

"THE CREVICE"

In memory of Eswyn

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

Issue # 15

February 2013

FROM THE EDITOR: The sun has come through for (most of) two whole days in a row. What more can I say? I hope you are seeing its positive effects on your alpine.

CLIFF BOOKER, well-known alpine photographer, author and lecturer, shares further photos of the Wengen Area of Switzerland. Thank you, Cliff.



Soldanella pusilla in the snowmelt



Crocus vernus albiflorus

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UPCOMING ALPINE SIG EVENTS

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 25TH - REGULAR SIG MEETING - PROGRAMME: SEED STARTING, PART 2 & VIEWING OF BERNIE GUYADER'S PHOTOS FROM PARADISE MEADOWS AND FORBIDDEN PLATEAU, TBC - LOCATION: PARKSVILLE CIVIC CENTRE - more information to follow in email from June Strandberg.

MONDAY, MARCH 25TH - REGULAR SIG MEETING - PROGRAMME: POTTING UP SEEDLINGS AND CUTTINGS, LOCATION: JUNE STRANDBERG'S - more information to follow.

SATURDAY, APRIL 13TH - ROAD TRIP TO VIRAGS SPRING SHOW & PLANT SALE - More information to follow and details on carpooling.

MONDAY, APRIL 29TH - REGULAR SIG MEETING - PROGRAMME TBA

SATURDAY, MAY 4TH, 2013 - OUR PLANT SALE @ MARS SPRING FLING - details to follow

MONDAY, MAY 27th, 2013 - CHRIS CHADWELL, PLANT HUNTER, SEED COLLECTOR, AND SECRETARY OF THE HIMALAYAN PLANT ASSOCIATION, will be visiting us for garden visits and a seminar. He will speak on **PLANT HUNTING FOR ALPINES IN THE BORDERLANDS OF WESTERN TIBET** - Chris, with 27 expeditions under his belt, will share his fine images of recent explorations for rock garden plants in the NW Himalaya and Little Tibet.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 29th, 2013 - HIMALAYAN SEED SEMINAR with Chris Chadwell at Alba Plants at Cowichan Bay - Members have already had an email about this. If you haven't booked a space, please contact Valerie at Melanson.valerie@gmail.com, to see if space is available. Cost is \$15 payable in advance. Seminar runs from 10:15 to about 1:30. Bring bag lunch. Coffee/tea provided.

FURTHER TO OUR LAST MEETING ON SEED STARTING: Sue Beatty notes: "I was looking up info for germinating clematis and was directed to

<http://gardensnorth.com/site/aboutus/germination.htm>. It's a good easy to follow for the novice tutorial. "

ESWYN'S ALPINE & ROCK GARDEN - FEBRUARY NEWS

Report & Photos by Karen Unruh

Last month I wrote an article on *Hamamelis x intermedia* 'Diane'. The winter flowers are now showing and here is a picture from Eswyn's Alpine & Rock Garden.



We don't have any alpine flowers blooming at this time--the garden is sited with more wind than a protected site so seems to be later with bloom times.

We do have flowers on the *Rosmarinus officinalis* 'Prostratus', not an alpine plant, but a low-growing rosemary draping over rocks which frame the garden.



PORTRAIT OF A GENUS:

Spring-blooming Alliums

by Todd Boland

Curator, Alpine Collection,

Memorial University of Newfoundland Botanical Garden

Among the 750 species or so of *Allium*, there are many which have great attraction as garden plants. From a horticultural viewpoint, the fall planted-spring blooming onions are by far more important than the summer-green, summer blooming types. The summer bloomers are still attractive plants and help to extend the bloom season of ornamental onions, but they are not as 'economically' easy to grow as the spring blooming types. In recent years, these spring blooming onions are becoming a main cash-crop in the Netherlands in the same way as tulips and daffodils.

The fall planted *Allium* primarily hail from the Mediterranean region and Asia Minor, areas that are typically cool and wet in winter but hot and dry in summer. This same area is also home to many tulip species. So in the garden, these *Allium* are typically planted in the fall, sprout and bloom in the spring months, then promptly go dormant for the summer. Some of these *Allium* are easy to grow while others are more difficult as they need to bake in the summer months, a difficult prospect for northern gardeners (we often have the same problem with some species tulips). However, the price of the bulbs is relatively cheap so these difficult ones may simply be grown as annuals in climates where they do not prove to be long-lived.

