Alpine Garden Club of British Columbia

*Acer griseum* in the E.H. Lohbrunner Alpine Garden

Volume 63, Number 4 Quarterly Bulletin, 2020
Executive

**President:** Chris Byra, president@agc-bc.ca, **Past President:** Richard Hankin, **Vice President:** Jay Akerley, **Second Vice President:** Rosemarie Adams, **Treasurer:** Philip MacDougall, **Secretary:** Lynn Batt, secretary@agc-bc.ca

**Directors:** Peter Brolese, Jane Byra, Laura Caddy, Andy Matheson, Bruce McConnell, Jo Turner

**Annual Pot Show:** Bob Tuckey, **Bulletin Editor:** Laura Caddy, bulletin@agc-bc.ca **Bulletin Associate Editor:** Valerie Melanson, bulletin@agc-bc.ca **Library:** Marika Roe, **Meeting Pot Shows:** Dana Cromie **Membership:** Jane Byra, membership@agc-bc.ca

**Name Tags/Membership Cards:** Karen Shuster, cards@agc-bc.ca **Plant Sales:** Chris Byra, sales@agc-bc.ca **Programs:** David Sellars, programs@agc-bc.ca **Publicity:** Rosemarie Adams **Refreshments:** Marika Roe **Seed Reception:** Linda Verbeek seedlist@agc-bc.ca **Seed Requests:** Pam Yokome, **Honorary Life Members:** Margaret Charlton, Pam Frost, Diana Hume, Bodil Leamy, Amanda Offers, Ian and Phyllis Plenderleith, David Sellars, Linda Verbeek, Bob Woodward

In This Issue

Upcoming Events.................................................................86
From the Editor .................................................................87
Club News.................................................................89
Related Events.................................................................91
In Memoriam.................................................................92
Polygonatum .................................................................94
My Spontaneous Symbiotic Season.................................97
Four Antipodean Conifers ................................................101
Thoughts on *Four Antipodean Conifers*...........................104
Some Fall Colour.............................................................108
Gardens Rock.................................................................110
Editors ID Challenge Answer ............................................111
Membership Renewals Due

Membership fees are now due for 2021. 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 and sent to:
Jane Byra, AGC-BC Membership Secretary Please email membership@agc-bc.ca for mailing address.

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. To accommodate members from different time zones, Zoom meetings will start at 7:00 pm.

2020/2021 AGC-BC Upcoming Events

All in-person meetings and events are cancelled until further notice. The following events will be held online via Zoom.

• November 11 - AGC-BC Annual General Meeting, 7:00 pm
  • Ben Stormes: Traversing North America in 350 metres: The North American Gardens at UBC.
• January 13 - AGC-BC General Meeting, 7:00 pm
  • Jim Lawrence: Birds, Bears and Blossoms: Kootenay Gardening
• February 7 -AGC-BC General Meeting, 12:00 pm
  • Jim Jermyn: A Look at Japan's Finest Alpine and Woodland Plants
  • Note day and time change to Sunday, 12:00-1:00 pm

For more information, visit http://www.agc-bc.ca/events
Hello everyone! I hope this finds everyone well, and enjoying autumn. It is my favourite time of year, as I’m a sucker for falling leaves and cooler temperatures (sweater weather!). It has been especially pleasant here in Vancouver, though I feel the fall colour has been a bit different this year. Plants that are usually showstoppers in the E.H. Lohbrunner Alpine Garden I’ve barely noticed, and others I don’t rely on for colour have stepped up and filled in the gap. Timing has been different as well, with some plants not colouring up for weeks after I would expect. All in all, it’s been beautiful, and the slight differences each year keeps me on my toes.

In this issue of the Bulletin, we cover quite a bit of ground. We have some great news regarding our recent fall club activities; thanks to everyone who helped make those happen! Linda Verbeek has once again shared her vast plant knowledge with us, this time regarding some gems from the genus Polygonatum. We also have an article from this year’s Willie Dickenson Scholarship recipient. Once again, I dove back into the archives and found a neat little article on conifers, most of which we grow at UBC, so I added a side article with photos and my own experiences with this taxa. One of the things I appreciate most about the original article is that it includes propagation information. I often forget that the winter is the best time for asexual propagation of most conifers, as I’m so focused on seeds. If anyone local would like to give cuttings of the taxa listed in the article a try, get in touch with me, and I’ll try to arrange material for you.

