

Wisley's Alpine Log

By Paul Cumbleton

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This year the two sand beds we have at Wisley have looked absolutely wonderful. It has taken some time to get used to managing these beds well in terms of watering and feeding, but as each year has gone by and I have tweaked what I do, I feel I have more experience and the results now are very pleasing. More regular feeding has given much better results – I now give them a half strength high potash feed about once every week to ten days through Spring and summer. In winter, thought the beds are covered to keep off the rain, I have realised that they were getting *too* dry and so I now give them just a little water occasionally in the winter.

One of the beds is devoted to North American plants. This year I removed a few plants that had died and have planted a lot more new things. At this time in summer this bed has a lovely display of the annual *Eschscholzia lobbii*. I used to grow a few from seed and plant them into the bed each year, but now this diminutive relative of the well known Californian poppy self - seeds itself back into the bed saving me a job.



While not exactly an alpine plant, its scale fits in well and it provides colour at a time when little else is flowering in this bed. Here is a more general view of it:



In the other sand bed next door, the hardy cacti have been truly magnificent this year. My favourite of them is this hybrid *Echinopsis* called 'Ralph's Orange':



This experience with the sand beds will help me also manage the new crevice garden as this is also has sand as the growing medium. Something new in there flowering this week is *Calylophus lavendulifolia*, an *Oenothera* relative from North America. Zdenek Zvolanek collected seed of this and kindly gave us a portion.



I love the way the flower is carried on a long tube. In this next picture of one in bud, you can see that sometimes this tube is a nice red colour:



These are still very young plants – they should branch and spread out much more as they grow. I have tried one or two *Castilleja* in the crevice garden – one, *Castilleja sulphurea* is currently in flower:



I've also allowed a common garden annual in – *Anagallis monelli* and when the sun opens its most blue flowers, it never fails to catch the attention of visitors who think it some rare exotic!



Staying with blue flowers, a couple of campanulas flowering in the crevice garden currently are *Campanula* 'Joe Elliott' and secondly *Campanula petrophila*.



In a pot in the display house is another *Campanula*, *C. garganica* 'W.H. Paine', which I particularly like not only for its very lovely flowers with a contrasting white eye, but also for its reliability.



Back to the crevice garden and another this time true *Oenothera* is also flowering. This is *Oenothera greggii*:



Just two more things from the crevice: This is *Penstemon rupicola* 'alba':



and this is *Papaver degenii*, which comes from Bulgaria and is an endemic of Pirin Mountain:



Finally, sometimes we grow plants that simply attract us irrelevant of whether they are alpines. and I made space at the end of a bench in one greenhouse for one such plant. On La Palma in the Canary Islands can be found the largest example of the *Aeonium* genus, *Aeonium nobile*. This makes a huge rosette 20cm or more across. Once large enough (this one took 4 years) it produces an equally impressive flower head that can be over 45 cm across and carries thousands of small rust-red flowers:



Sadly the plants are monocarpic but they are easily grown from seed sown in the autumn. The dust-like seeds should be surface-sown and they germinate freely. They are winter growing. Prick out as soon as large enough to handle and as they grow, move on to bigger pots before they get a chance to become pot bound. You will need at least a 20cm diameter pot to finish up with to get a large plant that will flower. Keep frost-free and give a *little* water in the summer too even though they don't grow much then.