Alpine Garden Club of British Columbia

*Saxifraga burseriana* ‘Snowdon’. There are many forms of *Saxifraga burseriana* and all do well outside. *Saxifraga* ‘Valerie Finnis’ in the background is a fine yellow.

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Membership Renewals Due

Membership fees are due for 2020. Please send a cheque for $30 to Membership Secretary, Jane Byra, with your name and contact info. Cheques should be made out to the Alpine Garden Club of BC. Contact Jane Byra for mailing information.

Or renew online using your credit card through PayPal on our website
www.agc-bc.ca/membership-renewal

Membership status can be checked on the website, after you sign in.

AGC-BC meetings are typically held on the second Wednesday of each month except July and August in the Floral Hall, VanDusen Botanical Garden. Doors and Library open at 7:00 p.m. and the meetings start at 7:30 p.m.

2020 AGC-BC Upcoming Events

All in-person meetings and events are cancelled until further notice.

• May 13 - AGC-BC Meeting Online Presentation
  • David Sellars: Alpine Plant Photography: A Landscape Point of View
  • 7pm - 8pm

For more information, visit http://www.agc-bc.ca/events
From the Editor
Laura Caddy

Well, what a strange, strange spring. I hope this finds all of you healthy and gardening through these hard times. I myself even started gardening. Yes, I said it, I don’t garden. My day job is as a horticulturist and I manage the care and curation of one of the best plant collections I could hope for, but I haven’t had my own garden in 10 plus years. Don’t get me wrong, I get my hands dirty at work daily (weeding, planting, pruning, etc), but I haven’t had my own home garden since before (ironically) I moved to Ontario to attend horticulture school. I think I tried to grow a cherry tomato on my balcony in Edmonton a few years back. I’m sure it died of drought. It’s the classic “plumber with leaky pipes” situation.

But this March that all changed. I was home for two weeks in self-isolation due to cold symptoms. Luckily they were mild and subsided quickly, but COVID-19 had just started to ramp up, and I wasn’t taking any chances. As luck would have it, as I was trying not to go crazy working from home, I found some old seeds in the fridge that I figured I would give a chance. So, out came some plastic nut and yoghurt containers from the recycling, some mystery potting mix from storage, and I was off. Within a day my south facing windowsill was lined with all the hopes and dreams gardeners put in their seeds, and I dutifully checked them regularly (like, every half an hour.) Is there anything better than seeing your seeds germinate? At UBC, we have a nursery manager who takes care of our propagation, so I miss out on this stage of the Alpine Garden accessions I bring in. All for the best though, as he is much more skilled at this task than I.

At about the same time that I was sowing all my seeds, the decision was made to cancel the Saxifrage Sunday event. Thank goodness for the sale online! I jumped at the chance to start my very own saxifrage collection. I have a small balcony that faces south, and therefore gets great light in the winter and early spring. Luckily, a couple of big maples and tulip trees out front shade it from the summer heat. Perfect for saxifrages, I’m hoping!
Within two weeks my personal plant catalogue grew exponentially, from a sad Christmas cactus and jade plant (that I also up-potted for the first time in way too long), to a small but respectable collection, bursting with potential.

It sounds like I’m not the only one who took advantage of the online saxifrage sale - it was a big hit! Many thanks to all who donated their plants and time to it. There was such interest around it, David Sellars has followed up with a great article about growing Kabschia saxifrages in this edition of the bulletin. We also hear from Ben Stormes about a couple of native plants in an update on *Trillium hibbersonii* and a Plant Portrait on *Viola praemorsa* var. *praemorsa*. I’m sure these two authors need no introductions by now, as they are two of my most prolific contributors. As appreciative as I am to them, I’m also always looking to hear from new and different voices, so was absolutely thrilled to receive a handwritten article from Patrick Healy in Manitoba. If anyone is thinking of contributing, but not so sure about computers, feel free to mail me. I can be reached at the UBC Botanical Garden, 6804 SW Marine Dr, Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z4. It would be absolutely wonderful to hear from you! I am always looking for content, and I just know more of our members have something to contribute!

