

Alpine Garden Club
of British Columbia



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www.agc-bc.ca

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Meetings are held the second Wednesday of each month except July & August, in the Floral Hall, VanDusen Botanical Garden. Doors and Library open at 7:00pm and Meetings start at 7:30pm sharp with the educational talk. Don't forget to bring a prize for the raffle which goes a long way to paying for the hall rental.

Front Cover: *Tricyrtis stolonifera*, drawn by Anne Aikins. It must be fall when the *Tricyrtis* plants bloom. cf. Vol.46. No.4 September 2003



PROGRAM:

Nov. 12th AGM – see Notice of Motion and proposed changes to the By-Laws below.

Brent Hine gives us his presentation on the collecting trip he and Daniel Mosquin took through the drylands of Western North America. Some of these plants are already appearing in the dryland feature in the Lohbrunner Alpine Garden.

Dec. 10th Our annual and popular rare plant auction to benefit the CKNW Orphan Fund. Please keep in mind a plant donation. If you're at all hesitant about attending remember this is **also our Christmas potluck!**

Jan 14th Popcorn and a movie. Harry Jens' movie on his Yunnan excursion was so good we are going to present another of these botanical adventures. We'll add popcorn for a pleasant evening out in midwinter .

Feb 11th TBA

March 15th Note that this is a change from our regular meeting date and again we will have this meeting at the Vancouver Community College The intrepid explorer **Joseph Halda** will be speaking to our group, courtesy of the NARGS speakers tour. Topic to be announced.



PROPOSED

AFFILIATION WITH NARGS - BALLOT

Hopefully everyone is aware by now that there is a motion on the table for the upcoming AGM, proposing that the Club should be affiliated with The North American Rock Garden Society (NARGS). As explained in the previous Bulletin, this is a major decision. The arguments for and against this proposal were published in the Winter, Spring & Summer issues and further comments were enclosed with the Summer edition.

NOTICE OF MOTION The following motion will be put at the AGM on November 12th by Charlie Sale:

PROPOSED: *"That the Alpine Garden Club of British Columbia should affiliate with the North American Rock Garden Society (NARGS)"*



Proposed motion to amend the By-laws of the Alpine Garden Club of British Columbia ~ Ian Plenderleith

Please note that I wish to move the following amendments to the By-laws at the Annual General Meeting of the Alpine Garden Club in November 2008.

- 1) By-law 4. B. b. to be amended to read – the Treasurer's annual financial report. This report shall be circulated to members at the meeting prior to the Annual General meeting and shall include:
(i) a balance sheet to and including the last day of August. etc
- 2) By-law 8.B to add a further position ix Web Site Manager to those listed.
- 3) By-law 6.B change to say "*The executive shall meet at least eight times yearly.*"

The reasons for proposing these changes are as follows:

- 1) Receiving the financial report prior to the AGM will allow members time to study it before being asked to approve it.
- 2) The internet was not appreciated when the original By-laws were written but has now become a major part of our Club's activities and of daily life. As such, a Web Site Manager has an important role to play in the organization.
- 3) It has become usual to not hold regular executive meetings in either May or June, when the monthly meeting is usually a garden visit, or in December with the meeting's festive activities.



Since the NARGS' Annual 2009, Calgary meeting has been cancelled, the NARGS annual Business meeting has been moved to the Western Winter Study Weekend in Portland, OR. This WWSW will be held on March 13-15, 2009. Because the meeting will be in March, all proposed awards and business reports need to be prepared earlier.



SEED EXCHANGE: The seed list and order form are enclosed with this Bulletin. Please read the instructions carefully and complete the order form in numerical order. Note that the deadline for ordering is December 12th 2008.

Ordering On-line: you can order seeds on-line at www.agc-bc.ca. Please note that this facility is for members only and you will need to register your email address on the site.



THE JOY
~ by David

Gardens • ROCK •

OF SAX
Sellars,

Surrey, British Columbia

Have you ever thought what would comprise the ideal alpine genus? It would include species that are relatively easy to grow, form attractive low mounds with year-round foliage interest and have flowers that are tight to the foliage or extend skywards seeking out the sun and insects for pollination. Saxifrages have all these characteristics and have been considered the backbone of the rock garden for over a century yet they are not as widely grown as they could be.

Saxifraga means “rock-breaker” because they were used in historic times to treat urinary stones and not because of their affinity with rocks. Nevertheless they really are a quintessential rock garden plant and they certainly like growing among rocks and in crevices.

