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AMERICAN PRIMROSE SOCIETY
President's Message

In this issue we honor Ralph and Evelyn Balcom for their many years of constructive work. During the formative years of the American Primrose Society and on into the present, no assignment was too big or too small for their willing hearts and hands to tackle. Life Memberships were awarded to both of them at our Board Meeting last May. Now, through the article written by Nancy Ford and testimonials throughout our membership, with love we wish to say, “Well done, good and faithful Ralph and Evelyn!”

This year we have endeavored to promote a positive approach to build a better Society. Work has started on an Index of the Quarterly's, bringing help from the east and west under the able direction of Susan Watson, another of our most faithful members. This will be a great asset in the future, helping in many areas.

A closer relationship can always be obtained by members working to reach a common goal, coming in contact with each other and forming new friendships. Our Round Robins continue to grow and are forming new links to strengthen the Society.

Letters have been requested before and I am sending out the call again. These are needed from all areas to show approval or disapproval, constructive criticism and willingness to be involved in our program where help is needed. Your right to vote by absentee ballot is the privilege of every member in good standing. Please help us make it a most vital part of our Society. A response, stating your wishes, is essential to know the heart of our membership. These ballots should be addressed to our Secretary, Mrs William Tate, other letters may also be addressed to the Secretary.

We know that in all areas of our Society there is much knowledge of the Genus Primula. Worthwhile articles written by our members are desired and most welcome. Involvement calls for helping hands. Please let us hear from you.

Most Sincerely,
Thelma M. Nelson

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**PRIMULA CHIONANTHA**

_Photograph courtesy of Cyrus Happy III_.

**Primula, Primrose**

Most Primulas should receive partial shade during hot summer weather. Soil requirements vary for the different species, but the better known kinds require a rich, well-drained soil with leaf-mold.

_P. polyantha_ is a horticultural form supposed to be derived from _P. veris, P. elatior_ and _P. acaulis (P. vulgaris)._ It is variable in color of flowers and other characteristics. Some plants bear single flowers on each stem while others have several to many flowers in a scape. There are many varieties and improved forms of all of these. All are hardy in Michigan and should have rich, well-drained soil with partial shade in the summer.

_P. amoena_, with much the same requirements, has purple or lilac flowers which appear in early spring. _P. auricula_ is a European species growing about four inches high and bearing flowers in early spring. It should have a limestone soil. It is perfectly hardy but suffers from the heat of summer. It is valuable for both the rock garden and wall garden. The garden Auriculas are derived from this group, probably with _P. auricula_ and _P. hirsuta_ as the original parents. They are hardy and run to a great variety of color forms. Usually, the flowers are yellow or white with markings of chocolate, plum, maroon, violet or purple.

Other species requiring the same general treatment as _P. auricula_ are _P. glaucescens, P. hirsuta, P. marginata, P. minima, P. pedemontana_ and _P. viscosa_. _P. marginata_ is said to do well in the moraine. All of these are low growing species from two to six inches high bearing rose, lilac, purple or violet flowers in early spring or early summer. All require a soil of loam, sand, and leaf-mold or peat, except _P. marginata_, which requires a deep sandy loam, and _P. hirsuta_, which should have an acid peaty soil. All may be planted in the rock garden or wall garden in a well-drained place. _P. minima_ and _P. marginata_ may be planted in rock fissures, dry and well-drained for _P. marginata_ and moist for _P. minima._

_P. japonica_ grows eight to 24 inches high and has purple, rose, carmine or white flowers which appear from late spring to midsummer. It should have a cool, partly shaded situation in a deep, moist, spongy soil. It is perfectly hardy and is offered in numerous varieties. This primrose is representative of a group of rather tall growing species requiring much the same treatment. They are specially effective planted along streams in partial shade.
Other species requiring similar treatment are *P. pulverulenta*, *P. Bulleyana*, *P. Beesiana*, *P. Cockburniana*, *P. Poissonii* and *P. helodoxa*. *P. pulverulenta* grows one and one-half to three feet high and has rose-purple or violet flowers in June and July. *P. Bulleyana* grows to two and one-half feet, with bright orange flowers in May and June. *P. Beesiana* grows to two feet, with fragrant, carmine-red flowers in May and June. *P. Cockburniana* grows to 18 inches and has bright vermilion flowers in May and June. *P. Poissonii* sends up a flower scape from three to five feet tall bearing rose or bright carmine flowers in June. *P. helodoxa* grows to two feet with yellow flowers appearing in May.

*P. involucrata*, a Himalayan species, growing six inches high, has white flowers in June. It requires a cool, half-sunny position in the rock garden and produces pink flowers in April and May. *P. Poissonii* has purplish flowers appearing in late April and May, and requires the same culture as *P. farinosa*.

*P. denticulata* is a lilac-flowered kind growing one foot or more high. The lilac-colored flowers appear in early spring. A rich, well-drained, moist loam in a partially shaded sheltered situation in the rock garden suits it very well.

There are a number of varieties of this species—*alba* is white flowered; *rosea* is pink flowered; *pulcherrima* is a very fine, vigorous sort; *cachemiriana* is a popular rich purple-flowered variety.

*P. croosa* (P. crispa) is a pale mauve-flowered species requiring the same treatment and is much like *P. denticulata*. It does well in the rock garden in moist or wet situations. *P. capitata* is a very fine blue-flowered variety growing about eight inches high with flowers heads up to sixteen inches. The flowers appear in late July. It does best in a well-drained, peaty soil in half shade. Though not difficult to grow, this species must be protected against winter wetness and cold, drying winter winds.

*P. Mooreana* is similar to *P. capitata* and requires the same cultural treatment. It has rich purple flowers and grows about one foot high. Both of these species grow naturally in bog-like situations.

*P. Forrestii* is a species rather widely advertised in recent years. It grows about nine inches high and has bright yellow or orange flowers. It is said to be difficult to grow and rather uncertain as to hardiness. It does not endure overhead moisture, and should be planted in rock crevices where the roots can reach abundant moisture. It requires a well-drained limestone soil and partial shade.

