

Alpine Garden Club of B.C.



Gentiana acaulis

From
Hardy Perennials and Old Fashioned Flowers
By
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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.

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PROGRAM:

June 13th: Brent Hine will be leading a walk through the UBC Alpine Garden at 6:30pm. Visitors will be very impressed with the dramatic changes to the Alpine House which will be described in a future issue.

Fall schedule (subject to change)

September 12th: Philip MacDougall will give an account of one of his hit and run botanical tours. China Lite presents an alpine flora travel-log of Taiwan, the beautiful island.

September 23rd: **AGCBC Fall Sale** at VanDusen Gardens, Floral Hall from 1 to 4 p.m. A chance to acquire a wide variety of rare and unusual plants not widely available from nurseries.

October 10th: In October 2006 Margaret Charlton and Charlie Sale returned to New Zealand. Charlie will take us on a tour of some of the best gardens on this island. Blessed with a benign climate, almost anything can be and is grown, sometimes your only problem is to keep the sheep off the lawn.

November 14th: The March 2006 on-line issue of "*The Plantsman*" contains Graham Ware's informative article on the climbing aconites. Tonight he will present an overview of the full genus. That such a diverse group of horticulturally significant plants has not had a significant treatment only speaks to the complexity of this group. Prepare to be enlightened.

December 12th: Christmas party and auction.

The Western Winter Study Weekend 2008: The Club will host the WSW in the Vancouver area from February 29th to March 2nd 2008. Details of the programme and registration will be announced nearer the time.

MEMBERSHIP NOTES:

It can be very helpful to have members' e-mail addresses for late-breaking news – open gardens or changes to the program, for example. These will not be published without your express permission. I hope that you will consider contacting me with your email address.

A proportion of members have signified that they would be willing to receive the Bulletin by e-mail. While this is not yet set up, the previous Bulletin – in full colour – is currently available on our website, www.agc-bc, should you wish to check it.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

This issue contains the first articles of a series on the history of rock gardening, crevice gardening and alpine troughs. We hope you will find the articles interesting and informative. We hope too that you will be encouraged to send us ideas for the bulletin. We would particularly love to receive articles and photos of your garden(s) and hear tales of your trials and successes.

SEEDS FOR THIS YEAR'S EXCHANGE:

We wish everyone a joyful Spring and hope that your seeds from last year's exchange are germinating well. To continue to make available a good selection of seeds it is necessary that our faithful donors continue to provide them. Now is the time to begin thinking of collecting seed for this year. Please make an effort to collect seeds from choice plants, either in the garden or in the wild, whenever possible.

We are particularly indebted to those who make special collecting trips into the mountains and fields to collect wild material for our exchange; and there are a number who do so. Trips to see plants and collect seed in the wild seem to me the essence of what we are about and are a delightful way to spend one's holidays (even if one can't go as fast or as far as one did in the past). Please remember to identify the plants from which seed is collected or, if that is not possible, provide a description of the plant and its location.

I have wondered whether it would be a good idea to compile a list of places members have gone and what they have seen so that other members could contact them for information and guidance. Of course, ideally, one could submit a short (or not so short) article to the Bulletin about where you have been and what you have seen and done. Please consider doing this.

We hope that everyone will have a wonderful summer and look forward to compiling a great Seed List for you in the autumn.

A REQUEST FOR BACK (WAY BACK) ISSUES OF THE BULLETIN:

We have been trying to compile a complete archive of our Bulletin and, thanks to several members, have gotten most of them. The Bulletin was started in 1958 at which time we were 'The Canadian Primula and Alpine Society' and the Bulletin was published monthly except for July and August. We have been unable to locate any of volumes 1 or 2, (1958 and 1959). We also lack volume 3 numbers 1 & 8 (1960), volume 4 numbers 4 & 10 (1961) and volume 5 number 9 (1962). Would some of our long-time members be so kind as to search your libraries and see if you might have these. If you do not wish to part with these ancient, rare and precious documents I would be pleased to photocopy them and return them to you.

Please do not deliver stacks of other Bulletins and material to me as we have most, if not all, of the later Bulletins; often several copies. Thank you.



A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE JOY OF TROUGH GARDENING ***~ by Rex Murfitt, Victoria, Vancouver Island, BC***

The history of growing alpine plants in antique hand-hewn stone animal feeding troughs or old farmhouse domestic sinks, even the occasional quern, goes back many years to England and probably Europe too. Clarence Elliott of the famous Six Hills Nursery, in Gloucestershire, UK, is often given the credit for trough gardening; unfortunately it is not true although he was certainly growing choice alpines in them. He was a prolific writer and much of the knowledge we have of rock gardening in those days came from his pen. His son Joe Elliott subsequently wrote in his handbook on gardening in troughs, "My father never claimed to be the originator of trough gardening".

Clarence Elliott recognized Miss Mary Saunders as one of the originators of the practice. She was a skilled alpine gardener back around 1922 and in her Yorkshire garden used sand-filled discarded sinks and troughs as hospitals for sickly plants. The plants came to be admired and the use of garden troughs spread rapidly.

Eventually gardening in troughs became the fashion in the alpine gardening fraternity, causing huge increases in trough prices. A comment written in the English Alpine Garden Society Bulletin by Dr C.C. Clay, one of the early pioneers, shows the mindset of the period: "Upwards of 50 of my troughs were 'thank offerings' from patients who survived my prescriptions. The remainder I purchased for a mere song, one or two of them for a few ounces of tobacco."

If he knew what one has to pay for a genuine trough in Britain today he might not survive his own prescriptions.