And finally, it is that time of the year again - seed exchange time! Thank you to everyone who donated and makes it happen. If you need a break from pouring over the seed list, I hope you pick up the Bulletin and find new inspiration or ideas regarding what seeds to try this year. And, as usual, as soon as one issue is finished, I start looking for content for the next issue, so if you have any thoughts or pictures you’d like to share, no matter what your experience level is, I’d love to hear from you.
AGC-BC events continued happening the fall in spite of COVID 19. The Fall Plant Sale held on September 13 at Dart’s Hill Garden was somewhat smaller than usual with fewer sellers and only members shopping but it was great to get out. Members came from as far as Victoria to shop and there appeared to be a pent up demand for plants. The weather was great (though smokey from forest fires) and being able to shop at the Dart’s Hill sale at the same time was a draw. The club table was full with great donations from Linda Verbeek, David Sellars, Paul Krystof, and many others. As usual there was lots of help. The Fall Sale the AGC managed to net slightly more than the average of the last 8 years, about $1200, so all in all, successful.

The informal garden tours were a success with small numbers (15 to 20) people that were keenly interested and happy to get out. Jay Akerley’s rock garden, cactus beds and tropical areas were appreciated. Pamela Yokome’s bonsai collection was out and demonstrations of bonsai pruning took place. Next spring we will encourage more informal garden visits where your garden would be open to club members for a few hours. I always find that I learn much at these events in addition to the social interaction.
Photos of Jay Jay Akerley’s rock garden from the Informal Garden Tour.
Photos courtesy of Jay.
Related Events

DHGCTS Fall Fundraising Auction
Susan Murray

Gifts from the garden! For the first time, the Darts Hill Garden Conservancy Trust Society is sponsoring a fall fundraising auction offering beautifully crafted items from Darts Hill Garden and garden gifts from local nurseries and garden centres. Unique gifts, hand turned bowls created from Darts Hill's Heritage trees and water colour plant portraits, artist's creations, and even gift certificates from amazing nurseries await your online bid. Please enjoy our online auction starting November 15 at www.dartshill.ca.
Malcolm McGregor

Malcolm McGregor, saxifrage enthusiast and larger-than-life character, passed away on September 4, 2020 after a long illness. He was the author of a number of publications most notably his comprehensive work, *Saxifrages: A Definitive Guide to the 2000 Species, Hybrids and Cultivars* published by Timber Press in 2008. One of the best descriptions of the art of rock gardening that you will find anywhere is in Part 4, Gardening with Saxifrages. My review of his book can be found here:


He was the Editor of the Scottish Rock Garden Club journal for many years and Editor of the NARGS Rock Garden Quarterly from 2010 to 2017.

Malcolm was an entertaining lecturer and we were fortunate to have him speak twice to the Alpine Garden Club of BC. He was really keen to come here in March 2012 and it turned out that the main attraction was to see the snowy owls in Boundary Bay. Malcolm was a dedicated birding enthusiast and a keen observer of the natural world. On a Saxifrage Society trip to the Picos de Europa in northern Spain we were looking for the endemic *Saxifraga felineri* high on a cliff face but Malcolm was equally interested in spotting a wallcreeper, a fascinating bird that also enjoys a cliff habitat. While driving down a country road in the Picos, Malcolm would suddenly yell “Orchid” and we would pile out of the cars and sure enough we would find spectacular orchids hiding in the grass in the roadside ditch.
He travelled far and wide looking for birds and saxifrages but also found time to garden at his home in Yorkshire. He created a number of Porphyrion hybrids and we are pleased to have one of his crosses, *Saxifraga* ‘Dora Ross’, which he named after his mother.

The rock gardening world has lost one of its leading practitioners and communicators. Malcolm McGregor wrote that the charm of saxifrages is that they retain the qualities of the places from which they come. The charm of his books and lectures was that he successfully captured the magic and beauty of saxifrages and their habitat.