*P. Littoniana* differs from all other primroses in its inflorescence. The violet-blue flowers are borne on stems up to two feet high. It should have some shade and an acid soil. It does well around the edge of rhododendrons. *P. sikkimensis* is similar but somewhat smaller and requires the same treatment.

*P. chionantha* is a white-flowered species from China growing about one foot high. It does not like winter wetness and is likely to rot unless protected. Three American species—*P. augustifolia*, *P. Parryi* and *P. Cusickiana* — require the same treatment as *P. chionantha*.


Please Note

As this Quarterly goes to press the location for the Annual American Primrose Society Banquet has not been selected. The date will be April 8 (Saturday). Please contact Mrs. Fred Clark, 6423 Wildaire Road S.W., Tacoma, Wash. 98499.
Ralph Balcom, Hybridist and Evelyn Balcom given Life Membership

By Nancy Ford, Regional Editor

"My wife and I are truly delighted that Ralph and Evelyn are being honoured by the A.P.S. There can be few who deserve it more richly. Ralph is one of that diminishing breed, a gentleman in every sense of the word—a gentle man, despite his big frame, gentle with his hands as he needed to be to pollinate primulas successfully, but above all, gentle in spirit, infinitely kind and courteous." from a letter of Dr. E. Lester Smith, Sussex, England.

When Ralph and his wife Evelyn were given a life membership I was asked to do an article on it. Why me? Probably because hybridising double auriculas and competing against Ralph at the Primrose Shows has been my greatest hobby for many years. Probably because there are so very few of us who have the patience to search out the elusive grains of pollen on some of the best double auriculas or will strain eyes and patience hunting for an elusive pistil on which to put the pollen.

Ralph taught me and others how to keep records on crosses made, etc. He is scientific about his hybridising, is the only officially named double auricula in the United States. Photo by Orval Agee.

"ELLEN PAGE HAYDON," the result of Ralph Balcom's hybridizing, is the only officially named double auricula in the United States. Photo by Orval Agee.

Ralph Balcom, Hybridist and Evelyn Balcom given Life Membership

As an avid grower and supporter of the Auricula, Ralph Balcom has been a force in the cultivation and promotion of these beautiful flowers. His work with northern primroses has been exceptional, and he has contributed many varieties to the world of horticulture.

The wide range of colors Mr. Balcom has brought to his doubles is noteworthy. The palest pastels, the bright yellow of daffodils, rose, lavender, buffs, to reds and deep purple are his colors.

Several years ago Ralph Balcom, Robert Putnam and I were asked to talk to the local branch of the American Rock Garden Society. Of course, being the Auricula specialist, Ralph talked about those—primarily the double auriculas. One of the members commented that he didn't like the "muddy" color of the yellow garden subjects. That was enough for Ralph. He has since worked the daffodil yellow color of the show auriculas into his double strain. His home garden is devoted, in one large area, to these plants. It took several years, of course.

The variety of petal formation on doubles is interesting and the camellia-like loose arrangement of some is quite different from the many petalled forms of others. He has one strain in which there is an attractive tuft of petals around the center of the blossom. Another has a picatee edge. Some have an acaulis type blossom that appears first, followed by a polyanthus taller umbel. Some are floriferous—others tend to be misericord in their efforts to be good garden subjects. The alpine auricula parentage of some lends beauty to many of the Balcom strain of double auriculas. There is such variety that it is no wonder he has specialized. Foliage can be as varied as the umbells. Some is mealy as in certain show auriculas, some is smooth edged, some is dentate.

Getting any auricula named in America is difficult because the A. P. S. rules are rigid. A plant, to be named, must perform consistently well for three years. In our mild climate with all the rain of Seattle, it is not always possible to have ones best plants in bloom at show time. A plant can be too early or too late. Most of our National shows are gaged to the latter part of April to catch the popular polyanthus at its best. Auriculas are later as a general rule. The committee of judges that must pass on a plant's qualities and point score it are not always available except at show time. Auriculas are perversive and often decide to be all through blooming by show time . . . or have only three fully opened pips (and one of those helped to open by the grower). Ralph has the only named double auricula in America. It is called Ellen Page Hayden after one of our Eastern members. For details on this plant please see the Summer 1968 Quarterly. There are many articles on Ralph's doubles, both at home and abroad, as he likes to tell others how to achieve and grow them.

One of our members was seriously injured and was unable to walk. Ralph Balcom got her interested in growing primroses and she crawled about her yard caring for her gift of primroses. Later she walked, overcoming the cerebral palsy induced by the accident. She might very well have stayed in her wheelchair. She knows the magic of someone caring, and sharing plants to motivate both muscle and speech. Many years later after winning trophies at Primrose Shows this woman took time to help a blind woman enjoy primroses.

When I was editor of the A. P. S. Quarterly and short on material...
Ralph could always find time to write a great and educational piece about whatever I suggested. He has been most generous and invaluable. He never "went commercial" and capitalized on his great knowledge, but grew plants of great beauty for the sheer joy of doing it. He was steeped in the tradition of the old Welch auricula growers and he too would have snatched the bedding from his bed to protect his auriculas from a sudden freeze had it been necessary.

As I write about Ralph and think about some of the other great hybridists of primula I marvel at their knowledge and patience. A collector of rare plants is noteworthy, but a hybridist creates his own. It's rather like comparing an art collector with the artist who paints the masterpieces. A hybridist isn't going to let the bees do the work for him. He knows what he wants and is willing to try and try again and again until he achieves his purpose. It may take a lifetime, disappointment may be his, but he tries!

Evelyn has been his patient and sometimes long-suffering wife since 1928. She and her mother Nellie Killen have fed and cared for this sometimes "impossible" fellow. Mud from the garden would track up their clean floors, dinner or breakfast could get cold for all he cared if he was out in the garden or greenhouse pollinating something. But they were always there to share his joy or grief. Mrs. Killen, a spry 80 year old woman, cared for his plants while Ralph and Evelyn went to England and Europe (a gift from fond sons) in August of 1966.

