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# The ALPINE GARDENER

Journal of the Alpine Garden Society





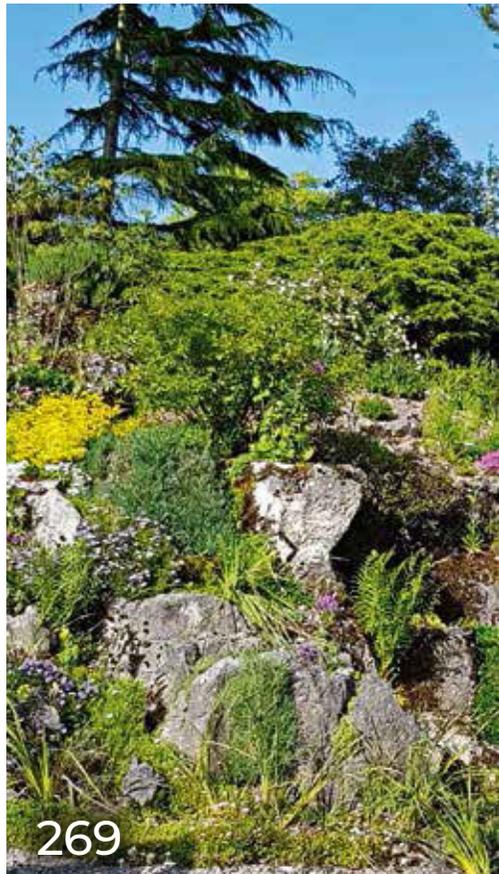
# Alpine

GARDEN SOCIETY



SEPTEMBER 2022  
VOLUME 90  
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by MARTIN SHEADER



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The international society for the cultivation, conservation and exploration of alpine and rock garden plants, small hardy herbaceous plants, hardy and half-hardy bulbs, hardy orchids, hardy ferns and small shrubs.

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# Editor's letter

**L**ike many other specialist plant societies – in the UK and around the world – the AGS is at a crossroads. Membership numbers and income are falling, at a time costs are rising fast. We make no apology for sharing with members information on the harsh reality faced by the AGS (and similar organisations), because without this honesty the long-term future of the Society cannot be guaranteed. Rest assured the AGS will continue for a number of years, but without taking action and finding ways of reducing costs, its lifespan is limited.

You might ask it there is anything you can do to help. There is: encourage friends and relatives to join the AGS and become part of an enthusiastic plant community; attend the Society's wonderful flower shows, special plant days and other events; take part in an AGS tour or buy AGS products. Don't forget about the AGS Bookshop, where you can buy books at a discount so both you and the Society benefit from those purchases. Please participate in the Annual General Meeting to make sure you have your say in securing the Society's long-term success.

With so much doom and gloom it is important to take joy and comfort when you can, and this is where plants and gardens can be so uplifting. This issue focuses on alpinists in gardens - from a North Wales garden where two AGS members have created alpine areas and strengthened their joy of growing these plants, to AGS members of the East Kent Group and their plots,

***“You might ask it there is anything you can do to help. There is: encourage friends and relatives to join the AGS...”***

to some well-known gardens and the alpine beds, troughs and alpine houses that can be found in them. Peter Liverman shares his knowledge of water collection, so gardeners can start maximising their harvesting of rainwater – so timely now many have hosepipe bans.

Enchanting plant species also feature in this issue. Heading further afield and into the wild, the doyen of crevice gardening Zdeněk Zvolánek searches for an orange *Sphaeralcea caespitosa*, Martin Shearer looks at *Oxalis*; and Rachel Lever highlights an *Erythronium* that should be available to alpine gardeners in the near future.

Deborah Parker

# The AGS at a crossroads

AGS President **David Morris** and AGS Director **Tony Bryan** discuss how the Alpine Garden Society can weather the financial problems it faces to secure its long-term future

The AGS, like many plant societies, is faced with declining membership numbers, rapidly rising costs and problems caused by the pandemic and Brexit. How secure is the Society's future?

**David Morris, AGS President:** The AGS, like other similar organisations, needs to adapt to survive and thrive – and therefore continue to do all the things it currently does that we all love and enjoy. Without wholesale changes in controlling the Society's expenditure, increasing its income and modernising the way we do things, we will struggle to survive for another 90 years. We need to be bold, harness new and exciting ideas and set the Society on a stable path into the future.

**Tony Bryan, AGS Director:** It would be wrong even to suggest that the Society is secure: like many if not all plant societies we have an ever-decreasing membership. If we do not engage with a younger demographic then our membership will continue to decline to a point where the Society will no longer be sustainable. We have a great opportunity right now to evolve into a Society fit for the next 90 years, but to do so we all need to embrace the changes that are needed. Only this will allow the AGS to be here for future generations.

**How did it get to this difficult financial situation? Why hasn't it been flagged before?**

**DM:** The Society's membership has been falling for over a decade and in the past, its operation has been boosted by investments and generous legacies that performed well, masking the underlying financial issues. The global Covid pandemic allied with the impacts of Brexit and now spiralling inflation has left the Society's past financial strategy exposed.

We are now in a situation where the income of the AGS is being outstripped by its expenditure, and those investments are being run down to support the



JON EVANS

AGS Flower Shows are popular events beloved by AGS members and the public

day-to-day running of the organisation. Recent improvements in the monitoring and clarity of the Society's membership numbers and financial performance have allowed us to assess the true effectiveness of this strategy and the impacts recent events are having.

### **What are the priorities in improving the outlook for the AGS?**

**DM:** Firstly, we want to limit the impact on the look and feel of the Society, its charitable activities and what our members and supporters come to enjoy. We then need to balance the Society's finances so that we close the gap between income and expenditure. Part of this will be achieved by savings and efficiencies in how the AGS is run, but a large degree of improving the Society's outlook will be achieved by modernising its operation and ensuring it appeals to a broad range of our membership.

Finally, we need to look to increase moral and financial support to ensure we can sustain the membership and excel in our charitable objectives: the education in, cultivation of, and conservation of alpine plants. We want to bring about needed change to create a healthy, modern Society that is fit for the future.

### **What steps have already been taken to reduce costs? How successful have they been?**

**DM:** A number of cost savings have been made across the Society, running through contract renegotiations, doing things differently and better use of technology. These have brought about valuable savings for the running of the AGS and ensuring our membership income is heading in a more profitable direction. Unfortunately however, these savings have been replaced year-on-year by additional costs brought about by Brexit, Covid and inflation.

**TB:** A big problem for the AGS is that membership fees do not cover the cost of the production and posting of the journal. This is not sustainable and the consequence is that we need to continually draw down valuable funds to subsidise memberships – this is why we needed to increase membership prices last year and we will need to do the same this year.

We renegotiated the production costs of the journal in 2021; unfortunately after Brexit and with inflation we are now paying the same as we were before this renegotiation. We are working through various cost savings throughout the AGS and hope to reduce overheads significantly over the coming months.

### **Will Local Groups, AGS Shows and the grants for conservation, for instance, be affected?**

**DM:** Many of these activities fulfil our charitable objectives alongside the things our members enjoy. Although we will always look to new ideas and to where things can be done better and more efficiently, our aim is to ensure these core activities remain strong and at the heart of what we aim to deliver as a Society.



GIULIO VERONESE

Among the AGS core activities are supporting alpine gardens through conservation grants (including at Birmingham Botanical Gardens, above) and offering education and learning opportunities (see pp250–254).

## What further steps are you proposing to improve the Society's financial situation, and what are the timescales?

**DM:** The Society's board and staff are currently undertaking a programme of work to look at the overall running of the AGS, what we offer and how we can improve this to improve our charitable delivery and the benefits to our loyal membership. Given the current challenges facing all of society around the economy we need to move swiftly to set out a clear strategy for change and growth that we aim to launch to coincide with our AGM and transition in within the next 12 to 16 months.

## How can members find out more and have their say on the future of the AGS?

**DM:** We will be informing members of the necessary changes to the running and operation of the Society over the next 12 months. We plan to launch this at our next AGM, with further correspondence over the coming months. The trustee board of the AGS will inevitably have to make some bold changes to adapt with minimal impact on our membership. However, that will hopefully put us in a leading position, as a small specialist interest charity, to demonstrate leadership in a field of other organisations similarly affected by the current climate.● Details of the AGM are included in the September AGS News or can be found on the AGS website ([alpinegardensociety.net](http://alpinegardensociety.net))

# FIRST AGS YOUNG PERSON'S WEEKEND A GREAT SUCCESS



The attendees ready to search for alpines on Cwm Idwal

The first AGS Young Person's Weekend took place 24–26 June 2022 in North Wales, with financial support from the Hendry Fund. Amateur alpine growers, horticultural students and young professionals gathered together to discuss, study, and look for alpine plants in the wild. Most, but not all, were AGS members and at a time of rail strikes, spent many hours travelling to Wales from England, Scotland and even the Netherlands.

### Friday talks

The event started on the Friday evening with a series of short talks. Participants were welcomed by AGS Director Tony Bryan, who stressed the importance of fostering a new generation of alpine plant enthusiasts, to carry the Society forward into its second century.

Razvan Chisu, AGS Social Media Manager, gave a talk on the past, present and future of the AGS. Henry Fletcher shared his love and passion for the genus *Daphne*. He grew up spending many hours in his grandparents' alpine nursery in Belper, Derbyshire, where he learned how to grow and propagate these desirable alpine shrubs, of which he has a large collection.

Matthew Jeffery and Connor Smith both talked about the alpine gardens where they work: Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and Utrecht Botanical Garden respectively. Bertie Swainston enthused about what he had learned so far in the AGS Trainee Scheme. The Scheme sparked a true love of alpinism in Bertie, who has successfully applied for a permanent position in the Alpine Department at RHS Garden Harlow Carr, to which he will go at the end of his training in September.

Aaron Marubi, a Welsh garden designer based in Bethesda, described how the native plants and landscapes of



*Ophrys apifera*

the Ogwen Valley in Snowdonia National Park inspired him to create a medal-winning border display at a recent flower show. Aaron knows the local flora well, and on his suggestion the group made an impromptu trip on the Saturday evening to look at wild orchids on Anglesey. AGS Trustee Tom Freeth ended the evening giving a crash course in field botany, based on his plant-hunting expeditions.

### Saturday expeditions

Organised plant-hunting trips are a great way to learn how alpinism grows in their natural habitats. At the same time these trips help to make connections and build friendships through spending time with like-minded enthusiasts. With this in mind, the group spent Saturday morning and early afternoon discovering alpinism on Cwm Idwal, in Snowdonia National Park. Despite inclement weather, all participants enjoyed the trek in these Welsh mountains. Finding *Trollius europaeus* ►



*Dactylorhiza maculata*

and *Narthecium ossifragum* in full flower, tiny filmy fern *Hymenophyllum wilsonii*, carnivorous *Drosera rotundifolia* and orchids like *Dactylorhiza incarnata* and *D. maculata* were among the highlights of the trek.

It was decided the group should follow Aaron's suggestion and visit the sand dunes at Aberffraw on Anglesey later that day. The reserve is home to a range of species that thrive in dune slacks and on sandy slopes by the sea shore. Within minutes of arriving, everyone was enthralled by groups of bee orchids, as well as *Anagallis* (syn. *Lysimachia*) *tenella* and perennial dune pansy *Viola tricolor* subsp. *curtisii*. In just an hour six species of orchids in flower were observed: *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, *Dactylorhiza incarnata* subsp. *coccinea*, *D. purpurella*,



The weekend was an active one

*Epipactis palustris*, *Neottia ovata* and *Ophrys apifera*.

### Sunday nursery and garden visit

If in North Wales, a visit to Aberconwy Nurseries is a must. On Sunday morning Tim Lever and his mother Rachel welcomed everyone taking part in the Weekend. The group was able to learn how alpiners are grown at the nursery – from propagation techniques to pest control and specific soil mixtures. The nursery is home to thousands of species and cultivars of alpine plants and many were still in flower.

The morning at Aberconwy proved a great end to the weekend, but those with a shorter journey home went on to visit nearby Bodnant Garden.

The inaugural AGS Young Person's Weekend proved a great success.



Learning how alpiners are grown at Aberconwy Nursery

Thanks should go to: Tom Freeth for his invaluable help in organising the weekend; Tim and Rachel Lever for giving up their Sunday morning to show us their nursery and answer questions; and Aaron Marubi for guiding the attendees around Aberffraw.

### Future events

Plans are already in place for the next Young Person's Weekend in June 2023. David Morris, AGS President, will host it at RSPB Haweswater, where the Society is a partner in the Mardale Mountain Meadow project to restore Lake District alpine vegetation. During the weekend we also plan to visit local gardens and Hartside Nursery.

To register your interest in the next Young Person's Weekend, contact Razvan Chisu at [digital@alpinegardensociety.net](mailto:digital@alpinegardensociety.net) ●

*'Huge thanks to the AGS for an exciting, informative, jam-packed, slightly damp weekend of botanical bliss! I learned so much on our trek in Snowdonia National Park, saw three of the five naturally occurring Saxifraga species in the UK and was almost wiped out several times in search of the ultimate crack where a nice plant might hide.'*  
Eloise

# A tour of alpine gardens in Denmark

**Jørn Danneboe**, author of several gardening books and a stalwart of Den Alpine Have, the Danish sibling of the AGS, visits a range of gardens in his country

PHOTOS: JORN DANNEBOE

The interest in alpine gardening has increased during the last 50 years, and today alpine enthusiasts and growers in Denmark have their own society, Den Alpine Have. Members gather in local groups, just as they do for the AGS in the UK. I have had the opportunity to visit many of Denmark's alpine gardens during the past 50 years, and continue to do so. Here is a selection of them.

## Troughs, tufa and slatted beds

Owners: Kirsten Andersen and Lars Hansen

The first garden I want to describe is Kirsten and Lars' garden, which is located in the little village of Herskind in Jylland (also known as Jutland). I go to see this garden every time I visit Jylland; it is extreme in its own fascinating way – not so big at only 900sq m, but packed with alpine plants. There are no big trees here, just plenty of light and air. Kirsten and Lars have spent a lot of money buying stone and gravel over the years. As Lars says: 'We want to spend our money on stone instead of furniture!'

In an open area in front of the house is a wonderful bed covered with tufa, and filled with exciting plants. *Jancaea (Ramonda) heldreichii* in full flower dominates this space in mid-June. It

self-seeds in this mixture of gravel and in the tufa, too. The bed is located where there was once a pond; it is still damp and therefore ideal for growing *Edraianthus serpyllifolius*, *Draba rigida* var. *bryoides* and *Physoplexis comosa*.

There are differences in the structures of tufa used in this bed. Some types are too porous and some are too compact; an intermediate type is best as it is possible for thin roots to grow in the stone punchings and get moisture from below.

As already mentioned, some plants are self-sowing, but Kirsten also helps



Kirsten and Lars check the tufa bed

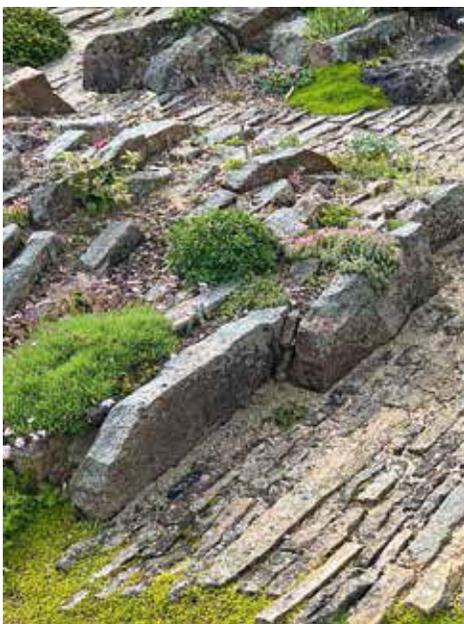


**ABOVE** What was once a pond is now a bed of tufa pocketed with alpine plants  
**BELOW** Sandstone crevice beds were constructed in both shaded and sunny sites





*Jancaea heidreichii* also thrives in the large blocks of tufa placed alongside a hedge



Zdeněk Zvolánek helped construct the crevice beds

new plants grow in the stone by creating 10cm-deep hollows in which she puts a mixture of gravel and grit, then puts the plant in place with great care. Finally, she gives them a spray using a water atomiser. Kirsten also has the task of removing weeds from the alpine bed.

Different kinds of stones have been used to build the beds: granite, sandstone and tufa. Plants thrive in the tufa, pieces of which are sunk into the gravel at a quarter of their depth.

Several of the beds in Kirsten and Lars's garden were altered some years ago. The original sandstone could still be used, but new rock was bought to build the crevice beds. With help from renowned Czech alpine gardener Zdeněk Zvolánek, lots of sandstone slabs were placed quite close to each other in a vertical position, which is the most stable. The gap between the stones is 5–10cm, which is ideal for growing alpine plants.

## An alpine landscape using gravel and recycled compost

Christian Holgaard Rasmussen

The next garden I visited was 'Blanshaven', where Susanne and Christian live, on the island of Lolland in the Baltic Sea. It is a wonderful garden of 2,800sq m, sitting in open, rural surroundings. Some of the beautifully arranged gardens have beds with perennials, shrubs, rhododendrons and roses. The most fascinating, however, is the alpine garden, which is situated in the southern part of the plot. It is here, especially, that Christian likes to work. In what was a flat field, thousands of kilos of gravel have been transported by wheelbarrow to create a real alpine landscape several metres high.

'Why have you done all this?' I ask. 'Wouldn't it have been easier to plant on the bare field?' Christian says: 'The drainage is optimal in this way, and the possibility to grow alpine plants is ►



From bare field to alpine landscape



One of Christian's main alpine beds in early summer



Moisture and nutrients are added through Christian's mix of gravel and compost

much better in these hills and valleys with their own microclimates. The more light and fresh air, the better?