In the garden, provide these spring bloomers with full sun and well-drained soil. I use the spring bloomers in rock garden settings and in the back of the border. The one drawback with these spring bloomers is that many have dying foliage at the same time they are blooming. This is especially true for the large drumstick types. *Hosta* are very effective companions for these drumsticks. Diseases and pests are few and they are even deer resistant.

While the summer blooming onions are typically under 45 cm, the spring blooming can vary dramatically from under 15 cm to over 120 cm. The flower heads are often much larger than their summer-flowering cousins and the colours can be more vibrant.

I'll start with the common, smaller-stature species; *A. moly* (bright yellow) and *A. oreophilum* (aka. *A. ostrowskianum*, bright pink). Both of these *Allium* are prolific growers and can be used for naturalizing. The bulbs are so cheap, that you can afford to plant them in great drifts for maximum display. Both species grow about 15 cm and are great candidates for the rock garden.

They are hardy to about zone 4. Growing a little taller is *A. neopolitanum* (aka *A. cowanii*), a dainty white-flowered species which is more tender, best for zones 6 and warmer.



Allium moly (photo taken July 2010)

The next group is the taller growers (50-80 cm) with relatively small, but still showy, flower heads. By far the best and most stunning is the blue-flowered *A. caeruleum* (aka *A. azureum*). Blue is a rare colour among ornamental onions and *A. caeruleum* is the only fall-planted, summer dormant species; the other blue ones are summer-green types with quite small flowers. I grow my *A. caeruleum* in groups of a dozen or more for best impact. They have held their own for me, returning yearly but not increasing much. This species blooms late spring-early summer. Another popular species is *A. sphaerocephalum*, which doesn't bloom until August in my area of Newfoundland (probably June-July elsewhere). It has very dense, albeit small, purplish-red flower heads and makes an attractive cut-flower. Another species which is starting to crop up in the trade is *A. atropurpureum*. This one reaches 45 cm with fair-sized hemispherical heads of dark reddish-purple. While attractive, this one did not survive for me, suggesting it might need the summer baking to do well. All of these are suitable for larger rockeries, providing some height without bulky foliage.

The last group is the drumstick types which fall into two main types; the low growers (under 45 cm) with relatively broad leaves and the tall types (over 100 cm) with narrower leaves. Among the lower growers, the most spectacular is *A. christophii*, which has huge heads of starry silvery-lilac blooms atop 30-50 cm stems. This species also has attractive seedheads so don't necessarily rush to cut this one back. Of similar growth habit is the unusual *A. shubertii*, again with huge heads of lilac-pink flowers but in this case, the flower heads are more reminiscent of a fireworks display as the individual flower stems vary in their length.



Allium christophii (photo taken July 2010)

The shortest of the drumstick types is *A. karataviense*, whose baseball-sized white or lilac-tinted flowers literally sit atop the broad, blue-green, heavily ribbed leaves. 'Ivory Queen' is the most popular cultivar. Again, their smaller stature allow these to be used in larger rock gardens.



Allium karataviense



Drumstick *Allium* collection

Among the tall drumsticks, the most popular and least expensive is a hybrid called 'Purple Sensation'. It is sometimes listed as a selection of *A. aflatuense*. This one grows to 150 cm with dense, baseball-sized purple-pink heads. Of slightly paler colour is *A. giganteum*.



Allium giganteum (June 2010)

The bulbs are indeed gigantic but the flowers are only slightly larger than 'Purple Sensation' and considering the cost of *A. giganteum* bulbs, you might be better off to stick to 'Purple Sensation'. At any rate, 'Purple Sensation' is faster to multiply. 'Goliath', 'Globemaster' and *A. rosenbachianum* are all attractive look-alike hybrids and/or species. For a white-flowered alternative, there is 'Mount Everest' or *A. nigrum* (don't be fooled by this last species as the flowers are white, not black, despite what the species epithet might suggest). I use these exclusively among my perennials since the dying *Allium* leaves are easily hidden by the perennial's foliage.



Allium 'Mount Everest' (July 2010)

Many other hybrid and species ornamental onions are in the making in Europe, using species not well known in the trade. Some of these are similar to *A. karataviense* while others are more like the 'Purple Sensation' group. Still others are unlike anything in the current trade. I recently saw a chartreuse, small-flowered drumstick type that will drive flower arrangers to distraction! So keep your eyes open...it's only a matter of time before they will be available in North America.

Propagation Note:

In regards to germinating allium seed, there is some variation, depending on species, if they need a stratification period or not. Generally, the fall-planted, spring-blooming species do need a stratification period of 3 months at temps just above freezing. The summer-green species are not as fussy but I must admit, I still get better germination with all *Allium* if they get at least 10 weeks of 2-4 C first.