In May of 1966, the second son, Ralph Carol, a U.S.A.F. pilot stationed in Thailand, was shot down over North Vietnam and has since been a prisoner of war. His lovely English wife and children are shown in the accompanying photograph. Were it not for the unhappy shadow of grief over the missing son, Evelyn said it would have been a perfect dream come true to visit the family and friends in England. The Balcoms are active in the National League of Families of Prisoners of War and Missing in Asia, devoted to efforts for humane treatment and early release for prisoners and accounting for the missing.

Standing with Ralph and Evelyn in their garden this spring discussing the merits of a particular double acaulis that was a winner but too late for the show, we were interrupted twice by neighbors afoot who wanted to come into the garden to admire or just to visit. One cannot walk by, day after day, without wanting to make friends with the people who live behind the white picket fence. The garden is not only colorful with fruit trees in blossom, rhododendrons, azaleas, rock plants, etc., but the scent of many primroses is a "people-stopper" anytime. Little do the neighbors and passers-by realize what really goes on in the hybridizing world of the Balcoms.

When Ralph knew I was to write an article about their life membership he begged me not to bore readers with an account of his life's story — not to be flowery. I promised, but, being a woman I can be devious too. I will quote from two letters from England. These friends say it better than I could, being masters of the English language. The quotation at the beginning of this article is the beginning of Dr. E. Lester Smith's tribute to Ralph as a hybridist and man. The rest of the letter follows:

"I have just looked again at the very first letter I had from Ralph, in January 1960. We were complete strangers then, yet he wrote me twelve pages, and sent some double auricula seeds, which were..."
very precious at that time. It seems I had written to Mrs. Agee asking for help as I was having difficulty getting seed from some of the Denna doubles I brought back from America in 1958, and she passed on the query to Ralph. He sent some colour prints of his best plants, too. Now nearly all those pages were detailed information about the nature of auriculas, and how best to cross them; all extremely helpful. He was well away by that date, mentioning he had sown 800 seeds, by actual count, and at that time had 563 seedlings from them (from a December sowing).

"But to illustrate the character of the man, I must actually quote you part of the last page:

"There is a favour that I would like to ask of you. It is that, if you should quote me to anyone in any way, you will keep me and my doubles in the background. Let's let Mrs. Denna Snuffer continue to get full acclaim for producing the double auricula over here in America. After all, she got them first and I even used a semi-double of hers to work into my crosses. She and Mr. Snuffer are wonderful people."

"You see what I mean?

"It is a small and specialised field, but I should suppose that Ralph was the top breeder of double auriculas in the world. He was imaginative in his selection of breeding plants, he worked meticulously, kept proper records, pondered upon the results, and made full use of the experience he gained. He worked on a massive scale too, considering he had a relatively small garden and greenhouse. If his plants have been surpassed, you may be pretty sure the better ones owed something to his strain. And of course, he was good with single auriculas and other primulas too, as you well know.

"I believe he won at every Show at which he exhibited. This happened in England too, for at all our Shows, prizes were won by plants raised from his seed. It is true, as you say, that such plants were in the collection that gained me the Lindley Medal in 1962.

"I visited Ralph in 1963, and stayed at their home for a week, at their very kind invitation, and saw something of his work and plants. He and Evelyn also took me around to visit other A. P. S. members. I wrote up this trip in our Southern Year Book for 1963. A few years later, they visited us on a trip to Europe. We have kept up infrequent correspondence, and indeed I have just had a letter from him.

"Well, I could go on at length, but this is probably enough — if only you get it in time — for you to draw upon for what you have to write. Also if I continue, I shall miss the post.

Yours very sincerely,

E. Lester Smith"

The other letter from England comes from K. J. Gould of Dorking, Surrey. He is a hybridist of note and writes:

"The news that Ralph and Evelyn Balcom have been honoured with life membership of the American Primrose Society, will give great pleasure to their many friends, including those on the eastern side of the Atlantic.

"Pamela and I were favoured with having them as our guests in 1966. Our friendship by correspondence was enriched by our personal exchanges. We wish there were more opportunities of renewing these, because the bond of
growing auriculas and primulas is very strong indeed, capable of bring together persons separated by an ocean and a continent.

"Ralph has been a real inspiration to those of us in this country who have been attracted by the beauty of the Double Auricula. He has been most generous in sending seed, for us to profit from his hybridising programme. Letters of encouragement and advice have also been flown across the vast distance, so that the promise of doubles conceived in Seattle have blossomed in Surrey. I have admired the amazing colour range he has achieved and the vigour of his crosses.

"Three varieties from the first batch of seed, Catherine, Mary and Nigel have continued to win awards at our Shows. Will some members who use International Postal Coupons, in lieu of cash, stamps, etc. to cover seed requests, kindly make sure that these are date stamped by issuing post offices. Without this stamp, we are unable to cash them In either the U. S. or Canadian Post Offices.

As of Jan. 1, 1972, first class letter rate in Canada is now 8c for first ½-ounce. Keith F. Elcombe

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**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

*Answers by Alice Hills Baylor, Corresponding Secretary*

**Stage Coach Road, Rt. 2, Stowe, Vermont 05672**

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**PRIMULA OBCONICA FT. PL. ARENS' SNOWFLAKE**

*Photo/Elmer Baldwin*

**Question:** Can you tell me where I can buy plants of Primula mistassinica? I am a beginner at growing Primroses and want to start with those native to this country. What other Primulas are native, and where can I buy plants? Also where do they grow?

**Answer:** It is *P. mistassinica* which resembles a Tritoma if so kindly give me the name.

**Question:** Is there a Primrose that resembles a Tritoma? If so then try to obtain seed of *P. mistassinica* and P. rosea for miniatures. (P. mistassinica is a miniature). The stately Polyanthus and the precious acaulis will not disappoint you and for the rocky crevices in the rock garden or in a stone wall plant the garden auriculas. Then try to obtain seed of the more difficult Primulas and experiment. Good Luck!

