment started. Also those needing heat can be started if you have space in your greenhouse and dome, lights and hot mats.

2. Gardening with alpine plants certainly is on the upswing in interest

going by the number of new alpine houses, growing walls, etc., being built at Botanic Gardens. Here are a few examples I have heard about or found on the internet:

The **Davies Alpine House** opened at the Royal Botanic Gardens, **Kew**, in 2006. This was covered on a couple of episodes of BBC's "Year at Kew" TV series. See also:

<http://www.kew.org/visit-kew-gardens/garden-attractions-A-Z/Davies-Alpine-House.htm>

The "**Alpine Zone**" and walls built at **RHS Harlow Carr** in Yorkshire in 2010. For a view of the house see:

<http://www.rhs.org.uk/Gardens/Harlow-Carr/About-Harlow-Carr/The-Alpine-Zone>

Here's Paul Cumbleton's weblog of a visit to the new house, etc.:

http://www.srgc.org.uk/logs/logdir/2011May091304960462Log_4_of_2011.pdf

The **crevice garden** built by **Zdenek Zvolanek** at **RHS Wisley** - see Paul Cumbleton's weblog at <http://www.srgc.org.uk/logs/index.php?log=wisely>, starting with log 18 of 2010:

http://www.srgc.org.uk/logs/logdir/2010Oct221287751651Log_18_of_2010.pdf

An update in 2011 shows some of the plantings:

http://www.srgc.org.uk/logs/logdir/2011Jun081307557574Log_6_of_2011.pdf

There is now a fund raising drive at the **Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh** to build a new bigger, **tufa only** alpine house (please see <http://www.rbge.org.uk/support-us/alpine-house>).

The RBG Edinburgh website notes: "The new Alpine House will showcase a contemporary method of growing and showing alpine plants in the 21st Century. It will stand next to the existing Alpine House where the plants are grown and displayed in traditional pots plunged into sand beds. The new structure will complement the existing house by demonstrating how to cultivate alpine plants in a more naturalistic way, offering a contrast to the traditional

style. This new method involves growing the plants in tufa, a soft porous rock of calcium carbonate



which we have sourced from Germany. Growing plants in tufa has been proven to improve the quality and survivability of species and will allow us to grow a much wider, more diverse range of alpine. It also forms a more natural and pleasing landscape. The new Alpine House will be the first in a British Botanic Garden to be fully dedicated to growing plants in this way. "

3. This issue includes an article by June Strandberg on Propagation and an article by David Sellars on Sechelt Sand.

PLANS FOR 2012 - FIRM & TENTATIVE:

January 14th - SPECIAL SEMINAR WITH ZZ - ZDENEK ZVOLANEK at QUALICUM BEACH CIVIC CENTER on SATURDAY JANUARY 14th, 10.30am to 2.30pm - in the Lion's Room

Zdenek Zvolanek (known as ZZ, pronounced ZeeZee) is a very famous Czech rock and crevice gardener, designer and builder. Paul Spriggs, who built the Nanoose crevice garden, trained under ZZ and it is Paul who is bringing ZZ to us.

There will be two presentations:

In the morning GOLDEN WEST (Plants from Nevada to Montana in memoriam of the explorer Joyce Carruthers)

In the afternoon BEAUTY SLOPE (plants in my steppe rock garden all year round)

There will be a break for lunch between the talks.

Admittance is by donation to help recover some of our costs. Please let me know if you will be coming as seating is limited. JuneStrandberg normjune@shaw.ca

You can find more about Beauty Slope and Joyce Carruthers by Googling the Scottish Rock Garden Club and scrolling down to The International Rock Gardener - go to:

March '10 for Joyce Carruthers' description of the Beauty Slope.

April '10 for plants and flowers of the Beauty Slope. (Also includes Mt. St George, Stone Mountain, BC and ZZ building a crevice garden at Montreal Botanic Garden.)

Oct '10 for the announcement of Joyce's tragic death and her articles on North America.

January 24th - 1ST FIELD TRIP (CARPOOL) TO VIRAGS:

Tuesday, January 24th to hear Zdenek Zvolanek on "Daphnes, Balkan Alpines, or the Mystery of Limestone". Doors open at 7:15 p.m. Meeting begins at 7:30. at Gordon Head United Church Hall, 4201 Tyndall, Victoria. Get in touch with June Strandberg re: carpool interest.

January 30th - SIG JANUARY MEETING - Monday, January 30th, 1-3 p.m. at June Strandberg's, 1980 Island Highway, discussion on plans for 2012. Cookies by Sue Beatty. Can someone else volunteer for cookies to June S.?

February 27th - SIG FEBRUARY MEETING - Monday, February 27th, 1-3 p.m. at Serious Coffee, Heritage Plaza, 9-1209 Island Hwy East, Parksville, in the meeting room. Mike Miller will demonstrate creating and planting up a small tufa mountain in a dish.