*A selection of 18th & 19th century troughs & sinks from £400 to £2000 !
Photo: English-garden-antiques.co.uk*

As the fashion of trough gardening grew so did the demand for genuine tufa until it too reached problems of availability and cost. Large pieces were used extensively in building actual rock gardens, as an additive in soil mixtures, and for landscaping inside trough, pot, and pan gardens. We all know today how well some plants grow in lumps of tufa. The thrifty members of the Alpine Garden Society of the 1930's agreed that these rising costs were becoming unacceptable so they invented artificial tufa. In so doing they managed to annoy many of the purists who disapproved of 'such unnatural things in the rock garden'. Simply by adding a quantity of peat moss to their concrete mixtures they hoped to create a porous mixture similar to tufa 'rocks'. They mixed and poured a creamy mixture into molds made in wet sand where real 'rocks' had been used as patterns. With the success of this experiment it was not long before enterprising people dubbed it 'hypertufa', a name that persists to the present day.

Shortly thereafter the first hypertufa troughs appeared, and look where we are today! Modern methods continue to help us to make hypertufa lighter and stronger than the original recipe. There are many methods and recipes.

North America suffers repeated freezing and thawing during its hard winters. Such weather wreaks havoc on troughs and plants. That is why work on frost resistant mixtures for troughs continues today. Fortunately the results are widely published and well documented. Information on current mixtures is readily available. Trough designs are not limited to simple replicas of hand hewn stone containers. All manner of artistic creations are possible, from wonderful antique Japanese lanterns and stepping stones to an endless variety of containers. Statuary is a possibility for those who are interested.

During a recent visit to The Genesee Valley Chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society I was introduced to an artist, David W.

Slayton who creates incredible things using his own hypertufa recipes. He has wonderful and delicate mushrooms and toadstools in a full range of sizes. I was quite overwhelmed with his wonderful recreations of traditional "staddlestones." Staddlestones were used to elevate barns and granaries off the ground to keep the grain dry and to deter rodents. They were carved from local stone and resembled toadstools. He had several of these fantastic replicas lining his long curving driveway and, combined with a mantle of heavy snow, they made an exquisite picture. I understand they are wired for low level lighting. Imagine arriving home on a terrible night to be greeted thus!

If the thought of making your own trough is not appealing there are plenty of people who create and sell lightweight containers. They are easily found in gardening publications. Should you have particular size or design in mind it might be possible to negotiate a custom item.

Small Troughs and Containers. The enormous value of small troughs and sinks for gardening in limited spaces is in both their appearance and their utility. It is a fact that a group of troughs can hold as many plants and require less weeding than a garden taking up similar space. In troughs the plants remain dwarf, retaining the elfin quality we so admire. Movable containers help you optimize the garden exposure. Lightweight containers are easy to move around to obtain the amount of sun or shade required by your plants. Also, interesting containers and plants can be rearranged to show off those in bloom or in particularly good form.

Another reason for using troughs is that the design of your home or garden may not be suitable to the informality of a rock garden. Rock garden plants grow so well in troughs that they can be used anywhere. Troughs can be straight and square, rounded, or formed in rocklike, irregular, freeform shapes. Harmonious shapes resemble one another and blend together.

You can make large shallow platters or tiny little bonsai type pots suitable for small elegant trees. These need attention, for shallow dishes holding so little soil are susceptible to drought and cannot sustain plants for long before the soil nutrients are depleted.

Do not let this deter you, for there is lots of fun to be had growing Sempervivums and Sedums. A crowded mass of hungry but colourful mounding Sempervivums is a satisfying picture. When they spread too much they are easily removed and planted elsewhere, and then the trough is yours to fill with fresh soil and plants.



LIFE AND DEATH OF A DAPHNE

~ by Linda Verbeek, Burnaby, BC

Daphne is generally a wonderful genus, with mostly tidy-looking shrubs, that nearly always have fragrant flowers. Most of them are medium sized, but there are a few truly alpine-sized ones. I think probably the most prestigious of these is *Daphne petraea*, but I have never even seen it, as far as I can remember. A much more amenable plant is *D. arbuscula*, and it is nearly as pretty.

In 1987 we made a trough for limestone plants. I can't remember now whether I had bought the Daphne first or just after, but in any case, I had this tiny plant, probably in a 2" pot, that I figured would be just right for the shrub element of a trough. It is evergreen, with narrow, shiny, dark green leaves almost in whorls at the end of the stems, and at the time I don't think it was more than 2" high. So we carefully positioned it in one corner of the trough (which was 2' X 3'), with a bit of rock as background. It settled in happily, and after a few years began to produce its clusters of pink, highly fragrant flowers. We were delighted.

The years went by and the plant grew. After maybe 6 or 8 years it was getting big enough that I thought I should try to propagate it. By then I had a book about propagation, and I did it exactly as they said, at the time indicated, and miraculously, managed to root 3 or 4 cuttings every year. I was almost pruning the plant now, because it began to take over. In another 6 or 8 years it had occupied more than a quarter of the whole trough, and was crowding out other treasures. Moreover, it was no longer in proportion, so I thought I would move it. We nearly emptied out the whole trough, carefully removing other plants that were in the way (including *Gentiana verna*, which survived the operation), and retrieved what I thought were nearly all the roots of the *Daphne*. I then proceeded to plant it in a 2 or 3 gallon pot, with as much the same soil mix as I could manage, and a limestone chip topdressing. I didn't use the same rocks we'd used in the trough, I didn't have any left at that point, so I topdressed with a commercial limestone grit.