**Answer:** It is *P. vialii* (syn. *P. Litoniana*) which resembles the Torch Lily (Kniphofia).
Question: Is it possible to grow a few Primroses in my stone terrace where I can enjoy them as I no longer can walk a distance into the garden to where there is shade?

Answer: Primroses can be tucked into any crevice in rock work where there is the shade of a friendly rock even though sun surrounds it. Steps are a favorite place and Primroses seed themselves in the spaces between the pavement in my terrace. If the roots are cool they can take some sun on their heads, especially the auriculas. Then too, some can be potted up and you can move them as you please from one spot of shade to another.

Question: If P. obconica is well covered could it be grown out doors in Ohio?

Answer: The winters are too cold for it in Ohio.

Question: I am exploring the possibility of raising potted Primulas for spring bedding plant sale I would appreciate it if you would recommend strains for this purpose and suggest ways of growing them.

Answer: In my experience the following are the best for potted plants: Primula polyanthus, P. acaulis, P. auricula, P. Julies, P. roseas, P. Sieboldii, Rose-in-Hose, P. marginata, P. rubra, miniature polyanthus, P. dariaica, P. Sieboldii, P. pulcherrima and P. abscasica. Have drainage in the bottom of pots. The soil mix must be sifted twice and is: one third each of good garden soil, clean sand, moist compost with a pint of dry cow manure to a bucket of mixture. Spread roots, fill half way up root system, water, press soil around roots to avoid air pockets, fill to an inch of top of pot (if large pot, half an inch if small pot), care must be exercised to avoid having soil on crown of plant. Water with a mild solution of any good fertilizer and continue to water with this solution once a week. Put under lights or in frame which is shaded. DO NOT OVERWATER.

Question: Will you tell me where the native P. mistassinica grows and under what conditions?

Answer: P. mistassinica is one of the more difficult ones to keep in one’s garden. It grows from Northern N.E. on out along the great lakes and one finds it also in Canada. I have collected it in two stations, on the side of the mountain in a limestone scree above Lake Willoughby and along Apple River canyon in N. Illinois and S. Wisconsin, in crevices of the limestone boulders. At both stations there was water seeping through the layers of limestone so the plants were saturated at their roots. It was almost impossible to wedge a plant out of the rock as the tiny roots are so thread-like. Those I did transplant lived two years and did not self sow. In Vermont P. mistassinica was growing with Grass of Parnassus, in Illinois with Campanula rotundifolia.

Question: What would you suggest to make my Alpine auriculas bloom? Have had them for two years and no bloom thus far.

Answer: Give your alpine auriculas a good soaking with lime water. Dig egg shells in and around the plants. I did that years ago to P. glaucescens calycina which flourished for me but did not bloom on the advice of Dr. Carl Worth. I even mulched with egg shells and crushed limestone and the following year they bloomed in profusion.

Question: Do you have a suggestion for companion Julies for P. Juliana Wanda?

Answer: One of the nicest color combinations for Julie WANDA is to have Mrs. King (lavender) and Julie DOROTHY (lemon yellow) growing near by.

A. P. S. members wishing to sponsor A. P. S. foreign memberships please contact the Seed Exchange Chairman

Mr. Keith F. Elcombe
11539 - 78th Place
Edmonton 61,
Alberta, Canada

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Signed
— Mrs. Herbert Dickson
— Mr. Richard Charlton
— Mrs. William Dines, Chairman

Nominations for any of the offices may be made from the floor. Also any member in good standing, who is unable to attend, may mail in his vote by absentee ballot. Simply send it to Mrs. William Tate, our recording secretary, at 1006-40th Street, Milwaukee, Oregon 97222, and it will be counted along with the other votes at balloting (Annual meeting in April) time.

Hand Pollinated Polyanthus and Acaulis. Available in individual colors or mixed at $1.00 per packet. At least 125 seeds to a packet.

Sory to say the 1971 crop of Double seed was very scant. Hope to have enough to fill the back orders. We will have a bigger supply in 1972.

Still have a good selection of double polyanthus, P. dariaica, P. Sibirthorpii and P. abschasica.

For companion Julies for P. Juliana WANDA:
Mrs. King (lavender) and Julie DOROTHY (lemon yellow)

1972 Winter Quarterly
AMERICAN PRIMROSE SOCIETY
Primula Are Easy—from Seed

By Herbert Dickson

Growing primula from seed is the only way many of us in the U.S.A. can have plants of the various primula species. Only a limited number are available from commercial sources in this country and quarantine restrictions prohibit their import from foreign countries.

Primula are easy from seed. Seed of some types can be obtained from commercial sources and some of the less common ones from the A.P.S. Seed Exchange and the seed exchanges of the alpine and rock garden societies.

There are a few basic requirements and as many ways of satisfying these requirements as there are people and places where primula are grown.

FIRST: The planting medium must be porous and loose so that water will drain through readily yet the mixture will retain enough water to be moist for a long time. It must not get hard and cake after watering.

SECOND: Close attention to watering is a must. The planting mixture and later the young seedlings must never be allowed to get dry or stay waterlogged.

THIRD: Provide shade after germination.

FOURTH: Transplant at the proper time. There are two times for successful transplanting. The first is while the plants are very small with one or two sets of true leaves. If for some reason you fail to get the job done then, wait until the plant has gone through the stage of shedding its seedling hair roots and has established a few of its larger adult roots. Transplanting during the time the hair roots are shedding will result in near complete failure. The different species differ in the length of time required to establish adult roots; however, all can be transplanted right after the first true leaves appear.

The following is how a lazy man grows his primula and many other hardy plants from seed with a fair amount of success. There are more effective ways that produce a higher percentage of germination and a little surer results but none with less work for a large number of pots and flats.

