

# International Rock Gardener





As gardeners we can sometimes be accused of creating unnatural settings for our plants: the first article this month shows how well nature creates “real” rock gardens, surely we can do no better than follow her example! Cliff Booker, who has also contributed the cover picture, shows a selection from various locations. Zdeněk Zvolánek abandoned the Beauty Slope this summer for some plant hunting excursions – he shares with us a trip to Italy. For some growers, their interest lies in working to produce hybrid plants which they hope will be easier of cultivation or more floriferous: In the world of saxifrages we are aware of the immense skill of the Czech growers - Adrian Young highlights for us the work of a British grower, Ray Fairbairn, who has done a lot of work with both Saxifraga and Primula.

## --- Gardens in the Mountains ---

### **Mother Nature: Master Gardener by Cliff Booker**

As we travel through the mountains and high places of the world we encounter more and more incredible examples of Mother Nature’s horticultural excellence. From immaculately planted crevices to natural trough gardens, from near vertical cliffs to intricately designed pavements, from decorated boulders to bounteous meadows ... the lady is a genius.

With a limitless palette and infinite resources she creates collages of colour, tapestries of texture and fantasies of foliage that defy description and beggar belief.

Pictures speak louder than words, so I have illustrated this short homage with a number of images captured in the wild places of the world.



Nature’s rock garden – above Chamonix in the French Alps

---International Rock Gardener---



*Campanula heaven* and splendid *Phyteuma* species (above) *Erinus alpinus* (below) - French Alps



## ---International Rock Gardener---

The companion planting effects we contrive so hard to replicate in our own gardens are achieved so effortlessly in Nature.



Mixed planting in a natural "trough"

---International Rock Gardener---



A perfect rock garden in the Cinque Torre, and “designer” plantings in the Dolomites with entire crevice gardens and covetable boulders.



## ---International Rock Gardener---

*Dryas*, *Salix* and *Silene acaulis* (below left) and *Potentilla nitida* variations (below right) in the Dolomites



*Potentilla* and *Thymus*,  
a delightful mixture of  
flowers and foliage.

# ---International Rock Gardener---

*Sedum and Saxifraga*

*Rhododendron ferrugineum* above Corvara - Dolomites (cover picture)



*Silene* occupying a boulder niche on Piz Boé



A mini-garden in a boulder in the Dolomites

---International Rock Gardener---



A magnificent natural cliff planting on the Gargano peninsula in Italy.

I can't be certain (as we couldn't scale the cliff to confirm it), but, while I have no clue about the white flowers, I believe the aubrieta on this 'Natural Rock Wall' to be *Aubrieta columnae*.





---International Rock Gardener---



*Sempervivum* paradise on Gran Paradiso in Northern Italy

*“For all that Nature by her Mother Wit could frame in Earth, and form of substance base, was there; and all that Nature did omit, Art (playing second Nature's Part) supplied it.”*

*Edmund Spenser, from The Faerie Queene (1715)*

*Ranunculus glacialis* and *Myosotis* - Porta Vescova - Dolomites



# ---International Rock Gardener---

## --- Gardens in the Mountains ---

### A Short Trip to the Apuan Alps by Zdeněk Zvolánek

It was the idea of the Moravian explorer, Mojmír Pavelka, when we travelled to Spain in August 2012, to make a visit to the Apuan Alps. His vision was to see *Moltkia suffruticosa* in nature.

The Apuan Alps are a mountain massif distinctly separated from the Tuscan Apennines in Italy. They show an elliptical shape about 55km long and 25km wide; the main axis is oriented NW-SE. The highest peaks (Monte Pisanino, Monte Cavallo, Monte Tambura, Pizzo d'Uccello) reach almost 2000m above sea level. A great variety of rocks and soils is one of the most interesting characters of the Apuan Alps, which are well known also for the marble quarries since Roman times. Marbles from the Carrara region are very fine for carving (In 1504, Michelangelo made his statue of the naked warrior David from a huge block of Carrara marble).



Monte Sagro, Alpi Apuani

The climate too is very variable, both over the seasons and at the different altitudes and aspects. Therefore, the flora and vegetation have many diverse facets that have been known to botanists for a long time.