You’ll notice some updates from spring events are actually included in this Bulletin - in a way. Normally this issue would include a recap of the Spring Show and Sale, as well as other events, such as the planned bus trip to the VIRAGS Show and Sale. These were, of course, all cancelled, so I hit up the archives to take a walk down memory lane and reprint articles about these events from years past. I hope you enjoy them as much as I did.

I also hope to see you all virtually at the next meeting. We are going to proceed with our May meeting via the online conference software Zoom. Please see the website and monitor your emails for more information on this.

Stay safe, and happy gardening!

Laura Caddy
Editor

Vol. 63, No. 2
Editor’s ID Challenge

Too easy? Too hard? Let me know at bulletin@agc-bc.ca
Club News

Chris Byra

In spite of the COVID-19 shut down of our in person events, the Alpine Garden Club of BC activities are continuing. The scheduled Saxifrage Sunday in March was cancelled as an in person event but an alternative on line sale for our members was quite successful. Two to three-year-old Saxifrages as well as rooted cuttings lists were made available and members placed their orders. The plants were sorted out at Dart’s Hill Garden and at the Sellars’s residence to be picked up while observing physical distance rules. As a result, the AGC BC netted $810.87, making up for close to half of our spring sale expected revenue. I would like to thank David Sellars and Pam Yokome for the idea, plants and logistics.

The lock down has provided some interesting and novel ways to conduct our club events. Participation in the on line Plant Show has included members that do not normally enter plants into the pot show. It has also provided a venue for members distant to the lower mainland, including overseas, to participate. In the coming weeks we intend to provide meetings on line. The process may alter or expand how we operate as a group in the future.

Local wholesale growers have indicated to me that what was feared to be a disastrous financial loss this spring has suddenly become a boon. Isolated families are rediscovering gardening, the ideal lock down activity at this time of year, and could increase interest in gardening clubs.

Please enjoy your gardens, take photos and include captions about the plants (source, growing conditions, etc.).
I spent this spring sale as the kitchen help upstairs in the William Griffin Auditorium, and found out it was a most interesting location from which to watch the sale - above the crowd, away from the elbows and boxes, a vantage point which allowed me to follow the changing patterns of the sale.

The tables had already been set up and covered with black plastic sheets so as we set up the refreshments and lunch upstairs, we could watch the orderly way in which the room downstairs gradually filled up with plants and workers. From above, the overwhelming impression really was of a very orderly process happening below the window, with everyone seeming to know where they should be working and what they should be doing. Some people stood out: Frank Dorsey talking as much with his hands as with his voice; Bob Bunn forever seeking in his coat pockets for yet another label, pencil, pen, etc.; Rosemary checking in plants yet gibing the impression of making a mental shopping list as she worked; Vera straightening up her trays after the plant count and then methodically placing the pictures or flowers in holders in the appropriate pot, so the buyers would know what that green growing thing would eventually do in the garden; Alan feverishly writing plant labels for what seemed to be flats of plants without labels.

Finally, all the tables were ready, with everything labelled, the display table full of well-grown specimens, and people just standing around waiting for the pre-sale. The overall impression at this time from our upstairs viewpoint was of a lush and green space, and we were particularly surprised how numerous the flowering plants were, considering how cold the spring had been. The pre-sale proceeding in a well-mannered fashion, with no injuries, although one table had quite a crush of hopefuls around it when Frank gave the work. Then while the workers came up for coffee and lunch we could look down and see the empty spaces left in the trays on the table.
A last minute re-arrangements of table contents after lunch and then the doors were opened. It was heartening to watch from upstairs and see the empty spaces between the tables fill up with potential buyers and yet more people coming in past the display table. A minor catastrophe occurred when a plant went missing from the display table but it was tracked down in the crush of people before it went through the cashier line.