For my soil mixture I use one part soil (mine is clay loam), one part vermiculite, one part peat moss, and one part sand or Perlite if good sharp coarse sand is not available. For containiners I use four and one fourth inch square plastic pots four inches deep or three and five-eighths inches deep wooden flats with wide drainage cracks in the bottom. I use pea gravel (the size that will go through a one-half inch screen) for an inch or more in the bottom of flat or pot and fill it the rest of the way with the prepared mix. I press it down to firm and level it as near to one fourth inch from the top of the container as I can guess.

After the seeds are scattered on this surface, I cover them with a layer of Vermiculite from which I have sifted the dust and fine particles. Even the seed that is dust fine gets a loose scattering of these grains of Vermiculite. A piece of cotton cloth cut to fit the top of each pot or flat is used to cover each one until germination. The scattering of Vermiculite makes it possible to remove the cloth on germination without removing the seedlings with the cloth.

With this cloth cover and a few grains of pea gravel at the corners to keep the wind from blowing it off, I can start planting in December or early January setting the flats and pots outside on benches exposed to the winter rains and snows. The bench makes it easy to keep the slugs away and the cloth keeps the rain from washing the seed out. On dry days I can squirt them with the hose without damage.

As soon as the weather warms up in the spring, they start germinating. Whether they were planted three weeks or three months before makes no difference. After germination the seedlings must be watered gently. I use a fogg nozzle.

Young seedlings are extremely hardy. I have seen seedlings covered with snow or covered with an inch of ice from a late freezing rain without damage. A dry freeze can cause severe damage by heaving the young seedlings. If this happens, sift a little fine dirt over them and water gently before the roots dry up.

Work out your own system to satisfy the basic requirements under your own conditions and try some new (for you) species from the seed exchange this year. You will enjoy every minute of it.

**MOIST SAND BEDS**

Copied from APS Round Robin from Norman Deno’s letter

"Primula Rosea can be grown in ordinary soil if kept moist, but why do it that way when it grows like a dandelion in a moist sand bed," asks Norman Deno to a question about his moist sand beds which are proving so successful. To continue he states, "We are experimenting with two basic methods. In one, there is zero drainage, obtained by lining a hole in the ground with polyethylene and filling the hole with sand, and watering same with a soluble fertilizer. A second method is to construct the same type of sand bed but make a pinhole leak in the bottom of the plastic. This is equivalent in a way to the moist soil gardening which Alan Bloom in England is pushing. P. mistassinica will probably require the zero drainage system. The beauty of all this is that the beds stay moist even after several weeks of no rain. Primula minima is tricky and I plan to try it under the conditions that are successful here with the high alpine Kabschia saxatrage. That is pure sand beds with nightly watering with cold water from the hose."

In my opinion the above is too valuable to be kept within the bounds of a Round Robin. I believe we should share it.

Alice Hills Baylor

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AMERICAN PRIMROSE SOCIETY
Notes from Around the Globe

From the Treasurer’s Desk

I want to take this opportunity to thank all the members for your cooperation in the year 1971, and hope you will send in your 1972 membership without the big job of billing you, this takes hours of work and an expense of postage to the Society. Besides you need your new 1972 number to send for your Seed Exchange seeds. All members must be in good standing to receive seeds. The Primula Florindae seed sent to members with their membership cards for 72 was donated this year by Mrs. J. Siepman and will continued to be sent as long as they last.

A little run down on 1971. Alice Baylor has sold Sky Hook Farm, and has retired from business. We will miss her ad in the Quarterly. Mrs. Baylor is our Corresp. Sec'y. She also edits our Questions and Answers column. Alice’s new address is Stage Coach Road, Rt. 2, STOWE, VT. 05672. Alice is not the type to do nothing, so she is helping her daughter run a Sky Resort, our best to you Alice.

Dickson’s Perennial Gardens has moved to Chehalis, Washington and is known as Chehalis Rare Plant Nursery. Herb and Dorothy Dickson are busily taking care of this large nursery and many Primrose Society activities.

We are sorry to report we lost a Life Time Member, Mrs. W. H. Haydon of Maryland.

Interest in the Genus Primula seems to be increasing as indicated by the many letters received from different countries.

And now for the notes . . . I came across your name listed in the book called “10,000 Garden Questions” in the special plant societies column. I have become particularly interested in promrises. I have tried to raise the Primula Polyanthus from seed but haven’t had much success. Last year out of 75 seeds I planted in a cold frame, only 5 seeds germinated. These 5 plants were so beautiful, with flowers the size of a silver dollar, that I am determined to keep on trying, but I don’t know what I am doing wrong. I would like to know more about growing Primulas. Mrs. E. Beaulieu—Ohio.

I am getting ready to start some seeds on my window sill. I have pretty good luck that way, they seem to germinate in a couple weeks . . . Mrs. G. Stevens—Wash.

The primroses have been so nice this year. I had a lovely show of P. acaulis earlier, and the P. auriculae were good, P. Vaili is showing color and the Candelabra are in full bloom. Most of the species I grow in the rock garden, but through trial and error have discovered that some as P. Cavadoriana, P. nutans and P. Reidii are better in the frames. I am trying P. geraniifolia seed for the first time. My P. Sachalensis seedling are looking very sad and I very much doubt if they will survive the summer. Unfortunately my P. Clarkei just faded and died this spring. I have had the plant for eleven years, and been able to share it with others. I wonder why it does not set seeds?

—G. Hamilton—New Zealand

Thank you very much for the packet of seed P. Florindae I found with my membership card. Nothing pleases me more than Primrose seeds and I’ve been low on P. Florindae. I do most of my seeds in frames outside where snow and frost take over in winter and went out at once to sow it with many other kinds waiting for the warmth of spring. Even though I am not young now (in may eightieth year) I am still as enthusiastic as always and each year I add to the treasured primulas, the list grows longer . . . Mrs. H. Hayward—Maine.

I wish I had joined the Primrose Society sooner as I enjoy the bulletins so much. I am only just getting started “down the primrose path”, Mrs. R. Fisher—Ohio.