Google Earth and the Internet were a great help to me, as I prepared an easy trip to approach a maximum height or elevation with our city car, a VW Sharan. We travelled from Sedlčany (south of Prague) via Austria and Germany to Carrara at the Tyrrhenian coast in the Ligurian gulf. It took 12 hours and we slept in our tents in a camping place on the seashore. Beer, which is essential for our partner Mirek Staněk, was not good there and that is generally typical for Italy. 😊

Next morning we, with one mistake from my navigation, found the narrow road SS446d in NW corner of Carrara and travelled via the village of Gragnana to the village of Castelpoggio, where there is an asphalted road called Strada Provincionale 59, leading to Campo Cecina at 1300m. Before reaching [Rifugio Cai Carrara](#) at 1100m (a mountain hostelry with cheaper but nice red wine) we saw pretty mats of *Globularia incanescens* decorating vertical limestone walls. Some of them, in south exposures, had ripe seeds. Mojmír was surprised how dwarf and compact this species was, with lovely bluish grey-

### ---International Rock Gardener---

green spatulate leaves. The best plants in cultivation are grown in tufa holes. I had trouble growing this species in my too dry, open soil. This species occurs towards the elevation of 1700m and plants there are really small treasures.



*Globularia incanescens* in flower (above) and in seed (below)



## ---International Rock Gardener---

[Campo Cecina](#) is an open area with a dusty road leading to the large, active marble quarry under Monte Sagro. It is place famous for impressive vistas above Carrara. Above the small old quarry is the limestone peak, Monte Barla, 1470m above sea level.



Above: *Centaurea montis-barlae*  
Left: Monte Barla

Here we saw the promising endemic *Centaurea montis-barlae* at the southern slopes above the quarry during our cooler evening trip. All plants were about 5-7 cm high, with decorative lanceolate leaves and pink flowers, 3-4cm in diameter. Some had started to form seeds. It is a saxatile alpine suitable for cooling crevices of sedimentary rock or tufa cultivation. Mt. Barla showed us marble fissures filled with a pretty flat shrub, a small Buckthorn, with small glaucous leaves, *Rhamnus glaucophylla* (below, left).



We saw flat cushions of *Moltkia suffruticosa* subsp. *bigazziana*, (left) which apparently lost seed production from some unknown reason.

We had seen, pictured on the Web, a stunning dwarf *Paeonia officinalis*, in a crevice, somewhere near the summit pine trees, but we had no time to climb the summit and did not try to find it. This peony is not listed in the available list of the local flora, so it seemed risky to look for

## ---International Rock Gardener---

it. I didn't recognise some listed plants because of the short time available for exploration together with my age and alcohol content: *Daphne alpina*, *Polygala carueliana*, *Phyteuma scorzonerifolium*, *Salix apennina*, the yellow buttercup *Ranunculus pollinensis*, *Scabiosa holosericea*, *Santolina leucantha*, *Senecio brachychaetus* or *Silene pichiana*. Many of these plants can be seen in a [website of Apuan plants](#). *Androsace villosa* is not widely listed for this area: but there were hundreds of compact plants showing chocolate brown seed at Campo Cecina.



One heap of marble grit hosted beautiful pure white *Arenaria bertolonii* (above) and I saw a few flowers of the all blue *Aquilegia bertolonii* (below, left).



We climbed two thirds of Monte Sagro (a 1750m tall peak, see photo page 10).

On the route up we found *Moltkia suffruticosa* (left), with some very small seeds. It makes cushions of dark green narrow leaves, about 40cm in diameter.

Its flower stems are up to ten centimetres high. It needs baking, as here on the marble surface, to thrive.

## ---International Rock Gardener---

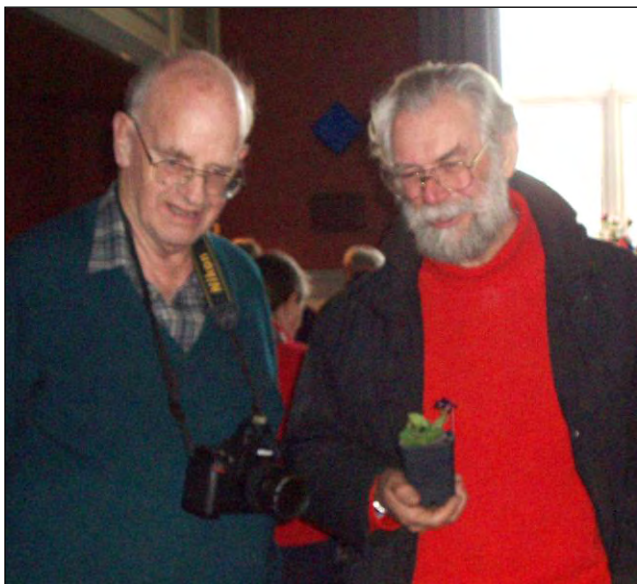
We looked at *Saxifraga lingulata* subsp. *lingulata* rosettes and recognised *Helianthemum croceum* and *Hypericum coris*. It was a very hot tropical day and we had to stay for many hours in the shade of trees of the Rifugio Cai Carrara. After the evening trip we bivouacked at Campo Cecino, which was busy all night with lovers of night vistas and lovers of each other. In the early morning the heaviest trucks started to transport marble blocks down the narrow road to Carrara and it was not romantic at all, so we travelled via extremely warm France to the even hotter country above Barcelona. Z.Z.