Malcolm McGregor in the Picos de Europa with *Helleborus viridis*. 
We all know the true Solomon’s Seal, *Polygonatum odoratum* (or maybe sometimes also *P. multiflorum*), with its tall arching stems, paired leaves, and two greenish-white tubular flowers dangling from every node. But the genus *Polygonatum* has a lot more to offer than that. There are some really tall ones – *P. verticillatum* from Europe and China and the Himalayas, with whorled leaves and upright growth up to 1.2 meters. I only saw this once in one of Philip MacDougall’s gardens. It has clusters of whitish flowers in the leaf axils. Similar in growth, but even taller, is *Polygonatum kingianum*, from China, also with upright stems and very narrow whorled leaves, but the flowers in this one are orangey-red with yellow tips. In my garden it grows almost as tall as I am. The berries are red, and add another period of interest in the fall.

There are also species that stay closer to the ground. *Polygonatum humile* is only about 25 cm tall. It has paired leaves like *P. odoratum*, but the stem is upright and the leaf surfaces are close to vertical, making a wonderful dark green background for the dangling white flowers. I do find that some years something eats the flowers just as they come out, but there are usually enough left to give some show. It is native to north-eastern Asia (China, Korea, Japan), but seems to be perfectly hardy in my Burnaby garden. I’ve never seen any berries, maybe because I have only one clone, or maybe because I haven’t got the right pollinator. Apparently they are black.
Above: Polygonatum humile
Below: Polygonatum prattii
Polygonatum pratii is a little taller, but more arching and wispy-looking and its flowers are a very peculiar greyish-pinky-purple. Like the previous one, it hails from East Asia, but this one is endemic to western China. It makes orangey-red berries (according to the Pacific Horticultural society, I have not seen them either). This is only the second year it has flowered for me, so hopefully I will get some berries one of these years.

I have grown all the above except Polygonatum verticillatum in a shady, moist bed where they all flourish.

Finally there is Polygonatum hookeri – which, frankly, I would never have recognized as belonging in the genus. It is native to the alpine of the Himalayas and western China. This one flowers before the leaves appear, clear pink upward-looking stars which seem to be sitting right on the ground. Only later does it make tufts of leaves which barely reach 5 cm tall. Unlike all the others, this one is a true alpine and likes a lot of sun. I grow it in a tufa trough where it seems quite happy. Like all the other Polygonatum species it has rootstocks that spread, but whereas the woodland ones I know spread in a compact front, this one runs around and pops up here, there and everywhere, not always where it was the year before. It is so small that this is not really a problem, and it is also easy to remove a few in the fall. I’ve tried it in a flower bed and in a scree-like setting, but it hasn’t flourished in either situation. It is so small that in a regular flower bed it is very easily overgrown, and I think in the scree it succumbed to slugs and snails – it is very difficult to put a copper collar around a plant in the scree.

There are something like 60 species of Polygonatum, so this is only a small selection, but it gives some idea of the range of the genus.
My Spontaneous Symbiotic Season
Aaron Campbell

This September I was awarded the Willie Dickenson scholarship by the Alpine Garden Club of British Columbia. Although my knowledge of alpine plants is limited, I admire the Club objectives, particularly the promotion of native plants, and feel honoured to be both a member and a scholarship recipient. Although I’m young and am not sure what my journey in horticulture will look like, I know I’ll always nurture and cultivate plants.

For several years now my personal garden has taken up the majority of my free time, becoming one of the most prominent relationships in my life. It is a cultivated sanctuary and the more time I put in the more attachment I feel to the place. Over the previous years I grew to know and love my space for all its limitations and affordances. This season was my fourth, and I was anticipating the best one yet. The early season is usually a time of potential and excitement, but this spring rang something different, an overwhelming feeling of unprecedented isolation and uncertainty. I’m normally able to shut out the noise of the world and focus on the small piece of earth that is my backyard, but the severities of the outside world were impossible to tune out.

People tend to be quite taken aback by a young person who loves to garden, but the surge of interest in gardening and growing food solidified that I had accidentally already acquired a valuable skill set. The reports of panic buying made people think food was going to run out, friends were calling me to tell me to plant extra for them, to which I replied I would if my dang seed order would get here.

During the early stages of the pandemic I began going on long walks with who would later become my partner. I would drag her to community gardens and talk her ear off about plants and gardening. Anything sounds good when you present it with enthusiasm and she showed a strong interest to learn more.
Sophie was naturally curious, which is one of the most important qualities in a good gardener. She would ask seemingly simple questions to which I would go on long tangents that probably only sparked further questions instead of answering any.