I am interested in joining the Primrose Society. Have very little knowledge of this lovely flower. I have seen this flower many times in the New York flower shows and I fell in love with it. Now I have my own place, I wish to try my hand in growing it from seed. But one thing pops up in my mind, can this flower grow up my way with 20 degrees below? If not what kind would you recommend? . . . L. Rubey.

I would be most pleased to be able to join your Primrose Society as I am a very keen primrose grower. I have quite a good primula and auricula collection and am interested in seed swapping. I am also interested in correspondence with someone in your country with this same interest as well as interest in Alpines. I have a small nursery which I run to raise funds for our Deaf Children of Timaru. I enjoy my work very much. For anyone interested in writing to me, I am 30 years of age . . . Estelle Gay Henderson—Opihi, Pleasant Point, Timaru, New Zealand.

I’m interested in joining the American Primrose Society. I never had too much luck with Primroses in New York. Recently moved to New Hampshire and want to try again. Mrs. A. Huenschmid, N.H.

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Page 21
I must say I am at a complete loss to explain the behavior of the candelabra primroses over the years in Millstream Garden here in Northwestern Connecticut.

We have tried them all, at least those that find their way into one or another of the seed exchanges. And I have on occasion purchased seed from Thompson and Morgan in England, or Jack Drake in Scotland and others. There has been no problem in germinating the seed, though in general germination has been a little bit better when I have permitted the sowed seed to have a period of freezing. Controlled experiments along these lines have not been undertaken, however, and that is not the burden of my concern at the moment.

Seedlings have been easy to move on into transplant flats and have grown apace during the summer, so that by early fall they have been well established in carefully prepared "permanent sites." We have tried them in a variety of situations, generally in the moister sections and with varying amounts of shade. Our earliest plantings were in the garden region near the house where the underlying rock is an ancient marbelized limestone and the soil reaction even with the addition of peat is soon neutral or above, on the pH scale.

Our more recent efforts have been in what we call the "upper" or "woodland" garden where, across the stream and up onto the next level of landscape, the overriding rock of Canaan Mountain, a meta-morphosed schist, is above the marble. Here the soil tends to be on the acid side of neutral. Here, at least, we successfully grow rhododendrons and other ericaceae. This area was, when we came here, rather thickly wooded with a typical New England hemlock-hardwood mixture.

Over the years — first by my wife and I on either end of a two-man cross-cut saw plus axe, plus long handled clippers, and more recently by the use of a smelly, noisy, but efficient chain-saw — we have opened up about two to three acres of this woodland into a kind of parklike garden. Some good old trees have been left, both coniferous and deciduous; those with least greedy root structure such as oak, white pine, paper birch with a scatter of especially brilliant fall coloring sugar maples.

The terrain here on the upper terrace is gently undulating with a good scattering of large gray-lichenened boulders left by the glaciers. On the way up to the higher land there is a glen, running east and west with a north slope and south slope at steep enough angles to require steps for paths. In the bottom of this dell is a moist seep, never entirely dry even in years of drought and in spring forming a side tributary to the main stream that flows off the mountain. Across this mill stream, on a bridge, we move from the lower to the upper wooded garden.

Even in one section of the upper terrace there is an area where in spring water surges out of the ground and flushes across a black-soiled area.

Starting first in the lower garden many years ago, I prepared a section in a moistish, semi-shaded area beside what came to be known as the primrose path. There, late one summer, I planted hundreds of sturdy transplants of a variety of primulas. Some were from seeds whose identity was testified for by purchased or seed-exchange packets, but I must at this remote date confess that most and the strongest were from a mixed bag that arose surreptitiously in my jacket pocket. During the previous summer in August I walked around some of the finest public and private gardens in England where primroses were plump with seed, mostly the party, taller growing candelabra and sikkimensis sorts. And what a wonderful melange that was when they bloomed sparsely the following year and in shuffling competition the next. It was a crazy quilt, breaking all the rules I have since enunciated that one should plant drifts all of a sort and color rather than sprinkle them higglety-pigglety. I'll stick to the rule, but I wish I could repeat the success of that planting.

By the fall of the second year the adjacent paths and other nearby areas devoted to alpines were planted with seedlings of P. japonica and other incipient cabbages to the point where I was frantically rooting out and composting the seedlings. The following year in the original area not a candelabra showed up. Perhaps that was the year when in August we had the great hurricane rains and that bed was swept clean of every crumb of soil down to bed rock by the raging stream. Or was the torrent the following year after the primroses had vanished anyway? I can't remember now in the long succession of display and dismay in a long succession of sites since.

The next year we had just begun to move across the stream and up into new country. I had taken out a tangle of young pines and some of the big sugar maples, dropping two of these stalwarts to make the stringers for a bridge across the stream. Just on the other side where the moisture from the side dells seeped on its way down to the main stream, I spaded up the dark moist soil. There that early fall we set literally thousands of primula seedlings. All my seed exchange allotments have gone for primulas, mostly candelabras, and some mecc-
onopsis. Here therefore were great drifts of *bulleyana, besezenya, bul-
esezenya, chungensis japonica, bur-
manica, pulverulenta, cockburni-
a* which we knew were short lived), *sikkimensis, florindae, copi-
tata, chionantha, "Red Hugh," 
Drake Inshriach Hybrids, and on 
the drier fringes a number of ver-
nales: *veris, vulgaris, Barnhaven 
Hybrids, et al. Scattered here and 
there were seedlings of *Meconopsis 
betonicifolia*. Our knees were wet 
and our hands black with clinging 
river silt after planting, but what a 
tight and gleaming stand of seed-
lings! It was hard to wait for 
spring. But there they were when 
the snow melted — some only 
icipient noses, some with persistent 
foliage. And how they bloomed. I 
have slides to prove it and now to 
make me weep.

