In this issue

President’s Message

A warm welcome to members who have recently joined the American Primrose Society. We hope your membership proves interesting and productive. If you have any special needs, or are interested in exploring a particular topic or in having the society set off in new directions, let us know.

I had the pleasure of visiting many of our members in Juneau and on Kodiak Island, Alaska, in May. You should see the outstanding primula in their gardens! And you’ll be pleased to know that groups are thriving enthusiastically throughout the state.

Meanwhile, in the Seattle area, the succession of spring shows by the various chapters has taxed everyone’s energy and diluted the entries to the point where they now plan to stage a combined show. The chapters will take turns hosting. Sounds like a very practical solution that can only strengthen the impact of our glorious spring shows.

As part of my desire for us to be more informed and involved in growing species primula, a new APS trophy is being donated by this president. It will be awarded annually to the grower who submits the most species entries in our national show. A look at our seed exchange list shows there can really be no excuse for not participating. Where else is such a variety of primula species seed available the world over from a single source? Let’s make good use of it!

On that very topic, this season’s seed exchange is now closed. Again, our grateful thanks to APS seed exchange coordinator Marie Skonberg and her efficient, hard-working volunteers in the Alaskan chapter for their fabulous efforts in managing this most vital activity. As the society prefers to exchange only fresh seed, we do not stockpile old seed from year to year. So, please, please collect seed now for our 1994 seed exchange.

John Kerridge
President

Send seed to the Seed Exchange by October 1, 1994

American Primrose Society - Summer 1994 3
Herb Dickson: Most Valuable Member
by Cy Happy

There was a new name among the winners at the 1954 Tacoma primrose show. Hebert H. Dickson of McNeil Island, Washington won with the Best Polyanthus in Show.

We knew him as a 40-ish, red-haired single man who worked at the federal penitentiary and seemed serious about primroses.

Soon Herb was living in Tukwila, south of Seattle, and trading rides to meetings with Karl and Dorothy Stredicke. Karl died suddenly in 1958. Herb and Dorothy were married in October 1959.

They lived in an old house on Herb’s property, raising many primulas in the rich valley soil. Herb had a nice collection of Primula sieboldii, all nicely labeled, partially shaded by old fruit trees. He was rototilling one day, forgot that it was the bed of P. sieboldii and thoroughly tilled the patch. The next spring he had thousands of plants — but all unlabeled!

In 1954-55, when Herb was still at McNeil Island, Tacoma agreed to put on the 1955 national show for the American Primrose Society. I was president of the Tacoma society and needed someone to do advance publicity. Herb volunteered and we soon found he had sent notices to every weekly and daily paper in the Northwest, every nationwide gardening magazine, radio and television station, garden club — everywhere!

Our 1955 APS national show was held in the old streetcar barn in downtown Tacoma. It was a few hundred feet from the bus depot and had a large parking lot.

The show plants filled the ample interior. It was a big show and due to open at 1 p.m. The judging was bogged down and they were not finished by the scheduled one o’clock start. But we had to open: the public — a huge crowd had gathered — was threatening to break down the doors. Show attendance was established at 10,000. Herb is thorough, to say the least.

By 1969, Herb and Dorothy had moved to acreage just south of Chehalis, Washington, where they had room for primulas, rock plants, trees, shrubs, fruit trees, dahlias, day lilies and more and more plants.

The show auricula seedlings have produced some excellent plants — as good as English named varieties.

Herb has earned the title of Most Valuable Member of the American Primrose Society. The symposium “Primula Worldwide,” held in Oregon in 1992, was his idea. He has served as president of APS many times, but all of that is just frosting.

He is a superb grower and hybridizer. He brought garden auriculas in the Pacific Northwest out of the dark ages. When he started his breeding program, garden auricula flowers were nodding, dull-colored, cupped — at best, quaint. He has given us bright colors on strong stems that display themselves well in the garden.

His show auricula seedlings have produced some excellent plants — as good as English named varieties.

continued on page 22
The American Primrose Society's 1994 national show, co-sponsored by the Oregon Primrose Society and the Valley Hi Chapter, was dedicated to the memory of Etha Tate, a long-time society member who died suddenly in March, 1994. Etha would have been pleased with the number of entries, particularly in the auricula and garden primula divisions.

Herb Dickson provided many of the spectacular displays of auriculas. His plant of 'Mary Zach', a bright yellow self, won trophies for the Best Named Show Auricula and the Best Self Show Auricula. The latter award, ironically, is named the "Mary Zach Trophy." A bright yellow garden auricula won the best in its group and 'Argus', a blue-purple alpine, was the Best Alpine Auricula. Both plants were grown by Herb Dickson. His yellow self show auricula was named Best Seedling Show Auricula.