One day one of our walks became a run causing me a debilitatingly slow-healing foot injury. It was incredibly frustrating that I could no longer do all the things I was used to doing by myself in the garden. I can be very controlling and particular in my space, a protectiveness I’m trying to work on. I used to garden in relative solitude, which I think was a combination of an urge to be alone and comfort found in total control. My injury demanded I ask for help.

Sophie took to gardening like a duck to water, carefully tending to each and every plant’s individual needs, maintaining surgeon focus for hours. I got to witness someone who had never really gardened before experience what it was like to actually interact with plants. Seeing it through her fresh eyes reminded me of the power of connecting to the earth, and how this can be done by nurturing plants.
Once she told me that the way I looked at plants was different, that I saw them as living things and treated them as such. I had empathy for the tomato, tobacco, and everything else growing in the backyard. She said after being exposed to this perspective of mine she began to see plants in a similar way, no longer objects, but producers and recipients of energy, just like us.

Sophie grew a particular affection for the tomato crop but recognized the sheer amount of labour they required. As they matured many of the 100 plus plants struggled. Stems snapped from the weight of the oncoming fruit sets and disease travelled from plant to plant. We used string supports and trimmed lower leaves in an attempt to keep the blight at bay.

Summer was closing and the fruits were ripening quickly, but despite all the work we had done, many of the fruit never ripened fully. She asked me why, and I wasn’t sure, they had done really well last year, but had been situated in a sunnier spot. I told her that their position in the garden wasn’t giving them enough sun, which was true. She asked me why, and I said tomatoes required a lot of light and were sensitive to falling temperatures and shortening days to which she asked why and I said because they weren’t from here.

When I began growing tomatoes four years ago I learned they were native to South America where the temperature is consistently warm and the amount of daylight doesn’t vary much seasonally. My garden, being in Vancouver, is in the coastal western hemlock biogeoclimatic zone of a temperate rainforest and has an oceanic climate. This means ample rain (and therefore cloud), mild temperatures, and a canopy of shade-creating trees. My yard is bordered by six foot high fencing on all sides and is partially shaded by evergreen trees.

I needed to accept that no amount of work on my part could overcome that living things are suited to the environment that they evolved in. I was fighting the climate, cultivating what I wanted to grow rather than what would be suitable to my specific region. Knowing that I’ll always nurture and cultivate plants makes it essential for me to learn from my mistakes: intuition is something that can only come through trial and tribulation.
Horticulture utilizes plants from around the world, but you must cater in some sense to the plants original environment if you want the plant to do well. So, in reflection of this season, I realize the importance of prioritizing plants that do well in this climate, like plants native to BC and the Pacific Northwest.

At my first job working with plants my boss always went out of her way to explain the theory behind what we were doing. Slowly but surely all the little bits began to come together to form a deeper understanding and appreciation for the process. I thanked her for sharing her knowledge and she told me simply that farmers must grow other farmers. The teachers that I’ve learned from have taught me that the most important thing you can grow is the next generation of gardeners. This can be done in spaces where humans and plants interact, which also cultivates community.

I began gardening through a natural urge to be outside by myself, with goals of self-sufficiency. Now I believe that the ultimate pursuit of gardening is to nurture symbiosis between people and plants. This is why the most beautiful thing I grew this season was a gardener.

Aaron is currently a student in the UBC Horticulture Training Program. He is very passionate about gardening; it continually challenges him, which keeps him growing and learning. Tending to plants has instilled in him a deep appreciation for horticulture, botany, ecology, and sustainable food-production. He does not know where this field will lead him professionally, but gardening has given him so much already and he loves to engage and encourage other people to take up gardening wherever possible.
Most rock gardeners like to plant a few dwarf conifers at strategic points in the garden to enhance the illusion of a real mountain landscape. The conifers chosen for this are usually small cultivars of normally large forest trees. They can be slow growing, or they remain small if their roots are restricted in a pot. Eventually though, they grow away to become overlarge shrubs, which can be a nuisance in a small rock garden. When alpine gardeners come to choose conifers for their gardens, they have a problem, for nothing is more uncertain than the size to which a so-called dwarf will eventually grow. Dwarf is no more than a comparative adjective, indicating that the cultivar is smaller than the species. *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* can produce trees in the wild of 200 ft and more, so *C. lawsoniana* ‘Elwoodii’, which at 50 years old is more than 12 ft, can correctly be described as dwarf. But it would not be suitable for present day rock gardens where dwarf conifers are not expected to exceed 6 ft, which is the height given in most catalogues and books for *C. lawsoniana* ‘Elwoodii’.