Christian makes his own compost, which is mixed with gravel. It has long been recommended to use only gravel in the alpine beds, but some alpine growers (including me) now recommend using a mix of gravel, clay and compost. After all, the plants must have something to live on, and this is what Christian is doing, with great success. Plants are growing faster, but they are still compact and look good.

This mix of compost and gravel provides a slightly moist, nutritious growing medium. The well-drained mix provides optimal conditions: with too

much moisture the plants will rot, and with too little they will die from drought. The ratio used in the upper 50cm layers on the alpine beds is four shovelfuls of 8mm gravel, two buckets of compost from the recycling station, and eight buckets of Christian's good homemade compost.

The alpine bed in this garden covers 800sq m, but in areas without plants weeds soon appear, which creates a lot of work. Beds are topped with small granite stones – this looks good and helps deter snails – but the stones also have another function, too. They form a drain at the top of the roots of individual plants, letting water run off quickly.



Every space in Hans Erik's sun-filled garden is taken up by alpiners

### Alpine collector's garden – propagated from seed

Hans Erik Jensen

Hans Erik lives at Frederikssund in Sjælland (Zeeland), northwest of Copenhagen. He is chairman of the North Zeeland Association and has been growing alpine plants for more than 50 years. Even in a garden of 600sq m it is possible to grow many alpine plants and have room for more than one plant of each species.

Hans Erik's garden is a collector's garden, where the last remnant of the lawn has long since been dug up. Most of the garden is open to the sun, which is a great advantage. In natural alpine areas the ground is covered with a thick layer of snow in winter, which causes the plants to go dormant. In Denmark we do not have a snow-covered period. The plants are still active, even though they look wintry. That is why light is so important



A small number of Hans Erik's seedlings



Daily checking of plants by Hans Erik is a labour of love and keeps alpines at their peak

throughout the year. In mild winters growth continues but cold weather can bring short, sharp frosts every year.

It is undoubtedly Hans Erik's daily observation of his alpines, looking at the wellbeing of individual plants, that lies behind the excellent results he achieves. Snails are kept in check every day as well as ants and other insects; plants need to be shaded from the sun here and watered there, too. This all provides a bond between grower and plant, but also a great sense of satisfaction, when everything in the garden is in order.

The joy of growing new species is as exciting as it is challenging. Hans Erik

has long been interested in growing alpine plants from seeds and cuttings. Some of his seedlings are planted out in the garden so that he can observe the differences within the same species.

Seed collection takes place over several months. During autumn, the seeds are cleaned of chaff, then they can be sown immediately or stored in a refrigerator for a later sowing. The process of being sown will have an effect on the seed coat, which should be sufficient to start germination. As the time to germination can vary, Hans Erik believes that if you are not sure how long it will take, it is easier to sow the seed all at once.



Between house and driveway Knud has created a bed for alpines and dwarf conifers

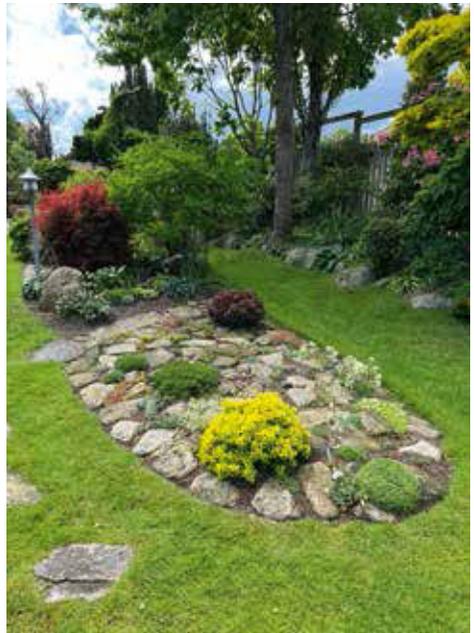
### Aesthetics in the smaller garden through use of different stones

Bente and Knud Thomsen

‘Nature can provide a lot of inspiration for a garden design. I try to imitate nature’s stone beds, just as I seek the growing conditions of plants as they are found in nature,’ says Knud.

Bente and Knud live in Solbjerg in the east of Jylland. Their garden is an aesthetic pleasure. Knud thinks a lot about what he wants in the garden, and how it should be done. He turns and turns a stone until it stands as it should. Knud prefers to use stones that have been found in the fields near his home. In some cases he uses small stones plus a few bigger ones in combination with concrete tiles.

A rounded, low-level bed in the lawn includes flat fieldstones. This is a new way to build, offering the chance of planting in the gaps between the stones, which are placed so that their flat sides are ▶



A low-level alpine bed built in the lawn



**ABOVE AND BELOW** Throughout the garden Knud's creative use of varied stones is evident



upwards. This new bed harmonises well with its surroundings, being raised just slightly above the level of the lawn.

Knud has made several bold attempts to put different types of stone together, and these have been successful, creating harmonious, exciting and inspiring stone areas to complement the alpine plants grown among them.

One small, isolated bed, which includes one of several water troughs around the garden, could have featured many alpine plants. Instead Knud has chosen a sculptural solution consisting of several single large stones and a few plant species as groundcover, which envelop the bed. This has created another effect, bringing Japanese style to the garden.



In Anna and Lars's garden, use of stone and pruning reflects a Japanese influence

### **Stones and paving all around**

#### **Anna and Lars Bertelsen**

Anna and Lars have lived in Århus, on the east coast of Jylland, for 40 years. At first it was the kitchen garden and lawn that held their horticultural focus, but visiting other gardens aroused their interest in alpine and Japanese gardens.

From the first moment of entering

this garden, the visitor cannot help but be impressed by paved paths and walkways. The use of stones in garden design has always interested Lars, too, and his car has often been about to collapse due to the weight of transporting them. It is an art to use so many different stones in such a limited space, but he has succeeded here. ►



**ABOVE** Cloud-pruned trees in the garden add to the Japanese feel, create shade and let light through to plans beneath **BELOW** A pool forms a backdrop to a crevice bed

The alpine beds were originally built using fieldstones, but sandstone was added later. Alpine plants grow well in a mixture of gravel, clay and compost, with a covering of small granite stones. Many dwarf conifers have settled down

here; to prevent them from becoming too large they are trimmed once a year. 'I cannot do without the shadow effects the conifers provide,' Lars says, 'it gives excitement and mood when the light is refracted between the trees.'



### Modern look with a tufa wall

Nils-Jorgen Rasmussen and  
Torben Ulrick

Nils-Jorgen and Torben have a garden on the east coast of Jylland at Skødstrup, northeast of Århus. The other gardens I visited are well-established - often several decades old - but this is a much more recent construction.

This 800sq m garden is on sloping terrain. To complement the modern design of their house with its glass-walled terraces, the garden has a structured and calm feel. In 2019, a two-tonne tufa wall was constructed along the terrace, which is raised above the surrounding land. Here, below the terrace, there is room for a bed with limestone and tufa, in which alpine plants have already established themselves.



The garden has a modern, simple feel



The tufa wall. Elsewhere there is a crevice garden and alpine bed below the terrace.





**ABOVE** One of the alpine beds in the front garden; cobblestones have been used to raise the level of the bed **LEFT** Jørn established alpine beds near the house

## My garden with a range of environments

### Jørn Danneboe

I live in Slangerup on Sjælland, northwest of Copenhagen, and have a garden of 2,500sq m. It is many years since I built my first alpine bed. A friend once said, after having finished a tour of my garden: 'Jørn, you need an alpine bed. It can be on the terrace. There is room enough for a bed and seating.' It was the beginning of many years of work cultivating alpine plants. The bed on the terrace is now supplemented with other, larger alpine beds in several places around the plot.

I believe that to succeed with an alpine bed it is necessary to establish it

in an open area without trees. It is also worth thinking about where the plants come from in nature, and then strive for the same growing conditions in the garden. Mountainous areas offer optimal drainage, which is of great importance for the wellbeing of the plants. This is one of the most crucial things when setting up an alpine bed. In fact I have studied different biotopes (particular environmental conditions that support specific species) on tours in the Alps, and used these observations in the establishment of my alpine beds. For example, I grow different cultivars of *Saxifraga* in a bed that has some shade during the day. ►



Plants grow well in this bed in a mix of gravel, clay and humus

Only after much deliberation did I decide to use sandstone, along with granite stones from a farmer's field, and was inspired, like many others, by the new trend of making 'gap' beds. But beyond the decorative, this also has other functions: the gaps between the vertical stones are ideal for growing more difficult alpinines. Drainage is optimal, and the roots are kept cold along the sandstone rocks in the summer and warm in the winter. Moisture created by condensation penetrates down the insides of the stones, which the roots need. The soil between the sandstones is mainly gravel.

Different environments have been

created in the slatted bed in my garden. This has both north and south facing aspects that provide sun- and shade-facing sides in which to grow alpinines.

I find it is sometimes expedient to renew parts of an alpine bed. At the start I find it can be easy to push this thought away, but it still comes to mind every time you walk past the bed. And then it happens: your thoughts are clarified. What is needed is more gravel and more stones – and thus more differences in level. This in turn creates more biotopes in a limited space – so giving new opportunities and new challenges for growing alpinines, which all makes for a happy gardener. ●

# Five gardens for alpine interest

AGS member **Josh Tranter** works at John's Garden at Ashwood Nurseries, owned by John Massey. In his spare time Josh can often be found visiting gardens around the UK; here he picks five of the best

**H**ere are five gardens that include some alpine-growing interest that I can highly recommend. I make no apology for starting with the well-known garden where I happen to work.

## John's Garden

Throughout his wonderful garden at Ashwood Nurseries, John grows a wide range of alpines. This garden is particularly close to my heart as I can call it my workplace. ▶



JOHN MASSEY

John's Garden at Ashwood Nurseries. The Rock Garden was created over 25 years ago



The tufa crevice bed is a popular spot in John's Garden

John created the large rock garden more than 25 years ago. Newer features were added in 2018, including a tufa crevice bed, and stone troughs kindly donated to us by Ron Beeston's family after his passing. Ron was a renowned alpine grower, and familiar to many in the AGS.



*Edraianthus pumilio* thrives in tufa



*Physoplexis comosa*

The renowned tufa crevice is hailed by John as the 'Cuillin Ridge'. Nigel Hopes, Head Gardener to John, and I built it in autumn 2018. We planted it up the following spring. I find this area exciting because it offers the chance to grow a vast number of plants. From the easiest to cultivate to the most challenging of alpinists, we seem to get away with growing them in tufa rock! Among the plants in the tufa crevice are drabas, androsaces, saxifrages, edraianthus, primulas and dwarf conifers.

One plant that always stands out in the tufa crevice and draws people's attention is *Convolvulus boissieri*. It has attractive, shiny silver foliage and flowers that are white with blush of pink. A plant I was happy to see survive in the tufa crevice bed and flower for a second season is *Physoplexis comosa*, commonly known as devil's claw or

tufted horned rampion.

Troughs are great for alpine gardens. We have a number of stone troughs, many filled crevice-style and others with tufa. We have created a number of *Sempervivum* troughs. We tend to mainly use *Sempervivum arachnoideum* cultivars as they have tighter, smaller and neater rosettes.

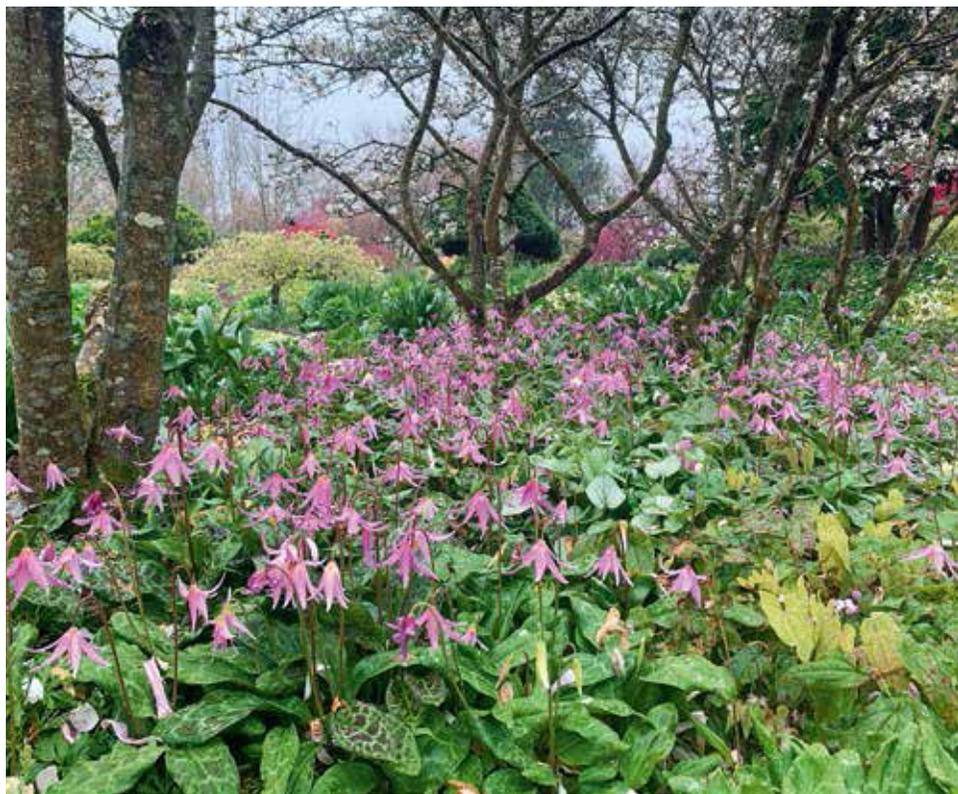
John's Garden at Ashwood Nurseries, Kingswinford, West Midlands, DY6 0AE, is open on Saturdays throughout the year. Check the Ashwood website ([ashwoodnurseries.com](http://ashwoodnurseries.com)) for details. Entry fees go to charity.

### Wildside Garden

Owner Keith Wiley has created a masterpiece on the edge of Dartmoor, inspired by the natural landscape. The garden offers great interest throughout the year. ▶



Spring in the Lower Garden at Wildside, created by Keith Wiley



JOSH TRANTER

Woodland plants, including *Erythronium revolutum*, thrive at Wildside Garden

In spring, the Lower Garden is covered in bloom from a vast number of flowering plants, nestled beneath the canopies of many magnolias that are also in flower. The garden is also home to a wonderful collection of woodland plants. Keith has planted vast drifts of erythroniums, trilliums, anemones, hellebores and *Narcissus bulbocodium*, thriving on the banks and seeding themselves around. These drifts draw your eye from the underplanting and take you into the trees and the wonderful landscape beyond.

What I really like about this garden are the endless paths and varying levels: Keith has used embankments to

raise smaller plants up to eye level.

Also at Wildside is The Canyons. Part of this area is being developed as a tribute to Keith's late wife, Ros, who died in 2019. Keith's aim for this area is to encourage wildlife through the use of water, pollinator-friendly plants and long seasonal interest. The sheer scale of Keith's work in creating Wildside is epic. I look forward to more visits and to seeing the garden develop and mature.

Wildside Garden is situated on the edge of Dartmoor in Buckland Monachorum, Devon, PL20 7NP. The garden can be visited on set open days throughout the year; details are given on the website ([wileyatwildside.com](http://wileyatwildside.com)).



JOHN MASSEY

The cliff garden at Glenn Shapiro's home

### Glenn Shapiro's private garden

After retiring from sheep breeding, Glenn Shapiro turned her attention to her other passion... plants! Glenn has a private garden in Lancashire where she holds the Plant Heritage National Plant Collection of *Hepatica*. Glenn was awarded national collection status in 2010 for *Hepatica* species and cultivars, not including *Hepatica japonica* cultivars. After expanding her collection further, *Hepatica japonica* was added to the National Plant Collection in 2015.

Glenn's collection is held in a large converted farm building and continues to grow rapidly. The collection shows Glenn's passion and dedication for hepaticas and for selecting exciting new forms. Glenn holds a yearly 'Hepatica Day' when she opens her garden and the collection to the public for the Plant Heritage charity.



GLENN SHAPIRO

*Hepatica x schlyteri* 'Red Max'

Set beside the house is Glenn's wonderful limestone cliff garden, home to some fantastic plants as well as many



The top of Glenn's rock garden is filled with colourful alpins in spring

hepaticas growing on the rocky banks. Various paths and routes can be taken through the garden – there are many beautiful plants to discover as you climb to the top. At the top of the cliff you are greeted with a different style of planting. A sweeping grass path with large borders on either side is packed with herbaceous plants and grasses that add texture.

Growing in a sheltered position and enjoying the wet weather, cultivars of *Saxifraga fortunei* associated well with *Cyclamen hederifolium*, adding autumn interest.

Glenn's garden at Silverdale, Carnforth, Lancashire LA5 0UB, is open each year for Plant Heritage. For details, look under 'Events' on their website ([plantheritage.org.uk](http://plantheritage.org.uk))

### Waterperry Gardens.

This 8 acre garden near Oxford has many interesting areas but my favourite, unsurprisingly, involves alpins. The garden holds the Plant Heritage National Plant Collection of *Saxifraga* sections *Porophyllum* and *Ligulatae*, which is tucked away in a courtyard. Adrian Young, the *Saxifraga* national collection manager, has spent many years developing this area, breeding and selecting new saxifrages. The majority of the plants are grown in raised railway-sleeper beds, filled with tufa. Wooden structures 6ft tall above them provide shade and protection during winter months; mist irrigation is used overhead for watering. Adrian says temperatures can be 10 degrees cooler under here during the summer.