Rosetta Jones' brown double auricula was awarded Best Double Auricula and Best Seedling. The fully double flowers had an amazing number of petals.

John Kerridge exhibited his superb gold-laced polyanthus, winning the Best Gold-laced Polyanthus and Best Gold-laced Seedling awards.

In the section Primula divisions, (formerly Vernales) a yellow 'Cowichan' from Barnhaven seed won Best Polyanthus. Another Barnhaven strain, 'Osiered Amber', a pale yellow acaulis with reddish stems, was awarded the Best Acaulis trophy. The Best Double Vernales went to 'Dawn Ansel', a white double Jack-in-the-Green. 'Mary's Gold', a small, very floriferous yellow-gold Juliana hybrid, exhibited by Jay and Ann Lunn, captured awards for the Best Juliae Hybrid and the Best Plant in the Show. This plant was named for Mary Keefe of Seattle.

The Best Species trophy went to Thelma Genheimer for a magnificent pot of Primula sieboldii. The pale lavender, frilled petals contrasted with a darker lavender center. The plant was 'Border Number A-9' of the Japanese plants from the 1992 "Primula Worldwide" Symposium. Thelma also showed the Best Companion Plant, a large pot of perfect Trillium luteum.

Yellow was certainly the predominant color on the trophy table. The plants coordinated beautifully with the many primula motif trophies graciously donated by Irene Buckles, a past APS president. The sponsoring chapters wish to thank Irene and all the members who exhibited and worked so hard to make this a very successful show.

Report by Ann Lunn

The trophy table at the 1994 national show in Oregon, April 9-10.
Tacoma Primrose Show
Tacoma Chapter, Lakewood Mall, Tacoma, April 1994

The Tacoma Chapter had an outstanding show this year from the standpoint of the number of entries, high quality of sales plants and the volume of sales.

The chapter bench 221 primroses, a surprising number. Our spring had been so warm that a great many would-be entries had reached their peak well before show time.

The trophy table was a hit remote from the center of activity because of mall regulations. However the best in class plants were outstanding and both growers and mall visitors were pleased with what they saw.

The special awards were in the primrose motif again this year: porcelain cups and saucers, coffee mugs, plates and note cards among them. In addition, growers received either Shultz-Instant fertilizer in a colorful new package, or other fertilizer.

We used the same configuration of show tables that has proven successful and eye-catching over the past years: oblong and round tables in groups of three. This year the mall has permanently skirted the tables in a washable bright navy fabric. The color proved compatible with the brilliant primrose hues. And, of course, the white walls and high skylighted ceilings are perfect for a flower show.

We set up our sales tables in the rotunda at the center of the mall. Ten tables were full of magnificent sales plants. Sales were brisk on Saturday — the clerks barely had time to catch their breath — and cash receipts proved it. While sales slowed Sunday, they remained profitable.

The courtesy floor displays are always popular and outstanding. The Pacific Rhododendron Society and Rocky Ridge Nursery pooled their plants and talents to create a garden of massed rhododendrons of all colors, accented with primroses. Mt. Tahoma Nursery exhibited a fine collection of various shaped troughs with mixed plantings.

A People’s Choice award was an innovation this year. Mall visitor had the opportunity to vote for the plant in the show that they liked best. The owner of the plant receiving the most votes received at $25 gift certificate from the mall management.

Report by Louise and Flip Fenili.

AWARDS
Best Acaulis:
Ernest Winter Trophy
Thea Oakley: ‘Miss Indigo’, blue with silver wire edge

Best Polyanthus:
Washington Hardware Trophy
Dan Pederson: bronze, fragrant polyanthus

Best Acaulis-Polyanthus:
Peter Atkinson: ‘Pearl Fountains’ x ‘Exodus’, lavender with pale yellow eye

Best Julie Hybrid
Cy Happy: stemmed pale cream, dark eye

Best Hose-in-Rose
Cy Happy: ‘Emily’, yellow

Best Double Vernales
Thea Oakley: ‘Miss Indigo’, blue with silver wire edge

Best Jack-in-the-Green
Floyd Keller Trophy
Thea Oakley: “Dawn Ansel” double white

Best in Hybridizing
Rick Lupp, Mt. Tahoma Nursery: P. villosa x P. marginata, violet shading to dark purple

Best Garden Auricula
Herb Dickson, Chehalis Rare Plant Nursery: creamy yellow with lilac flush