As an alternative, there are naturally occurring species which are slow growing and remain small even when old. From these, rock gardeners can safely make a choice and be assured that they have true dwarfs. In this article I am going to describe four species from the Southern Hemisphere.

*Microcachrys tetragona*, which has the common names of creeping pine and strawberry pine, is restricted to mountains above 4000 feet in Tasmania. It is slow growing, producing a few prostrate main stems which may reach 3 feet in length. From these develop short shoots which are thickly clothed with green overlapping scale-like leaves in four ranks giving the branches a squarish appearance. Male and female flowers are produced on separate plants. Female flowers which have been pollinated produce ovoid fleshy cones about 1/2 inch long, which are bright red although the colour can fade as they age. The plant is hardy over most of the British Isles, but needs planting in a gritty, well-drained soil containing peat in full sun. Fresh seed should be sown in a well-drained acid compost and exposed to cold. Cuttings of new growth taken in December will root over bottom heat.
Microstrobus niphophilus, for which I have been unable to discover a common name, is also known as Pherosphaera hookeriana. This Tasmanian endemic occurs on lake and stream sides on mountains between 3500 and 4500 feet. It is again slow growing, forming a dense, much branched bush, somewhat roundish in form, with medium or dark green, overlapping scale like leaves. Although it can reach 6 feet in height, it takes many decades to achieve its ultimate size, so rock gardeners need not worry. Like the previous plant, it is dioecious, and following pollination the female flowers produce thin, pendant brownish cones on the ends of the branches. Plant in full sun or partial shade in a peaty soil which remains moist throughout the year. Although cold is not necessary for germination of this conifer, and for that matter all the others from the Southern Hemisphere, it does stimulate it. Seed looses its viability with age so sow as fresh as possible. It can also be propagated by cuttings taken from new growth in December or January and rooted over bottom heat.

Lepidothamnus laxifolius, which has the common name of pygmy pine, may be better known as Dacrydium latifolium. This conifer, which is endemic to New Zealand, occurs in the North, South, and Stewart Islands. At the northern end of its distribution it can occur on mountains up to 5000 feet, but in Stewart Island at no more than 500 feet. The pygmy pine is found on moist, even boggy soil. It has wiry, prostrate stems which can reach a yard in length. These are much branched and clothed with tiny scale-like leaves which can be green or glaucous; in winter the green leaves become brown and the glaucous ones turn plum-coloured. Very occasionally both sexes appear on one plant, but unisexual plants are more usual. The fruits consist of red fleshy aril in each of which a black shining seed is embedded. Grow the plant in full exposure in a peaty soil which is moist at all times. This conifer does better in areas of high rainfall. Sow the seed as fresh as possible in a peaty compost and expose to winter cold. Take cuttings of new growth in early winter and root over bottom heat.

Podocarpus nivalis has the common names of mountain totara or snow totara. This is another New Zealand endemic, which is widespread on the mountains of the North and South Island between 2500 and 5000 feet. It is variable in habit: suckering, prostrate, or sprawling; there is an upright form, which has been
given the botanical varietal name of *erectus*, which can grow up to 9 feet. Commonest amongst alpine scrub, it can also occur along the upper margins of forest and on stable scree slopes. On the scree the suckering form is usual, for this habit of growth results in further stabilization. From the suckering, prostrate, or sprawling forms short upright stems develop which have prominent leaves. These are up to 3/4” in length, leathery, narrow and pointed. They can be olive, yellowish or bronz-y green, and have a white band. Upright male flowers, which are pink and spiky, are produced in fours at the end of the branches and are about 1/2 inch in length. The female flower produces a fruit which has a red fleshy aril with a brownish or green seed protruding from its apex. Occasionally male and female flowers are produced on the same plant but it is more usual for them to appear on different ones.

The prostrate form is the more desirable for a rock garden, but it is a stronger grower than the previous three species, so allow enough space. Plant in full sun in a crevice so that stems can cover a rock surface. It will grow equally well in an acid or alkaline soil as long as both are well drained. Sow seed as fresh as possible and expose to winter cold. Take cuttings in January or February and root over bottom heat.