## ---Plant Report---

### Allendale Kabschia Saxifrage Cultivars by Adrian Young

Ray Fairbairn should be congratulated on his important contribution to the world of Saxifrage Cultivars; his name will be added to the list of great hybridizers that started over 120 years ago with John Brack Boyd.

Ray has used 27 Kabschia species in 48 different combinations to produce 77 new hybrids. There were 39 pinks, 21 yellows, 16 white and one orange. He was extremely methodical in the choice of plants: species made up the vast majority of parents. His alpine houses were carefully netted to avoid any stray bees gaining access and interfering with the selections, Ray performed the delicate task of transferring pollen to stigma of the female choice with great care, and this is a job for a keen eye and a steady hand.



Left: Glassford Sprunt, compiler of the SRGC Journal and IRG Indices with Ray Fairbairn, hybridiser par excellence.

I visited Ray several times during the early days and was amazed at the numbers of new plants that germinated; he had a very high success rate. The compost used to grow on the seedlings was simplicity itself, sharp sand and moss peat mixed 50/50. I have no shame in admitting that I copied this mix and still use it today for all my saxifrages. The other surprising discovery was the size of Ray's compost heap, I remember grabbing a nice looking plant from the heap and asking what the problem was with this plant, Ray's answer was "petal shape is wrong": he had a plan for his hybrids and he stuck to it even if the plant produced had a nice form, it was compost if it did not match up to the plan, it takes real

discipline to be that selective.

The first one published was S. 'Kathleen' named after his wife, in 1990: all the rest use the Allendale prefix to celebrate the North Pennine village where the Fairbairns live.



Left: *Saxifraga* 'Allendale Bravo'

Far left: *Saxifraga* 'Allendale Charm'



## ---International Rock Gardener---

I have been asked to select a “top 15” Allendale plants suitable for out-door cultivation. This is fortunate as I do not have any indoor saxifrages. I manage the ‘Plant Heritage’ [National Collection of Kabschia Saxifrages at Waterperry Gardens](#). The plants are grown in two 20 metre long raised beds, with a compost of 20mm ballast (sharp sand mixed with gravel up to 20mm) and medium grade moss peat in equal proportions. The beds contain about 3 tonnes of tufa which is half buried. The plants get high level winter wet protection using acrylic sheets 2 metres above ground level and summer heat protection from wood slats arranged to give 50% shade.

Waterperry Top Allendale cultivars for raised bed culture		
Cultivar	Hybrid Combination	Flower Colour
'Allendale Allure'	<i>Ss. Stolitzae x aretioides</i>	Yellow
'Allendale Angel'	<i>Ss. cinerea x ferdinandicoburgi</i>	Yellow
'Allendale Ballad'	<i>Ss. media x diapensioides</i>	Pink
'Allendale Bravo'	<i>Ss. 'Quarrywood' x georgei</i>	Pink
'Allendale Bonny'	<i>Ss. aretioides x georgei</i>	Pink
'Allendale Charm'	<i>Ss. wendelboi x poluniniana</i>	Pink
'Allendale Citation'	<i>Ss. cinerea x diapensioides</i>	White
'Allendale Enchanter'	<i>Ss. kotschyi x McB1379</i>	Yellow
'Allendale Fairy'	<i>Ss. lilacina x matta-florida</i>	Pink
'Allendale Frost'	<i>Ss. marginata 'Sorrento' x diapensioides</i>	White
'Allendale Goblin'	<i>Ss. poluniniana x kotschyi</i>	Yellow
'Allendale Ghost'	<i>Ss. SEP549 x poluniniana</i>	White
'Allendale Hobbit'	<i>Ss. matta-florida x poluniniana</i>	White
'Allendale Jinn'	<i>Ss. diapensioides x poluniniana</i>	White
'Allendale Snow'	<i>Ss. burseriana x wendelboi</i>	White

Over the last 20 years I have grown a lot of the Allendale cultivars, all outside.