Many alpine plants do not perform as well in the garden as they do in the wild. For example, *Douglasia laevigata* puts on a magnificent show of flowers on the high ridges of the Olympic Mountains but in our garden they have only a few, rather limp, flowers. Saxifrages, by contrast always seem to flower in the garden as vigorously as they do in nature. In fact, the European forms of *Saxifraga oppositifolia* are more floriferous in the garden than the native *Saxifraga oppositifolia* in our mountains. Saxifrages are thus very satisfying to grow, as their floral display so closely resembles plants in the wild.

Many growers like their sax indoors and expend efforts on developing an alpine house with plenty of glass so the neighbours can see what's going on inside. But for the most excitement, sax in the outdoors is hard to beat and is not difficult as long as the beds are properly prepared with sandy, well-drained soil. Silver saxifrages are the classics of the genus with their beautiful foliage and spreading habit. My favourite species is *Saxifraga longifolia* with single, very large, lime-encrusted rosettes and spectacular flowers on a single extended panicle, which does not appear until the plant is five or six years old. At that point, exhausted by the effort of florescence the plant promptly dies. But what a way to go.



Saxifraga longifolia near Benasque



Saxifraga longifolia near Gavarnie



Saxifraga oppositifolia in the garden



Saxifraga 'Winifred Bevington' (left)

Saxifraga paniculata (above)

All photos provided by David Sellars



Saxifraga oppositifolia in the Swiss Alps

We searched for *Saxifraga longifolia* in the Pyrenees last year. We hiked up the Ossoue valley near Gavarnie in France and spotted the long panicles high up on the cliffs sprouting from rosettes as large as dinner plates. Later, just outside the town of Benasque on the Spanish side of the range we were astonished to see hundreds of flowers of *Saxifraga longifolia* cascading from the vertical face of a high crag right by the road.

There are a number of other large flowered silver saxifrages. *Saxifraga 'Southside Seedling'* is a spectacular form of *Saxifraga cotyledon* with red blotches on the white flowers and well worth growing. According to Malcolm McGregor, *Saxifraga cotyledon* had a romantic connotation in Lapland as a flower for young men to give their sweethearts, presumably in the hope that the sax will encourage them to return the favour. *Saxifraga paniculata* has many forms and hybrids all of which are delightful and easy to grow. Our favourite is *Saxifraga 'Winifred Bevington'* which has lime-encrusted dark green leaves and pretty pale pink flowers with pink anthers. All the silver saxifrages are easy to propagate by rooting rosettes and they come easily from seed.

Most saxes appreciate some shade during the day as long as the overall light levels are bright. This is particularly true of *Saxifraga oppositifolia* which is not hard to grow in the British Columbia climate on a north facing slope shaded by a vertical rock above. It is easy to propagate as the stems are quite long and can be inserted deeply into moist sand. Having propagated lots of forms of *Saxifraga oppositifolia*, I have been experimenting with finding the best planting location. The plants that are growing the most vigorously in our garden are on a ledge on a near-vertical cliff beside a waterfall with no direct sunlight. They like it in that location so much that one has self-seeded into moss on a vertical rock below. Our favourite forms are 'Splendens', 'Theoden' and 'Michaud' and they are all very floriferous with the flowers appearing in mid-March in coastal British Columbia.

For those who prefer their sax between the covers, Malcolm McGregor's new book is a stimulating bedtime read. *Saxifrages: A Definitive Guide to the 2000 Species, Hybrids and Cultivars* does not just fill the gap in the rock gardening literature. It packs the void with excellent granular material combining authoritative taxonomy, personal observations, growing and propagation tips and accounts of mountain travel. It is beautifully illustrated and invites both casual browsing and focused study. This is an essential volume for the sax lover's library.

It has recently become harder to source a wide range of saxifrages from growers in Canada. We need to give more support to our nurseries and encourage them to embrace the Catholic Church perspective; that the joy of sax should be considered to be mostly about propagation.

Next issue: More Joy of Sax



CYCLAMEN – AN UPDATE

~ by Andree Connell, Victoria, Vancouver Island, BC

First a mention of name changes to be certain we are all visualizing the same plants: the spring blooming 'propeller' one that used to be *C. trochopteranthum* is now *C. alpinum* – that's not too hard to take.

Then there's the repandum group where the three species were *balearicum*, *creticum*, and *repandum* with its 3 subspecies *peloponnesiacum*, *rhodense* and *vividum*. Well *balearicum*, *creticum* and *repandum* remain, but it turns out the least known of the subspecies is actually a species in its own right so from *C. repandum* ssp. *rhodense* emerges *C. rhodium* and the subspecies *peloponnesiacum* and *vividum* now belong to it instead of to *repandum*.