After the crowd thinned out we could see the workers and sellers starting out on their buying forays - Ruth with her shopping basket that she filled to overflowing, with one plant actually hanging over the edge of the basket since there was no room for it inside; Charlie commenting that “if they sold two more plats of their plants everything would fit in the vehicle to go home”, and looking down to and seeing Margaret filling yet another tray with new plants from the other sellers. Jo Bridges’ ‘Anzac’ cookies were late arriving in the kitchen because somehow they had been mislaid during the sale set-up and were not unearthed until the sale was almost over. Vera’s table was right under our window, so we could watch as she spoke with one mother accompanied by her little girl, who, while her mother and Vera talked plants, played with the markers in the pots on Vera’s table. Fortunately, as far as we could make out from our window, she did not mix up any labels.

Finally, we packed up the kitchen for another year, paid for our plants, and went home. Really not a bad way to work at the plant sale.
The Victoria Show and Garden Tour  
Excerpt from AGCBC Bulletin Vol 31, No.3, June 1988  
Bodil Leamy

For a change, the weather in Victoria was just as nasty and cold as here in Vancouver, but that has never deterred avid rock gardeners yet and there were quite a few Club members present at both the show and the garden tour.

The show was as lovely as always, with many rare and unusual plants. I can only mention a few of them. I think to me the most noteworthy plant as *Cypripedium japonicum* on Al and Shirley Smith’s display table. The *Cypripedium* was in a large container and there were no less than eight open flowers in pale pink of the typical fat-pouched shape. These were set off by the pleated pale green leaves with an oriental elegance. Al apparently bought them at a local nursery under a different specific name. I hate to think where these rare and choice plants came from - probably dug from the wild.

Al and Shirley also had lovely *Pleione* in many different colours with *Arisaema sikokianum* standing guard over them. There was a beautiful pot of *Daphne arbuscula* in full flower. This species, in my opinion, rivals *D. petraea* as the most beautiful and fragrant *Daphne*.

The splashiest display was put on by a *Lewisia cotyledon* in a two gallon pot grown by Rena Wingert. There were literally hundreds of flowers in apricot and pink shade. Rena also had a 12 inch pot of *Primula ellisiae* with 14 flowering stems. A plant of *Aquilegia akitensis* var. *kurilensis* was interesting because the blue and white lowers were facing upward at an angle, rather than pendant.

Mr Roger Whitlock had six different cultivars of *Anemonella thalictroides*: single white and pink; double white and pink; *A. thalictroides* ‘Shoaf’s’ double pink; a green cultivar called ‘Jade Feathers’ which gives a good indication of what it looked like; and a double light green cultivar.
Gordon Bentham had many new and choice dwarf conifers. Two that caught my eye were *Pinus parviflora* ‘Pumila’ and *P. strobus* ‘Sea Urchin’. I am partial to dwarf pines and I think my favourite is *Pinus contorta* ‘Pumila’, but these two could make me change my mind very easily.

Rosemary Burnham picked up *Pygmaea pulvinaris* as her favourite. It is a small grey-green high alpine from New Zealand. A small plat cushion with tiny white flowers does not exactly remind us of forget-me-nots, but that’s what it is related to.

Two different colour forms of *Romulea bulbocodium* won trophies. The best was a wonderful soft purple, again grown by Rena Wingert. The paler lilac form, unfortunately, was more ordinary in my opinion, but still lovely although overshadowed by the dark form.

Sunday morning started out cold and windy and we really felt it, since the first garden we visited was perched on a rocky knoll overlooking Oak Bay. Jack Todd’s garden was full of colour, all the traditional spring flowers, daffodils, forget-me-nots, lots of wallflowers, *Rhododendron* and azaleas, were planted in masses and flowering ribbons on many different levels with lots of pools.

One combination I really liked was a pure rose-pink *Myosotis alpestris* cultivar planted next to a white daffodil with a soft pink trumpet. At the very top of the rock with the most magnificent view, Jack had planted his alpine, again associated with several pools surrounding the patio outside his living room. A truly wonderful garden.