Best Multiflora Garden Auricula
Herb Dickson, Chehalis Rare Plant Nursery: daffodil yellow with white eye

Best Double Auricula
Herb Dickson, Chehalis Rare Plant Nursery: lemon yellow with greenish tinge

Best Border Alpine
Aaron Linxweiler: ‘Argus’

Best European Species
Peter Atkinson: P. marginata x P. auricula, lavender-blue

Best Asian Species
Thea Oakley: P. modesta alba

Best Named Show Auricula
Herb Dickson, Chehalis Rare Plant Nursery: ‘Mary Zack’ yellow self

Best Self Show Auricula
Rosa Peterson Trophy
Herb Dickson, Chehalis Rare Plant Nursery: ‘American Beauty’, red

Best Alpine Auricula Seedling
Dan Pederson: purple

Best Gold-Laced Seedling
Thea Oakley: Dark ground, silver lacing

Best Rarity
Rick Lupp, Mt. Tahoma Nursery: P. daenosia, purplish-red

Best Growers’ Exhibit (6 in 1)
Leslie Phillips: Jelitto ‘Wanda Hybrids’, dark leaves and brilliant flowers of red, yellow and blue

Best Growers’ Exhibit (Floor)
Pacific Rhododendron Society, Rocky Ridge Nursery, Mt. Tahoma Nursery

Best Primulasceae
Rick Lupp, Mt. Tahoma Nursery: Douglasia montana

Best Decorative (Sec. A)
Jewel Doering: six orange blossoms with red edge

Best Decorative (Sec. B)
Thea Oakley: three varieties of P. x ‘Juliana’ and P. farinosa

Best Companion Plant
Edith Dusek, Bijou Alpines and Water Gardens: Lewisia cotyledon, pink

Best Plant in Show: Silver Tray
Cy Happy: stemmed pale cream, dark eye

Sweepstakes
Ryan Trophy: Thea Oakley

People’s Choice
Flip Fenili: P. denticulata, white

SHOW COMMITTEE
Shirley and Gordon Lymburn, Louise and Flip Fenili

A colorful display of double primroses at the 1994 Tacoma show, April 9-10.
Growers from the Washington State Chapter came up with some excellent primula, despite the fickle weather and the season's last show.

The largest display was an outstanding table of double acaulis. Visitors to the show wanted to know where they could obtain those gorgeous plants. There was a kaleidoscope of all the colors of the rainbow from glistening snowball white, palest primrose, brilliant sunny yellow, demure lavender through old-fashioned soft ambers and apricots to the riches of rubies, maroons, deep rose, indigo, plum purples — all standing proudly on strong stems!

Still in the section Primula, Best Polyanthus went to Peter Atkinson for his latest 'Garryard'-polyanthus cross. This year's winner — his most recent innovation — had an unusual radiant sheen, texture and hue: blossoms of a luminous pearly-mauve on strong dark stems set off against the background of the distinctive dusky 'Garryard' foliage. Peter's new selections are always worth attention and it's a delight to see what this year's hybrids produce. We hope Peter's inspired hybridization program continues.

The Grace Dowling Trophy for Best Alpine Auricula went to Dan Pederson for an exceptionally robust 'Argus'. Thea Oakley won Best Grower's exhibit with a large pot simply crammed full of Primula acaulis 'Dawn Ansel', the unique double white Jack-in-the-Green.

Rosetta Jones outdid herself this year with double acaulis, winning both Best Double Auricula with 'Son of Brownie' and Best Double Seedling Auricula with a double whose buds of fluorescent chartreuse open to a lemony-lime sherbet color. It was difficult to pick the best one of her lovely array of doubles.

This year's oddity was a truly freakish plant. Theresa Richardson found it among a group of her plants she was gathering into a flat to take to the sale table. A plant of Primula elatior had not only the normal blossoms, but a Jack-in-the-Green blossom, a Jack ruff with no flower and another stem with a complete plantlet at the top — sometimes called 'Jack-a-napes on Horseback' — all on the same plant!
Alpine Garden Club of B.C. Spring Show
VanDusen Gardens, Vancouver, B.C., April 1994

Primula formed almost half the number of blooming plants in the spring show of the Alpine Garden Club of B.C., held April 16 and 17, 1994 at Vancouver's VanDusen Gardens. And, no wonder! It was right in the middle of primula season!

Polyanthus and 'Cowichan' forms were displayed, the latter becoming more popular. Also well represented were doubles of Primula vulgaris, some new (to us) varieties such as 'Miss Indigo' and 'Ken Dearman'. These, and other named doubles, are keenly sought after.