It's not that recent but just to recap: *C. purpurascens* ssp. *ponticum* is now *C. colchicum*, and the truly long petalled forms of *coum* are *C. elegans*. If it looks like a *repandum* flower on *coum* it is *elegans*; if you are only staring at the petals trying to convince yourself they are longer and narrower than usual it more likely is just a long petalled *coum*.

Autumn blooming *C. intaminatum* used to known as the smallest cyclamen, having white flowers with noticeable grey veins. Now *C. parviflorum* is a mate sizewise and most of my *intaminatum*s are in varying shades of pink, which it turns out is actually the most common colour as verified by the Cyclamen Society Expedition to Turkey October 2004. *C. parviflorum* by the way is a nice neat plant, those I have had have all been uniform in leaf (plain and *coum-like*) and flower (a cool blue-ish pink and *coum-like*) however do be aware that it tends to inhabit cool mountain slopes (hence good & hardy) and is more akin to *purpurascens* in that it doesn't appreciate a total drying out in summer.

Thought you couldn't grow *C. persicum* outside? Ah, but did you know that high altitude forms were collected (CSE 90560 & 90561)? I can only relate that they were out and happy for 4 years on Galiano before we moved, but have only just been planted out this year in Victoria. There is also an autumn blooming strain.

C. coum is of course one of the most widely grown species and there are now several forms of pure white-flowered plants (no pink nose) tagged 'albissimum'. "Golan Heights was the first, and in my experience is the miffiest. 'George Bisson' seems altogether more substantial.

The pure white form of *C. cilicium* was first to follow on from the ordinary pink but there is also 'Bowles variety' which is white with a pink nose

In *C. hederifolium* look out for ssp. *confusum*, a triploid noted as being later blooming, scented and having larger flowers and narrower more twisted petals, with larger, often shiny, leaves. The occasional plant of

hederifolium, *graecum* and *repandum* has been found growing on tree trunks and rocks in basically epiphytic mode.

Various improved and interesting forms have been selected out of species and amongst hybrids; notably a double *persicum*, a *purpurascens* with strikingly zoned leaves, a *creticum* with bright silver leaves and a deep pink/silver leaf *repandum* x *creticum*. If getting involved in these endeavours make sure your plants achieve their mature foliage and flowers before concluding it's a hit or a miss. Actually I hate to discourage you but to be fair have to admit that flowers of a particular *hederifolium* cultivar took 8 years to fulfill their typical colouring. Of course I had long before given them up, but luckily always try to segregate special types in one spot in case anything should develop, so one day had a very pleasant surprise.

If you are interested in the stargazer types of flowers (upward facing) *C. hederifolium* is the only one with a cultivar so-named although they have been found in other species. It would seem that few come true from seed – my own experience from Cyclamen Society seed as well as from my own segregated plant – and all have been white, as have all photos and all but one reference found on the internet (is there really a pink Stargazer?), so patience and persistence would be the order of the day.

I would be re-miss not to mention that in England and some areas of Southwestern BC a fungal problem occurs which causes a disfiguring anthracnose on cyclamen leaves. The Cyclamen Society help people have made recommendations of raising plants; watering only from the bottom, (difficult to contrive with garden plants!) improving ventilation, and removing affected leaves. They specify that spraying would not be effective as the fungus thrives on wet foliage. Vigour and flowering do not seem to be compromised by this particular *Colletotrichum* fungus which they say affects only cyclamen and should not be carried by seed from clean plants.



SPRING CRUCIFERS ~ by Linda Verbeek, Burnaby, BC

No, I am not talking about *Aubrieta* and *Aurinia*, welcome as they are around this time. Not even about *Draba*'s, although they would certainly qualify as alpines. The plants I am thinking of are less well known. They all have white flowers. The first one is *Pachyphragma macrophyllum*. Years ago, when I was still editor of our Bulletin, Robert Isherwood from England wrote a plant portrait of this species for us (Vol. 40 no. 4, Sept 1997., p. 86) Very kindly he also included some seeds for me. I only managed to raise one plant, which has been in the garden ever since. As Robert wrote, the plant is native to the Caucasus and Armenia, and originally was classified as a *Thlaspi*. I have it growing in a semi-shaded place, and it has been fairly slow to spread. Robert mentioned a square

meter of it, I don't think mine covers even a square foot, and that after 10 years. It has fairly large (6 – 8 cm), mid-green, roundish leaves that are more or less evergreen, although they get a little tattered in the winter. Now, in early April, it has at least 20 stems, each carrying a cluster of glistening white flowers. The inflorescence at this point is quite flat, so that the impression is almost of an umbel. They are carried well above the leaves, and from a distance it looks like these white inverted saucers or mini-parachutes are floating over the plant. The individual flowers are also quite large, about 1 cm across. Being only one plant, it sets very little seed, and I haven't seen it in the exchanges very much. But it is very cheery.