Next, we went to Peter Platt’s garden and what a change in temperament. This garden is sheltered by fences and shrubs and filled with treasure. Two plants, out of many that caught my eye, were *Leiophyllum buxifolium* ‘Nanum’ and the most wonderful *Potentilla*. The *Leiophyllum buxifolium* ‘Nanum’ was simply covered in buds, but not fully out yet. The *Potentilla* was *P. atrosanguinea*, a very choice plant with strawberry-like leaves densely covered with fine silver hair. The leaves had trapped some of the rain and they positively shone with an inner light, brightening a dark morning.
After lunch, we visited Susan Ryley’s garden which again was totally different form the first two. It is, in my opinion, one of the most exquisite and beautiful gardens I have ever seen. It was a garden bounded by tall hedges which formed a stately background. The beds were filled with choice alpines and perennials and so skillfully planned and blended. Colours of leaves and flowers, texture and height were matched or contrasted in the most delight way. One planting especially caught my eye - white tulips with a white \textit{Rhododendron} and silver foliage in the foreground. On the patio, herbs and grey foliage plants were used to spill over the edge and occupy beds right in the patio. Facing the patio was a small formal pool planted with, among others, \textit{Caltha palustris} ‘Flore Plena’ close in colour to the golden form of \textit{Origanum} and an interesting variegated plant, \textit{Scrophularia aquatica} ‘Variegata’.

No ones needs and introduction to the wonders of the Lohbrunner garden. It simply gets more beautiful each year as the plants grow a little larger. I have a weakness for willows and seeing \textit{Salix nakamura} var. \textit{yezoalpina} draped over some large rocks, made me long for a large garden so I could let it grow to its full potential. This willow is large in every way except height. It is totally prostrate and will follow the contours of the ground. The stems are polished dark brown and at that date (April 17) covered in erect catkins. The leaves were just beginning to unfold and when mature, are up to two inches across and almost round. It is native to the mountains of northern Japan, so should be hardy in a large part of BC.

The last garden we visited was Ernie Lythgoe’s with its unique setting on Elk Lake. It is a beautiful garden full of choice plants superbly grown. One plant that caught my eye was a red-flowered \textit{Bergenia}, the closest to red I have seen, and I think the same form I bought two-three years ago in Victoria. Mine has not grown - it is still a single crown - and has not flowered again. I noticed Ernie’s plant was also a single crown. I wonder if other people have had a similar experience?

Our thanks goes out to Daphne Guernsey for arranging this splendid garden tour and of course, to the owners of the lovely gardens we saw. Any of our local members who did not go, missed a wonderful tour.
Collectors Classified Corner

After a suggestion originating in an AGCBC Executive meeting, we are trying something new in the Bulletin. Collectors Classified Corner is a feature to connect people looking to acquire or share plants and seeds. This is not intended to replace or undermine our great plant sales and/or the seed exchange in any way. Rather, a means to connect people when the sales or seed exchange isn’t appropriate. For instance, perhaps you have been searching for a specific plant and would like to post a ‘want’ ad, or maybe you have a great plant you’d like to share, but their seeds need to be sown immediately (and therefore can not be stored and shipped in winter, when we do our seed exchange). I will also have a wish list section for the seed exchange. So, if there is a plant you’d like to see in the seed exchange, feel free to post it here, and hopefully it will encourage other members to collect it and contribute it.

If you would like to participate, please send your “ad” to the editor at bulletin@agc-bc.ca. Make sure to include contact information (not required for seed exchange wish list items), so interested parties can contact you directly. Please note, that all personal information only appears in Bulletins sent via email or paper copy to members. Versions available online (e.g. the high quality pdfs available on the website) have all personal information removed.

Trade
Seeking to diversify Primula auricula collection. The following varieties and seedlings are available for trade:

‘Argus’
‘Eden Blue Star’
‘Eden Davis’
‘Fabuloso’
‘Fiddlers green’
‘Lincoln Bullion’
‘Martin Luther King’
‘Mary Poppins’
‘Remus’
‘Star Wars’
Brown striped seedling
Pink-red seedling

Named or historic cultivars are preferred, but seedlings are welcome!

Contact: Tim Chipchar
Trillium hibbersonii
Ben Stormes

Trilliums are charismatic additions to the shaded garden, and much coveted by those who grow them. Long lived and slow to bulk up, growing trilliums in the garden is both an exercise in patience and labour of love. Rewards are great for time invested in allowing garden plants to settle in for a decade or four, as little else brings such a regal air to the woodland garden than a large, robust clump of trillium in full bloom. But not all trilliums grow large and robust, regardless of how many decades you give them, and one of the most diminutive of all grows here in BC, and nowhere else in the world.