These conifers are not common in cultivation and may be rare in North America. New Zealand conifers are sometimes offered by the New Zealand Alpine Garden Society in its seed lists. Seed and sometimes plants of the first two are offered for sale by Ken Gillanders of Woodbank Nursery, Tasmania (Editors note: Ken is retired but still an active member of the AGC-BC).

References:


Metcalf, L.J. *The cultivation of New Zealand Trees and Shrubs*, revised second edition. Reed Methuen, 1987

Vol. 63, No. 4
Thoughts on *Four Antipodean Conifers*

*Laura Caddy*

The previous article is yet another I stumbled upon when perusing older, paper Bulletins. I was already considering using the first plant listed, *Microcachrys tetragona*, as the Editor’s ID Challenge for this issue (once again showing my unintentional bias to Australasian plants for this feature), but decided my photos would be better used to compliment this article.

We have one accession of *Microcachrys tetragona* in the Australasia section, it is about 10 years old. In general, I am a fan of conifers, and this species is no exception.

This past month it caught my eye when I saw a single ‘berry’ (actually a fleshy cone) and managed to snap a picture before it vanished. This is surprising, considering Brian’s article noted that this species is dioecious, and I just have the one plant! Further investigation is now warranted. Writing this at home, I am able to check the Garden’s collection data online (https://collections.botanicalgarden.ubc.ca) and see pictures taken in about 2010 (as this is the era most of the pictures online were taken) show maturing cones, even back then. Is it possible pollen from a neighbouring relative in Podocarpaceae fertilized the cone? Maybe this could be one of those rare times a seed matures without fertilization. Or (as happens occasionally in the plant world) this plant...
decided to cover its bases and grow just a few cones of the other sex? This last theory is supported by at least one reference (Farjon’s *A Handbook of Conifers*). Whatever the reason, it does not take away from how lovely this little conifer is. It was new to me upon moving to Vancouver four years ago, so I wonder how many of you have it in your gardens.

We also have an accession of *Lepidothamnus laxifolius* in the collection. Currently it is turning its bronze/brown winter colour and seems to thrive in the conditions described by Brian in his article. If you were to visit the garden, you would see a plant labelled as such, but with a red label, not our usual black ones. That means there is missing information or potential uncertainty with the accession. In this case, we received this plant as *Microcachrys tetragona*. When I first started here, it was identified as likely to be

*Close up of Lepidothamnus laxifolius.*

*Lepidothamnus laxifolius* happily grows along a rock in a moist spot with *Diplarrena morea*, *Coprosma*, and *Blechnum penna-marina* ‘Cristatum’.
**Lepidothamnus** by a UBC researcher utilizing the collection. Unfortunately, I had no female cone (our plant is a male) and that was required by all the keys I could find. I could, however, read all the descriptions of the species in this genus (there were only three...) and identify it based on other features as most close to *Lepidothamnus laxifolius*. Due to the lack of cone to be certain, it dons a red label. This is a pitfall of dioecious species I face occasionally. In fact, this plant cohabitates with another that I’m almost certain is *Coprosma atropurpurea*. However, until I get a male for my female plant, I won’t have berries to be sure.

*Podocarpus nivalis* is likely the most common in nurseries and gardens of the four plants in the article. At UBC, we have three different cultivars of it; *P. nivalis* ‘Jack’s Pass’, ‘Otari’, and 'Kilworth Cream'. The latter is a young plant, only five years old, and so far not charming me with the trait of its supposed creamy-white foliage. It may need to be moved to a different location to really shine. The specimens we have of *Podocarpus nivalis* ‘Jack’s Pass’ and ‘Otari’ are over 35 years old, and quite large. As Brian noted, they are significantly bigger and require more space than the *Lepidothamnus* and *Microcachrys*. We also have a few of the closely related *Podocarpus lawrencei* in the Alpine Garden, which honestly, I think are very difficult to tell apart from *P. nivalis*. The only ID feature I’m sure of is their native locality, as *Podocarpus lawrencei* is native to Australia, but of course that doesn’t help when you’re not in the wild or know where your plant was collected from. Douglas Justice and I have commiserated over how to tell these two apart in the garden. After consulting multiple (over 10) sources, both floras of