The saxifrages at Waterperry are



JOSH TRANTER

A tiny part of Waterperry Gardens' collection of saxifrages



ADRIAN YOUNG

This large terracotta pot shows an alternative to stone troughs for a 'trough' garden

grown to perfection, and the set up to house the collection is impressive. I came home with one tip after I asked what food they used. 'What's that?', said Adrian. He uses no plant food in his mixes, making the plants grow hard and form tighter rosettes.

A number of troughs show off the wide range of saxifrages that you can grow. I think silver saxifrages are great garden plants and should be more popular, since they offer interest throughout the year and have the added bonus of flowers in spring. I also noticed a large terracotta pot taking the place of a trough – and showing what you can create at home and that you don't always need a stone trough.

Waterperry Gardens, nr Wheatley, Oxfordshire OX33 1JZ, is open daily to the public; admission fee payable. For more information visit [waterperrygardens.co.uk](http://waterperrygardens.co.uk)

### RHS Garden Harlow Carr

An RHS Garden in North Yorkshire, Harlow Carr features a fantastic collection of alpinines from mountainous regions around the world. As well as the landscape and plunge beds within the large Alpine House, alpine displays continue outside it with a tufa wall, troughs and raised beds.

My first visit to Harlow Carr was in autumn 2021 to attend the AGS Autumn Show at the gardens. What impressed me most about the Alpine House was the balance between landscaped beds and plunge beds. The rock work reflects various habitats where alpinines may grow in the wild. One plant I was so excited to see in flower, scrambling over a rock, was *Jamesbrittenia bergae* with intense red flowers.

Other areas of the Alpine House are used for seasonal-interest alpinines, where they are plunged in beds,



JOSH TRANTER

Harlow Carr's Alpine House: scarlet-flowered *Jamesbrittenia bergae* draws the eye



JOSH TRANTER

Plunge beds in the Alpine House display choice alpine plants

showing individual plants off. I like this way of displaying plants as it gives you the chance to see a wide range of plants throughout the seasons, and every visit to the garden provides a different experience of alpine plants on display.

Close to the Alpine House are other alpine features, such as a large vertical tufa wall. I noticed that a permanent irrigation system has been installed, which is used most days during spring and summer and has improved growing conditions immensely. It was exciting to see so many plants growing in the tufa wall. I look forward to returning to the garden in spring to see the many plants flowering in the tufa wall.

RHS Garden Harlow Carr, Crag Lane, Harrogate, North Yorkshire HG3 1QB, is open daily; [rhs.org.uk/gardens/harlow-carr](http://rhs.org.uk/gardens/harlow-carr) has more information. Admission charge for non-RHS members; free entrance to AGS members when AGS Shows are held there. ●



AMY SMETHURST

One of the tufa walls at Harlow Carr

# Maximising water collection

This year's drought-like summer in many parts of the UK reinforced the importance of collecting water and storing it when it rains. AGS Trustee **Peter Liverman** shares his system of using multiple barrels

PHOTOS: PETER LIVERMAN

**D**uring a Zoom meeting earlier this year, I received an envious comment from Ian Young on my virtual background of

water butts when there had been no rain for weeks. I was prompted to see if there was some interest in a practical article on this subject and hope my experiences prove of use to members.

Firstly, I have had an interest in watering and irrigation systems from an early age as I was brought up on a commercial nursery. During many hours of hand-watering with a hosepipe my mind was exercised to find anything that would reduce this chore through automation. At our nursery we grew year-round chrysanthemums (both in pots on benches and in the ground) for cut-flowers from the mid 1950s. Back then there were no off-the-shelf solutions for irrigation systems, but plastics were just starting to come into use, with LDPE (low density polyethylene) pipe of different diameters becoming available. MDPE (medium density) in either black or blue is still used today for mains usage, as it was then.

## Using recycled food barrels

Liquid feed had to be injected into the irrigation for the plants and so stock solutions were made up and stored in



Single butt connected to a downpipe



Four water butts now collect water from the shed roof

all sorts of containers from galvanised tanks to asbestos tanks (perish the thought now). Later, secondhand containers from the food industry started to become available.

It is these food containers or barrels that I still had when the nursery was wound up. I took them to our new house and decided to start diverting rainwater from the gutters to these barrels. I also bought ready-made water butts when water companies had them on offer, but the quality was not good and I found they deteriorated in sunlight and were constructed of lower-grade plastic. Since then I have added to my collection and now have a total of 21 220-litre barrels as well as three 110-litre containers.

### Connecting the barrels

Initially, where I had several barrels to interconnect, I followed convention ►



Taking delivery of barrels with 32cm lids



This 4m shed was an ideal candidate from which to collect water



Cable ties were used to connect support brackets to glazing bars on the greenhouse



Peter created his own gutter supports



The guttering and downpipe in place

and used the top overflow from one to the next, using any available hose. These were linked with a one-inch hose tail/connector with a back nut in the overflow, or I had to drill a hole (25mm).

Sometime later, while surfing the internet, I found that someone had cleverly interconnected barrels at their bases, allowing them to fill up at the same time from only one gutter or downpipe. This means barrels can be placed in awkward spots, as long as one is accessible with a tap. I now have four sets of low-level interconnected barrels.

### Creating the base

There is another factor that is important and obvious, but needs stating: the barrels need to be on the same level! For this I have used sharp sand, retained in a crude shuttering, as it is easy to level, and then laid 60 x 60cm slabs on top. After that, two lightweight blocks are placed on their edge with another 60 x 60cm slab for each barrel to stand on. This is repeated for the number of barrels needed; I find it gives the right height

for a watering can to be filled from the tap, although a short length of hose could be fitted to the tap if wanted.

### High-quality containers

As mentioned, the barrels are often former food barrels and may have had all sorts of interesting things in such as olives, pickled onions or exotic-smelling foodstuffs from Greece or India. However these barrels are all of a high-quality, food-grade plastic and last for many years. I have mainly used 220-litre barrels, but the company I have bought from supply containers in many other sizes, including the 1,000 litre Intermediate Bulk Container (IBC) that comes in a metal cage, sized at 1 x 1 x 1m. There may be a minimum order for the 220 litre barrels as they are bulky, so you could perhaps split a load with a friend or two. One pallet contains eight 220 litre barrels.

I am sure there are many companies that sell these, but I used DV Containers ([www.dvcontainers.co.uk](http://www.dvcontainers.co.uk)). They also supply all the fittings for taps, but probably not the interconnections. For ►



Creating the bases: lining the shuttering



It was then covered with sharp sand



...then more slabs place on top of them



Side view of a completed base



Slabs were laid on top



Two blocks per butt were added...

the hose, hose connectors and fittings I use City Irrigation ([cityirrigation.co.uk](http://cityirrigation.co.uk)).

### Tap fitting

I strongly advise buying barrels with the taps already attached, otherwise you will have to drill the barrel and then somehow get inside it to tighten the back nut while your wife, partner or helper ensures the tap on the outside is in the right position. I did not check this last time and when the barrels arrived the open end of the barrel was only just big enough for me to stretch in with a 24mm ring spanner for the back nut! This spanner was left over from being used on the nursery to remove the nuts that held the fire door on my 12million BTU boiler; luckily I had resisted my wife's call to chuck it out.

On each barrel I use a barrel tap with a 'click' fitting, which are compatible with Hozelock and are now standard. ►



Four butts fitted on the base by the shed



Low-level connection in place

On the barrel where you want the take off for your watering can you will need two taps – one of course to interconnect to the previous barrel. I used half-inch Tricoflex hose to connect each barrel via a bayonet hose fitting that pushes onto the tap. The barrels are connected to each other by hoses and 14mm Antelco DB (double-barbed) tees and the last one by a 14mm Antelco DB elbow. To ensure the hose has an easy fit onto the barbed fittings, place the hose in hot water until soft and then it

**LEFT, TOP** it is easier to get barrels with taps fitted, but these can be bought separately  
**MIDDLE** elbow and tee connectors  
**BOTTOM** pumps help maintain pressure



Standard Hozelock fittings were used



The linked barrels in use

will easily push onto the double barbs of the tee or elbow, and when cool will be permanent and have no need for Jubilee clips, Antelco or other ratchet clips either. The advantage of using a push fitting and a tap on each barrel is that if there is a problem then any barrel can be disconnected and isolated. You will only have to empty the one with the leak or problem.

### Useful pumps

If you want to connect your barrel to a hose or other nozzles then a pump is useful. I bought a cheap submersible pump with a float switch that automatically turns off if the water in the tank is low. This will also boost the pressure and output, and can be obtained from any of the main DIY

stores such as Toolstation or Screwfix. I am assuming that your barrels are close to a mains supply and that you have a hose to connect to your system. If so you should be fine, but bear in mind that a basic pump may not give much pressure so first do some homework on flow rates and outputs of drippers or nozzles. You may have to get some form of adapter from the pump outlet to the output hose: this will probably be a screw fitting into the pump with another click fitting for the output hose.

Another detail easily overlooked is that you will need a length of non-perishable cord or something to lower the pump to the bottom of the barrel as you should not rely on the hose to lower it. Pumps nearly always have a handle to tie on the cord (see photo, far left). ▶



An overflow pipe was attached



Mesh helps keep leaves out

### Drip system and other choices

If you want to install a drip system that feeds from the barrels that requires less pressure, then Darlac ([darlac.com](http://darlac.com)) makes a battery-operated timer that does not rely on pressure other than the head of water in the barrel. It would be good for a seep hose or drippers.

When choosing how to deliver water to your plants, you will have a plethora of choices to make such as drip or spray nozzles. The latter can be mini sprays for a small area such as a pot or hanging basket or a heavy-duty sprayer that covers a much bigger area. It should be noted that there is a risk of transmitting *Legionella* bacteria if stored water is used in a fine spray that creates an aerosol effect; using a watering can or drip system is better.

The best watering systems involve a drip to the actual plant base as this is

the most economical and direct use of your precious water. Drip lines are ideal for burying under or next to a new hedge, or to wind round a border such as the new system that has been installed in the AGS Garden at Pershore.

Drip lines can be covered up under mulch, soil or gravel as each pair of drips (one each side of the 14mm pipe) is pressure-compensated so each dripper gives the same amount of water for the whole length of pipe. These drip lines will deliver 2 litres of water per hour and can be attached to the submersible pump in your barrel as the pressure compensation is fine for this, but it would also work well for a length of 4mm pipe put into a LDPE pipe from 14 to 20mm diameter with a drip nozzle on the end. This is useful if your plants are far apart.



The positioning of a tap on the outer edge allows watering cans to be filled easily

### Careful watering

Although we have plenty of rainwater storage, we only use the water we collect for newly planted-out plants. These will be new to us, transplanted from another area or possibly been grown in a very exposed place.

We tend to work on the principle that if a plant is not doing well (after a severe talking to!) or has the temerity to die, then that gives us an opportunity to put in something that is already thriving in the garden or try something that will tolerate our new climate challenges.

Our other use of water is to top up our birdbaths with a clear conscience, one of which is on the ground for hedgehogs and other mammals of various sizes.

I think I have covered most aspects of setting up a multi-barrel water collection system, but if members have any queries I am more than happy to answer them via the editor's email on p244. ●



Peter bought 16 barrels to increase water collection or replace any damaged butts



# Cultivating an orange charm

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ZDENĚK ZVOLÁNEK

*Sphaeralcea caespitosa*

*Sphaeralcea caespitosa* was once grown in a few British gardens, from seed collected by John Andrews in Utah. It has probably long since died but, as **Zdeněk Zvolánek** writes, the hot summers of the Czech Karst are more to this USA native's liking

**A**lpines with vibrant orange flowers are uncommon and often a challenge to cultivate. We gardeners badly need the feeling of warmth and exoticism that radiates from the orange-blooming prostrate subshrub *Sphaeralcea caespitosa* var. *caespitosa* just after the all too sudden end of spring. Its luminous, impressionistic colour enlivens the summer rock garden and its performance, spread over at least three months, the flowers up to 3cm in diameter, is record-breaking.

My first contact with this spectacular plant was in its native habitat, at which time I had not seen it in cultivation in all my 50 years of gardening. Exploring the North American mountain ranges of the Great Basin, we used Highway 21 in southwestern Utah, known as the loneliest asphalt road in the United States, and enjoyed pastoral places far from civilization. This quiet, lengthy road connects the tiny settlement of Garrison with Millard County. We camped in our Toyota (whose charming Welsh-Canadian owner was Joyce Carruthers) on the shore of the small ►

Lake Pruess in the Burbank Hills.

Personal favourites among the steppe plant associations found there include a bright blue state endemic, *Penstemon nanus*, and *Eriogonum shockleyi*, which has a much wider distribution, from Colorado to Arizona at up to 2,600m.

### Searching for the plant

In the summer of 2005, this and other dwarf eriogonums were blooming unusually well. One hill in the Antelope Valley offered *Eriogonum ovalifolium* with extra-large, rose-pink flowerheads. The classic approach when you are in unknown mountainous country and searching for plants is to explore every promising stony ridge. At Halfway Ridge (1,900m) we discovered the beautiful *Malvaceae* member that is the focus of this short article, *Sphaeraleea caespitosa*, the tufted globe mallow, described by geologist/botanist Marcus Jones in 1908. The small theatre in which it was performing was very simple: a gentle slope of greyish calcareous gravel across which the well-spaced grey tufts or cushions were sparsely adorned with large orange-red flowers. Some plants had a decorative offering of black seeds, set in wagon wheel-like capsules.

The stony soil was hard, in a layer some 15cm deep atop the bedrock, which I strongly suspect is dolomite, of Devonian or Silurian origin. Here are the remains of Pleistocene Pine Valley Lake, now the site of the famous Lake Bonneville. I am sure this is the same locality where that great American plantswoman Margaret Williams collected herbarium material in June 1980. *S. caespitosa* var. *caespitosa* is narrowly restricted to Millard and Beaver Counties (to find its taller sister, named after Margaret as var. *williamsiae*, you must cross the nearby state boundary into Nye County, Nevada).

### North American beauty

Robert Nold, author of the fine book *Dry and High; Gardening with Cold-Hardy Dryland Plants* (Timber Press, 2008) writes that *Sphaeraleea caespitosa* is the most beautiful North American rock garden plant. I agree with him, having grown it for three years on my terrace in the Czech Karst, observing it at close quarters and appreciating its delicate fragrance and tremendous flower-to-foliage ratio. My plant, in a tufa crevice, has prospered, having so far attained a height of 10cm and a spread of 15cm. The ornamental, thickish leaves are whitish grey and one inch in diameter. Short, woody branches are slowly beginning to develop. Flowering starts in May, but even as late as November a few blooms linger.

The romantic history of this specific introduction begins close to Salt Lake City (Utah) when Catherine King introduced us to John Stireman, whose rock garden was packed with lovely cushion alpiners. His brother Tony has constructed an inspired crevice garden nearby. Their late older brother, Patrick, was also a skilled grower who cultivated and photographed *Sphaeraleea caespitosa* in early May, 2001. John sent me viable seed of this star of Utah and I planted five tiny seedlings in tufa crevices within a large plastic pot, sheltered by a high roof. After a few months there was just one survivor, which fortunately established in a deep crevice. A frosty winter did it no harm and even as a one-year-old plant, it put on an exciting show.

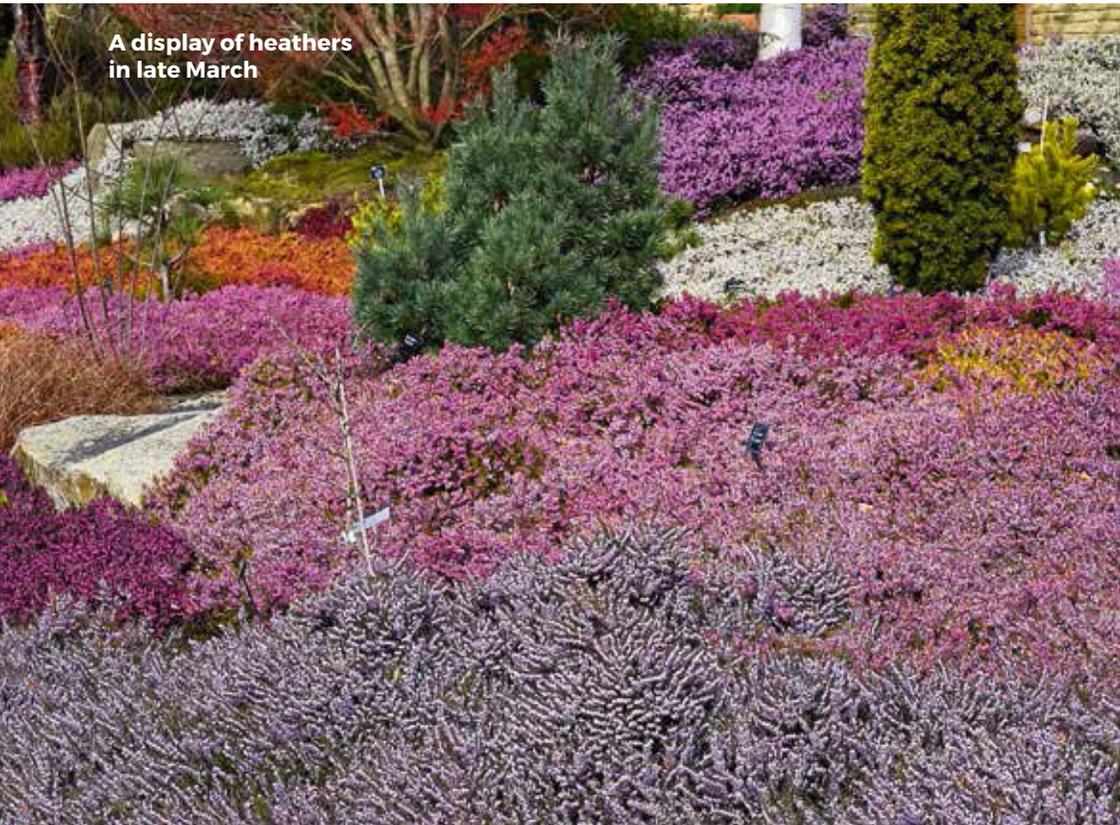
The photograph on p288, taken in mid-June 2022, shows this perennial orange mallow at its peak. I hope for an even better display next year when, from 5–9 May our garden, along with a number of others, will be open to delegates attending the 4th Czech International Rock Garden Conference in Průhonice near Prague. ●

# Welcoming Erica to the garden

It may have been out of fashion, but **Robert Rolfe** is happy to bring *Erica carnea* into the garden. He suggests good companions for this heather, and reveals planting schemes in which it shines

PHOTOS: ROBERT ROLFE

A display of heathers  
in late March



Carpet bedding, while not entirely unknown on rock gardens, is as a rule alien to that branch of horticulture.