Attaining a maximum height of only 17cm, though usually much shorter, Trillium hibbersonii is one of the smallest of the species. Flowers conform to the typical trillium formula: three showy petals and three green sepals sit above a whorl of three bracts (what we would consider the three “leaves”). Petals are a soft pink, and the flower itself often nods slightly, not uncommon among the pedicellate trilliums. A treasured collectors plant, Trillium hibbersonii often makes the “most wanted” list, and has garnered attention from the AGCBC in the past. A piece covering this species in the Summer 2014 bulletin (vol 57, No3) is worthy of a good read, and can be found here: http://www.agc-bc.ca/uploads/images/file_view/AGCBC_BulletinSummer2014web.pdf

In the summer 2014 piece, the case was made for Trillium hibbersonii to be recognized as a distinct species, rather than classifying it within Trillium ovatum as either T. ovatum subsp. hibbersonii or T. ovatum forma hibbersonii, both of which had been proposed in the past. The argument for species recognition had been favoured by many, and after much patience and persistence it was officially recognized and published as a valid species in the journal Phytotaxa in March 2020. The publication acknowledges work done by various studies examining the morphological, molecular, cytological characters of Trillium hibbersonii, and concludes that it warrants acceptance as a valid species. This comes with welcome smiles and quiet cheers from many of us, as we as gardeners have long known this tiny treasure to be wholly unique.
To read more:

Phytotaxa Vol 436 No 2 (full) [link]

“Trillium hibbersonii (Melanthiaceae), a phylogenetically distinct species from western North America” in Phytotaxa Vol 436 No 2 [link]

AGCBC Bulletin Vol 57 No 3, Spring 2014: [link]
In the 2012 seed list I came upon *Thalictrum ichangense*. The name sounded Chinese. Sure enough, my books confirmed that it is native to China. But China is a big country, and most of it more temperate than my southern Manitoba home. Should I give it a try? Why not? I’m pleased that I did.

I exposed the seeded pot to three months of below freezing temperatures, and then place them on the floor of a cool greenhouse. Within a month or so, I had 15 – 20 seedlings. This was enough to plant in four different spots in my garden, all under high tree shade. Most of the seedlings survived the first winter.

The plants are late to emerge in the spring, giving some concern about winter survival, but most winters survival has been good. The winter of 2017-18 brought the usual several day periods of temperatures dipping to -30 degree Celsius or lower, rising to -20 to -25 during the days, with little snow cover. Many of the smaller plants died, but most of the larger ones survived, although set back in size.

The first plants had some bloom the second summer, with increasing bloom in the following years. Each fall I have waited until the achenes and accompanying fluff come away from the plants easily. This, planted in the fall and left to freeze on the floor of an unheated greenhouse, has always given me more seedlings, so now I have many plants both beside woodland paths and in shaded rock gardens.

Over the first few years, the original plants have increased in height to about 30 cm, with many airy clusters of white to light cream flowers in late summer. But, the main attraction for me is the mottled leaves. Emerging in late spring, the leaves are initially a dark reddish brown. As they open this changes to olive green with white patches along the veins. The leaf edges retain a reddish tinge. The leaves are frost resistant, remaining attractive until covered by falling leaves and then snow.
Editor’s Note:

These images were taken by myself at the UBC Alpine Garden. My small patch of *Thalictrum ichangense* does not seem to be quite as happy as Patrick’s. Still, in the image above (taken June 18, 2018), you can see the airy flowers and mottled leaves. For scale, the label in front (so rudely blocking the plant) is about 20 cm tall.

The image to the right of the newly emerging leaves was taken April 27th of this year.
Growing Kabschia Saxifrages

David Sellars

The Saxifrage Sunday event that was to be held in March of this year had to be cancelled because of coronavirus concerns. However, an on-line sale went ahead. Many of our members went home happy with boxes of saxifrages and questions about growing these fascinating plants.