Mid-April is early for auriculas in British Columbia, but sturdy handsome rose-purple 'Argus' from Ellen Wilson took a first. Double 'Susannah', a pastel yellow, seems to come early, and 'Camelot', a beautiful deep purple was also on display.

Garden auriculas from Thea Foster's Fambridge strains always make a colorful display. The lines are distinct and most pleasing, especially the pale yellows and blues.

The date was too early for P. sieboldii, but some other species were well represented. Bob Bunn took the trophy for Best Primula with P. rusbyi. The rose-purple flowers, standing elegantly among buff-toned rock chips, were set off admirably. A neat P. juliae, the progeny of 'Wanda Hybrids', some of the progeny, also claimed firsts.

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Garden auriculas from Thea Foster's Fambridge strains always make a colorful display. The lines are distinct and most pleasing, especially the pale yellows and blues.

One of Thea Foster's sturdy Fambridge strain garden auriculas.

Vancouver Island Rock and Alpine Garden Society Show
Victoria, B.C., April 1994

The annual show of the Vancouver Island Rock and Alpine Garden Society was held on April 8 and 9, 1994 at St. Mary's Church Hall in Victoria, B.C.

There were 13 classes in the primula section and approximately 60 entries in total, submitted by 10 exhibitors.

Two trophies were awarded in the Primula section: the Watson trophy for the best primula exhibit was won by Rex Murfitt for a fine specimen of P. reidii. Rex was also awarded the Biggerstaff Wilson trophy for this exhibit as being the best plant in the show suitable for a rock garden. The Barton trophy for the best polyanthus primrose was won by Keith and Susanne Muir for an exquisite 'Venetian Cowichan' polyanthus.

There were some fine entries in the Primula section. In the three-pan subsection, the winner was Maedythe Martin, who submitted three Hose-in-Hose seedlings: bright yellow, maroon and magenta. In the single-pan subsection, the winner was Tony James, with P. elatior, grown from APS seed from Devon, England. There were several good exhibits of double acaulis, especially a three-pan entry of 'Dawn Ansel', 'Lillian Harvey', and 'Sunshine Susie'.

In the show auricula section, Maedythe Martin took the honors with a fine single-pan entry of 'Mary of Doonhill', a green-edged auricula, and a three-pan entry of 'Commeal', 'Mary of Doonhill', and 'Gwen Gauthress'. For the alpine exhibition auricula section, the winner was Paul Chyz with 'Forestier'. Among the garden auriculas, Tony James received a first for a plant with violet-blue flowers with a center of clear white paste of Chehalis Rare Plant Nursery strain.

Keith and Susanne Muir submitted several nice pastel-colored P. sieboldii, and a number of well-grown plants of P. scotica, P. farinosa, P. modesta, and P. laurentiana for which they received awards. In the Saxatile auricula class there was a three-pan exhibit of P. marginata 'Agee' and one of P. belluensis. There were not many laced polyanthuses shown this year, and only one Juliana hybrid, a plant of 'Julie Jack'.

Report by Dennis Oakley

One of Thea Foster's sturdy Fambridge strain garden auriculas.

Rex Murfitt staged a double prize-winning plant of P. reidii in Victoria.

Report by Tony James
British Columbia Primrose Group Show

Southlands Nursery, Vancouver, B.C., April 1994

The B.C. Primula Group held its second successful show and sale at Thomas Hobbs’ Southlands Nursery in Vancouver, British Columbia on April 23 and 24, 1994.

The display area was again set up in a marquee tent with the sales area on tables next to it in the open. This arrangement allowed much more room and the exhibits did not have to be as crowded together as previously.

Among the many fine plants was a beautiful display from the University of British Columbia Botanical Gardens arranged by Bodil Leamy. This included rarities such as *Primula tangutica* with its strange orange flowers and twisted thread-like petals. The color of this plant, *P. tangutica var. flavescens*, was darker than the norm, almost mahogany. Another exotic species shown, *P. wollastonii*, with deep purple bell-shaped flowers, was grown from wild seed collected in China.

Among the other exhibits which attracted a lot of attention was a lovely navy blue double primrose, ‘Miss Indigo’. Many hopeful enquiries were made if similar plants were for sale. Sadly the answer was no.

The newly released *P. marginata* ‘Herb Dickson’, which has a remarkably deep blue-violet flower with a heavily mealed white eye, was also on display. It is a larger flowered plant than its parent ‘Agee’. This handsome marginata hybrid is a tribute to Herb Dickson, its raiser and breeder. April Boettger, who brought it, says that it increases reliably and quickly.