Not a notable shrub in summer when its needles are green, *Podocarpus nivalis* ‘Otari’ (centre of photo) in quite interesting in winter. The copper winter colour is a trait of this cultivar.
the regions they are native to and conifer specific monographs, I still have no answer. There is some chatter about how prominent the midrib is, but even that isn’t consistent in descriptions. Part of the problem is we don’t have wild collected specimens of both taxa at UBC, and there is hybridization within Podocarpus (I have read resources that list both Podocarpus ‘Kilworth Cream’ and ‘Jack’s Pass’ are likely hybrids, not straight P. nivalis). But where there is hybridization, there is also horticultural promise. Interestingly (I’m not sure if this is coincidence or not) all our P. lawrencei are female, and both P. ‘Jack’s Pass’ and P. ‘Otari’ are male cultivars. We have offspring of the two species we have grown on for interest, and the variation in them is really quite remarkable. I have been monitoring them closely, and so far have propagated one especially low plant with lovely dark red winter colour (pictured right) as a potential introduction.

Shrub on left is Podocarpus lawrencei, right is P. nivalis ‘Jack’s Pass’ (middle Callistemon pityoides). A cultivar trait of P. nivalis ‘Jack’s Pass’ is its dense foliage. Both shrubs are quite large, and I find respond well to hard pruning.
Some Fall Colour

*Saxifraga* Pink Elf® growing in the Bischoff garden.

Photo credit: Carla Bischoff
Above: This *Enkianthus campanulatus* has particularly bright and long lasting fall colour.
Top right: I think *Armeria maritima* 'Little Penny' looks best in autumn.
Bottom right: The silver leaves of *Potentilla atrosanguinea* turning red.
All photos taken by Laura Caddy in the E.H. Lohbrunner Alpine Garden at UBC.
There are not many pests in the rock garden in coastal British Columbia but occasionally you come across a new one. Slugs we are all too familiar with and it’s the baby ones that are most deadly. These microslugs creep out virtually unnoticed in early spring and wreak havoc. I used to think that it was the rain that was spoiling saxifrage flowers until Pam Yokome found out it was slugs! Slugs particularly like the Campanulaceae so I try and plant them in drier areas away from damp crevices which slugs like to inhabit.

Moles have been a nuisance for many years in our garden. They really like rock gardens on a bank as they can easily dispose of their tunnel material by creating a tailings pile on the slope. Generally they don’t disturb the plants. However, by creating tunnels underneath, there can be soil collapse and plants will dry out. In new garden beds I have placed netting material at depth which seems to help. Otherwise you just have to live with moles in our region.

So what is the “new pest”? Well it was a mystery for many years. Shallow holes frequently appeared in a sunny rock garden and the surface stones flung about. Explorations revealed that the holes in the sand did not continue deeper. As with moles, the plants were not attacked. There were ants about but they could not be the culprits.

Or could they? Ants are prey for the Northern Flicker and I eventually spotted one digging furiously with its powerful beak spraying small stones around. The solution was to replace the small surface rocks with chunky pieces of broken stone, large enough that they would not be displaced by a ravenous woodpecker.
Editor’s ID Challenge

Our mystery plant is in a diverse family that has a range of lifeforms including trees, vines and herbaceous plants. Many species in this family are well known, some for good reason, some not so much. Notable and common edibles in this family are buckwheat and rhubarb. One of my favourite genera, *Eriogonum*, is included and is an exemption to a family identification trait of having a sheath (called an ocrea) around swollen stem nodes. However, many notable weeds are also related, including *Rumex acetosella* (common in the UBC Alpine Garden) and troublesome knotweeds, including Japanese knotweed.

I wasn’t surprised when writing this to learn that the genus of Japanese knotweed (*Reynoutria japonica*) is different than what I learned in school about 10 years ago. It has been classified as a *Fallopia* and *Polygonum* in the past, and our mystery plant has changed names a few times relatively recently as well. You may know our plant as a *Polygonum* or *Persicaria*, but it is now classified as a *Bistorta*. From what I can tell, inflorescence type, present nectaries, and prominent leaf veins are some of the traits that put it here (currently...we all know that can change).

The specific epithet hasn’t changed, though, and means blueberry (*Vaccinium*) like leaf.

Whatever the name, this is an effective and reliable ground cover at UBC. An original accession from Lohbrunner Nursery, it has graced our Asian section since 1974.

*Bistorta vacciniifolia* blooms late summer and into fall.