Now because I didn't use the same topdressing, I don't know whether it was the move, the topdressing, or yet something else, but after that moment the *Daphne* sulked, then languished, and then began ailing, and no matter what I did, change the soil, change the topdressing, nothing helped. It took 3 or 4 years but our big beautiful *Daphne arbuscula* died. And even after that, when I acquired new ones (Ian Gillam even gave me a rooted cutting of his plant which was originally a rooted cutting of mine), they would again sicken even while still in their pots. I was getting quite discouraged. However, the story may have a happier ending: a year or two ago I planted yet another tiny *D. arbuscula* straight into our little tufa hill in the garden – no pot, no daily attention, only a little slug protection, and so far that one appears to thrive, although it hasn't bloomed yet. It can stay there forever, so I hope we will keep it.



GET CRACKING

~ by Ian Gillam, Vancouver, BC

How weeds do grow in cracks in paving! A seed that's fortunate to fall there and get established has important advantages, freedom from competition for light and air above and for moisture and nutrients below. The paving not only reflects some of the sun's heat and light but stores the rest for release when the sun is obscured. It is easy to imagine that if human activity were removed, our roads and cities here would quite quickly disappear into the rain forest as those of the Maya did. Vegetable growers sometimes utilize these advantages, planting not into paving but in slits in plastic sheeting laid on the soil, usually black to warm the soil and suppress weeds, red in the case of tomatoes. The cover also reduces evaporation of moisture from the soil, itself a cause of cooling.

Alpine plants in nature take full advantage of such opportunities by growing in cracks and gaps in rocks and it is a common observation that branches pressed to the rock flower days earlier than those higher on the same plant. Some alpiners, often particularly desirable plants, tend to specialize in growing in this type of environment, even in minute cracks in essentially vertical cliffs, where their roots must reach back considerable distances to supplies of moisture. In cultivation these choice plants are often challenging and may demand deep and narrow spaces for their roots.

Growers in the Czech Republic have recently led the way in developing a specialized form of rock gardening, the crevice garden, particularly suited to such plants but very satisfactory for many other alpiners too. Instead of constructing the garden with massive boulders, artfully placed, the crevice garden uses thin plates of stone cleaved from the rock bed and set almost upright into the soil. To appear natural, of course, all the plates must run parallel to one another and be largely buried. (The final effect should be nearer to a cobbled area than to a pet cemetery.) The rock slabs can be spaced as closely as wished but planting or replanting at a later stage is easier if they will accommodate a narrow trowel between them. Alternatively, closely placed slabs may be dug out, a new plant sandwiched between them and the whole replanted as a unit. Czech growers have planned and built several such gardens in North America and the concept is being taken up by resident constructors in other countries.

Joyce Carruthers gardens in Victoria, BC and in the Czech Republic. In her Victoria garden Joyce has built the crevice garden, a section of which is illustrated on page 29. Larger rocks are interspersed with smaller slabs of similar rock providing numerous crevices for planting. The surface is almost completely covered with rock, essentially paved, yet allows the plants to root deeply into soil.

Recent interest is in fact a rediscovery of the type of garden described forty years ago by P. Siviter Smith.¹ In an article titled "Stones On Edge – The Roman Way" he described this solution to the problem of growing alpine plants in an outdoor bed fronted by a low stone retaining wall and a stone-flagged path, where a "classical" rock garden would have looked out of place. His photographs show the stone slabs set into the ground at a slight angle to the vertical and running along to represent carefully curved strata. He suggests using slabs 7 to 10 inches (20-25 cm) wide by 4-6 inches (10-15 cm) in depth. Slabs he used varied from 2-4 inches (5-10 cm) thick and were carefully sorted into piles of equal thickness to allow a given line or stratum to be constructed with constant thickness along its length. Siviter Smith also recommended shaping the slabs to uniform rough rectangles. This allows each to butt up closely to the next and permits individual pieces to be pulled out and replaced easily when planting or replanting.

A friend viewing this novel rock garden likened it to the discovery of a section of a buried Roman road, hence the title of his piece. (It is unlikely that this garden on a third of an acre (0.13 hectares) one and a half miles (2.4 km) from the centre of Birmingham, Britain's second largest city, can have survived urbanization.)

An effect to be aimed for is of a fractured mass of rock rising as a slope or as a mound from the earth. Outlying arms might be added, perhaps later, as the gardener's experience and enthusiasm dictate. Of course, the soil below and between the slabs should be well prepared in the usual way as for any rock garden, with abundant gravel or other drainage material. Actual proportions depend upon local climatic conditions. As the soil is likely to settle more than the rocky ribs, time should be allowed for this to occur before planting. Additional topdressing may be applied to bring the soil surface close to the tops of the slabs.

Not only are a crevice garden's rocks more readily laid than for a traditional rock garden but, in a suburban garden on more or less level ground, less suspension of disbelief is required in viewing as it can look more natural. Similar constructions can be used in trough gardens too, though the volume of the stone placed underground does reduce the actual growing medium available. Mark Demers, our leading proponent of styrofoam trough building, has even created *faux* rock slabs of this material, disguised in the same way as the exterior of the trough. Their use allows for a much lighter trough, conveniently transportable for display elsewhere. While the majority of plants normally grown on rock gardens have no absolute requirement for rocks, they are displayed particularly attractively among them. If few really grow better on a crevice garden than elsewhere, such gardens do have advantages for the builder. Smaller stone is more readily available, is much simpler to set into place and the results can appear pleasingly natural.