Having grown saxifrages for the past 20 years I am happy to share what I have found about growing these fascinating plants. The most colourful saxifrages are in the Kabschia section and are an excellent plant for the rock garden as the foliage looks good year-round and they form tight cushions especially in tufa. The silver saxifrages (Ligulatae section) are less fussy, can tolerate more sun and flower much later in May. So it is a good idea to grow the silvers as well as Kabschia saxifrages.

For an early spring flower display in the rock garden, Kabschia saxifrages are wonderful plants to grow. They do have special needs however and, in addition to the requirement for good drainage like all rock garden plants, they need to be cool in the summer. This can be achieved in the garden by planting them in east or north facing aspects but with plenty of light including some sunlight, as they will not tolerate overhead shade. If you plant them in pots they can be moved to the north side of a building during hot summer periods.

Saxifraga ‘Gregor’ performs well in the rock garden
Keeping the roots cool and moist is critical and for saxifrages in sunnier gardens; planting close to a rock will help. The roots can seek out cool locations under the rock. With the right growing conditions, Kabschia saxifrages are very long-lived, which is more than can be said for many alpines plants.

In the garden I grow Kabschia saxifrages in tufa rock or Sechelt sand, which contains about 15% crusher fines providing mineral nutrients. For planting in pots I have been experimenting with reducing organic matter and now use a mixture of Sechelt sand, pumice and limestone chips without any peat or other organic matter. This is a very free-draining mix and it is not possible to overwater the plants. Plenty of water on hot days keeps the pots and roots cool. Overhead sprinkling in the summer does not damage the foliage. However, endless winter rainfall is not ideal for these alpine plants, which would prefer snow cover. I grow some saxifrages in an alpine shed in a sand plunge using clay pots that absorb water from the sand. The cover in the winter protects the foliage and the quality of the cushions is enhanced. I use shade cloth over the alpine shed in spring and summer to keep the plants cool and remove the shade cloth for the rest of the year to maximize light.

*Saxifraga ‘Peach Melba’ growing in a tufa crevice. It has an interesting flower colour and is a vigorous plant.*
For potted saxifragas I basically follow the fertilizing regime suggested by RHS Garden Wisley:


Too much feeding seems to produce plants with few flowers and lax cushions. Wisley gives three liquid feeds per year – a couple after flowering and one in early fall, when the roots start to grow with the cooler weather, using half strength, high potash fertilizer. I use tomato fertilizer with high potash diluted to about a quarter of normal strength, as I prefer tighter cushions. Rooted cuttings need more frequent very dilute feeding to help get established. Saxifragas in the garden do not need fertilizer.

*Saxifraga ‘Winifred’* is one of the best pink-flowered saxes for the garden.
Saxifrages flower best after a cold winter. They are totally hardy so if grown in pots they should be left outside in the winter ideally under cover to protect from winter rains. On the west coast, flowering of some cultivars starts in February or even earlier if January is warm. Peak flowering is usually in March but watch out for tiny slugs, which enjoy eating the flowers! Some cultivars are still in flower in April. After flowering I deadhead the saxifrages in pots, but I am not as dedicated as those who take them to the shows in the UK. Apparently, some growers have been seen taking the flowers off their prized saxifrages in the car park immediately after the show!

The accompanying photographs are saxifrages that perform particularly well in the rock garden and most of these can take a fair amount of sun.

If you want to learn more about the Joy of Sax you could dip into this article: [https://saxifraga.org/plants/saxifrage-magazine-articles/57-the-joy-of-sax](https://saxifraga.org/plants/saxifrage-magazine-articles/57-the-joy-of-sax)

Saxifrages are very versatile and whether it’s pots, troughs, tufa or crevices, every rock gardener should find a place for Kabschia saxifrages.
North America Plant Portrait

**Viola praemorsa var. praemorsa**  
*Ben Stormes*

In the previous edition of the AGCBC bulletin I wrote a piece about the Garry oak meadows, both in the wild and in the garden at UBC Botanical Garden. It was an article focused not on any one plant, but rather about the beauty and significance of this threatened native plant community, and work being done at UBC Botanical Garden to rejuvenate and restore the Garry Oak Meadow and Woodland Garden that was initially created in 2006. For this edition of the quarterly bulletin, we will take a closer look at one special plant that occurs naturally in the Garry oak meadows of southern Vancouver Island and Saltspring Island, and very recently has also made a home for itself at UBC Botanical Garden.