Some are difficult in my Southern England conditions: plants such as Allendale Ruby, Elite, Elegance, Czech, Chick and Celt all proved susceptible to summer heat.

I have looked carefully at my records and 15 Allendale cultivars have grown well for a period of time in the Waterperry raised beds, many have been planted directly into the tufa.

I would advise that these lists are seen as guidelines only, Saxifrages are very sensitive to location and growers will have to experiment within their own micro-climate, after all this is part of the fun of gardening.



Allendale Saxes - 'Fairy', 'Bonny' and 'Bravo'

---International Rock Gardener---



*Saxifraga* 'Allendale Charm' in the garden of Jan Fouquaert [in Belgium](#)



Raymond A. Fairbairn and his glasshouses - photographed by George Young

[www.srgc.net](http://www.srgc.net)



## ---International Rock Gardener---

Below: *Saxifraga* 'Allendale Betty'



*Saxifraga* 'Allendale Ghost'



Below: *Saxifraga* 'Allendale Amber'



*Saxifraga* 'Allendale Ballet'



*Saxifraga* 'Allendale Ina', *Saxifraga* 'Allendale Enchanter', *Saxifraga* 'Allendale Citation'  
- showing their attractiveness for culture in pots or in the open ground.

## ---International Rock Gardener---

It is important to understand that growing Saxifrages outdoors in raised beds is a very different proposition to growing them in pots in an alpine house, pots are further removed from the natural habitat and a great deal of skill is necessary to compensate for this un-natural environment and keep them in good condition for more than two or three years.



'Allendale Harvest' in a pot and in the ground



'Allendale Frost'



'Allendale Beauty'

Right: 'Allendale Goblin'

Most of the photographs for this article were taken at Waterperry by Adrian Young and David Hoare.

For a complete list of Ray Fairbairn's Allendale saxifrage cultivars, please follow this [link](#).

Ray has written various articles for the [Saxifraga Society](#) journal over the years, such as: [Hybridising Porophyllum Saxifrages](#) by Raymond A. Fairbairn.



## ---International Rock Gardener---

I have also discussed the Allendale cultivars with two very good Kabschia Saxifrage growers that use pot culture, David Hoare and Tony Hale, below are their considered opinions.

David Hoare & Tony Hale Top Allendale cultivars for showing	Colour	David Hoare & Tony Hale Top easy Allendale cultivars	Colour
		'Allendale Accord'	Pink
		'Allendale Angel'	Yellow
		'Allendale Billows'	White
		'Allendale Boon'	Orange
		'Allendale Cabal'	Pink
		'Allendale Carol'	White
		'Allendale Cavalier'	Pink
		'Allendale Charm'	Pink
'Allendale Ballet'	Pink	'Allendale Citation'	White
'Allendale Billows'	White	'Allendale Desire'	Pink
'Allendale Bonny'	Yellow	'Allendale Dream'	Pink
'Allendale Bravo'	Pink	'Allendale Duo'	Yellow
'Allendale Celt'	White	'Allendale Eden'	Pink
'Allendale Charm'	Pink	'Allendale Elf'	Pink
'Allendale Comet'	Pink	'Allendale Enchanter'	Yellow
'Allendale Elegance'	Pink	'Allendale Envoy'	Yellow
'Allendale Elf'	Pink	'Allendale Gamet'	Pink
'Allendale Frost'	White	'Allendale Ghost'	White
'Allendale Ghost'	White	'Allendale Goblin'	Yellow
'Allendale Goblin'	Yellow	'Allendale Icon'	Pink
'Allendale Grace'	Pink	'Allendale Jinn'	White
'Allendale Harvest'	Yellow	Allendale Jo'	Pink
'Allendale Host'	White	'Allendale King'	Pink
'Allendale Ice'	White	'Allendale Magic'	White
'Allendale Icon'	Pink	'Allendale News'	Pink
'Allendale Jinn'	White	'Allendale Noon'	Yellow
'Allendale Ruby'	Pink	'Allendale Snow'	White
Pic: 'Allendale Allure'			



Above : 'Allendale Elegance'

Note: 'Allendale Brilliant' never got into circulation; Ray lost it soon after naming.

Allendales 'Vert', 'Ambient' and 'Dawn' were soon extinct after the initial release to one or two growers. If anyone has contrary information I would be very pleased to [hear from them](#).

A.Y.



Saxes at Waterperry

[www.srgc.net](http://www.srgc.net)