¹ P. Siviter Smith, Quart. Bull. Alpine Garden Soc., **35 #3**, 238-244 (1967)

VANDUSEN GARDEN TROUGHS ~ by Ian Plenderleith, Vancouver, BC, Canada

In 1984 ten stone troughs, imported from Yorkshire, became available from a dealer in Victoria and were purchased for VanDusen Garden. A wise decision by founding Curator Roy Forster since the value of such 'heritage' stone troughs has since escalated greatly. Further troughs were constructed of hypertufa, resulting in a total of 30 troughs in all. Early on these were planted and cared for by members of our club but that care dwindled over time. In 2000, as a result of some unkind comment made by myself about the troughs, I was asked to assist with their care, which I was pleased to do.

Dwarf conifers, alas, do not remain dwarf forever and eventually outgrow their trough or other container. A number of these had to be removed and replaced. Most of the troughs were emptied, drain holes cleared and covered with screen and the growing medium renewed. What growing medium is appropriate in a setting such as Vancouver where it rains for six months and bakes for three or four? (It isn't really quite that bad.) Well drained but moisture retentive – ah yes, a magical compost! A mixture of loam (whatever that is exactly) or leaf mold with approximately equal amount of crushed granite (number 2 [chicken] or number 3 [turkey] grit) and coarse forestry sand. The ratio of loam/leaf mold to gravel varies depending on the plant material to be included. Some troughs also had pumice and others crushed tufa added. Actually, when other sources of gravel were lacking I screened the material from gravel paths and that also provided the top dressing for most. The aim is to find a compromise which will allow the plants to survive through our wet winters and hot dry summers with little or no artificial protection (some do have some shade but none have protection from rain, snow etc.). The stonework for troughs can be whatever appeals or whatever is available. A number of the troughs have good sized pieces of tufa – ideal for *Saxifraga* as well as *Petrophytums* and other calcium tolerant or calcicole plants. Several troughs have long-established plants growing happily in tufa. Other troughs have granite or limestone landscaping.

Deciding on plantings for troughs can be a matter of philosophy or availability. I would prefer, given my druthers, to arrange the troughs geographically – plants from one region, mountain range etc. together in a trough. This is easier said than done. It may be difficult to obtain sufficient suitable plant material from a single region for a trough planting. Alternatively one may select plants, regardless of their nativity, which will enjoy or tolerate similar conditions to associate in a trough. Some troughs may be devoted to a single family or genus; ie *Saxifraga* or *Crassulaceae*. Currently all of these exist in the VanDusen troughs. I am trying to work toward a geographical system but there are still North American natives associating with dwarf Mugo Pines. It is nice to have one eye-catching feature in each trough. This may be a dwarf conifer, a small *Rhododendron* or other small shrub or a dramatic rock feature.



*The crevice garden
at the Alpine
Garden Society,
Pershore, UK*



*Photo left and top
p.33 - Joyce
Carruthers' garden
photographed by
Maedythe Martin,
Victoria, British
Columbia.*



Photos of the VanDusen trough garden by Ian Plenderleith

There are other challenges for one tending the troughs in a public garden. We have had visitors use them as benches and trash bins. There is occasional vandalism and theft of attractive plants. Plants are occasionally damaged or pulled up by crows and other 'varmints'. The most perplexing problem was finding plant labels removed and left laying on the ground or stuck back in the wrong places, often bent. The reason for this eventually became apparent – wandering photographers who wished to photograph the troughs but didn't want the labels in the picture.

The matter of fertilizer is debatable. I use some standard granular 6-8-6 sparingly each spring as growth begins. This doesn't seem to result in plants becoming bushy or out of character. As implied earlier, watering is not a consideration during most of the year in Vancouver. I do make a point of having the surface of the growing area raised above the trough edges to facilitate drainage. During the hot dry period, usually July through September, the troughs require regular watering, often daily. This is usually done using a hose by one of the garden interns resulting in washing off much of the inch or two of top dressing. Thus I am back to screening gravel from the paths.

It is a pleasure to tend the troughs. In effect, one can use one's ingenuity to create thirty rock gardens in miniature and to grow some of the treasures of the alpine in the garden for visitors to enjoy (or sit upon).



MAKING PAPERCRETE TROUGHS

~ by Betty Mackey

Last year I came across information on people in the USA's Southwest who were making houses out of a concrete variant called papercrete. It is like *papier maché* made with cement, and if it is strong enough for houses, it is more than adequate for garden troughs and containers. I had to work out my own recipe. After several tries I optimized my method, but even the first experiment was successful. Here is my streamlined way of making a weatherproof footed troughs using just Portland cement, newspaper shreds from a shredder, and perlite along with a form made from a cardboard box. Papercrete is more claylike than hypertufa and is very easy to shape. For small troughs no reinforcing fibers are needed.

BETTY'S BASIC PAPERCRETE RECIPE

Conservative, safe proportions for papercrete are:

- 3 parts Type I Portland Cement
- 2 parts (dry volume, loosely packed) finely shredded paper, and
- 2 parts perlite or sand. Perlite is easier to work with.

Supplies: In addition to the Portland cement, paper shreds, and perlite, you'll need rubber gloves, a large trowel or small shovel, a dust mask, a wheelbarrow or mixing container, plastic sheeting to protect your work space, a mold or form for the trough, plastic bags to line the mold or form, a source of water, a measuring cup, and a large, sturdy carrying board upon which to make and transport your project.