Allow me to introduce *Viola praemorsa*, more specifically *Viola praemorsa* var. *praemorsa*, commonly called by the names yellow montane violet, canary violet, or upland yellow violet. *Viola praemorsa* contains three recognized varieties, each differing slightly in morphology and in some cases relatively distinct ranges, though overlap does occur. All three varieties are native to western and central-western North America, with two varieties found in Canada; *Viola praemorsa* var. *praemorsa* in British Columbia, and *V. praemorsa* var. *linguifolia* east of the Rocky Mountains in Alberta. This article focuses on *Viola praemorsa* var. *praemorsa*, and for the purposes of easing the word count (and making text formatting easier for Laura) will simply be referred to as the canary violet. Both are globally secure, but exceedingly rare in their respective provinces. The canary violet has been recognized as critically endangered in BC, making it a red listed taxon with BC Conservation Data Centre.
North American violets can be split into two groups based on morphology, the caulescent (stemmed) and acaulescent (stemless). The caulescent violets produce stems above the soil surface that elongate throughout the season, with leaves and flowers appearing along these stems. The acaulescent violets produce rhizomes at or below the soil surface, with leaves and flowers arising directly from the rhizomes. Canary violet is one of the caulescent violets, with stems that grow between 5 and 30 cm tall, depending on the environment. Dryer, leaner, and sunnier sites will produce shorter plants, while deeper soils, more moisture, and dappled shade will all contribute to taller statured plants.

The caulescent nature of this species is not immediately apparent during early emergence and first flowering, as all growth originates from a central tight crown. It is only later as the plant matures that the leaf and flower bearing stems become apparent. Highly adapted to the seasonality of preferable growing conditions here in the Pacific North West, the canary violet initiates growth in March, taking advantage of abundant soil moisture and increased warmth due to the sun reappearing after months of hiding behind relentless rain clouds. By mid April flowering has begun, and carries on through May. Growth continues through June, and with the onset of drought conditions in July, the canary violet goes into a dormant state, with all above ground tissues withering as it retreats to stored energy in the roots and crown underground. This growth cycle is common in many plants.
of the Garry oak meadows, a highly ephemeral plant community well adapted to the often shallow soils that bake bone-dry in the summer sun. The canary violet gets its name from the glowing yellow flowers it produces, each relatively small but produced in great abundance on mature plants. A cheery face of five petals, the upper two often having dark flushes of rusty brown on their backsides. The lower three petals are marked near their bases with a network of dark striations, with the two lateral petals with short beards. Like many in the genus, the canary violet produces two types of flowers, but only one is often noticed. The flowers previously mentioned, with showy petals and produced in April through May, are technically known as chasmogamic flowers – these are flowers that are fully functional for cross fertilization with other members of the species, and in the case of the canary violet are produce first. A second type of flower, known as clastiogamic flowers, are produced a little later in the season. These flowers are held closer to the stem/base of the plant, do not produce showy petals, and in the case of canary violet never actually open. They are fully self-fertile, and produce viable seed without ever opening or being cross pollinated. Both flower types produce ovoid fruits that when ripe, explode to expel the seed for up to one meter. Each seed is also accompanied by an elaiosome, a packet of lipid and protein rich tissue that entices ants to further distribute the seeds.