ONE PEEP INTO NEPAL

Report by Zdeněk Zvolánek, Photographs by Mojmír Pavelka



Mt. Langtanglirung

Two of my close friends, Czech seed collectors Mojmír Pavelka and Vladimír Staněk recently visited Northern Nepal and offered me an article for my Prague journal Skalničky. One picture shows a stunning gentian in a vertical crevice in a bigger cliff. So I share with you this rare picture in an unusual habitat hoping to ignite an inspiration how to try cultivate Asiatic Gentians, namely ***Gentiana ornata***.



Gentiana ornata

This species, endemic to Nepal is still a rarity in gardens. It is one of the finest of the Asiatic species and it is not as difficult as is sometimes in literature suggested. In some ways it can be likened to a more compact shorter-stemmed *Gentiana sino-ornata*. This Nepalese beauty forms a small basal rosette, from which radiate short, leafy stems ending in solitary blue flowers. They are rounded bell-shaped, striped purple-brown and cream outside, white within. It flowers from August onward. ***Gentiana ornata*** needs the coolest place in the acid part of the rock garden (no scorching sun radiation) and plenty of lime-free (rain) water while in growth and just moist in winter. Propagation is best by careful division in March-April or by sowing freshly collected seed.

Gentiana ornata had always the company with lovely dwarf cushions of *Gentiana depressa*. Both species produced rare white forms.



Gentiana ornata alba



Gentiana depressa alba



Gentiana depressa

PLANT PORTRAITS

Saxifraga x edithae 'Bridget'

by John Husbands, Alpine SIG member and Webmaster of
<http://portraitsofalpineplants.com/>

This wonderful group of plants should be represented in every alpine plant collection in one form or another. Seen here is *Saxifraga x edithae* 'Bridget' growing in the same piece of tufa, in the same trough as the original plant did some 30 odd years ago. It's a most attractive plant, producing tight domes of silvery-blue rosettes and elegant arching heads of rosy-red flowers, each with a ring of yellow stamens in the centre. It's a very old hybrid, apparently pre 1915; almost a century old! This will stand full sun better than others and is not so prone to sun-scorch. It flowers in April and grows to a height of about 9 centimetres and has a spread of about 20 centimetres.





TREBAH GARDENS

Report by Louise Cotterill, Photos by June Strandberg

Six or seven years ago, I attended a talk given by a spokesman from Trebah Gardens in Cornwall, England, put on by Milner Gardens in Qualicum Beach. I was dazzled by the pictures of Trebah, particularly by the glorious, bloom laden Dove Tree (*Davidia*) which I had never seen in bloom,



as well as the tree ferns which looked so tropical and other-worldly that I could almost imagine dinosaurs walking amongst them.



It was at this time that I promised myself that I would visit some day. That day came along in May 2012, when I finally went on a garden tour to England. June Strandberg and Shirley Finstad, both members of the Qualicum Beach Garden Club, were also on the tour.

Trebah is described as a sub-tropical garden with a coastal backdrop in a Cornish valley on the Helford River with views out to the open sea. Because of its warm and protected valley position, Trebah is able to support huge trees, called "Champion Trees" which have been declared the largest of their kind in the United Kingdom, including Japanese Maple (*Acer japonicum*), Tree Fern (*Dicksonia antarctica*), *Rhododendrum protistum*, and many others. The valley also has 100 year old Rhodos, Magnolias, Camellias, and *Gunnera* as well as hundreds of Hydrangeas. Of course, there were also hundreds of shrubs, perennials, and bulbs, many of which were not familiar to us, but, upon speaking with other members of our group, we were mostly able to identify. June, of course, is a treasure house of information on plants and many of us relied on her knowledge to help in identification. June is also an excellent resource for identifying many of the songbirds found in England

(there are many more in England than anywhere else I've been), which I found very enjoyable.

Another area that I found irresistible was the water garden built around a natural spring that flows downhill through a series of pools and is crisscrossed by a meandering path, surrounded by lush plantings of candelabra primula, and skunk cabbage in Spring when we saw it, followed by arum lilies and ginger lilies later in the season.



A bamboo maze has been created, locally known as the Bamboozle, with many different species including the Mozo bamboo with canes thicker than a man's arm and that has been known to grow 30 cm in just 24 hours. This rate of growth could not be sustained indefinitely, but specimens at Trebah regularly reach 10 m. tall in just one growing season.