The second plant is *Cardamine trifolia*. It looks a little like *Pachyphragma*, but is all round daintier. The leaves seem to be unaffected by anything winter can throw at them, they look as tidy now as they did in the summer. This plant is also evergreen, with dark green leaves, each consisting of 3 completely round leaflets (ca. 2 cm) with somewhat scalloped edges, joined together by short stalks. The mound of leaves is less than half as high as the *Pachyphragma*, maybe only 8 cm or so, and the flower stems are relatively tall in relation to the leaves. This gives the whole plant rather an airy effect. The flowers are just as glistening white, but somewhat smaller. It also blooms just a little later. The *Pachyphragma* is in full bloom, the *Cardamine* is just coming out. This one comes from central Europe, the Alps and northern Italy, where it doesn't grow very high at very high altitudes. It likes woods, and apparently often grows on limestone, although it doesn't seem to sulk in my garden, which is on sand, and therefore quite acid. And I often forget to lime.

The last one is even smaller, really more of a mat-forming plant, and also a true alpine, from the mountains of Europe (Alps, Pyrenees). This is *Hutchinsia alpina*, and the plant I have had the longest. It has wonderful leaves, like very small cress leaves, and they give a very fine texture to the mat. The flowers are again borne in clusters on stems above the leaves, but since the leaves only come a cm or two above the ground, the flower stems can also be quite short. They are also produced in profusion, so a happy plant is almost covered in flowers. I think it probably likes more sun than I am giving it, and I suspect it is happiest draping over a rock. But even in my somewhat shady corner, it blooms for weeks and weeks every spring. It does come a little later than the other two – I haven't seen any sign of flowers yet.



A FALL FLOWERING SNOWDROP ~ by Brian Halliwell, Halifax, England**

Snowdrops have wide appeal, to horticulturists and non-gardeners both. These tiny nodding flowers are delightful in a winter landscape, Alpine Garden Club of BC

although those who garden where there is winter snow have to wait for snowmelt before they can enjoy their treasures. Snowdrops have achieved fashion status with specialists. Some collect only species with their botanical subdivisions, while others concentrate on cultivars.

In this article I am writing about a snowdrop which differs from all the others by flowering in fall. *Galanthus nivalis* ssp. *reginae-olgae*, named for a queen of Greece, in now, according to Flora Europaea, the valid name for this snowdrop. In some books it is given specific rank and it is possible to find it referred to as *G. olgae*. Older publications may mention a second fall-flowering species: *G. coryrensis*, but this has been sunk into *G. nivalis* ssp. *reginae-olgae*. This subspecies occurs in a few locations in Greece and in Sicily. There appear to be two forms: in one the flowers are produced between September and December before the leaves; whilst in the other flowers appear between January and March, usually with the leaves. The leaves which come in pairs are dark green with a longitudinal grey band. The time of flowering is variable and can change from year to year. Visually the flowers resemble those of the common snowdrop *G. nivalis* but they are larger in all parts.

In nature the bulbs are summer dormant with flowering beginning as the season ends, usually about the time rains begin to fall. In a moist soil flowers will be followed or accompanied by foliage and subsequent fruit development. By the onset of summer, even before the soil has dried out, the aerial growth has died back. Although no external growth occurs after that, development is taking place in the bulb where next year's flower buds are formed; this is affected by soil temperatures.

This subspecies will not be easy to find as bulbs, but seed is occasionally offered in seed lists. Fresh seed always germinates better than old. Sow seed as soon as it is received and plunge the container outside. Sometimes there may be immediate germination, but it is more usual, especially with older seed, to observe germination after winter cold. Let the seedlings grow as long as possible, reducing water only when the leaves begin to yellow.



Galanthus nivalis ssp. *reginae-olgae*: photo reprinted by permission Christine Skelmersdale, Broadleigh Gardens, Bishops Hull, Taunton, Somerset, England.
www.broadleighbulbs.co.uk/

**The article is excerpted from an original article in the AGCBC Bulletin, Vol.39, No.1. February 1996