At UBC Botanical Garden, we have been fortunate to work with staff at Parks Canada Fort Rodd Hill Natural Historic Site to acquire conservation quality seed of Viola praemorsa var. praemorsa in quantity. The successful renovation of our Garry Oak Meadow and Woodland Garden that is currently underway depends on such partnerships, as thousands of plants of high-curatorial value will be needed, many of which have protected status, limited naturally occurring populations, and remote or difficult to access sites. In the fall of 2017 we received our fist lot of canary violet seed, but had limited success with germination and subsequent growing on of propagules. Only a single plant of this first accession of seed has survived beyond our nursery, and is now fully established in the garden. A second accession of seed received in 2018 proved much more successful, with nearly 100 individuals establishing in the garden.
Higher production numbers like these are required when renovating a large-scale meadow garden, though it can be demanding on our propagator who is also growing material for all of our other garden areas. As a result, I have arranged with our nursery manager to split the workload. Our nursery manager handles the germination stage and grows on a specified number of plants, usually not more than 50. Any additional propagules come to me, usually as young seedlings in seed pots eager to avoid the compost pile. I have created a bit of a make-shift nursery area where I can grow on such seedlings.

While our nursery manager grows in individual pots, I tend to grow these seedlings en masse in deep nursery trays in a lean, free draining mix. These deep trays are far more forgiving with respect to watering than individual pots, a welcome feature as I’m tremendously busy in the garden during spring and summer. I would surely lose a high percentage at this young seedling stage if they were growing individually in small pots. The deep nursery trays also have the advantage of an open lattice bottom, allow roots to grow straight through to the sand bed of the old cold frames that make up the bulk of my make shift nursery space. I use this method very successfully to produce several hundred graminoids every year for the Garry Oak Meadow and Woodland Garden renovation project as well. After a year growing in the deep trays, the young canary violets are ready to either be planted out into the garden, or potted up and grown on in larger pots that are more forgiving of my nursery neglect. I have opted to plant out about 75% of the plants, and retain 25% in pots this year. Rodent damage can be significant in the garden, so the plants held back in pots also serve as insurance the accession will not be lost due to these stochastic events.

The canary violets are grown in the same fashion as the grass in the image. The tray is 15 cm deep, and rooting through to the sand provides a cool and moist environment in the summer heat.
Canary violets grown on in flats are shown above. Most of these (about 75%) were planted out this spring. The rest are being grown in pots (image to the right).
The canary violets planted out in the garden appear to be settling in well, and have been putting on good growth this spring. I tend to over plant with the expectation of some loss, but so far not a single plant has died. I’m hopeful that all those cheery yellow flowers will result in copious seed that will allow this gorgeous little treasure to find a safe, secure, and long standing home in the Garry Oak Meadow and Woodland Garden at UBC Botanical Garden.

Approximately 70 plants of canary violet were planted out into the Garry Oak Meadow and Woodland Garden this spring. Half produced at UBC Botanical Garden’s nursery, half produced by the methods depicted in the article.
Editor’s ID Challenge

Before moving to Vancouver, one of the hats I wore at the University of Alberta was curator of the Patrick Seymour Alpine Garden. As you can image, the plant palette from there to here is quite different, being about 5 zones apart. There are only a dozen or so species (out of about 2,500) that overlapped between the two gardens (that interestingly have about the same number of accessions and taxa). Our mystery is plant is one of them.

I remember finding our mystery plant, unlabelled, in the Patrick Seymour Alpine Garden outside of Edmonton in my first spring, and being absolutely stumped by the closely packed, needle shaped leaves that were reminiscent of a conifer. When it flowered (and boy did it flower!) it was apparent that this neat ground cover was definitely an Angiosperm. The flowers point to Lamiaceae, even though the leaves have no discernible scent. Unusual for this genus!

There are very few plants that I’ve grown in both Edmonton and Vancouver that do equally well in both locations. Our mystery plant was a stunning performer in the Patrick Seymour Alpine Garden, thriving in the sandy soil and full sun location that relied only on rainfall for moisture in the summer. At UBC, it has been quite underwhelming even though it also grows in a sunny, well drained sight out of the scope of our irrigation system. This spring seems to be an exception though, and it has more blooms and looks healthier than ever before. Perhaps because of the (relatively) warm, dry spell we had through March and April. Still, it doesn’t hold a candle to the ones grown in Alberta.

So, to our members growing in the lower zone range, I highly recommend trying Thymus leucotrichus subsp. neiceffii (juniper leaf thyme). To those closer to Vancouver’s climate, if you’ve had success with this, let me know!