You can add a pinch more perlite and paper to the recipe if you wish, but don't make it too papery. Small newspaper shreds from a paper shredder are absorbent and easy to work with. Papercrete has a fairly smooth consistency and the paper fibers make it easy to shape. Water is added at about 2 parts water to 7 parts dry ingredients. Even a small trough usually requires 8 or more cups of Portland cement and a two foot trough might start with a gallon. You may have to make another batch of papercrete to finish up the project so have lots of supplies on hand. It takes more concrete to make a trough than one would expect.

After your mold or form is ready (see below), mix the dry ingredients together, add the water, form the trough, and let it cure. Unlike clay, no firing or cooking is required, and your finished trough won't crack during winter freezes and thaws. This is a dusty job and should be done outdoors if possible. Wear a dust mask and rubber gloves, and old clothes. Moisten the ingredients with as LITTLE water as possible and knead it in thoroughly. Make a stiff, claylike dough that holds its shape without dripping or crumbling. Add water or mix if necessary to correct the consistency.

Make A Small Rectangular Trough With Feet:

- Select a sturdy, small rectangular carton such as a shoebox for your form. Stuff it firmly with old newspapers and the like to prevent shifting.
- Tape it closed on the bottom and around the sides and wrap it tightly with plastic taped into place. Place the wrapped box (open side down) onto the carrying board (also wrapped or lined) and place it on your protected workspace.
- Put on the mask and gloves. Place your dry ingredients in the mixing bowl, add water, and make the first batch of papercrete. Make it thick and claylike. It should not crumble or drip. When the papercrete has been moistened you can take off the mask.
- Coat the box with an even layer (one inch thick or more) of papercrete, starting at the bottom of the walls and firmly working upward and across. Mix more papercrete as needed. With a small knife, make a drainage hole in the middle of the base of the trough.
- Make four small balls of papercrete and stick them on for feet. Cover the trough with plastic sheeting and allow the concrete to set in a dry, cool place such as the garage or basement.

Cleanup: Immediately rinse out your mixing tools and mixing container with water, before the concrete mix hardens. This will be a very alkaline mixture so be careful where you dump it out (not on the

acid-soil-loving azaleas!). Don't put it down the drain or it could cause clogging.

Smoothing and Aging: Let the project cure for over 24 hours but not over 48 hours. It should feel warm after 15 to 30 hours - it is curing. If it is still warm let it cure a little longer. Remove it from the wrappings very carefully. Open the box and take out the paper, then maneuver the box out too.

Take time to sand, scratch, smooth out, or age the surface until the shape and texture appeal to you, using an old can opener, ice scraper, or chisel, other sturdy tool. Antique troughs of real stone were chiseled. Scrape off all stiff-looking edges, bubbles from molding, and the like. Then rewrap it in the plastic and continue curing the trough in a cool, shady place. Keep it moist for better curing. 28 days of curing is said to be ideal but 7 to 10 days has worked for me, possibly at cost of a few years of longevity of the trough. Of course it continues to age and cure even after being put to use. Once it is unwrapped, wet it down often to leach out some of the alkalinity and weather it.

Planting: Even when the trough has cured and aged, the cement is somewhat alkaline. Certain plants favor this pH, while others prefer acidic soil and will not thrive in it. The alkalinity of the trough will affect the soil pH, eventually and may need fresh soil after a while. Choose small plants in proportion to the container, then set them into place using soil suited to the type of plant. Top the soil with a mulch of small stones or grit, or for shady gardens, a sheet of moss.

*Betty Mackey, garden writer, lecturer, editor, and independent publisher, is the editor of the book *Creating and Planting Garden Troughs*, by Joyce Fingerut and Rex Murfitt. It was named a Book of the Year 2000 by the American Horticultural Society. Ms. Mackey also edited and published the book, *Creating and Planting Alpine Gardens*, by Rex Murfitt, of Victoria, winner of a silver trowel award for writing from the Garden Writers Association. Betty is the author or coauthor of popular garden books including *The Gardener's Home Companion*, *Gardening Made Easy*, and *Cutting Gardens*. Her CD on making papercrete troughs is sold on her website, www.mackeybooks.com.*

COMING NEXT ISSUE !

BERRY BOTANIC GARDEN by Ian Gillam

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***Did you respond to our Editor's Quiz?***

***Check out the previous issue and send in your answers  
to Sue Evanetz***





## SPRING SALE 2007

By ~ Linda Verbeek, Burnaby, BC

It seems to become a bit of a tradition that I should write a report on our Spring Sale. This one is going to have to be somewhat like an 'overnight review', as one of my friends calls them. The sale was yesterday, and we're going on holidays the day after tomorrow.....

It has been the most miserable spring ever that I can remember in Vancouver, and I am not the only one to complain about this. It has been very wet (after a cold winter) and it is still considerably cooler than average. So the plants are not coming along according to schedule, and it showed, as did the winter losses. But we always manage to put on an interesting display, even though perhaps this year it was a little less colourful than usual.

Not that some people didn't have blazes of colour on their tables: there was Kaz Pelka, with not only the usual display of Sedums and Sempervivums, but also at least a whole tray (I actually think two trays) of *Gentiana angustifolia* (indistinguishable from *G. acaulis* by the average gardener), all fully decorated with the large, intensely blue trumpets. He also had several large plants of *Saxifraga cotyledon* 'Southside seedling', with the flower stems just about ready to open the first flower.

Another blaze of colour was the centerpiece of Joe Keller's table: more forms and varieties of *Lewisia cotyledon* than you could ever dream of, and all in full bloom. They are actually quite long lived if you find the right conditions for them. Mine are at the top of a tiny slope, between two rocks, and they've been there for years. They do not get protected from the wet and they bloom abundantly every year.