Yet groundcover plantings at the fringes are evidently acceptable: witness the deployment of invaluable staples in shaded areas such as *Epimedium x cantabrigiense*, *Persicaria affinis* 'Darjeeling Red' and *Vinca minor* 'Atropurpurea', with *Genista sagittalis*, *Lathyrus vernus* and *Thymus coccineus* (various selections from white to purple) in full sun.

To this second cohort, while it will

also tolerate light shade, should be added *Erica carnea*, found across large parts of mainland Europe, from Germany throughout much of the Alps down to central Italy and northwest Greece, at up to 2,700m, sometimes alongside *Calluna vulgaris* and further east, in the Dolomites, occasionally in combination with that most distinguished *Ericaceae* family member *Rhododhamnus chamaecistus*. It's a bona fide alpine, but one too often shunned by superior gardeners with the dismissive comment: 'Heathers are best left on their native moors'.



*Erica carnea* growing on a rock bank

A re-think is in order. This long performing stalwart of the winter and early spring display flowers enthusiastically from November, exceptionally, to early April (March to June in its wild homelands). It also acts as a first-rate foil to other early-blooming plants, from fairly tall to relatively small – but nothing truly miniature or slow-growing, for anything in these categories it will overwhelm in short order.

Back in the mid-1970s, a knowledgeable nurseryman wrote: ‘The innumerable cultivars of heaths and heathers are especially valuable for the small, modern garden. They are suitable for a wide variety of uses with their ground-covering properties, their long flowering and great variation of colour, form and height’. This unsnobbish advice holds true. If you mix the different colour forms (these ranging from pure white to lilac, rose pink, carmine and crimson), a tapestry effect will be achieved. Where possible, select a sloping, undulating, south- or southwest-facing site, and intersperse with low rock outcrops. *Erica carnea* is lime-tolerant but best in a humus-rich, fibrous compost that never dries out. If you garden on heavy clay, you have two choices: alter the soil structure radically, or choose other plants.

### When and how to plan

In the 1970s the standard advice was to plant from September through to April, or throughout the year in northern England and Scotland, assuming the ground was moist. Now I would counsel late September to March. The rooting medium also needs updating, for English readers at any rate. In 1974, *The Peat Garden and its Plants*, written by Alf Evans, was launched to great acclaim. Nowadays no UK publisher would touch it, the contents no doubt leading to a Twitterstorm and similar

opprobrium. Coinciding with the book’s 50th anniversary, from 2024 the retail sale of composts containing peat in England will be banned. The position is less clear-cut elsewhere in the UK to date. Germany and Switzerland are the only other European countries that have drawn up similar plans.

Presently the sale of ericaceous compost (pH range between four and five) is allowed, often marketed as ‘with reduced peat content’. This is what many gardeners dig into ground where heathers are to be planted. English ones will soon have to change to substitutes that incorporate seaweed meal, shredded wood, coir (read a thorough study first), green waste, garden compost or leafmould (use a pH meter) and best of all (I feel) composted fine bark, ideally made from the non-native conifers whose blanket planting on peatlands was once widespread. The pH range here is typically between six and eight and the soil will be suitable for many other plants and planting styles, a few examples mentioned here.

### Some suggestions

Stealing plants from anyone’s garden, public or private, is undeniably reprehensible; stealing their ideas is fair game. Everyone does it. Dress the practise up and call it homage if doing so makes you feel better.

You might emulate the ‘river’ style of planting developed over several decades by Adrian Bloom to such good effect at Bressingham Gardens and beyond. This can be costly unless you are able to propagate in quantity or obtain constituents at a bulk rate. If not, content yourself with a rivulet, to start with anyway. My preference is for a mix of plants to populate the banks, not a monoculture, which can look contrived. (That said, most plant associations in gardens, whether formal or not, are contrived: the task ►



Friends with heathers: *Pulmonaria* 'Trevi Fountain' and *Helleborus x ericsmithii*

in the non-formal garden is to make them appear spontaneous or harmonious; ideally both.)

Shown above is a blend involving three elements, one of them spent. First up, the one now well and truly finished, but useful early on: a snowdrop. *Galanthus* 'S. Arnott', with stand-to-attention, fairly tall stems would look well, given time, but for practicality *G.* 'Atkinsii' bulks up more readily and is fertile. *Pulmonarias* are prone to powdery mildew and scorch when grown in full sun and allowed to become dry at the root. *Pulmonaria* 'Trevi Fountain' is less susceptible, though best in light shade. If it's true blue you want, however, look no further than *P.* 'Blue Ensign', plain-leaved but among the best of all the numerous lungwort selections. A comparable

widening of the range has been witnessed since the turn of the century in *Helleborus x ericsmithii* (*niger x sternii*) with greyish or marbled foliage and white, cream, less commonly mid pink flowers, that open in February, clones such as 'Ruby Glow' maturing to deep pink. All age to greenish tawny, remaining decorative through to April.

Eric Smith's eponymous hybrid, initially dubbed "*H. x nigristern*", neater and lower growing (35cm or so) than *H. x hybridus* offerings, has been around for 50 years. Another return to the 1970s, for this was when *Daphne bholua* entered cultivation (the reason for its omission from earlier standard gardening reference books). If you want what designers call a 'vertical accent' to soar above the low heather mounds,



*Pulmonaria* 'Blue Ensign'



*Narcissus* 'Jetfire'

this is just the plant – and much more exciting in full, synchronous bloom than the conifers usually chosen. The clone 'Gurkha' is more likely to shed its leaves in a hard winter than 'Jacqueline Postill', displaying the flowers more prominently in consequence. Or you might opt for *D.* 'Spring Beauty' (*D.* aff. *sureil* x *bholua* 'Peter Smithers'), a Blackthorn hybrid whose hardiness has been pondered, yet in a few northern gardens I've seen mature plants 2m tall, which must have withstood the testing conditions of February 2018, when temperatures widely dipped to below -14°C.

Often the same good idea occurs to several gardeners simultaneously but independently. Our image (overleaf) of *Erica carnea* 'Nathalie' in association with *Scilla luciliae* Gigantea Group was

taken at RHS Garden Harlow Carr in late March but very similar combinations were seen a few weeks apart in Lincolnshire, Suffolk and the West Midlands. The rebranded former *Chionodoxa* has the essential virtues in this partnership of vigour (it can hold its own and will seed freely), sufficient size, colour contrast and a differing but sympathetic form.

#### Useful bulbs and bark colour

Other readily available bulbs perform a similar task. Miniature daffodils such as *Narcissus asturiensis* are too small and too slow to multiply for the job. Settle instead for *N.* 'Jetfire' or *N.* 'February Gold', both around 25cm and with the grace of their *N. cyclamineus* parentage in evidence. Seen here (p297), bold flotillas breast not a river but a sea of ►



*Scilla lucilliae* Gigantea Group makes a good foil for *Erica carnea* 'Nathalie'

mixed *Erica carnea* clones and can hold their own if heather pruning is the rule.

Continuing into early April, white *N.* 'Jenny' could take up the baton, another Division 6 *N. cyclamineus* hybrid, this time with *N.* 'Mitylene' as the seed parent, bred by CF Coleman at least 60 years ago. It has been joined here (see image p298) by *Iris bucharica*, both of them accentuating the dark red stems of what is – at a guess – *Cornus sericea* 'Isanti' or 'Coral Red'. Once established, this dogwood should be coppiced annually, no later than mid-April, cutting back the stems to a height of just 2–3cm to induce new whips that will colour most vibrantly if in full sun. The same goes for *C. alba* and *C. sanguinea*. Both are most usually but not always necessarily best positioned somewhat behind *Erica carnea*, but can be

interplanted with the aforementioned *Narcissus* cultivars, as a grouping of *N.* 'Jetfire' and *C. sericea* 'Budd's Yellow' demonstrates. In another instructive Harlow Carr juxtaposition, *Erica carnea* f. *alba* 'Cecilia M. Beale' nestles at the foot of another vibrant dogwood. The heather needs only a light clipping over to keep it in shape, once the flowers wane and therefore long before the next flush is set in midsummer; the dogwood responds best to a full-blooded decapitation.

### Recommended cultivars

At the last count, made in 2021, 19 variants of *Erica carnea* (*E. herbacea* according to some authors but this opinion hasn't prevailed) hold the RHS Award of Garden Merit. They are joined by three versions of *E. x darleyensis*, its ►



**ABOVE** *Narcissus* 'Jetfire' with *Cornus sericea* 'Budd's Yellow'  
**BELOW** *Narcissus* 'February Gold' amid a sea of *Erica carnea*





**ABOVE** *Iris bucharia*, hellebores and *Narcissus* 'Jenny' make good partners for ericas  
**BELOW** *Erica carnea* f. *alba* 'Cecilia M. Beale' with *Cornus* at Harlow Carr





*Erica carnea* f. *alba* 'Winter Snow' with dark purple *E. carnea* and *Cornus sericea*

hybrid with the Irish heath, *E. erigena*, which first occurred in the late 19th century at a Darley Dale (Derbyshire) nursery. You will surely want *E. carnea* 'Challenger', introduced by H. van Gemeren & S. C. van der Wilt (Boskoop, Netherlands) in 1986. Long-esteemed *E. carnea* clones such as deep carmine 'Eileen Porter', pale pink 'James Backhouse', coral pink 'Startler' and rich pink 'Winter Beauty' have been omitted from the latest coterie, whereas 'Springwood White' (white, vigorous), alongside *E. x darleyensis* 'Arthur Johnson' (deep pink) have stayed the course. Once championed *E. carnea* 'King George' (rose crimson), 'Ruby Glow' (red) and also *E. x darleyensis* 'George Rendell' are no longer easy to obtain. Some may have gone to the

wall (I don't mean the onetime peat enclave of that ilk).

Those chosen have been dictated by present availability, other mainstays including *E. carnea* 'Ann Sparkes' (bronzed foliage; deep crimson flowers), 'Foxhollow' (foliage orange-tinged in winter; flowers pink), trail-blazing 'Myretoun Ruby' (blood red), 'Rotes Juwel' (derived from the last by Kurt Kramer in Edeweicht, Germany) and a sport from 'Kramer's Rote', possibly a tetraploid. All will perform admirably, deployed in no fewer than fives at a 15cm distancing, so that they blend within three seasons. Alpine gardening oscillates between the highly specialised and the very worthwhile but more routine. At this juncture, we champion the latter. ●

# A quartet of Patagonian Oxalis

**Martin Sheader**, an authority on South American plants, outlines four species of *Oxalis* observed on his travels – and looks at how easy some are to cultivate

PHOTOS: MARTIN SHEADER



*Oxalis enneaphylla* growing on a mountain slope in Santa Cruz

The genus *Oxalis* has a worldwide distribution with some 800 species found in habitats ranging from deserts to the tropics and from the coast to the high mountains. This article focuses on a small group of Patagonian *Oxalis* in Section *Palmatifoliae*, consisting of only four species; *Oxalis enneaphylla*, *O. laciniata*, *O. loricata* and *O. adenophylla*. All are in cultivation and have characteristically large, eye-catching flowers, delightfully scented. In Patagonia they each occupy a wide range of habitats and show a high degree of variation in flower colour and foliage. They are winter dormant, flowering in the austral spring from October to January.

The degree of variation we see in

cultivation is relatively limited when compared with wild populations and it would be exciting to introduce more material in the future if possible.

Patagonia includes the southernmost provinces of Chile and Argentina. Most of my trips to the area have focused on the drier, Argentine side of the Andes. In the far south, Tierra del Fuego is separated from the mainland by the Strait of Magellan. The offshore Falkland Islands have an impoverished Patagonian flora with a few endemic species. The southernmost Argentine province of Santa Cruz is located between 46° and 52°S, Chubut between 42° and 46°S, Río Negro between approximately 39° and 42°S and Neuquén between approximately 37° and 39°S. ►



Brown-eyed form of *O. enneaphylla* on the Santa Cruz steppe



*Oxalis enneaphylla* tucked under a rock on a mountain summit, Chile



A white form of *O. enneaphylla* on a mountain slope in Santa Cruz

### *Oxalis enneaphylla*

This is the southernmost of the Section *Palmatifoliae* species. It is distributed from central Santa Cruz Province (Argentina) and adjacent Chile south to Tierra del Fuego, with outlying populations on the Falkland Islands, occurring from sea level to exposed mountain summits up to about 1,100m. It is found in habitats varying from sandy steppe and grassy mountain slopes to rocky screes and gravelly mountain ridges.

It has typical oxalis palmate leaves consisting of seven to 14 heart-shaped leaflets. Leaves can be pubescent (hair covered) or glabrous (smooth), in some populations with an orange-brown margin. Large flowers (to 3cm across) are held on stalks just above the foliage and are white to pink or lavender, occasionally with a darker pink or green eye. *Oxalis enneaphylla* is rhizomatous, with branching, elongate bulbous rhizomes, making propagation by division relatively easy. ▶



**ABOVE AND BELOW** *O. enneaphylla* thrives on an exposed mountain summit. Both forms bear attractive red-edged leaves





A large cushion of *Oxalis enneaphylla* growing on the Santa Cruz steppe

Growing as it does in a wide range of habitats and at different altitudes, it is instructive to compare growth forms.

Low altitude and steppe forms often develop into large, floriferous cushions with the leaves covered by soft silvery hairs. Most have flowers in shades of pink, occasionally white, though Falkland Island populations are predominantly white-flowered. An excellent example of the latter is *O. enneaphylla* 'Sheffield Swan', introduced into cultivation by Capt. Peter Erskine. Some mainland plants can be found that have flowers with attractive green, brownish or maroon eyes.

At greater altitude on southern hills and mountain slopes, plants may still

form cushions or mats, but are often somewhat smaller than steppe forms.

The most compact forms grow on exposed mountain tops and ridges. These often have leaves with red margins and may be glabrous or pubescent. Flowers are typically short-stemmed, the plants forming tight mats, sometimes tucked into the base of rocks that provide additional protection.

*O. enneaphylla* generally performs well in cultivation if grown in a well-drained compost in a container, trough, rock garden or raised bed. I have had little success with mountain forms of this species which seem to be much more challenging in cultivation.



*O. laciniata* 'Bitterne Beauty' in cultivation

### *Oxalis laciniata*

Another species of the far south, *Oxalis laciniata* occurs from southern Chubut (Argentina) south to the Straits of Magellan and adjacent Chile. It grows in steppe, and on stony hillsides and mountain slopes from sea level up to about 1,000m in the south of its range, to 1,500m in the north. The palmate leaves have around 10 narrow leaflets, often with wavy margins. The rhizomes are long, narrow and branching, making propagation by division easy. Plants in habitat are often small, producing a few flowers in succession. In cultivation specimens may be more robust and floriferous.

Flower colour and veining are incredibly variable, the ground colour ranging from white, pink, lavender or blue to purple. Populations show most variation in flower colour at sites in southern Santa Cruz province (Argentina), notably Estancia Stag ▶



*O. laciniata* growing on the steppe



*O. laciniata* 'Purple Haze' in cultivation



Hairy-leaved *O. laciniata* var. *pubescens*



*Oxalis laciniata* from Miradores de Darwin



*O. laciniata* on the Atlantic coast of northern Santa Cruz



*O. laciniata* 'Seven Bells' in cultivation

River and in steppe southeast of El Calafate. In Torres del Paine National Park (Chile) flowers are typically pink, showing only slight colour variation. Populations on the Atlantic coast at Miradores de Darwin (Santa Cruz) are robust with elegant, funnel-shaped pink flowers, often with a dark eye, whereas populations further north are more like those found in south Santa Cruz. On mountain slopes in the northwest of the species' range (e.g. Monte Zeballos) an extraordinary form, *O. laciniata* var. *pubescens*, can be found in which the leaves are densely hairy. Many interesting *O. laciniata* clones have been raised in cultivation.