The sales area was crowded with buyers right from the word “go” when the nursery gates opened to the public just before 9 a.m. A rush was made for the many fine auriculas and other plants brought up from Washington by April Boettger. These colorful plants contributed greatly to the sales total of just over $1,900. Twenty percent of sales went to the group’s funds. Sales were brisk on the Saturday under hot sunny skies but tapered off on Sunday when the weather turned cold and rainy until about 3 p.m. Packets of seeds were sold and a few new members signed up.

We were delighted to welcome and appreciated the support of several APS American visitors. Al Rapp and his wife, Don and Mary Keefe, Thelma Genheimer came all the way from

continued on page 22
DOUGLASIA: THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST'S ANDROSACES

The Douglasia are very lovely and rather little known and grown members of the family Primulaceae which grow principally at high elevations in the Pacific Northwestern regions of North America.

American botanists generally keep these plants in the genus Douglasia while many other botanists place them in with the Androsace.

Some, such as Douglasia laevigata v. laevigata and v. ciliolata can be grown in the open scree garden in a maritime climate. However, as a group, they are all best grown in the alpine house.

Douglasia laevigata is the most widely-grown member of the genus because of its ease of cultivation and propagation as well as its very attractive foliage and showy pink blooms. D. laevigata v. laevigata is a compact plant with entire, smooth foliage of dark green, which normally forms very tight, prostrate mats with large, deep pink flowers held on short stems in umbels of as many as 10 blooms.

I also grow a cultivar "Packwood" which builds up into almost spherical domes. D. l. var. ciliolata forms a less dense mat of larger foliage which often suffers winter dieback and is not as good a plant in cultivation as v. laevigata.

I grow both plants in a lean mix with just enough humus that they do not ever dry out and in an exposure that is the equivalent of morning sun.

In nature, D. laevigata v. laevigata is found on east-facing cliffs, while v. ciliolata is usually found on east-facing scree.

Both plants root with ease from cuttings taken after blooming and both produce seed which germinates rather freely when exposed to stratification. These plants can generally be relied upon to produce a long spring bloom.

Just over the east crest of the Cascade Mountains from where D. laevigata grows we find Douglasia nivalis and D. n. var. dentata. The range of this species extends on into the province of Alberta, Canada.

There are several distinct forms of this plant in Washington state. One is D. nivalis variety dentata, which forms small, lax mats of toothed foliage with the richest, darkest color of any member of the species. The most common form of D. nivalis has entire foliage and tends to form rather large mats with many blooms of lighter color than the above. There is a form which grows on serpentine soils that makes tight little cushions with many stemless blooms. I treat them all the same in cultivation in the alpine house giving the plants a very lean mix with more sun than D. laevigata and good air circulation.

This species has always behaved as a monocarp for me, although the plants set abundant seed. Cuttings of non-blooming material will root freely when taken at bloom time. I have had plants of D. nivalis grown in a large, covered trough reach 12" by 15" before blooming. The...
PRIMULA HEUCHERIFOLIA
Will the real Primula heucherifolia please stand up? For several years, I have ordered seed for this species from various society seed exchanges and catalog sources. Invariably, the resulting plants turned out to be P. polyneura, a nice species but not the desired one.

The true P. heucherifolia blooms on 6 to 12 inch thin, hairy stems. The flowers, usually three to ten, are mauve pink to a rich deep purple. Primula heucherifolia is unique in the Cortusoides section in having nodding, bell-shaped flowers in a one-sided scape.

The general shape of the leaf is round and deeply heart-shaped at the base. The blade is cut into seven to ten rounded lobes. Leaves are dark green with a thin covering of hairs above, lighter green below with thick hairs on the veins.

According to Florence Bellis, P. heucherifolia blooms the first of April in the Pacific Northwest and becomes dormant during the winter. Aside from disliking winter wet, it grows easily. Like other members of this section, it multiplies by creeping stolons. It is hardy, divides readily and produces abundant seed. Its only drawback appears to be unavailability!

Photographs of the true species appear in the APS Pictorial Dictionary and John Richards’ book, Primula. If any of you have the real P. heucherifolia in your garden, please send seed to the APS seed exchange. It should become more available to primula enthusiasts. I will continue to order seed for P. heucherifolia, but I have enough P. polyneura, thank you!