March 12th - 2ND FIELD TRIP (carpool) - TO AGCBC MEETING, Van Dusen Gardens, Vancouver & DAVID SELLARS GARDEN in South Surrey: - Monday March 12, 2012. **Visit to David Sellar's Garden** in afternoon. In evening **Malcolm McGregor** will speak on " Saxifrages around the world and in the garden". Malcolm is editor of the NARGS Bulletin and author of **Saxifrages: A Definitive Guide to the 2000 Species, Hybrids & Cultivars.**

Choice of taking late Tsawassen ferry in the evening (BC Ferries willing), or staying overnight.

Contact June S. re: carpooling.

March 27th - 3RD FIELD TRIP (carpool) - TO VIRAGS, Victoria, Tuesday, March 27, 2012 - **David Sellars** will speak on "Chaos in the Rock Garden: Putting Theory into Practice". Doors open at 7:15 p.m. Meeting begins at 7:30. at Gordon Head United Church Hall, 4201 Tyndall, Victoria B.C. Contact June S. re: carpool.

Location at Gordon Head UC, TBC closer to the date. Location may change.

March 28th OUR MEETING: DAVID SELLARS -Wednesday, March 28th - here at QB Civic Centre, 1 TO 3 PM., on "Alpine Jewels of the Olympic and Wenatchee Mountains, Washington State". David plans to bring plants to sell. List will be circulated in advance.

OTHER PLANS TO DISCUSS & FIRM UP:

APRIL WORKSHOP TO BUILD TROUGHS?

APRIL or MAY PLANT SALE AT LOUISE COTTERILL'S ?

TRIP TO BERNIE GUYADER'S ROCK GARDEN IN COURTENAY ?

PARADISE MEADOWS WALK IN JULY-AUGUST?

TRIP UP MT. COKELEY IN AUGUST?

SEPTEMBER - WORKSHOP ON BUILDING A CREVICE GARDEN IN A TROUGH with

Gordon Mackay. Please see interesting article on the subject by the Ottawa Valley Rock Garden and Horticultural Society from 2004

<http://www.ovrghs.ca/articles/other/slab%20in%20a%20bag.htm>

(thank you to Sue Beatty for this link)

OTHER EVENTS OF NOTE

NARGS WWSW at Everett, WA

In 2012, The NARGS Northwestern Chapter will host the 37th Annual Western Winter Study Weekend and the NARGS Annual Meeting on March 9 - 11 in Everett, Washington

Stop the Car NOW...! Roadside Botanizing: East of the Cascade Mountains,

<http://nedm.drizzlehosting.com/2012/2012.htm>

FOLLOW UP ON SIG EVENTS

CREVICE GARDEN BUILD, PART 2, NOVEMBER 21ST

Here are some photos of the build part 2. Thanks to Karen, June, Sue and others for sending in photos.



Part 1 looking good. Karen, Suzy, Elaine & Paul hard at work. The small stones in.

Confer Planting, December 7th



Conifers purchased at Elk Lake Nurseries and ready to plant in crevice garden. Other goodies ready to go in as well, thanks to Paul Spriggs.

GOOD READS / USEFUL LINKS

BLOG OF PANAYOTI KELAIDIS OF DENVER BOTANIC GARDEN -

<http://prairiebreak.blogspot.com/2011/12/geranium-magniflorum-underappreciated.html>

(Thanks to Sue Beatty)

PROPAGATION

by June Strandberg

We will be having a plant sale next April or May so, if you want to make lots of money to get speakers in or to have work parties with Gordon Mackay, then you have to get cracking now! You can dig and divide existing plants in your garden or dig around and find some shoots with a few roots attached. (Irishman's cuttings). Make sure you dig plants from your garden at least a month before the sale - the sooner the better!

Then there are real cuttings and a little more work is involved. (See Hand Out # 11 - April 2011). Most rock garden plants can be propagated from cuttings. The best time of year seems to be any time except in the hot summer months or freezing weather. I find right now (late winter) to be a good time and hopefully some will be well rooted and ready for our late April or early May plant sale.

Plants like dianthus, phlox, aubrieta, dryas, etc can have a section removed and clipped into cutting sized pieces (not too big) remove all bottom leaves so you have a bare stalk long enough to insert into your medium, clip just below a leaf joint or use a heel cutting, dip into rooting hormone and place in hole made with a small stick or nail. Tamp in well. We like to use the liquid hormone 'ROOTS'

Smaller plants such saxifrages look carefully and snip a small segment with as long a stem as possible, Treat the same way as above. Saxifrages are slower to root and won't be ready for this year's sale.

Small shrubs such as daphnes, rhododendrons, conifers etc - take heel cuttings or cut just below a leaf node, remove bottom leaves, scrape a little bark from one side and if leaves are fairly large clip them to half size. Plant as above. These will take up to a year to be ready to transplant.

I like to put my cuttings in 3" or larger plastic pots and place as many as possible round the edge and a few in the middle. You can put several different species in the same pot, label carefully and date. You can use clay pots if you prefer but remember they dry out quicker. Or you can plant in rows in a tray.

To pot on, you can do it when the roots show at the bottom hole or you can give a gentle tug at the plant to see how firm it feels, if it does not move try lifting with a knife or other narrow utensil and check for roots, pot on if ready. I use the small pots that hanging basket plants come in and these are plenty big enough for our sale. Keep pots and cuttings in a shady place and cuttings under cover.