This does well in cultivation, planted in troughs, containers or rockeries. For me it performs best in a sandy, well-drained compost, under cover and with good ventilation. ▶

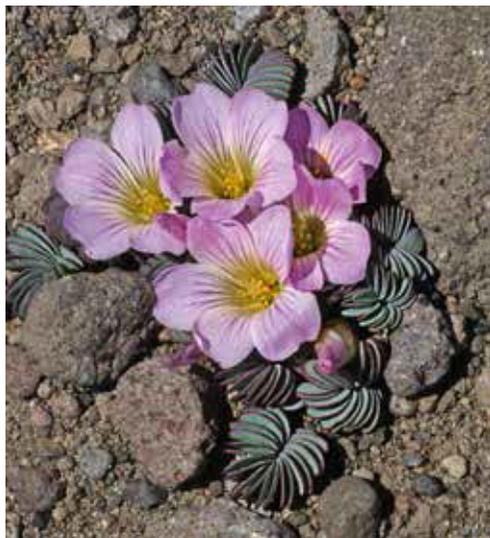


*O. laciniata* 'Julia Johnston' is another plant that comes from Stag River

***Oxalis loricata***

This is another southern species, occurring from southern Chubut (Argentina) to Tierra del Fuego and Chile. It is found above the treeline in mountain screes and on exposed mountain summits, the leaves pushing through at snowmelt, the flowers opening shortly afterwards. The palmate leaves have 5-12 fleshy glabrous leaflets, often with red-purple margins. The branching rhizome is thick (about 1cm diameter) and clothed in red fleshy scales. Flowers vary in colour from white to deep pink.

This is a difficult species in cultivation, needing a well-drained compost with maximum ventilation and cool conditions during summer.



*Oxalis loricata* on a mountainside



*O. loricata* growing in Torres del Paine National Park, Chile



White form of *O. loricata* growing on a mountain ridge at Stag River



*O. loricata* in Central Santa Cruz



*O. loricata* at Monte Zeballos in northern Santa Cruz

***Oxalis adenophylla***

Perhaps the easiest of the four Section *Palmatifoliae* *Oxalis* in cultivation, this species occurs in northern Patagonia, extending south from Mendoza to northern Santa Cruz and adjacent Chile. Its distribution overlaps with that of *O. laciniata* and *O. loricata*, but not with *O. enneaphylla*. It is found on rocky/sandy steppe, rocky hillsides, mountain slopes and screes, and occasionally among lakeside cobbles and in open woodland. The palmate leaves have 12–22 broad, triangular, glabrous leaflets, often with purple markings on the margin. Flowers are variable in colour from pink to violet, rarely white. The flowers are solitary, occasionally in pairs, held on stems just above the foliage. The rhizomes are bulb-like with fleshy scales and the remains of old leaf bases. Propagation is by the removal of small side-bulbs.

*O. adenophylla* varies in flower colour and foliage throughout its range. For example, at Monte Zeballos in northern Santa Cruz province, flowers are usually pale pink (rarely white). Here it grows with *O. loricata* and *O. laciniata*



*Oxalis adenophylla* growing among rocks on Cerro Catedral, Rio Negro

var. *pubescens* and each species shows relatively little variation in flower colour. Further north at Lago Vintter (Chubut province), *O. adenophylla* can be found among lakeside cobbles where



*O. adenophylla* on the shore of Lago Vintter, Chubut



*O. adenophylla* at Monte Zeballos, northern Santa Cruz



*O. adenophylla* at Batea Mahuida,  
Rio Negro

there is a ready supply of water at the roots. Flowers here are pale to deep pink and leaves are edged with purple. In Rio Negro province, on the upper slopes of Cerro Catedral, growing in

screens and among rocks, flower colour is variable and the leaves are usually unmarked. Close by and to the east of Cerro Catedral at Mirador del Nirihuau, plants exhibit a range of colour forms, including a sizeable number of albinos. In northern Patagonia (Neuquén province) plants usually have well marked leaves and pale to deep pink flowers.

We found an unusual population at Paso Córdoba (Rio Negro Province). Here *O. adenophylla* grows in dry open woodland. Plants are unusually large with flowers held well above the unmarked foliage. Many have flowers with a dark central eye. Plants from this location are also large and vigorous in cultivation. This species does well in the UK, succeeding in rockeries, troughs, sand beds and containers.

A concluding note: all four hybridise readily in cultivation. Some of the best to date have been hybrids between *O. adenophylla* and *O. laciniata*. There is scope for more hybridisation and selection of novel varieties of these striking Patagonian natives. ●



In cultivation: a hybrid of  
*O. laciniata* x *O. adenophylla*



*O. adenophylla* at Mirador Nirihuau,  
Rio Negro





Donald and Leonie Charlesworth's garden in the Weald of Kent. Donald was a member and Treasurer of the Mid Kent AGS Group.



**ABOVE** Visiting the garden of Mike and Hazel Brett (see *The Alpine Gardener*, September 2021, pp254–261) who helped run the Mid-Kent AGS Group for many years

**BELOW** Elizabeth Strangman shows nursery owner Jennie Maillard her garden



Little Chart Forstal, a delightful hamlet hidden away near Ashford) was memorable on the occasions he opened it, with visitors queuing outside, waiting to be first for the chance to purchase from the rare and unusual plants he had propagated. For a young AGS member it was a revelation to see the wealth of plants he grew at Coldham, and he was a most generous gardener and friend.

Our Secretary for nearly two decades, Rosemary Powis, also made the most delightful garden and after she so sadly passed away far too young I helped her husband Paul look after it for a number of years. Strong friendships are forged by gardens.



Hellebores in Elizabeth Strangman's garden at Robertsbridge, East Sussex

### Value of local groups

I write this to emphasise the immense value of the AGS and its Local Groups to the past and present art of horticulture in the British Isles and the sadness that now, after half a century or more, some of these Groups in places such as Kent are slowly coming to their end, no longer able to stimulate renewed interest in the plantsmanship they celebrate or arguably to promote the value of the gardens they have engendered. This is set against the context of a world in which the environment and ecology, and stronger perception of the values of the natural world, become more and more vital to

counteract the dominating and homogenising forces of politics and economic growth, to help adapt to the dangers of climate change and to the chronic losses of biodiversity that we now face locally and worldwide.

### Value of individual gardens

A garden in itself cannot save the world, but the state of mind that making a garden promotes goes a long way in helping us understand nature. It gives us hope that our worst fears are not realised, that we can tread more lightly on the world, that the resilience of nature herself will recover and prevail when the opportunity is presented. One ►



The garden of Sylvie Buat-Ménard and David Sayers, just south of Whitstable. Sylvie is a former Chairman of the East Kent Group, and David its Treasurer.

of the strongest arguments in support of specialised plant societies is that unique and varied resource of plants that we all hold in our gardens. And this is made locally and inspired and shared by the friends and relationships developed within the Local Groups of organisations such as the AGS, Hardy Plant Society and others.

The importance of our individual gardens cannot be overstated, nor the plants which we propagate and share, nor the local connections which now become more and more under threat of loss as they are subsumed by monopoly and the internet. For me, 'small is beautiful' becomes hidden from view.

This resource becomes more vital than ever as the introduction of seed and plants from both the wild and from horticulture overseas, so long the very basis of our gardens, is now more restricted and regulated. As we define the natural world ever more precisely and accurately we are, if we are not careful, increasingly distanced from it culturally and personally.

Gardens too have greater and greater ecological significance as urbanity grows and the wider landscape increasingly is developed and lost. Not only are gardens a resource, but important habitats in their own right too. Growing numbers of academic



Michael and Pamela Heigham's garden on the north Kent coast, at Margate. Michael was an elder statesman of the East Kent Group and made this tufa garden complete with a misting spray that he could use to irrigate it in dry and hot weather.

studies reveal their collective worth and detailed biodiversity audits, such as that carried out for Great Dixter in East Sussex, show that the non-native and exotic flora that gardens contain can be every bit as rich and diverse in wildlife as the best of natural habitats. The second Beth Chatto Symposium (held in September 2022) is entitled 'Rewilding the Mind' and shows the essential connection that gardens can make for both our own wellbeing and that of the natural world itself.

### Creating a community

What remedies might there be for us in Kent and elsewhere hoping to

reinvigorate that past community of plantspeople that has given us so much stimulation ever since a Group such as ours was formed more than 60 years ago? Much does inevitably revolve around particular individuals who initiate and run such Groups and take over the reins as others retire or move on. But once momentum is lost and new members are not easily attracted, there does come that point where we need to seek ways of beginning again. This is the position we have reached in Kent and the hiatus of the past two years of Covid has impacted on our ability to meet up and now leads us to ask how we can keep our local community of ►



The chance to visit other's gardens is one of the pleasures of summer. Here, a Group visit tours Richard Sampson and Phyllida Edwards' garden at Barham, southeast of Canterbury.

gardeners excited and inspired as we have done in the past. The Plant Fairs held at Great Dixter, the southeast-based Plant Fairs Roadshow and, in its way, the Kent AGS Show all show that keen community is still very much alive but now meets up in different ways than it may have done in the past.

Zoom talks online have proved valuable for us but have paradoxically crossed that divide between local and global with more visitors joining us from elsewhere than our own members doing so in Kent itself. It has enabled us to listen to the experiences of gardeners far away that would be prohibitively expensive ever to invite to speak to us in a village hall, and radically changed how Groups such as ours may function in the future. Yet that essence of local garden community remains so fundamentally important, the fact that

our gardens themselves can only ever be local and individual, and that as much can be lost - the intimacy of a garden - as gained by this interconnectivity. We still need to invite each other to our gardens, open them more generally, to speak about what we do, share the practicalities of gardening and raising plants as well as the hard won knowledge of experience. And most of all propagate the plants and disseminate them.

### Connecting with other groups

On the 60th anniversary of our East Kent Group we invited the renowned nature photographer Heather Angel to speak to us about her book *Pollination Power* and to describe her photographic skills. Our membership was swelled by visitors from the local Canterbury Photographic Society. ►



The garden of Rosemary and Paul Powis at Old Wives Lees, southwest of Canterbury. Rosemary was Secretary of our East Kent Group for nearly 20 year: our Group relied on her organisational skills and dedication during the 1980s and 90s. She and Paul provided hospitality to many of our speakers during that time.



The garden of Jeremy and Hilary Spon, just south of Canterbury, has been planted to attract butterflies and wildlife. Jeremy is Treasurer of the East Kent Group and is involved in several plant and wildlife societies.

Gardening needs its pollinators too, those who plants have captivated for their own ends every bit as much as the natural pollinators they have primarily evolved to attract.

Our gardens are the result of these connections we make with the natural world and, whatever our resources and abilities, they have deep meaning and reason for each of us as individuals. Anna Pavord has written that 'A garden is made up of a thousand small inventions, but each small act is a defiance (defiance even) against a world without anchors or safe harbours.' This seems more true than ever before given the age of climate change, and of the deep divisions evident across human societies that only too clearly now rock the present day. These smaller connections we make, so especially revealed by gardens and gardeners, ground us literally to the

natural world and are always worth preserving and renewing. It may be that the AGS in Kent will not carry on as before; that a new generation of gardeners will form their own Groups locally in their own particular ways and that 'alpine gardening', in whatever form that might take, will be discovered anew in its own time. Any keen gardeners locally who seek fellow company, and with ideas and plans for the future, please let us know!

For now though it is worth celebrating these gardens and friendships we have made and to show those who join the AGS now the communities we have formed in the past and continue to meet and support now.

Various of our Local Group members' gardens are proof of that. Those famous and timeless words of Voltaire still ring loudly several centuries on: 'cultivate your garden'... ●



The Bulb House at Adrian Cooper's garden at Sutton Valence near Maidstone. Adrian's remarkable garden overlooks the Weald of Kent from the slopes of the North Downs. Renowned plantsman Adrian organises the local AGS Show and has been a Trustee of the AGS. The author regards him as one of the most skilled gardeners in the UK.

# Memorable performances

Continuing the series that celebrates exceptional alpine specimens, renowned growers **Cyril Lafong** and **Martin Sheader** offer their contributions

*Lilium lophophorum*



***Lilium lophophorum*****Where:** private garden, Fife, Scotland**When:** mid-June 2018**History:** obtained from Paul Christian's RarePlants bulb list in 2004.

Repotted annually or every second year in late autumn, at which time new roots have yet to form. At the last count the total was up to 32 large bulbs, potted separately from the similar number of intermediate and smaller ones. The bulbs are snapped apart at the base during late dormancy, as with some fritillarias and, fingers crossed,



have not so far shown signs of virus infection that blights other members of the genus, making it sensible to raise replacements from seed – these typically taking four or more years to reach flowering size.

**Notes:** virtually all the truly dwarf lilies are Sino-Himalayan, from *Lilium nanum* (Himachal Pradesh to southwest China, with bell-shaped flowers, purplish red to yellow, rarely white), occurring at up to 4,500m, to blackish *L. souliei* from Sichuan, southeast Xizang and Yunnan, the altitude range erroneously given in *Flora of China* as 1,200–1,400m, which is far too low and a misprint; it was recorded (for instance) by Ludlow and Sherriff at 4,100m.

None are easy to obtain or to maintain. All appreciate a lime-free, well-drained, humus-rich compost and part-shade, with intermittent high-potash liquid feeds during summer, through to dormancy. They should be kept consistently well-watered during the growing season and at least damp during dormancy.

**Further information:** described by Franchet as long ago as 1898, but little known in gardens until almost 100 years later – from introductions made by the 1993 Kunming-Gothenburg Botanical Expedition (KGB 413–415 at 3,800–4,350m) and the AGS Expedition to China (ACE 1767), for all that it was found 'on almost every high meadow and pass we visited'. The altitude range is given as 3,900–4,650m, the higher figure above that recorded in *Flora of China*. Forms subovoid, whitish bulbs up to 3.5cm in diameter, yielding predominantly solitary flowers (the stems, 10–45cm, rarely have a complement of two or three), pale yellow or greenish-yellow, the spirally twisted tepals terminating in a characteristic, defining drip-tip.

It is occasionally offered in specialist catalogues (expect to pay ►

a high price) and in seed lists. In cultivation seldom above 15cm in height, but very rarely increasing to form clumps, as illustrated on p322.

CL

### *Biarum marmarisense*

**Where:** private garden, Southampton

**When:** early October 2021

**History:** initially considered a subspecies of *Biarum davisii*, named for Peter Davis and described in 1938 from Crete. The preponderance of material presently grown appears to derive from a 1988 introduction made by Bob and Rannveig Wallis, which rarely sets seed but increases by offsets that develop laterally on the main tubers.

**Notes:** native to southwesternmost Turkey (the Marmaris peninsula), the adjacent island of Simi and (recently) a small population has been confirmed in 2020 from northern Rhodes, a short ferry ride to the west, typically inhabiting terra rossa and limestone pavement. It differs from *B. davisii* in its longer spathe, to 8cm (rather than 5–6cm) and a narrower spadix appendix. The berries are ‘dirty white’ at maturity, rather than the pale purple or lilac/lilac grey of some other species, these spread throughout southern Europe to the Middle East (the centre of diversity).

**Further information:** I acquired a corm from Norman Stevens (Cambridge Bulbs) more than 20 years ago. It sat in a pot, gradually going downhill over the next few years. Eventually I thought it had died and dumped the compost, using some of this, mixed with sand, in one of my Access cold frames. There must have been a tiny remnant left in the compost, since a flower appeared a couple of years later. When dormant I replanted the corm(s) in a mesh pot, plunged in sand. In 2015 I exhibited the plant with five flower spikes. It increased rapidly



and in 2017 I repotted the corms into a 30cm clay  $\frac{3}{4}$  pot, again plunged in sand in the Access frame. By 2018 an impressive 26 flowers were produced; three years later, as depicted here, that number had increased to 35. I will repot only when the number of flowers decreases.

A compost made up of one part John Innes no. 2, one of sharp sand and one of grit has proved suitable, the corms

*Biarum marmarisense*

MARTIN SHEARER

planted halfway down the pot. To set off the flowers I top-dress with black volcanic cinder after removing the dead leaves in August. The plunge in which the pot sits is never dry. Flowering usually takes place in September or October, the leaves appearing a couple of weeks after the flowers die down and persisting through the winter. I water overhead in autumn with occasional dilute high potash feed. As the

temperature falls, the plunge is kept damp through winter and the plant needs little watering, with the leaves dying down in March/April. In August I thoroughly soak the pot – this way all the corms start into growth together and flowering is synchronous (in the one year I relied on water from the plunge, flowers appeared patchily over several weeks). ●

MS

# *Sedum acre* – a current stonecrop...

**Robert Rolfe** develops an affection – but not the taste – for this under-appreciated mat-forming, yellow-flowered plant, and suggests some good companions to grow with it

PHOTOS: ROBERT ROLFE (UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED)

I've seen it in spectacular profusion from a coach window, massed along the broad central reservation of the M4, a few miles east of Oxford. Just outside Lincoln, to select just one of many similar sites, it beautified the trackside clinker and the immediate hinterland of the East Coast rail line. There are records from short, sparse grassland, coastal areas (above the tideline) in shingle and sandy meadows. In other places it occurs on old walls, reflected in the longstanding common English name wall pepper (we'll come to the second element later) and there are photographs of it growing contentedly on rooftops, both thatched and tiled. We have twice illustrated it, coincidentally both times in Scotland, in the wild (or possibly naturalised) rather than in gardens. Not before time, that score is settled.

*Sedum acre*, in some parts of Europe a respectable alpine, occurring as high as 2,300m (most Aretian androsaces descend to 2,000m, to put things into perspective), is native to a broad swathe of countries from Greenland to North Africa, across to the Caucasus, but has also found its way to much of North

America (where it tops out at 2,400m), New Zealand it is thought to have arrived there in 1904, nowadays popping up everywhere from coastal cliffs to around 1,500m) and southern Chile.

## Freely rooting; bitter taste

Easy to understand such far-flung additions to its range, given that it produces seed in abundance, while the smallest fragments of its evergreen mats will take root in seemingly inhospitable, in truth congenial, spartan conditions. EB Anderson, a founding member of the AGS, grudgingly conceded that it was one of 'a few [that] are an ornament to the rock garden, in any dry place where little else will grow'. Other expert rock gardeners have been by and large similarly wary, yet have welcomed superficially similar, more condensed (and far less hardy) *Sedum humifusum*, native to Mexico, from Guanajuato to Hidalgo. *S. acre* is not among the c.120 species recognised in that country.