Report by Ann Lunn

Sources:


This Plant Portrait is submitted by the Oregon Primrose Society in lieu of a chapter activity report. Meeting times for the chapter are listed with News from the Chapters.

Primula heucherifolia
Drawing by J. Lunn
Sakurasoh Update

Two reports have been received this spring, April, 1994, on Sakurasoh plants obtained at the 1992 symposium “Primula Worldwide.” Did you also get a plant at the symposium? Has your plant bloomed this spring?

I am especially interested in descriptions of some of the named varieties that were available: Gyokkoh-bai, Hagi no awakaze, Hana taisato, Kokoro-uki, Mejiroda, Nisato, Setsugenke, Shun-ryu, Takane no yuki, Tohcharumen, Toh-en Shinkiroh, Toyokata-gumo, Yaki no Hada.

Were any of these the one you picked out? Do you still have it? Send a description for the Sakurasoh Inventory to the editor.

Enclosed is a photo of my Sakurasoh ‘Ukima’ obtained at the “Primula Worldwide” symposium in April, 1992. The photo was taken on April 3, 1994. The plant was just coming into bloom.

The peduncle was about seven inches long and the leaf about four inches. There are six to eight flowers on each stem.

The color was a little darker magenta than in the photo. I’m not an expert at this, but the flower looks like a “thrum.”

James Hershner
Eugene, Oregon

This variety is, I believe, one of the “wild forms” — this one from the district of Ukimti. It does bear a strong resemblance in flower shape and color to the wild primroses in the photographs by Gishu Aoki taken from another area, the Tajimagahara wild primrose field. Editor.

Enclosed are two photos of my border Sakurasoh no. A-9. It would be interesting to see if Fred Knapp’s A-9 was the same as mine.

The leaves on the plant are shiny when new, and the peduncle (leaf-stem) is quite long and hairy. The flowers are a very cut and twisted snowflake shape with a distinct darker shading towards the center. The buds are a deeper shade of pink than the flower when it opens.

Thelma Genheimer,
Beaverton, Oregon

Robert Brotherson,
Revere, Pennsylvania,
sent in this photo of his border Sakurasoh no. 2-37b last summer. The overall effect, he reported in his description (in the Fall 1993 issue of Primroses, p.11) is one of “a large upholstery tack.” He is interested in trading offsets.

The photo of Robert Brotherson's border Sakurasoh no. 2-37b.
In Memorium – Elizabeth van Sickle
Elizabeth van Sickle was a life member of the American Primrose Society

Elizabeth was a very good primrose friend of mine. I first met her probably in the early 1970s when I inserted an ad in the Portland Oregon paper asking for people interested in belonging to a local primrose group to call me.

Elizabeth was the first one to answer my ad. I had several other responses, and we met at my home and formed a little informal group, just getting together at one another’s homes to discuss the growing of primroses.

Elizabeth and I would always plan some sort of program about primroses, but the group discussed other flowers too.

She was the one person who would really discuss primroses with me, and we would talk on the phone for an hour or more about our favorite flower, new books coming out, new species we had tried, and so on.

While her husband was living her garden was lovely, but after he passed away and her health failed, she could no longer keep up with it. I hope her daughter will find some of the lovely treasures in her yard and will be able to save them.

Elizabeth served as recording secretary and as a board member for the American Primrose Society. She and I attended judging classes at the Dickinson’s and received our judging cards. I am not sure if she ever finished the training or not. Her last function was to serve as the chairperson of the society’s Round Robin letters. I believe she enjoyed this most of all because she could do it from her home.

She entered a nursing home in Sequim, Washington, early this past spring and passed away March 28, 1994.

She was a good friend — may she rest in peace. I will miss her.

Anita Stevens,
Port Angeles, Washington

Herb Dickson: Most Valuable Member
continued from page 5

I shall miss Herb if he sells and moves to Missouri. He has been at the center of primula growing here for many years and we have been friends for over 40 years — 40 great years!

Herb Dickson has been threatening to sell up and move to Missouri to be closer to his daughters. But he is still growing primroses in Chehalis, and the American Primrose Society, while it wishes Herb a happy and well-deserved retirement, hopes he will still go on growing his wonderful primroses and auriculas in Chehalis for a little while longer.

Dorothy Springer from Tacoma visited the display. Thea and Harold Oakley from Redmond, Washington, pitched in and worked as hard as any of our members. Thanks, Thea.

As a result of our efforts more people in the Greater Vancouver area are becoming aware of the great diversity of Primula species and have the opportunity to purchase many plants that would not otherwise be available.