*Lewisia nevadensis*  
Copyright Al Schneider,  
[www.swcoloradowildflowers.com](http://www.swcoloradowildflowers.com)

Joe also had *L. nevadensis* – which had large pink flowers, very different from the small white-flowered plant I grew years ago by that name. I don't know what went wrong there. I liked seeing *Antennaria dioica* (I might have liked even more to see one of the high-mountain ones, although they do look much alike). It makes such a neat mat of somewhat silvery leaves. The flowers (which earn it the name 'Pussytoes'), are not spectacular, but cute in a way. The outer parts of Joe's tables were completely occupied by dwarf conifers, in every shape and configuration possible. I don't know anything about them, so I won't say more.

Dan Sierzega is always the odd man out, not least because most of what he grows is decidedly not hardy. But there are some intriguing

plants. Can you imagine growing a Baobab in your living room? I've seen them in Africa, huge trees with trunks wide enough to build a living room inside. However, *Adansonia fony* seems to take kindly to bonsaiing, and Dan said it was no problem. I am not trying, though.

*Mandragora officinarum* on the other hand, should be hardy. This is the fabled Mandrake to which medieval alchemists and herbalists ascribed the most miraculous powers. It grows as a rosette and makes small flowers in the centre. You'd want to grow that one for its associations rather than for its beauty, I think. The flat rosette can be up to 60 cm across and the flowers are greenish white.

*Kaempferia rotunda* is a ginger which is marginally hardy here. The large flowers look for all the world like orchids, in white and purple.

As far as I know, this was Ian Gillam's first foray into selling. He had brought only a moderate number of plants, but they were special. Our 'regular' Gesneriad lady wasn't there but Ian had some anyway. *Chirita tamiana* with flowers looking somewhat like shortened Haberlea flowers, and neat rosettes of round leaves. He also had *Daphne retusa* which is a very good garden shrub, not as rambunctious as *D. tangutica* but apparently as willing and as floriferous. Since my *D. tangutica* died this winter (torn apart by the weight of the snow on it), I am replacing it with a *D. retusa*, but I found mine on the Club table.

What I couldn't pass up on Ian's table (nor could others, because they seemed to be gone quite soon) was *Cassiope lycopodioides*. I love Cassiopes, and the first one I met in my life was *C. hypnoides* from Scandinavia. It looked like the moss was growing little red stems with single white bells on it, and I fell in love. *C. lycopodioides* is as close as you can get to that, and since I've never even seen seed of *C. hypnoides*, I am going to try it. Ian said he had it in a tufa trough, so I will put it there too. The local one *C. tetragona* is very difficult at sea level. There are some hybrids that are more amenable, but in my experience they are never easy.



*Cassiope lycopodioides* – author unknown

The most spectacular plants on Ann Jolliffe's table must have been the sturdy pots of *Fritillaria camschatcensis*, just about in full bloom. The flowers are the colour of the darkest chocolate inside and out, set off by six brilliant yellow anthers. It only occurs in the northern half of B.C. and it is unusual in that it almost always grows in wetlands and so must never dry out. Ann said she'd seen it on coastal meadows as a child. We've seen it once growing under trees in a marshy area along a creek. Ann also had *F. affinis*, and *Viola glabella*, both of them local

natives – but not always that easy to please for all that. *V. glabella* is the yellow wood violet and it does seem happiest with some shade, although it certainly didn't want to live underneath my Douglas Firs where it gets no water in the summer. Obviously that was too dry.

The Klapwijk's came with, as usual, an array of Rhododendrons. They always look so nice and varied. The ones that caught my attention this time were *R. schlippenbachii*, a deciduous shrub with large, open, soft pink flowers. Even though it is deciduous, it really doesn't look like an Azalea. I have found it fussy and quite susceptible to weevil damage, but it does grow and bloom, and it is quite exotic-looking. The flowers somehow look very large on the shrub. The next one was *R. obtusum* var. *amoenum*. I had never heard of this one, but it was very dainty with small purple-pink flowers that did look somewhat azalea-like. A fairy plant. Finally, *R. williamsianum*. This is a favourite of mine. It has wonderful foliage, almost round, as though the shrub is completely hung with glossy green coins. The flowers are pink bells. I think it is one of the parents of the popular 'Bow Bells' cultivar. The interesting thing is that it seems to vary in its growth habit. My plant, which I must have had for 10 years now, is a flat mound, 3 ft across and no more than a foot tall. But I have seen it in other gardens where it was much more upright. The plant the Klapwijk's had was too small yet to tell what it would do.

Anna Burian had both the red and the white form of *Trillium sessile*. This must be one of the biggest Trilliums going, and quite sturdy, but don't try to divide them. I had a clump of both colours together, and thought they were getting too congested, so last summer, as they were dying down, I pulled them apart. The white ones have come up nicely, but the red ones are barely above ground, looking very sick. I hope they will recover next year! Anna also had a lot of ferns, from the native Maidenhair (*Adiantum pedatum*) to various cultivars of the Painted Fern (*Athyrium niponicum*).

Dick Pearson and Philip MacDougal were sharing a table and I wasn't quite aware of that at the time so I may not be completely sure



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which belonged to whom. I know the *Nerine crispa* belonged to Dick. Nerines are probably on their northern limit here and I have ever only seen *N. bowdenii*. That one will grow and bloom, but mine are all close to the house which gives a little added warmth in winter and a little less rainfall as well. *N. crispa* appears to have very curly petals, making the flower look “crisp”. One or the other also had *Jeffersonia dubia*; there were in fact several of them scattered through the hall. It would be nice to see it more often; it is such a wonderful plant. I probably raved about it last year too, so you can look it up.