It has been estimated that of the world's 400,000 plant species, three-quarters are edible – but only 200 are widely consumed. On the evidence of a personal sampling – mixed with



*Sedum acre*

cucumber and thinly sliced onions, as recommended – I would emphatically not use *S. acre* for culinary purposes, given its bitter, peppery (as indicated earlier) sharpness at the tip of the tongue, then a lingering, tingling, unpleasant aftertaste at the roof of the mouth. But despite its invasive reputation, I feel that it is underused and undervalued in gardens, the green roof deployments of late aside. The real menaces are those plants that spread by means of deep-set, rhizomatous, almost impossible to expunge rootstocks, seeding wantonly as a further affront. *S. acre* is easily removed with a shearing spade and deadheaded before it takes hold, if necessary: moreover, any close leafy

competition will overwhelm. It does best in spartan conditions, where it enjoys ample space and full sun.

### **Sedum selections**

Several forms have been offered by nurseries. Apparently larger in all parts *S. acre* 'Major' is little if at all grown these days, whereas 'Minus' (once distributed as 'Minor', only 4–5cm tall and with close carpets of bronzed foliage, crimson if conditions are dry) is still around, as are 'Aureum' (pale green with yellowish new growth in spring) and 'Golden Queen' (still lighter green, with pale yellow shoot tips). My plant came unselected but had been grown pumped up and protected in a ►



*Leontopodium nivale* subsp. *alpinum* 'Berghman' (Blossom of Snow)

polytunnel. As such it didn't flower in its first year, but hardened off and given a strict diet came good in its second. Sundry bees, flies, damselflies and peacock butterflies were in abundant attendance throughout its mid-June dazzling crescendo.

What to deploy alongside and as a backdrop? If you can forget Rosemary Verey (late of Barnsley House in the Cotswolds) and her 'good taste' colour wheel that defied primary colour clashes, you might choose similarly low-growing *Thymus serpyllum*, either exclusively in its white forms or with more vibrant purplish interlopers. Greenish *Teucrium polium* (few nurserymen offer

this presently) would provide a subtle counterpart, with another member of *Lamiaceae*, grey-silver-leaved *Stachys byzantina*, equally attractive to a wide array of insects, in the background: 'Silver Carpet' is recommended. You might also interplant with slightly taller, saucer-bowled, pure white *Campanula persicifolia* var. *planiflora* f. *alba*, too little grown these days, *Silene alpestris* (the double form I can do without), *Helichrysum milfordiae*, whose elegant everlasting flowers chime in synchrony, and silvered, mat-forming New Zealander *Raoulia australis*, which enjoys the same well-drained, sandy soils but benefits from spot-watering in



BOB WALLIS

Black-flowered *Papaver macrostomum* growing in Turkey, pictured in 2014

dry weather. *Onosma alborosea* is another high-summer trouper, excelling in such associations. Also consider *Leontopodium nivale* subsp. *alpinum* 'Berghman', presumably grown wholesale of late, for it has appeared en masse in some florists and garden centres, often sold as Blossom of Snow, as illustrated, left.

Two other suggestions. What is now *Papaver aurantiacum* (*P. rhaeticum* of old) would be just the thing to dot roundabout, 10cm tall as seen in the limestone screes of the Dolomites, with complementary greyish foliage. But it is often more exuberant and less concise when cultivated. In its stead I've deployed *P. macrostomum* 'Black Magic', Bob and Rannveig Wallis's 2014 Turkish find, the fleeting flowers burnt orange and overall blackish. Sow in March and it will perform from June onwards if regularly deadheaded. This annual, 20–45cm in height, is described from

Armenia and extends from Turkey to India, pervasively purple or pink, but in the Wallis's significant selection a distinguished charcoal accent against the grey foliage. Surface sow in March but in my experience expect a modest germination, still sufficient to yield a rewarding display.

I can think of one other comparable performer (in nature, if not in gardens), *Gutierrezia spathulata*, offered in the Flores & Watson 2000 seed list for southern Patagonia under the accession number F & W 9334 and described as a 'rounded bun/shrublet so smothered in blooms that one grower christened it The Golden Cowpat'. This collection was from Santa Cruz Province but according to *Flora Patagonica*, it can be found as far north as Mendoza and Neuquén. This has been cultivated, but is nowhere near as compliant as *Sedum acre*, nor anything as like as widely grown. ●

# ...and *Rhodiola*, a former stonecrop

An alpine native to the UK, *Rhodiola rosea* was once placed in the genus *Sedum*. **Robert Rolfe** explains the history of the plant and examines the differences between two alpine genera

PHOTOS: ROBERT ROLFE

A few years back, the genus *Sedum* received a shake up, with some long-term affiliates reassigned, mostly to *Hylotelephium*, but some to *Crassula*, *Sinoecrassula* and *Rhodiola*. This last was the invention of Linnaeus in the mid-18th century and includes *Rhodiola rosea*, a British alpine, of sorts. Found on Ben Lawers at 1,160m, along with *Saxifraga oppositifolia*, it elsewhere inhabits sea cliffs, and in southwest Ireland (County Kerry) crops up as an element of the limestone pavement flora. The British Isles forms only a small element of its full distribution, which takes in much of the northern hemisphere, across Europe to Central Asia and five provinces of China, on to Japan and Korea, and from there a giant leap to North America.

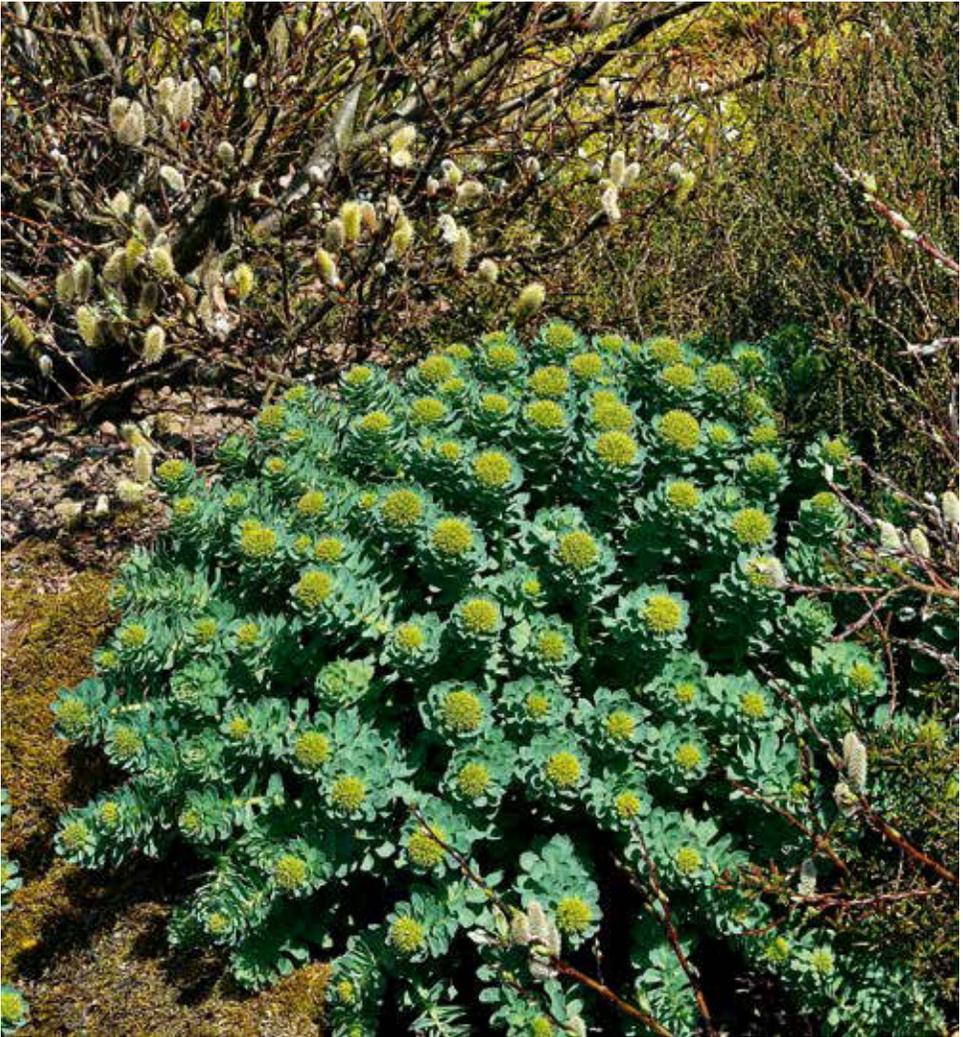
The image right, taken at Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, shows it flowering in early May with a backdrop of *Salix lapponum*, whose upright grey catkins provide a sensitive, sophisticated foil. This decorative willow, hanging on in just a handful of sites in northern England, is quite widespread in Scotland. Found there at

up to 1,000m, sometimes co-occurring with the *Rhodiola* on damp ledges, craggy slopes and streamsides, it too is not confined to the British Isles, extending across northern Europe through to western Siberia.

Typically growing to a height of 1.5m, it never attains the 30 feet (9m!) quoted in W Keble Martin's *The Concise British Flora in Colour* (1965) – an unusual slip-up in that generally meticulous book.

## Rosea and other rhodiolas

*Rhodiola rosea* has greenish yellow, four-petalled flowers, close-packed cauliflower-fashion in a corymb at the tip of arching or upright shoots up to 40cm long (*rosea* refers to the scent of the rhizome when damaged, as it has been over many centuries for medicinal and culinary purposes). The grey foliage and overall form have greater appeal than these, placing the species in the category of plants described in horticulture as architectural. This is the standard template for many of the 90 species currently recognised, examples including *R. heterodonta*, *R. fastigiata* and *R. wallichiana*, all of them in



*Rhodiola rosea* in flower, against a backdrop of catkin-covered *Salix lapponum*

cultivation... and all of these including Pakistan among their homelands.

*Flora of Pakistan* lists 12 species, the majority sending up an annual flush of new stems. But two others are mat- to cushion-forming. *R. pachyclados*, with small rosettes of toothed leaves, is easy enough to grow but seldom if ever

blooms enthusiastically in gardens, whereas *R. saxifragoides*, when suited, is the fairest of all roseroots. An image of this plant was last published in the *AGS Bulletin* in December 2005 (vol. 73, p456) under the name *Sedum trollii*, since when a shift of both genus and specific epithet has been widely



Five-petaled *Rhodiola saxifragoides*, with rosettes of *R. pachyclados* to its left

accepted. The combination dates back to 1977: botany and horticulture aren't always in step.

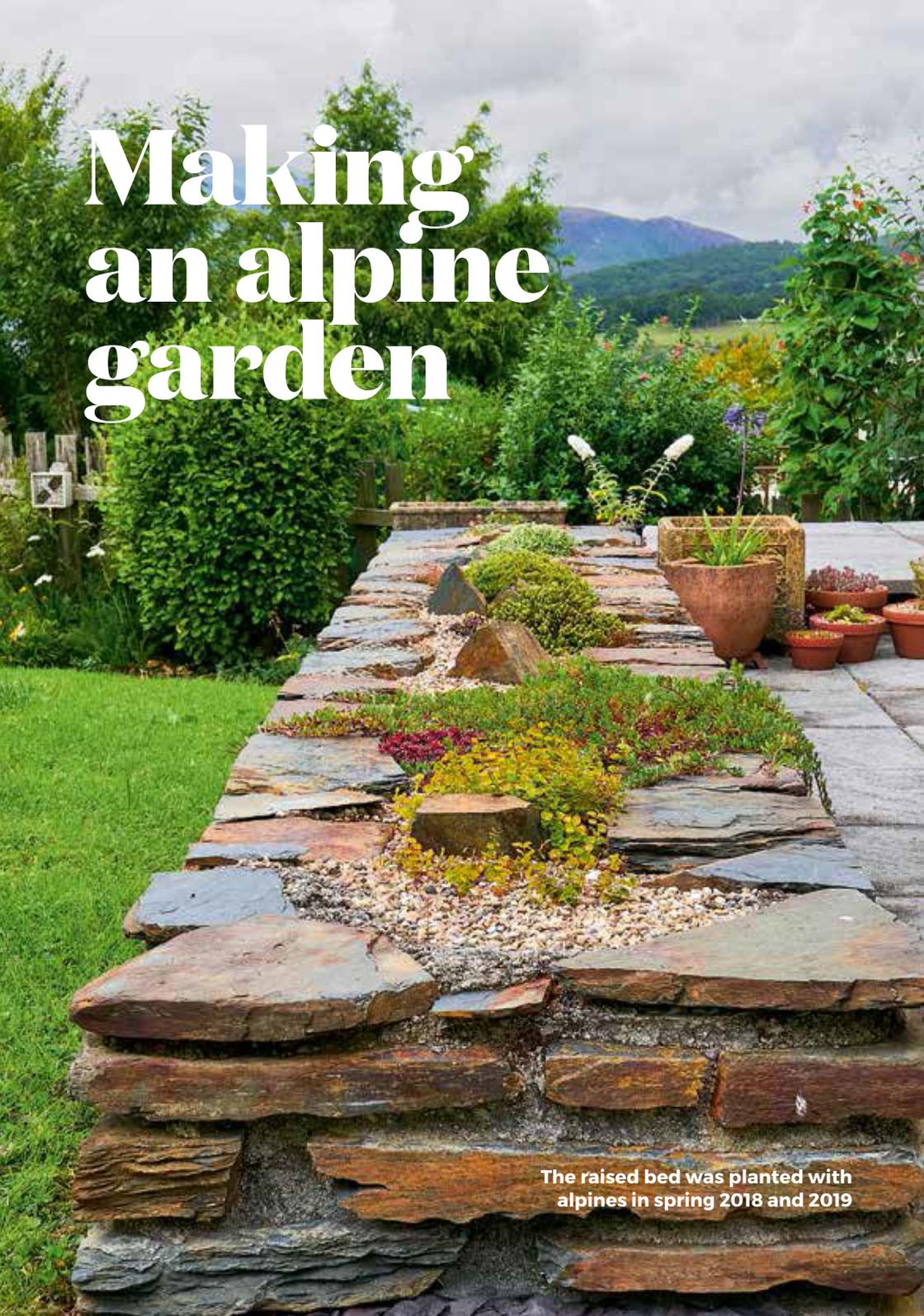
### Different from sedums

*Rhodiola* differs from *Sedum* in its stout rhizome (slender or absent in its close relative), rosette-formation and unisexual flowers that typically have four petals (five of these, of both sexes, in *Sedum*). Yet as with *Saxifraga*, *R. saxifragoides* flowers have five petals. The name is well chosen, as studying a picture of *Saxifraga stellaris* will confirm, for the shape is remarkably similar. But they are larger, to 15mm in diameter, and carried two or three in short, fleshy cymes rather than the fragile-stemmed arrangement of the

damp-loving starry saxifrage. The habitat is given as on rocks and in crevices at 2,500–3,200m and the flowering period as from May to September.

A degree of root restriction is worth trying in order to encourage the sort of performance shown by the small plant illustrated above, where conveniently the easily distinguished rosettes of *Rhodiola pachyclados* are present on the left. Full sun is needed and overhead protection may well encourage freer flowering, for all that this long-lived species will survive in the open garden. Survive, yes – but how many gardeners have coaxed it to dazzle there in early June, as it has from time to time when grown in a pot? ●

# Making an alpine garden

A photograph of a raised garden bed made of stacked stones, filled with alpine plants and gravel. The bed is situated on a grassy slope with a wooden fence and mountains in the background.

The raised bed was planted with  
alpines in spring 2018 and 2019

AGS members **Alison Slater** and her husband Martin, moved to North Wales and refashioned their new garden. It is now home to numerous alpiners, reflecting their enthusiasm for these plants

PHOTOS: MARTIN SLATER

I have a background in environmental science and Martin, my husband, has spent most of his life volunteering for and working in nature conservation. We have always shared an interest in wildflowers, but holidays to the French Pyrenees, the Picos de Europa in northern Spain, and the Burren in the west of Ireland have given us a greater appreciation of the wide range of alpine and rock plants.

Back home in Dorset, our pocket handkerchief-sized garden limited our opportunity to grow alpiners to just a few small troughs. So when we moved to North Wales in 2016 we were able to fulfil an ambition to develop some modest alpine areas within our new garden. We live at the southern end of Snowdonia National Park; our garden has a west-facing, open aspect, and is in sun or part-shade for most of the day, from spring through to autumn. However, the underlying clay can lead to waterlogging in some parts of the garden during prolonged periods of wet weather, which occur quite frequently in northwest Wales. It can also be very windy.

### Creating a raised bed

The uneven patio needed re-laying so we decided to incorporate a raised bed that would separate the patio from the lawn. We used slate from the local quarry at Arthog in the construction. This is a lovely stone: a mix of blueish-grey and contrasting orange-brown

colours. Inner and outer walls were built to create a planting cavity between. The wall is 7.5m in length (with a small break in the middle to provide access onto the lawn), 60cm wide and 35cm high. John Innes No. 2 compost, mixed with some coarse sand and grit for added drainage, was used to fill the raised bed. We then left the compost to settle for a few weeks, before planting up.

In addition to the raised bed, we also decided to repurpose a neglected flowerbed that bisects the lawn. The house is built on what was a rough field, and as we got to grips with the garden we discovered that there was no shortage of rocks of all shapes and sizes lurking just beneath the surface. After the bed had been cleared of its forlorn mix of plants and weeds, we converted our 'rock collection' into a rock garden.