*Denticulata* in all shades from 
pure white through soft gray-blue 
to real crimson opened the parade. 
Then the fringe of the vernales. 
Then in June the riot of candel-
abras mixed with the sky blue of 
meconopsis. At last we were sure 
we thought to those wet seeps 
where these same species made 
we thought to those wet seeps 

Then came that impossible win-
ter of 1957-58. For three weeks in 
a row during January, with no 
snow on the ground, the thermo-

tometer even on sunny days never went 
above 10° F. and every night below 
zero. The cold went down into the 
ground night after night. Water 
pipes more than three feet beneath 
the surface froze solid.

The next spring not a primula, 
not a meconopsis appeared. An 
extraordinary winter, we confessed, 
but maybe the seedlings would take 
take over, given time. A few seedlings 
showed up but the hardy sedges 
and local weeds had left far more 
and more viable seed.

So we moved on, only partly 
daunted. Meanwhile that wonderful 
site just across the bridge, when 
it failed to burst forth with a new 

cover of self-sowed seedlings of 
primulas was too good a situation 
to leave to weeds. It got filled with 
all the other seedlings and propa-
gations waiting in their flats and 
pots for housetoom: gentians, 
astilbes, phlox stolonifera, epimedi-
s, hellebores, tree peonies. There 
they still thrive with a mixture of 
some *Primula denticulata, a few 
florindae,* and a scattering of oth-
ers that come and go. No riot like 
that first year. But it was an 
unusual winter.

By this time we had cleared the 
side valley of the dell and its slopes. 
In the wet bottom we had burned in 
the winter the great bon-fires. And 
along the lowest seepage gully our 
neighboring farmer had come with 
his small bulldozer to carve out two 
basins and pile the fine silty soil 
into dams. One small pool above a 

larger one down the slope. What a 

collect because by now we were 

convincing from past experience 

that they must self sow to perpetu-

ate themselves.

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ter of 1957-58. For three weeks in 
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basins and pile the fine silty soil 
into dams. One small pool above a 

larger one down the slope. What a 

site around the shores for sweeps 
of primulas! The lower pool refused 
to hold water, though there was 
plenty there as evidenced by the 

fact that the upper one overflowed 
all summer during a record break-
ing drought. Nothing for it but to 
shovel back into the lower basin 
the rather ugly dam. Into the bot-
tom of the slough we tossed 
branches and chunks of the further 
cutting we found was essential for 
the azaleas and rhododendrons 
which had now been planted on 
both slopes of the glen.

After the fine silt of the dam had 
been tossed back into the excav-

ation on top of the branches, logs, 
and old fires, we added some peat 
and cow manure. This amalgam 
was then churned and mixed by 
the little Simplicity rototiller which 
by now I had learned could churn 
soil anywhere and fight bravely 
with roots, rocks, and stumps.

We let the area sit and settle all 
summer, weeding out the thick mat 
of weedlings that sprang to life on 
the enriched muck. Come fall I 
trundled an old wheel barrow as 
far as the bridge and from thence 
carried in my arms at least twenty-
five flats of seedling primroses. 
Raising them from seed and prick-

ing out the babies into transplant 
flats was my stint that year during 
the school holiday.

This time, because it was a 

large area and because we began to 
think that to make good and per-

manent cabbages of candelabra 
primroses you have to give them 
room, we spaced them generously 
and in big swatches of each kind. 
Again I can guarantee with colored 
slides that the old leaky pool, filled 
in and fed, was just perfect. There 
was a glorious display from early 
May through July. At last we 
thought we had found the site; 
moving water beneath, high shade 
off to the south, a pocket to hold all 
possible snows of winter, a neutral 
to slightly acid soil. Let them go to 
seed and replenish the few bare 
spots. If they get too crowded we 
can always dig up some seedlings 
and give them away. There were 
some very special color forms here 
from all the fine work that the 
primula buffs had been doing. Even 
*secundiflora,* which bloomed gener-
ously near the bottom of the slope, 
might lend to future generations 
some of its subtle color dusted 
with silver and its shy croisier 
stance.

The following spring, after a 
winter of steady and good snow 
cover from before Christmas till
early in April, we looked for the quick flush of green. There were, to be sure, heavings and hollows. But look as we might as spring advanced only an occasional weak and tentative nose of a primula appeared. Except for the denticulatas that had mysteriously marched out from their sweeping bands among the others. There was a whole new picture and not just what we had visualized.

Maybe, we thought, denticies can take this kind of heaving. After all they do have great thong roots. Maybe when the soil settles down and those old logs and things really rot and the whole area consolidates the others will do better. We'll try again when things have settled back. Mouse runs are numerous but that's only because this is a new area and all those buried branches and stuff make good runs for them. And maybe it is just a bit too wet in winter.

The primrose bog in the old pool eventually became a solid mat of denticulatas with only a few candelabras in the running water that snakes across the bog and makes denticulatas with only a few can-

eventually became a solid mat of it as it trickles down to the main brook a freight of denticulata seed which have sprung up along its verges, but there are none of those splendid sweeps of yellow and orange and red and white that had made for that one year the area glow in June and July.

We must try again. And I wish the final episode had a happy ending. But it was a replaying of the same old record stuck in a worn groove. There were fine young plants of P. bullysiana, beccisiana, pal-

verulenta “Barley Strain,” and other candelabras from the Prim-

rose Society exchange. And there were two full flats of stalwart plants of Jack Drake's Inshriach Strain Select—"What we sow our-

selves.” And that was the year there were seeds from Leningrad of P. pallasi, and from the Botanic Garden in Bratislava a gamut of species that all turned out to be varieties of P. veris. And there was also a batch of seed from Linz-

Donow of P. sibthorpii which was supposed to prove to me that P. ab-

schasica was the same in the eyes of their botanists. But that is an-

other story and all the sibthorpii were a uniform pale lavender and later to flower than the early neon purple of vivid abschasica whose

seed had passed once through their hands on its way from Leningrad to the American Primrose Society.