Report by Dennis Oakley

British Columbia Primrose Group Show
continued from page 14

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Report by Dennis Oakley

Turn Left at Ballinluig

APS member Ian Scott lives in Newport-on-Tay, Fife, Scotland and sends this account for APS readers of a visit to a Scottish garden full of species primula. Since there is little likelihood of most of us visiting this garden in person, the report is invaluable.

You may remember Ian Scott’s report from the last issue listing primula seed collected on a number of expeditions to Asia. Some plants grown from wild seed are described in this article, and the number noted relates to the expedition and collection number.

Dunkeld is called the Gateway to the Scottish Highlands. For centuries it was a major crossing point on the river Tay, the boundary between the wild, lawless highlands and the peaceful lowlands.

Today, it is a tourist trap with its ruined cathedral (housing the tomb of Alexander Stewart, the Wolf of Badenoch), quaint whitewashed market square (under the care of the National Trust for Scotland), and the quiet flowing river. It is the tourists’ lasting memory of an old Highland village surrounded by forest and heather-clad purple crags.

But, then we are not tourists, you and I. We have a mission — a journey into the glens to visit a place full of primulas — John Mattingley’s garden.

ON TO CLUNY HOUSE

It’s only a few miles north to Ballinluig, but as we turn left and follow the course of the Tay into the narrowing glen, the heart begins to beat faster. Crossing the white water rapids by the Grandtully bridge, the narrow road winds along the north side of the river through the woods and upland grazing until, at last, a sign directs us uphill to Cluny House, home of the National Collection of Asiatic Primulas in Scotland.

Primula rotundifolia (now P. cardiophylla) “the rounded leaves ending with a heart-shaped base give it away.”

Inside the gate you could well be disappointed. It looks like just another garden with a lawn in front of an imposing house. On my first visit I suppose I had expected something like the Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh, but Cluny is not like that. At Cluny you won’t find neat beds of Primula x inverewe in regimented rows.

Worse than that, you’ll be lucky to find a single primula labeled! Visitors are free to wander around the grounds most days of the year, yet it
In a glade he has stock of Primula sonchifolia to raise seed. The leaves of the plants are over two feet in length, like young cabbages! All they need is a moist atmosphere and a bit of feeding, he’ll tell you. Out in the garden, they line the banks of the dappled streams and even colonize logs that have fallen across the burns. You can see the association clearly; the further the plants are from the moisture-rich atmosphere created by the trickling water, the poorer is the growth.

In another part of the garden the boggy ground is erupting with the yellows and purples of self-sown swarms of Primula calderiana, P. stumosa, P. tanneri, P. griffithii and their various hybrids. Few of these species can be acquired as the genuine pure stock. One exception is P. griffithii which is offered on occasion by Jim Jermyn at Edrom. These plants are raised from offsets of the original introduction (Sherriff 19610) which were flown home from Ha La as dormant buds in 1949.

**BLENDED SETTINGS**

At Cluny the plants blend into the background — they look natural. Over on that tree stump is a colony of P. rapicola (Cox 5078, which has mistakenly been sold as P. florida). You don’t see it unless it’s flowering or you are very observant, but it’s been there for three years already and likes its home.

John experiments. He likes to try plants in, different, likely places and see how they get on. Eventually, a suitable habitat is found for that new addition to the collection. Yes, a number of plants slowly decline, but if you start with a couple of hundred P. rapicola seedlings, it helps.

Underneath that canopy of rhododendron leaves in a slightly drier soil is a clump of P. szechuanica (Cox 5077). This is a curious member of the section Crystallolophinis (replaced from section Nivales of Smith and Fletcher times) which has the yellow petals of its flowers completely reflexed backwards so that they touch the tube. Not an outstanding plant, more a collector’s item.

Then, just in front, are a group of P. pinnatifida, from the Muscareiod section, with their gentle purple flowers and red-tinged calyx cap. On a previous visit, I saw this rare plant for the first time; it having been recently re-introduced from the Yulong Shan by Ron McBeath in 1990 (CLD 1092). John was using it as slug bait to protect his rarer plants! Certainly this must be the slug’s equivalent of caviar, as I have seen plants stripped down to the petioles by slugs.

John was, as usual, generous and from his original plants I now have a colony of 50 seedlings, including one which is a most promising white form.

Another white beauty is P. edgeworthii alba, its flower of delicately cut petals hanging from a crevice in a stone dike. Growing like a lewisia, it has full sun, cool roots and ample moisture from the bank behind the retaining dike, and so it flourishes.