A huge area, 2 acres, has been devoted to hydrangeas. Planted in the 1950's, the cut blooms were sent to the Covent Garden Flower Market to raise income to support the ongoing growth and operation of the gardens. Unfortunately our tour was too early in the year to see the hydrangeas in bloom, which must be a breathtaking sight.

There are hundreds of rhododendrons at Trebah - in early spring, the whole valley is full of bloom, from Rhododendron 'Trebah Gem', originally planted in 1900, a cross of R. arboretum and R. nuttallii. 100 years ago, visitors used to describe a walk through Trebah as "coming up Paradise".

Both adults and children are enchanted by the huge forest of *Gunnera* with paths leading to hidden corners. You can also gain protection from either the rain or the hot beating sun under their wonderfully large leaves.



You will also find several species of unusual tree ferns throughout the garden, bringing with them a sense of what a prehistoric landscape could have looked like, but, thankfully, no dinosaurs were present (at least not at the time of our visit!).

At the bottom of the valley, on the beautiful, sandy beach, there stands a memorial to the event which occurred in 1944 during the Second World War, when the beach was used as an embarkation point for 7,500 soldiers of a U.S. Infantry Division, for the assault on Omaha Beach, which was part of the D-Day Landings and was the beginning of the end for the war.

At this point, it's impossible to decide which garden on the tour was my favourite, but Trebah is high on my list. I'd love to visit again!

WHAT'S NEW IN MY GARDEN - SUE BEATTY - JAN 31st



"The snowdrops are actually from Eva's garden - we had a little adventure last year when they were going to tear up ground for development. I'd walked by there a few times and saw this gorgeous, big patch of snowdrops and so I grabbed Eva and off we went before they dug. We did get permission. When we went it was quite overgrown but I knew exactly where they were so we literally bush wacked our way over and voila! We got the most in the green but also got a load of bulbs. We left there covered in scratches and filthy but smiling with a big bag of bulbs. Mine aren't up as far as Eva's so I'll give you the picture I took of hers today. "



"Like everybody I have a few mossy saxes but the touran neon rose is always first to open and last to stop blooming. It looks like two different color pinks but they change color as they bloom. "



"Of course that gorgeous victorian primrose is blooming too - it is a prolific bloomer and I didn't notice it stopping much over winter. "



"The cyclamen is one from June's garden - the first to bloom this year - I am so excited."

And a couple of updates on **Feb 15th**:



Lovely purple and yellow irises



Left: *Saxifraga* and Right: *Draba* probably *sphaeroides*

WHAT'S NEW IN MY GARDEN - JUNE STRANDBERG, Feb 5th



Galanthus reginae-olgae



Galanthus caucasica

June notes that she really hopes to get some *Galanthus reginae-olgae* seeds from these seedpods this year. The *Galanthus caucasica* were grown from seed.



Saxifraga sp. From Betscho Pass



Saxifraga 'Harry Marshall'



Saxifraga 'Dana'

The saxifrages all originate from Wrightman's Alpines and are about to burst into bloom.



This *Hutchinsia alpina* came from Cannors (now Cultivate). It has been in flower longer than anything else.

SOME PLANTS THAT SHONE IN MY GARDEN IN 2012

Photos by Kirsten Juergensen



Gentiana



Leontopodium alpinum

INTERESTING LINKS:

From UBC Botanical Garden' POTD:

<http://www.botanicalgarden.ubc.ca/potd/2012/12/lewisia-oppositifolia.php>

<http://www.botanicalgarden.ubc.ca/potd/2012/11/psilocarphus-brevissimus-brevissimus.php> - **Wooly Marbles**

<http://www.botanicalgarden.ubc.ca/potd/2012/11/lupinus-bogotensis.php> - **an Andean lupine**

<http://www.botanicalgarden.ubc.ca/potd/2012/11/masdevallia-veitchiana.php> - **Peruvian gallo-gallo from the Andes.**

<http://www.botanicalgarden.ubc.ca/potd/2012/11/enkianthus-campanulatus.php>

A Buckwheat from SW USA and Northern Mexico:

<http://www.botanicalgarden.ubc.ca/potd/2013/01/eriogonum-inflatum.php>

A member of the Dutchman's Pipe family from the South Caucasus:

<http://www.botanicalgarden.ubc.ca/potd/2013/02/aristolochia-steupii.php>

A Begonia from Bhutan:

<http://www.botanicalgarden.ubc.ca/potd/2013/02/begonia-hatacoa.php>