This collection of transplants was set in carefully labeled sweeps in the upper garden where for some years I had been annually churning up a sizeable area for use as a temporary nursery. Old roots and stumps were by now pretty well gone. Stray rocks had been kicked out by the rototiller. Weeds were reasonably well under control. The soil was open and dark, the high shade to the south was ideal, and in the spring the area was naturally moistened by a flush of under-ground water from the mountain above. One could almost visualize lowland Sherpas urging their flocks in early spring up through the incipient swags of primulas.

And, indeed, the first year the display was all we hoped for. The early vernales were magnificent if somewhat uniform yellow in the bands of so-called species from Bratislava. A clump of chionantha hybrids from Ruffier-Lanch had a few blooms above the silvered leaves. Abschasica seedlings, F-2 from the original introduction, were as glowing as the original parents. And later the variety of candelabras did just as we wanted. There were sweeps of color for over a month after the early ver-

nales. We let them all go to seed. We collected sparsely among them for the various exchanges. To be sure we found it difficult to discover any ripe seed on any of the vulgaris tribe that carry their fat capsules close to the ground. Long before they were ripe they had been mostly ravished by mice, green cases torn asunder and unripe seed glutonized. We could only wish them a severe belly-ache or a prolonged dysentery.

The more erect seed heads of the veris, candelabras and others did ripen, and even after our sparse collecting there were obviously seeds in numbers so great that if all had germinated the plants could have populated the whole of Litchfield County in congenial sites.

The following spring there were the separate and now crowded bands of vernales. Even the chio-

nantha hybrids were fatter. But where were the candelabras in all their diversity? Gone and their progeny with them.

After these repeated experiences in such a variety of sites, and in a succession of years with different weather, I am left with questions instead of the display of candel-

abras I expected and still want. I have pondered this history of prim-

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Richard W. Redfield, Secretary Box 26 Closter, N. J. 07624
ulas of the candelabra section in this garden here in Northwestern Connecticut. I would like to be able to grow them successfully for their special beauty at a particular time in the garden year. I could become ecstatic about the effect of the Inshriach Hybrids in the candelabra bog at the foot of the Azalea calendulacea that flower year after year on the slopes of the dell. But I do not wish to go in for bedding plants, to raise seedlings every year and set them out for effect.

The questions that naturally occur are these: 1. Are most of the candelabra primulas short-lived by nature? 2. Are most of the candelabra primulas really not hardy enough to endure temperatures that regularly go below zero? 3. Are candelabra primrose plants and their roots and their seeds particularly attractive to red-back and pine mice, with which our setting is abundantly furnished? 4. Are there other creatures in this garden, such as strawberry weevil, that destroy candelabras but not members of the vernales and some other sections of the primula genus?

I should and will, I think and hope, set up a program to test these various possibilities. I shall use my allotment of seed from the Primrose Society exchange solely for species and hybrids of this section. I don't anticipate difficulty in germinating the seed or growing on the seedlings. Then I shall try to set up some experiments. First, some specimens of each I'll pot up in roomy enough pots to give them a fair shake. These I'll carry over the winter either in the deep frame or alpine house to test for hardiness. (Oh, but they have all been hardy the first year. It's the second year. O.K. Carve on the same experiment the second year.) Shall I let them go to seed? Shall I let some go to seed, others not?

Second, I shall prepare a situation in one of the sites already used where candelabras have done well for a year. I'll sink mouse proof enclosures for a variety of sorts and will cover the plots with mouse-proof wire. Some I'll decapitate after flowering and before seeding. Others I'll let drop their seed into the mouseproof playpen.

These two procedures should answer questions 1, 2, and 3. The second experiment could answer question 4, since mouse proofing will not exclude insects.

If the spirit does not flag come spring when all the other things in the garden demand my love and attention, I'll try to carry out this program. Records day by day will not be kept and since this is at least a two year project, reports will be delayed, if they ever appear. I'm not one to keep notes or follow through on quasi-scientific experiments. I love plants. I dote on them. I dote on primulas and I wish I could find a way to make the candelabras perpetuate themselves but I don't propose to become a "bedding-out" gardener.

I should be pleased to hear from anyone who has an answer to my questions. If someone else has established some sound information along these lines, I might save myself labor and heartaches or discover the one secret that will permit me to have my beds of candelabras without "bedding-out."

How many in the APS classroom can raise their hands when I ask the question: "How many of you have the candelabra primroses giving a good show in the same site year after year without replanting?" Speak up, I can't hear you.

**BOARD MEETING**

A Board Meeting of the American Primrose Society was held, October 16, 1971 at Longview, Washington.

Meeting was called to order at 1:30 p.m. by President, Mrs. Olaf Nelson.

Minutes of last board meeting were absent.

Correspondence read. — Letter from Anita Alexander, resigning as a Regional editor, was read. Motion we accept was passed.

A letter from Mr. Keith Elcombe of Edmonton accepting Seed Exchange Chairmanship. Emma Hale was instructed to put notice in Quarterly. Elmer Baldwin to be advisor to Seed Exchange Chairman.

A letter from Tacoma Primrose Society asking for dates, April 8 and 9, 1972, for National Show. Fayme Haverty moved we accept. Motion passed.

Reports of prices for printing were read, with the Grange Printing Company giving the best price. Al Rapp made motion we accept their price and continue to deal with them. Motion passed. Secretary was instructed to write to them.

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R. H. D. Orr, C.A., Subscription Secretary

70 High Street, Haddington, East Lothian, Scotland
The above maps were omitted in the article "Four Cortusas in Three States" by Ing. Valdimir Vasak CSC, published in the Fall 1971 Quarterly, owing to a lack of space. Please refer back to your Fall 1971 Quarterly, Page 101.

Fig. 1. Localities where the author collected Cortusa altaica (A), C. matthiolii (M), C. pekinensis (P), and C. sibirica (S). (Del. H. Vackova).

Fig. 2. Approximate distribution areas of Cortusa matthiolii (M), C. altaica (A), C. sibirica (S), and C. pekinensis (P) in Eurasia. (Del. H. Vackova).

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