### Adding alpine plants

Once all the groundworks had been completed we were ready to start adding alpiners. We are fortunate to be about an hour's drive away from Aberconwy Nursery and we obtained most of our plants from there. The choice and quality of alpiners is fantastic and the Lever family are always happy to offer suggestions and provide advice.

Developing the alpine areas within our garden has been a gradual, but enjoyable, process and is still ongoing. The majority of the plants have done well – probably due to their own tenacious attributes rather than



The rock bed makes use of rocks found elsewhere in the garden



**ABOVE** *Thymus serpyllum* 'Conwy Rose' **BELOW** Saxifrages do well in the alpine areas

anything we have done! The ones that have thrived include creeping thymes *Thymus serpyllum* 'Conwy Rose' and *T. serpyllum* 'Minor', both of which provide a good source of nectar for bees. Mossy saxifrages also do well, particularly in the rock garden where adjacent rocks provide semi-shade.



Some also seem to self-seed quite easily and provide a supply of offspring plants to bring on and relocate at a later date. *Saxifraga* 'Welsh Dragon' is a lovely cultivar with dark red flowers and does well despite the blackbirds pecking out bits for nesting material. The trumpet gentian *Gentiana acaulis* is the star of the raised bed; it flowered particularly well in spring 2022. *Globularia meridionalis* (sometimes sold as *G. bellidifolia* 'Horts') is a reliable, compact little alpine requiring minimal attention. It has a mass of round blue flowers in June – they remind me of the blue sweets in Bassetts Liquorice Allsorts!

*Iris reichenbachii* has done really well for us in the last couple of years. The first winter after planting was very wet and the ground around the plant slumped, so it was prone to waterlogging. The following spring we carefully raised it up and altered the ground profile slightly to ensure surface water did not pool around the plant. This year we were rewarded with a dozen beautiful lemon flowers.



*Gentiana acaulis* flowered well this year as did (BELOW) *Iris reichenbachii*

Another easy-going plant that loves a sunny position is *Teucrium ackermannii*. Throughout July it was covered in strongly scented violet flowers that the bees and butterflies loved. *Lewisia* ‘Little Plum’ (Little Series), *Oxalis* ‘Anne Christie’ and *Phlox caespitosa* ‘Zigeunerblut’ have all done well. But if I had to pick a favourite it would be the ever-reliable pasque-flower, *Pulsatilla vulgaris*. One of the first of the alpinas to flower each year, our specimen has deep red flowers. When these fade and die they leave behind feathery seedheads that are both fascinating and beautiful in their own right.

### Less successful choices

As is the way with all gardening, some things don't work out as you had planned (or hoped). *Rhodohypoxis baurii* does not like our Welsh climate. We have planted several in the raised bed but, even though they are dormant in the winter, the tubers succumb to ►





**ABOVE** *Oxalis* 'Anne Christie' **BELOW** *Lewisia* 'Little Plum'



the wet conditions and the plants never re-emerge the next spring.

*Leontopodium pusillum*, a form of edelweiss, settled in well and produced lots of flowers in its second year, despite a cold, wet winter. This year has been a different story altogether: it looks in a sorry state with only a couple of green patches to indicate it is still (just) alive. My plan is to remove it from the bed, pot it up and transfer it to a small cold frame during winter to see if it can be revived. I am not that hopeful but a miracle might occur.

Friends gave us a *Primula capitata* subsp. *mooreana*, which flowered really well for a couple of years before succumbing to the wet. I was sad to lose this plant as the flowers are so intricate: deep purple and mauve with a powdery finish. If I am able to source another



A deep red flowered selection of *Pulsatilla vulgaris*

plant I will try again, but with a bit more care and attention second-time around.

### Further developments

After five years we are now at the point where we probably need to replenish the compost in the raised bed. This will give us the opportunity to move a few plants, and of course add new ones. Last autumn Martin decided to dig up a length of uninspiring tarmac alongside the drive. It turned out to be a slightly thicker layer of tarmac than he had anticipated and took quite some time and effort with a pickaxe to dig out and remove. Using blue slate chippings and some remaining Arthog Quarry stone left over from the construction of the raised bed, we are in the process of creating a small scree area.

Martin and I place ourselves in the

amateur alpine gardener category, but we have gained an immense amount of enjoyment and satisfaction from the addition of these modest alpine features within our garden. I would encourage everyone to have a go at growing alpines: a container or trough can be accommodated in the smallest of gardens, or even on a balcony. They are good value too, especially when compared to a one-summer-wonder hanging basket of annual bedding plants. Once established, alpines give many years of interest and colour and need only modest attention: watering in dry periods and deadheading faded flowers if appropriate. This leaves you plenty of time to just look on and admire the sheer variety and intricacy of the foliage and flowers these tiny plants have to offer. ●

# CELEBRATING BOTH HALVES OF HORTICULTURAL PAIRS

**Rachel Lever** and **Robert Rolfe** herald a charismatic addition to the range of *Erythronium* hybrids that has occurred at Aberconwy Nursery. It is hoped it will be listed commercially before too long

PHOTOS: ROBERT ROLFE

Some alpine and hardy dwarf bulbs have numerous clones named for their raiser's family members. This applies particularly to *Primula allionii*, where the Burrow, Earle and Wooster clans have numerous distinguished representatives, the oldest of the last 70 to 80 years old and still holding their own. But curiously, when both a husband and wife are significant members of the horticultural world, that number plummets.

Kath Dryden has several commemorative coinings but her steadfast husband Maurice is acknowledged, a small form of *Primula allionii* aside, only by a seed-perpetuated selection of *Cyclamen coum*, the leaves silver-pewter with a green edge, the flowers white but crimson-nosed. It was Kath who took over some of EB Anderson's collection of plants in 1971. *Erythronium* 'Jeanette Brickell' and 'Margaret Mathew' were named by her but raised by Anderson in 1956, ref. EBA 56/63. There is soundly reasoned disagreement concerning

their supposed parentage, for although recorded as representing the cross *E. tuolumnense* x *oregonum*, there is little or no evidence of yellow-flowered *E. tuolumnense* in either of them. (Not the only such case: his *Iris* 'Katharine Hodgkin' is widely thought to have *I. winogradowii*, not *I. danfordiae*, as its pollen parent.) *E.* 'Jeanette Brickell' received an RHS Preliminary Commendation in April 1978, when it was described as having slightly mottled leaves (those of *E. tuolumnense* are plain green) and five to seven flowers per stem, 'icy white with a greenish centre and brown markings, freely produced'. That figure is surely inflated: a count of two or three flowers is typical.

## Surprise hybrid

When the Pan Garden Plants Series book *Bulbs* (authors Roger Phillips and Martyn Rix) was in preparation, just over 40 years ago, a visit was paid to Kath Dryden's Sawbridgeworth garden in the second half of April. She was unable to be present and one of the



*Erythronium* 'Chris Brickell'



*Erythronium* 'Margaret Mathew', named for the wife of botanist Brian

specimens plucked for photography, assumed to be *Erythronium* 'Jeanette Brickell', was instead a chance hybrid that came as a surprise to its owner. In the book this changeling is described as follows: 'The crimson style and anthers suggest that *E. hendersonii* was one parent, possibly crossed with some other white-flowered species. Hybrids between *hendersonii* and *oregonum* are reported to occur in the wild.' It's a red (or in this case pinkish) herring that has led to confusion. Unlike *E.* 'Jeanette Brickell', the mystery plant faded away after a few years.

### Honouring the Brickells

Jeanette must have walked round more notable gardens, attended more flower shows and sat through more after-dinner speeches and lectures at horticultural gatherings than almost anyone else reading this article. Chris, who has christened many more plants than have been named in his honour, can claim by way of repayment (among others) North American *Allium unifolium* 'Chris's Dwarf' (with large umbels of lilac pink flowers atop stems only 20cm tall rather than the usual 30–60cm), southwest Turkish *Crocus brickellii*, with white or pale yellow,



*Erythronium* 'Chris Brickell'

orange throated flowers that appear in March, vibrant fellow Turkish *Euphorbia rigida* 'Chris Brickell', *Daphne x sűndermannii* 'Chris Brickell' and almost inevitably, given that he has been responsible for christening so many snowdrops, the dubiously named *Galanthus* 'Chris Brickell' – which he doesn't recall having agreed to being gazetted as such!

Rod Leeds notes that this was espied at a Snowdrop Lunch held by the Brickells at their Sussex home, The Camber, around 20 years ago and that,

while an honorific naming was suggested on the spur of the moment, the proposition probably came to nought: it isn't present in any specialist collections surveyed, let alone in commerce. Rod also mentions a really good deep pink form of *Scilla bifolia*, far more intense than the general run and, unlike any of these, not subject to fading with age, which Chris selected at RHS Garden Wisley and has latterly consented to being named *S. bifolia* 'Chris Brickell'. Bulbs have been 'chipped' and it should be available in ►

two or three years' time. Other selected colour forms date from the late 19th century but few have lasted the course.

Those who visited RHS Garden Wisley when Chris was Director General from 1985 will recall the dazzling woodland garden there, ravaged two years after his appointment by the Great Storm of October 1987. This trashed some of the underplantings, erythroniums included; but Wisley has an enduring, distinguished and subsequent association with erythroniums, including two trials of the genus. The man who oversaw those earlier plantings, who has recently celebrated his 90th birthday, now has a handsome *E. oregonum* hybrid, *E.* 'Chris Brickell', called after him and complementing the one named for his wife. It flowers markedly early in the season (late

March) and because of this timing is surely a cross also implicating either *E. multiscapideum* or *E. citrinum*. To 30–35cm tall, the scapes typically carry two flowers, each a voluptuous 10cm across: white overall, the perianth segments are slightly furled, with an inner yellow ochre central zone that extends to give a star-like suffusion over a third the length of the 'petals'. It will make a fine addition to the early spring woodland garden, several weeks ahead of the far longer grown *E. californicum* 'White Beauty' and more substantial in all respects.

### Old plant, newly available

It arose spontaneously around the turn of the century, or only slightly later, in North Wales at Aberconwy Nursery, where it is now well established in the woodland garden and also in a sheltered, raised nursery bed, overlooked by a tall, sheltering hedge of synchronously flowering, heavily perfumed *Daphne bholua*. It is hoped that stocks will have increased sufficiently to release a small number of corms next year, or the one afterwards. A box in full flower was taken to the first AGS Kent Show in 2016 at Sutton Valence, where Chris consented to have it named in his honour.

As with so many of these selections it is fertile, albeit sparingly, the seed maturing in mid to late June and best sown immediately, though if soaked for 24 hours in its dry state, it will still come good. Anderson reckoned on five years from germination to flowering; you might hasten things a year by keeping the seedlings well-watered, well fed and shaded – but please do not pass them round under their parent's name (as has happened with *E.* 'Jeanette Brickell'). They will all be subtly – or sometimes markedly – different. ●



RHS/NEIL HEPWORTH

Chris Brickell at RHS Wisley

# AGS SHOWS

A review of the AGS shows, compiled by **Robert Rolfe** from reports by **Bob Wallis, John Richards, Dave Mountfort, Billy Moore** and **Frank Hoyle**

PHOTOS: JON EVANS (UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED)



## FARRER MEDAL WINNERS

**SOUTH WEST** *Fritillaria reuteri* (Bob and Rannveig Wallis)

**HEXHAM** *Viola brevistipulata* var. *hidakana*\* (Ian Kidman)

**NORTH MIDLAND** *Rhododendron megeratum* 'Bodnant Form'  
(Chris Lilley)

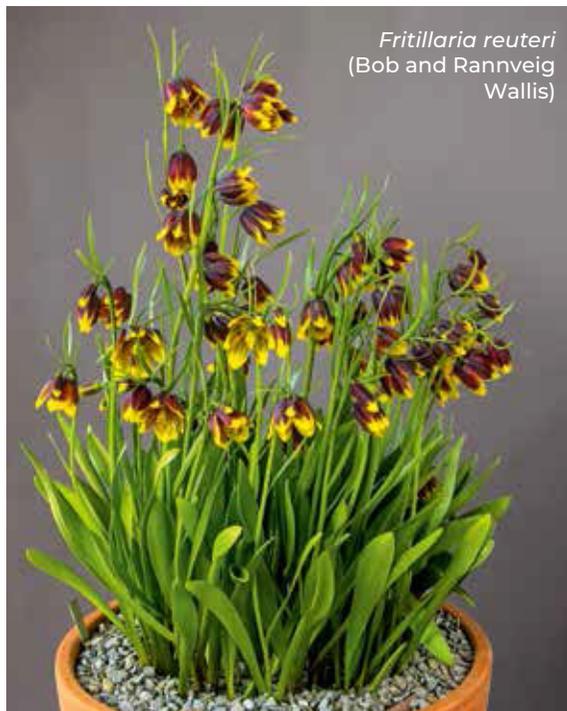
**ULSTER** *Hepatica nobilis* (Paddy Smith)

**CLEVELAND** *Androsace robusta* var. *robusta* (Geoff Rollinson)

\*Forrest Medal



# SOUTH WEST SHOW



*Fritillaria reuteri*  
(Bob and Rannveig Wallis)

## *Fritillaria reuteri* (Bob and Rannveig Wallis)

Iranian fritillarias have been added to specialist collections in variety over the past 20 years, some as re-introductions such as *Fritillaria zagrica* and *F. straussii*, others new to science.

As recently as this July, another (*F. kordestanica*) was added to the list. This is reminiscent of *F. uva-vulpis* (also from western Iran, as well as neighbouring Iraq and southeast Turkey), with grey-purple flowers, tipped yellow. A more dramatic interpretation of this colour combination is true of *F. reuteri*, from the mountains north and west of

Isphahan, where it sometimes abounds in rock-strewn meadows that are wet at flowering time (May and early June) but later become very dry.

The flowers are broadly campanulate, up to eight per stem, and as if dipped in egg yolk, the dramatic contrast with their purple ground colour similar to Turkish *F. michailovskyi*, though the stems are taller, to 25cm, the bells smaller and the tepals not flared. This collection is thought to represent a sampling made by Felicity Baxter 50 years ago, when she lived in the country. Not usually vigorous in cultivation, this mature clump was an exception to this rule and a Farrer Medal was its reward.

*Daphne modesta*  
(Dot Sample)



### *Daphne modesta* (Dot Sample)

Flowering up to a month ahead of the main *Daphne* bonanza, and the most vibrant of the yellow-flowered species, Chinese *D. modesta* has the overall habit of mainly Greek *D. jasminea* but is deciduous and slower-growing. It puts on only a few millimetres of growth each year and still less than 10 cm tall after eight years. Specimens in the wild that have attained a height of 1m or so much be of great age.

Recipient of the East Devon Trophy. The plant had been raised from her own seed by the exhibitor, whereas most plants seen have been vegetatively propagated, either by half-ripened cuttings or as grafts. Grown in a rich, gritty mix of John Innes compost and

grit in the ratio 60:40, it requires alpine house conditions, for who has managed to establish a plant in the open garden that has matched the performance enjoyed at Rosemoor?

First collected in W Sichuan more than a century ago by EH Wilson, it is also recorded from Yunnan, invariably on rocky slopes at 2,100–2,900m. At one stage ascribed to the closely allied genus *Wikstroemia*, which has been contentiously merged with *Daphne* by some authors, it is worth heeding the stricture contained in the *Flora of China* account: ‘Features such as leaf arrangement, inflorescence type, and flower colour are all clearly paralleled within the two genera [but] are of no diagnostic value.’ ▶

*Cyclamen persicum*  
(Jim Loring)



***Cyclamen persicum***  
(Jim Loring)

While the largest corms of *Cyclamen persicum* exhibited formed part of Ian Robertson's RHS Sewell Medal six-pan, the most floriferous shone in the Intermediate Section and had all the elegance that has been forfeited in the breeding of house plant (even window box or bedding) cultivars, some in lurid shades of salmon pink, orange, crimson, even pale yellow. This had pink nosed, white flowers with an attenuated profile, appealingly spiralled petals and a strong, unmistakable fragrance.

Sometimes found on open hillsides at up to 1,200m, it is more often a coastal

plant: your compiler recalls it in full flower one February in southern Cyprus, growing abundantly just above the tideline. Following its summer dormancy, new growth is very much dependent on when the plants are watered (or when rainfall occurs in the wild, any time from mid- September to December). Best grown in a clay pot plunged in sand to provide insulation and seasonal moisture, it benefits from good light, in the absence of which the stems grow disproportionately tall and the concise appeal forfeited.

# HEXHAM SHOW



DON PEACE

*Primula marginata*  
'Jon Snow'  
(Ian Kidman)

## *Primula marginata* 'Jon Snow' (Ian Kidman)

Albino forms of this species are very rare in the wild, rarer still in gardens. The best of them in recent years, 'Casterino', is hard to obtain true to name, a *P. x pubescens* impostor with creamier, ruffled flowers sometimes laying claim to the name. In an attempt to improve the range of albinos, in 2001 a sowing of a deliberate cross between two bona fide selections was made, and what was passed on to several friends under the identity *P. m.* BB11/12/01 has now been christened 'Jon Snow', a character in the television drama *Game of Thrones*, loosely based on 15th-century European battles. Raiser Brian Burrow has followed this programme from start to finish.