*Beesia deltophylla* - Photo [www.heronswood.com](http://www.heronswood.com)

*Beesia deltophylla*<sup>2</sup> definitely belonged to Philip. It is so new that it is not yet in my encyclopedia (Readers' Digest A-Z), nor in my edition of the Seedlist Handbook. It is a Heronswood introduction. You have to grow it for the beautiful, shiny leaves for the flowers are uninteresting. Also from Philip was *Ypsilandra thibetica*, closely related to *Heloniopsis*. It makes an elongating spike of small white flowers very

early – starting in February. Like the *Beesia*, it is a woodland plant. Another brand new plant is *Bernieuxia thibetica*, which Philip imported from China. It is related to the *Shortias*, and, Philip said, just as fussy. But it must grow for him if he has enough to sell it. It doesn't much look like a *Shortia*, though, with paddle shaped leaves and a short spike of tiny white flowers instead of the single bell that *Shortia* has.

We haven't seen Roger Barlow for some time now, but he faithfully sends down a number of flats of plants so we aren't quite deprived of his treasures. This time there were several nice *Primulas*, like *P. yuparensis*, with very mealy foliage and flower stem and blue flowers, and *P. glomerata*, which was also blue but had no meal.

I was interested to see that he had sent *Talinum sediforme*.<sup>3</sup> I first knew this plant by its old name of *T. okanoganense*, referring to its (limited) distribution, mostly in the Okana(o)gan Valley. The new name

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<sup>2</sup> Though this rare species is regarded as a close relative of Snakeroots (*Cimicifuga* spp.), in truth, it appears to be a cross between a violet and an Asarum. The extremely glossy, evergreen, heart-shaped leaves form dense rosettes to 2 ft. across, while spires of white flowers rise above the foliage to 1 ft. Though tolerant of a range of soil types, we find this species resents any direct sun. Representing seedlings from my original collections from Sichuan Province in 1998, there are few plants that I feel so strongly are deserving of greater attention. Source Dan Hinckley, Heronswood, WA, USA.

<sup>3</sup> Many *Talinum* species of interest to gardeners have been moved to the genus *Phemeranthus*; that's where they'll be in the new *Flora of North America*, based on both genes and physical appearance. Source Paige Woodward [www.hillkeep.ca](http://www.hillkeep.ca)

is a good description for the plant does look somewhat Sedum-like, if with rather more prominent, permanent stems, until it starts to flower. It is actually in the Portulacaceae, related to Lewisias and such, and the flowers are creamy white cups on thread-like stalks. I love this plant, but not many people seem to share that love because we have never managed to sell it. I wonder how it did this time.

Edraianthus are Campanula-relatives from Europe. They are generally small plants with grassy leaves and upturned blue bellflowers. *E. pumilio* which was on the table is the most common one, but there are others. They are true mountain dwellers and don't like our climate, probably missing their cozy blanket of snow. But I'll try again, for they are truly wonderful in full bloom.<sup>4</sup>

Another NW American native, and probably more coveted, is *Petrophytum caespitosum*. This prostrate shrub forms large mats hanging vertically down out of rock crevices in the mountains of the NW. I have seen it on the Bighorn Mts, but it has a wider distribution. It belongs in the Rosaceae and makes little

spikes of white flowers. I'll now make a complete fool of myself and state that I'll take the Talinum any day over the Petrophytum.

JenRay nurseries had Iceland poppy, *Papaver croceum*. Of course, this is not one of the rare gems, but it looked so pretty with the large yellow flower on a tidy rosette. They also had a few unusual forms of the Wood Anemone (*A. nemorosa*), a double white, which looked very charming even though in general I prefer the wild type, and a pale yellow form which I had never seen before. I know they come in blue and pink, but yellow? Quite a true yellow, too, for I wondered whether it was a pale form of *A. ranunculoides*, which is almost buttercup-yellow.

For an Alpine sale we had a lot of big plants this year. Not only Joe Keller's dwarf conifers (some of which were in large pots!) and Klapwijk's Rhododendrons, but Sylvia Mosterman had only woody



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<sup>4</sup> A number of endemic and relict plants are to be found in Croatia, a crossroad of several vegetational regions. Some of them are rare remnants of very old flora, going as back as to the Tertiary. The bellflower genus from the Biokovo occurs in the crevices on the mountain of Biokovo, exposed to the most violent blasts of the bora, to the hot summer sun, to the heaviest draughts and extreme winter colds. In June or July this tiny bellflower blooms with blue bell-shaped flowers bigger than the stem itself. White flowers occur sometimes in this species. It is native only to this Croatian mountain whose name it bears. *From Philately of Croatia and Slovenia.*

plants. Most were meant for Bonsai, like some of the dwarf forms of *Larix*, and a columnar form of *Ginkgo biloba* called 'Princeton Sentry' as well as various cut-leaf maples. Also, we had another new face, Athena Liu, who sold *Cortaderia* (Pampas Grass).



*Viola pedata* – John Wood, England, 1883

Jason Nehring had *Viola pedata*, with really very finely divided leaves. I've grown it from seed a few times, but I've never got anything that looked like that. In some forms the flowers are bicoloured, but this one wasn't blooming yet, so I don't know. Also *Saruma henryi*, which is related to the Asarums (the name is even an anagram of Asarum), but doesn't look like one at all. It is upright, softly hairy, and has open, three-petalled, pale yellow flowers. Then I noticed *Lilium wardii*, a lily with a stoloniferous habit and fragrant deep pink flowers with dark spots. Sounds wonderful. And I don't even mention the various *Arisaemas* he had.