Planting medium: 3 parts coarse sand and grit, 1 part leaf mold or peat, 1 part loam, 1 part perlite - or you favourite cutting mix. If I am doing this in warmer weather I put a little peat in the bottom of the pot to hold moisture, then the planting medium and for smaller cuttings such as saxifrage, a layer of sand on top for quicker rooting. Make sure you stir the

layers as roots don't like a complete change of soil mix. Immerse pot up to its neck in water and drain.

Tip from Mike: if you use coir instead of peat/leaf mold make sure you wash it several times as it tends to be salty - a result of throwing the coconuts into the ocean to soften them.

To pot on use a little more loam and a little less sand but still keep the mixture gritty.

If you want to try your hand at cuttings but don't have any material come and see me and I will set you up with something - you can do that as soon as you get this newsletter, don't wait for the meeting.

GROWING MEDIUM FOR ROCK GARDEN CONSTRUCTION

by David Sellars

Rock garden plants certainly need well-drained soil but amending garden soil with sand or gravel does not solve the challenge of growing choice alpine from high elevation natural habitats. One solution that is effective for our wet climate is to build a raised bed of growing medium on top of the natural soil. After experimenting with different combinations of materials, the best medium I have found locally is "Sechelt Sand". It can be used in rock gardens by itself or mixed with some Sunshine #4 Mix to increase the organic content. The resulting medium does not contain soil at all and the lack of soil fungi and bacteria suits high alpine because they naturally grow in relatively sterile environments. For bulbs you can always add some leaf mould to further increase the organic content.

Sechelt Sand is used by landscapers as a bedding sand underneath pavers as it compacts well but remains well-drained. Sechelt Sand compacts because it is a mix of coarse sand and crusher fines, the rock dust left over from rock crushing at the gravel pit. It may be counterintuitive to include fines in a rock garden growing medium but there are two reasons why it is effective. First the fines make the medium firmer compared with typical sand which remains loose after placement. Secondly the rock dust in the crusher fines provides a source of mineral nutrients.

Alpine plants are well-anchored in nature otherwise they would be uprooted in strong winds, avalanches and movement of scree. Because alpine plants have evolved to be well- anchored, they are less tolerant of loose growing conditions in the garden.

Lewisia cotyledon is an example of a plant with roots that like to be firmly anchored. The plant will tolerate being root-bound in a small pot for years and is virtually indestructible in that condition. However, if you plant *Lewisia cotyledon* out in a vertical crevice, which is recommended for good drainage, some plants will expire in a few seasons. I have observed that they do not tolerate soil movement around their roots, which frequently occurs in rock gardens constructed with a coarse sand mix. The planting material in vertical crevices needs to be well-compacted before planting and even then there is likely to be soil movement over time.

Regarding the advantages of rock dust, those who follow Ian Young's bulb log at the Scottish Rock Garden site may have noticed this interesting comment.

http://www.srgc.org.uk/logs/logdir/2010Jul211279719133BULB_LOG__2910.pdf

"To replenish the nutrients I add some volcanic rock dust; a rich source of minerals and trace elements essential to the health of all plants. I have discussed the benefits of this volcanic rock dust, which is being marketed quite widely in Scotland, in the bulb log in previous years. The addition of rock dust to improve the fertility of soil has long been recognised as I have read in old journals that the quarry men took home rock dust to spread on their gardens and they had the best gardens. There is no doubt in my mind that the absence of these trace elements in the soil will cause problems in plants - much like our health would suffer if we did not receive our required vitamins and minerals- and this form of crushed volcanic rock is a very good source of these elements."

Most alpiners, particularly Saxifrages, cushion Androsaces, Daphnes and Dianthus, seem to like growing in Sechelt Sand without additional organic material, as the rock dust component seems to provide sufficient nutrients. I have *Lewisia rediviva* growing strongly in a Sechelt Sand bed but I added some slow release fertilizer around the plants last Fall as I suspect the thick root will need additional nutrients to develop.

Sechelt Sand is available from Lehigh Northwest Materials in Victoria at 250-382-2973. Sourcing small quantities may be a challenge but Sechelt Sand could be replicated by mixing coarse sand with crusher fines both of which are more commonly available.

FURTHER SEED STARTING TIPS

This link from Sue Beatty re: making our own seed starting hot mat:

<http://doorgarden.com/02/home-made-bottom-heat-seed-starting>

POTTING UP THE SEEDLINGS

If you have items or ideas for new sections or articles, or would like to write on a topic, please contact the editor, Valerie Melanson, Melanson.valerie@gmail.com. Submissions would be very welcome. The newsletter will be sent out in the body of an email and as Word and .pdf attachments. If you do not have a printer and wish a paper copy mailed to you, please contact Valerie above. Submission deadline is 12th of month, with newsletter to be sent out circa 15th. Frequency - most months except December.

NEXT ISSUE, FEBRUARY 2012:

THE NEXT STEP - POTTING UP THE SEEDLINGS, BY VALERIE MELANSON