The pin-eyed flowers are indeed

'snow' white, and carried on atypically short stems, leading some to deduce that pollen of *P. allionii* has perhaps infiltrated, courtesy of a passing bee. Yet the heavily farinose, dentate-margined leaves are typical of *P. marginata*, albeit more compact than is typical. Slow to build up but less prone to becoming woody/subject to dieback with age, 'Jon Snow' is readily increased from single rosette cuttings taken any time from April to mid-autumn, the lower leaves peeled away and the fledgling plants kept in part shade. Presently lack of propagating material inhibits a wider ownership. One recipient has found that seed produces a low proportion of white offspring, differing slightly from the parent and requiring new clonal names if their early promise is maintained. ▶

*Saxifraga x concinna*  
 'Ben Loyal'  
 (Robert Rolfe)



ROBERT ROLFE

### *Saxifraga x concinna* 'Ben Loyal' (Robert Rolfe)

When Caucasian *Saxifraga dinnikii* entered cultivation in 1996, it triggered a new wave of hybrids harnessing the potential of its rich pink, sizeable flowers. Aside from the natural hybrids *S. x dinninaris* (*x columnaris*) and less ornamental, seldom grown *S. x akinfievii* (*x juniperifolia*), it has been mated with *S. aretioides*, *S. alberti*, *S. ferdinandi-coburgii*, *S. kotschyi*, *S. lilacina*, *S. poluniniana*, *S. ramsarica*, *S. pulchra*, *S. scardica*, *S. stribrnnyi* – and no doubt other species.

In Wakefield four years later, John Mullaney reared a batch of *S. cinerea* seedlings that by chance clearly showed the introgression (transfer of genetic material) of *S. dinnikii*. 'Ben Loyal' (named after his favourite Scottish

mountain) is the most intensely purplish-pink of all, this hue dependent on the health of the plant and cool conditions, boosted by liquid doses of sequestrene as the buds develop. The flowers are smaller than those of the pollen parent but more numerous (two to five per cyme), so that when in full bloom, they provide a complete mantle and the silver-grey foliage is obscured.

This is a plant that requires patience: at the age of 20, the specimen shown occupied a 19cm plastic pot and was at its peak – a matter of luck, given that the flowers soon fade. Also present, *S.* 'Bohemian Paradise' has the same seed parent, matched instead with *S. columnaris*, the flowers larger, brighter, and a lighter shade in comparison.

*Fritillaria* 'Lentune Slate'  
(Don Peace)



DON PEACE

***Fritillaria* 'Lentune Slate'**  
(Don Peace)

The majority of the fritillarias staged at this 50th Anniversary event were the property of just one exhibitor. Don won the Roger Smith Cup for a six-pan of the genus raised from seed, a Certificate of Merit for his *F. pinardii*, and an RHS Cultural Commendation, along with an Award of Merit, for a hybrid of uncertain parentage, conjecturally *F. crassifolia* subsp. *kurdica* x *whittallii*.

The latter would account for its height and the generous production of bulbils. The input of 30–50cm tall *F. grandiflora* is surely also on the cards. Whatever its precise origins, this is an unusual, subtle addition to the ranks, the flowers, two or three to a stem, all presented at an even height and a mix of grey and bronze.



# NORTH MIDLAND SHOW

## *Androsace muscoidea*

(Geoff Rollinson)

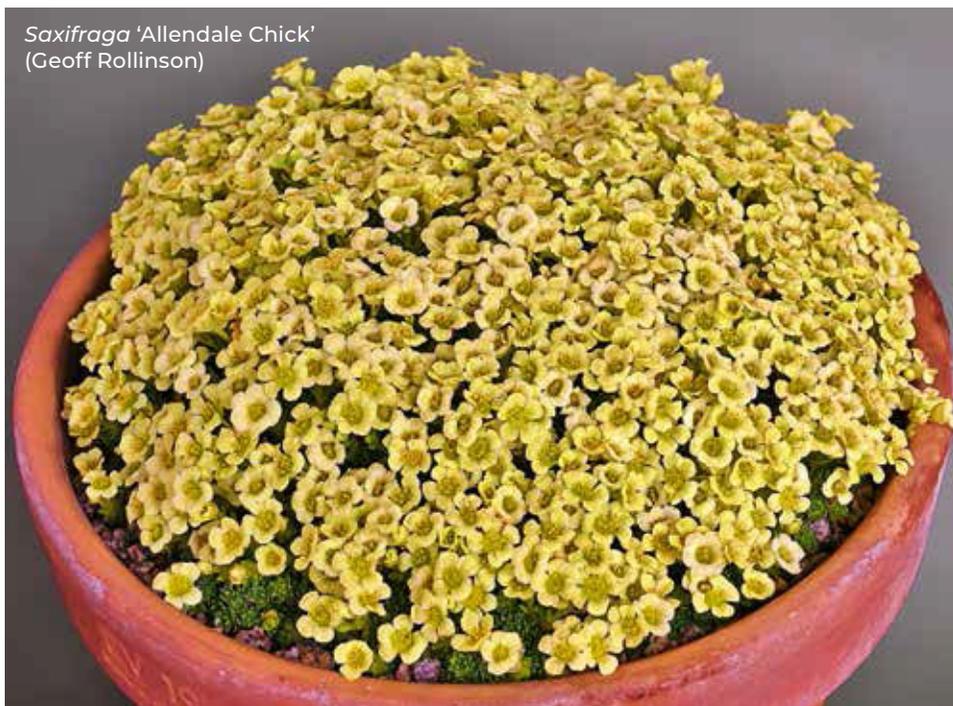
This show succeeded its Nottingham predecessor in 1998: the exhibitor mentioned here hasn't missed a single one, his predominantly *Primulaceae* entries setting the standard for the near quarter century of its existence. Knowledge of Himalayan and western Chinese androsaces has been added to greatly over that time span. Their cultivation remains a specialist endeavour and while once a few enthusiasts could muster a dozen of the genus in a single entry, nowadays it is highly unusual to witness even a three-pan grouping. Remarkably several stocks from 40 and more years ago have been kept going, the one in

question a Chadwell and Ramsay Kashmir expedition introduction (C&R 188) that gave rise to the clone 'Millennium Dome'. Plants become progressively more challenging to maintain in good health with age, with repotting a particular challenge, for the neck becomes vulnerable when not supported by its gritty topdressing, and the root ball must never dry out at its core, even in winter. In this example the flat-faced, delicately perfumed flowers are carried on very short stems and often twinned: in some other forms they are solitary and sessile. Cuttings taken in late spring from the periphery of the flattish mound are the readiest means of propagation.

*Androsace muscoidea*  
(Geoff Rollinson)



*Saxifraga* 'Allendale Chick'  
(Geoff Rollinson)



ROBERT ROLFE

### *Saxifraga* 'Allendale Chick' (Geoff Rollinson)

Three weeks earlier, *Saxifraga* 'Allendale Ghost' (*ramsarica* x *poluniniana*) was awarded the Farrer Medal. Bred by Ray Fairbairn, it is one of over 50 of his *Porophyllum* hybrids still propagated and offered commercially by a few nurseries. In the right hands this can be coaxed to fill a 36cm pot. Other Allendale-prefixed raisings are far slower to reach any size, and you would need to be a latterday Methuselah to witness a cushion of 'Allendale Chick' (*aretioides* x *georgei*, dating from 1994) achieve similar proportions. The Pyrenean mother plant has imparted a firm, deep green cushion and the flowers' yellow coloration, while the contribution of *S. georgei* (distributed from Nepal to

southeast Tibet and Sichuan) has shortened the stem length, softened the hue of the corolla and broadened the petal width.

At 14cm in diameter, this was easily the most accomplished of its kind ever shown, as acknowledged by the bestowal of the Finley Swift Trophy for the best plant in a 19cm pan. Its closest rival, Mark Childerhouse's Himalayan *S. quadrifaria*, is almost as gradual in its increase. Another key figure in the world of latterday kabschia hybridisation, Karel Lang, by coincidence the following year (1995) added *S. x quagrata* (*S. quadrifaria* x *aretioides* x *ferdinandi-coburgii*) to the listings. If this has been grown beyond its Czech Republic cradle, neither of its named clones, 'Sirius Alfa' and 'Sirius Beta', has appeared at an AGS Show. ▶

*Draba rosularis*  
(John Richards)

ROBERT ROLFE



***Draba rosularis***  
(John Richards)

The Caucasus and central to eastern Turkey provide alpine gardeners with a greater range of cushion-forming drabas than anywhere else on the globe. The most sophisticated have densely hairy to felted foliage and flower prolifically in the first half of spring. *Draba mollissima*, its longstemmed flowers with a fizz of stamens, is easily recognisable, as is atypically white-flowered *D. ossetica*. Several others are readily confused. The Albury, Cheese & Watson Turkish enterprise, which took place in 1966 when that country was scarcely a tourist destination, encountered what is now confirmed as *D. rosularis* (AC&W 2220). John Watson's later account of the Çuh Pass flora (AGS Bulletin vol. 39,

no. 4, p. 292) records 'a saxatile draba which we believe to be *D. cappadoecia*, although it may well have affinities with *D. rosularis*.' It was the latter, the 'colonies of round hummocks, pressing against the vertical faces... overtopped by the mass of... yellow flowers'. Occurring locally in eastern Turkey at 2,400–3,200m, this has scapes slightly longer than closely related *D. cappadoecia* and was first described by Pierre Edmund Boissier in 1842.

Best given cold glass protection (it has also been grown outdoors, in troughs, with overhead glass cover in winter), it should be given an exposed situation and a gritty, sandy substrate. John Richards staged two plants, grown from SRGC seed, selected from the original four raised. Repot annually, in late spring or very early summer.

# ULSTER SHOW

*Hepatica nobilis*  
(Paddy Smith)



HEATHER SMITH

## *Hepatica nobilis* (Paddy Smith)

As a rule, hepaticas in the garden – and more especially those grown in a polytunnel or unheated greenhouse – are at their best from the end of February through to late March. Only in a hard winter are they held back in general, but a reliably late-flowering form, obtained from Aberconwy Nursery around 12 years ago, was in peak bloom in the second week of April – so much so that a Farrer Medal was bestowed. Grown outdoors in shade and repotted annually in a compost of 50% grit, 20% perlite, 20% leafmould and 10% loam, to which is added a small

amount of Vitax Q4, bonemeal and lime, its old leaves are best removed in late winter, just before the flower buds start to expand. If these are dark at the margins, this is a sure sign that the plant suffered from heat stress the previous summer. Repotting is only required every two or three years once flowering size has been reached, for preference carried out in autumn, when the roots can be trimmed by a third their length. Vine weevil is the main foe, and nematode applications (e.g. Nemasys) are recommended, the previous treatment, Provado, long since withdrawn from sale. ▶

*Trillium chloropetalum*  
 'Bob Gordon'  
 (Billy Moore)



HEATHER SMITH

***Trillium chloropetalum***  
**'Bob Gordon'**  
 (Billy Moore)

This Californian, coastal species is from deciduous or redwood forest, scrub and occasionally grasslands, exceptionally up to 1,500m but predominantly found much lower. The flower colour can be anything from dark purplish-red to white with pink veining or pale greenish yellow, as in the case of the plant shown, which takes the name of a celebrated Irish plantsman.

It and 'Val Mulvihill' are along the same lines and much sought after. Such clones will always be expensive in the trade and in short supply: it helps to have a close friend in possession of a

mature specimen, or better still a generous father, witness Gavin Moore's young plant, also present.

Transporting such plants any distance is hazardous – they certainly won't fit into a standard car boot. However carefully packed, slight damage in transit is always the threat, which we are told is what happened somewhere between the exhibitor's Co. Dublin home and Antrim. This is not apparent in the photograph published above, and the judging panel was evidently not disconcerted, given that a Certificate of Merit was recommended.

*Narcissus primigenius*  
(Jamie Chambers)



HEATHER SMITH

***Narcissus primigenius***  
(Jamie Chambers)

Described as a species in its own right back in 1986 (having been assigned to *Narcissus nobilis* at varietal level four years earlier), this taxon is generally treated as a variant of *N. pseudonarcissus* subsp. *pseudonarcissus* at present. We preserve the name to indicate a fairly uniform, short trumpet daffodil from northwest Spain in which the leaves are spreading rather than semi-erect and the bicoloured flowers are of pleasingly disproportionate size.

It has been listed on and off by at least two bulb nurserymen, and also appears as *N. primigenius* in recent seed lists, the epithet translating as 'first produced'.

The clump shown received the John McWhirter award for the best pan of bulbs in the Intermediate Section. ►

*Androsace mariae*  
(Geoff Rollinson)



DON PEACE

***Androsace mariae***  
(Geoff Rollinson)

This mainly western Chinese species, widely distributed from Sichuan to Qinghai, has seldom been exhibited, aside from a 2006 white form that received an RHS Preliminary Commendation when shown at the onetime Harrogate Show in 2006, and a vivid lilac-pink morph that John Bunn took to the Cleveland Show, also in late April, five years thereafter. This albino, with fewer flowers per umbel (in some others, there can be up to ten), was five years old, grown from seed sent by Dieter Zschummel, who in turn received it from Chinese friends. (Coincidentally Vojtěch Holubec distributed seed sourced from Sichuan's Min Shan at 3,900m in 2017, the plants 10cm in diameter, found in 'mountain grassland' and yielding up to six flowers

on stems to 6cm tall.) *Flora of China* gives it as extending to Mongolia, with an upper altitude limit of 4,000m, but Dr Holubec encountered *A. mariae* var. *tibetica* in Qinghai at 4,300m on limestone, the leaves both shorter and wider, the flowers rose pink. It is better kept outdoors from late spring to autumn, then brought under cold glass cover in a sand plunge, the compost a gritty leaf-mould mix with a light leavening of loam.

For a predominantly montane species, surprisingly it can also be found as low as 1,300m in open woodland and dry meadows. First described (under a different identity) just over a century ago, then rebranded *A. tibetica* var. *mariae* in 1905, it has never been anything other than a rarity in gardens, the preserve of a handful of dedicated growers. ▶

*Androsace robusta* var. *robusta*  
(Geoff Rollinson)



DON PEACE

***Androsace robusta* var. *robusta***  
(Geoff Rollinson)

Another Asian species with both white and purplish-pink (subsp. *purpurea*, syn. *A. muscoidea* f. *longiscapa*) forms having a toehold in cultivation, this never bettered exemplar received the Farrer Medal. The exhibitor has kept it going for some 20 years since receiving a plant from fellow exhibitor George Young, taking cuttings most years. It presently occupies a 25cm clay pot, having been protected from the unrelentingly hot weather of mid-July this year by the stratagem of deploying an upright-positioned piece of cardboard to deflect the sun's rays (this dodge is also used to delay flowering by

up to a week during spring), the meanwhile keeping the sand plunge saturated. Lightly draping horticultural fleece over the plants will also help. As with *A. muscoidea* (see the North Midland Show report, p352) it is from the western Himalaya, as given in the 1997 AGS monograph from 'Baltistan, Ladakh and Lahul ... [at]... between 2,300 and 4,200m'.

Geoff's first *Androsace* to receive this award was *A. vandellii*, back in 1975 at the Harrogate Show. The previous year, at the same venue, his *Anchusa cespitosa* was similarly championed – his very first competitive exhibit, his first such Medal and an indication of what was to come. ●

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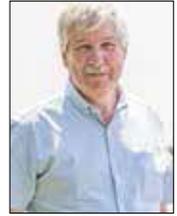
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# The last word...

John Galloway, Treasurer of the AGS, on the tough decisions needed on the Society's financial future



I have been the AGS Treasurer for a dozen years. For the whole of that time, and continuing a tradition set by my predecessor Colin Smith, my theme has been emphasised at successive AGMs – that the AGS lives beyond its means. Each year the Society spends more than it receives from its various sources of income. Over many years income from memberships has never amounted to more than around 40% of what the Society has been spending. It has hardly needed the help of a clairvoyant to predict that this state of affairs could not go on indefinitely. At some point the cash would simply run out. Predictions were made as to when that point would be reached unless something in the running of the Society changed rather drastically. And it was certainly not in the far distant future.

Without knowing and understanding what underlay this state of affairs, it was clearly not going to be possible to do anything about it. For instance was (and is) the Society too extravagant? Was the solution simply to run a tighter ship? Use less and buy cheaper in other words; that was a possibility but nothing presented itself that could make more than a superficial improvement. And as your Hon. Treasurer, I monitor spending pretty much week by week. Clearly then the problem has lain and lies at a much deeper level, and solutions will need to cut deeper.

And at this deeper level the first issue is income from members. Membership has fallen steadily over my time in office. Was the way out of the financial

problem simply more members? Again, guesses were made as to how many more... another 2,000 perhaps? Possibly, but no one knew how this could be achieved. Raising subscriptions then. Well yes. But there would probably be a trade off in falling membership. Perhaps the problem lay at an even deeper level: what and who does the AGS exist for? Is it a club simply providing benefits for its members? Or is it a charity with charitable objectives. On the one hand, therefore, who are the members of the future and, if it is also the second, what should those objects be? Whatever the details, the future of the Society lies in answering these two fundamental questions successfully.

## Firm foundations needed

Right now the Society is engaged in firefighting – fighting to stay alive. If it cannot do this successfully, the deeper questions about its future are idle. The board has put together a raft of proposals (to be presented at the AGM), but these proposals are not only to fight the metaphorical fires. They must – and I cannot stress too strongly – provide a sure foundation for the Society's future. And that means having a clear vision of the future Society, which may be very different from how we see it now.

A final word. The Society is living beyond its means at present. But a fundamental truth in evolutionary biology is 'All progress is based upon a universal innate desire on the part of every organism to live beyond its means.' Please think about it and take heart. ●

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### **MAKING SPACE FOR ALPINES IN THE GARDEN**

It is easy to be tempted by alpine plants when you see them at shows and nurseries. But where do you put them in your garden? AGS members Alison and Martin Slater created an alpine bed and raised area so they could grow a wider range of alpine plants. Having Snowdonia as a backdrop adds to the effect (p333).