Jim and Julie Coomey had brought in a pot of *Corallorhiza maculata*, a native orchid from our montane forests. It is peculiar in that it doesn't have any chlorophyll, but makes a living by parasitizing the fungi that in their turn have a symbiotic relationship with the trees. I don't know whether that makes them parasites of the trees. They don't seem to do much harm, anyway. Of course, that one was not for sale. They did sell *Rehmannia elata*, which I've talked about before, like a large pink foxglove but decidedly not as accommodating, and *Zauschneria californica*, the California Fuchsia. That one does grow here and blazes away in August with its scarlet tubular flowers (nothing like a Fuchsia), as long as you give it a position with good drainage at the top of a slope or a rock wall.

We ourselves had a few new things. One of them was *Cichorium spinosum*, a relative of the weedy Chicory that grows all along the roads in the Interior of B.C. I love the colour of the flowers and have actually tried to grow it, but even on the roadside they grow 5 ft tall and in a

garden setting it became a monster. This one has the same truly sky-blue flowers, but is supposed to grow only 20 – 25 cm tall. I haven't seen it flower yet, but know it will survive a winter in the open. We also had two forms of *Rhodohypoxis baurii* (which, incidentally, seemed to be plentiful in general this year), the type in white with a pink flush, and the cultivar 'Douglas' with nearly red flowers. Another new one for us was *Erigeron peregrinus*, the daisy that covers the alpine meadows in midsummer from Manning Park to the Rockies. That too survived the winter in the open which our local alpinists quite often refuse to do.

The Club tables had quite a few interesting plants. I already mentioned *Daphne retusa*, but they also had *D. oleoides* (also pink) and *D. alpina* which is deciduous and white-flowered. This year only the Club had a few specimens of *Cypripedium formosanum*. There was a Peony that I can't find anything about except that it was listed in the seed exchange of the Scottish Rock Garden Society, namely *Paeonia ruprechtii*. Will anyone in the membership who knows this one, please send a description so we can share it?

I've tried to grow *Commelina dianthifolia* several times. It has beautiful gentian-blue flowers and is a much smaller and daintier plant than the more common *Commelina scoelestis*. I've never been able to get beyond the seedling stage, but Ann Jolliffe did and she'd given the Club a flowering-sized one. I've seen *Primula kisoana* before, but never with cream flowers. It looked nice, if not as in your face as the normal magenta one.

We haven't seen the long line-ups before opening that we used to have for some years now, but people do come and the tables do end up looking a lot barer after a while. Some people nearly sold out including the Club tables – but then they cut their prices in half for the last hour or so and it is amusing to see how everyone makes a dash for the Club tables at that point. It usually works: there isn't much left at the end of the day.



**SPRING SHOW REPORT 2007**  
**~ by Ian Gillam, Vancouver, BC**

Winter served up a full and varied menu of foul weather that did much damage to trees and to plants of borderline hardiness. More reliable flowers duly appeared in spring in colder weather than normal. Our Spring Show was held in the Floral Hall at VanDusen Gardens on April 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> with several growers unable to attend. Entries were fewer than usual and with some last minute additions to fill out the tables, we mustered only 168 pots as against 285 last year. Disappointingly, no entries were received in the bonsai or miniature garden classes. Fortunately, Roger Low, our bonsai judge, was kept occupied grooming and training a couple of larger specimens brought in

before going on to the University of British Columbia's Rare Plant Auction later in the month.

Judges in the main section were Bob Woodward, Rosemary Burnham and Brent Hine. Jean Hausermann judged the Primulas, of which a good number were entered by members who are also members of the BC Primula Group. They held a concurrent sale on the outdoor walkway on Saturday which attracted a good crowd, many of whom came in to view the show. Roxanne Muth created her usual attractive Primula display within a setting of her considerable collection of garden memorabilia.

Jason Nehring provided four beautifully grown and presented containers of striking and unusual plants for display purposes only that were very welcome additions to the show. The usual self-assembling crew of workers made short work of setting up and later clearing away the show's hardware in possibly record time. Diana Hume was a dedicated assistant in setting up and running the show.

Let us hope that exhibitors absent this year may consider themselves on sabbatical leave and will return with renewed enthusiasm next year. Though entries were fewer, competition was vigorous in many classes and the trophy for highest aggregate points was won by Joe Keller by a single point advantage over Kaz Pelka.

**Trophy winners:**

|                             |                      |                                        |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Best in show and            |                      |                                        |
| Best Primula                | Joe Keller           | Primula ellisiae                       |
| Best Woodland Plant         | Margot Ketchum       | Pteridophyllum racemosum               |
| Best Alpine Plant           | Joe Keller           | Androsace vandellii                    |
| Best Cushion Plant          | Joe Keller           | Androsace pyrenaica                    |
| Best Rhododendron           | Ian Plenderleith     | R. 'Razorbill'                         |
| Best Bulb or Corm           | Phyllis Plenderleith | Fritillaria crassifolia<br>var.kurdica |
| Best BC Native              |                      |                                        |
| Alpine Plant                | Joe Keller           | Lewisia tweedyi                        |
| Best Gold-laced             |                      |                                        |
| Polyanthus                  | Ian Gillam           |                                        |
| Best Fern                   | Joe Keller           | Woodsia alpina                         |
| Best Dwarf Shrub            | Joe Keller           | Tsuga canadensis<br>'Abbott's Pygmy'   |
| Highest Aggregate<br>Points | Joe Keller           | 73 Points.                             |