Another shelter lover is a fine example of P. forrestii growing with no more protection than an over-hanging rock. It is a mass of orange-gold flowers on a background of bright green, rough leaves.

Then further along is a pink flowered species. At this distance, it is hard to identify, but as we get closer, the rounded leaves ending with a heart-shaped base give it away as P. rotundifolia. When the buds of this plant just start to break they are an intense purple, but as they open, they change to a deep, rich pink.

Once again, no protection except the natural shelter of an over-hanging rock — another plant in the right place for it.

**SELF-SEEDING SUCCESSES**

Now we come across a bank of mixed candelabras. P. bulleyana, P. beesiana, P. chungensis, P. helodora, P. pulvulentia, P. japonica, P. anisodon, and many more besides. Once again self-seeding in profusion. John confesses that, from time to time, he has to scythe them back as they start to invade the paths. Success is when, like here, plants self-seed so readily that you can’t help but tread on them.

Some, however, are kept a closer eye on. John has been watching this plant, a P. serratifolia, waiting until the seed capsule is ready to harvest. A small plant of little vigor for its section, and not much seed, but it is the only one which has a bi-colored petal. This variety, collected from the Cang Shan (CLD 1365), is reputedly smaller-flowered than later collections by Peter Cox, but the petals are a clear yellow edged with cream. Perhaps if it was grown more like a Nivalid, it would be more common in cultivation.

And somehow we have found our way back to the main gate where there is a stall of plants for sale. There are lots that we have seen as well as many others we haven’t. Fancy some P. tangutica or a real P. glomerata? And somehow we missed finding P. stuartii, and P. prenantha with only a glance at the P. cashemiriana — it is really different from P. denticulata? And what about John’s greenhouse? I did want to see the seedlings of P. cowdoriana, P. maccropylla moorcroftiana and John’s “tricky dickies” (P. dickiana).

Ah well, that’s the beauty of Cluny. We can always come back for a longer visit, another day.
Board of Directors' Meeting

Held April 9, 1994 at the Beaverton Mall, Oregon

This is a summary of the board meeting minutes.

The treasurer passed out a current statement of finances. Jay Lunn has agreed to keep the membership list and work on this with treasurer Addaline Robinson.

Maediythe Martin, editor of *Primroses*, sent a letter of resignation, but agreed to stay on until the end of 1994, that is, for two more issues, with the assistance of a managing editor she has located in Victoria. She asked that he be paid an honorarium. The board agreed to this arrangement for the next two issues. The treasurer was asked to analyze the cost of the quarterly to budget for next year's issues.

The quarterly still needs the help of an advertising manager. (An advertising editor, Ellen Wilson of Sechelt, B.C., has now been found. Editor.)

Marie Skonberg reported on the seed exchange. She received 284 orders, the largest for 292 packages. There will be a profit of about $1,000. Marie sent a letter with every order asking how to improve the exchange, and will incorporate as many suggestions from the replies as she can into next year's seed exchange.

A supplementary seed list for the remaining seed will be sent out.

Rosetta Jones requested that Chapters do not use non-members for judges of APS shows. A list of qualified judges will be compiled. Judges for the national show will be approved by the board.

Don Keefe has taken on the coordination of the Round Robin letters. John Kerridge announced with regret the death of APS life member Elizabeth van Sickel.

The corresponding secretary continues to receive and answer letters as a result of the articles in *Harrowsmith and Horticulture*.

The Chapters reported that Eastside will not have a show or sale this year. It was proposed by June Skidmore that there be an single show next year in which all chapter would participate. The motion was passed.

The next meeting will be held with the summer picnic on July 9, 1994 at president John Kerridge's home in Vancouver, B.C., Canada.

Respectfully submitted,
Barbara Flynn,
Recording Secretary

Notes from the Editor

Information received at the Editor's desk

**PRIMULA FEDSCHENKOI**

So, who got the *Primula fedschenkoi* in the seed exchange this year? By the time my order went in, there were none left!

This is one of the primula from Asia Minor, another climatic area like the part of the Pacific Northwest where I live that has a summer drought. This species should adapt very well to our dry summers. Will whoever got the seed let me know if it came up? Hope there is more for another year. Thanks to Horst Georgii of Germany for collecting the seed and supplying it to the seed exchange.

Another species that might do well in dry summers, *Primula kaufmanniana*, is mentioned in the Scottish Rock Garden Society *Journal*, Vol. XXII, Pt.4, no. 89, p. 401. It is from Central Asia and has a tendency to develop a tuberous root. Has anyone grown this, or can we find seed of it?

**NURSERY CATALOGS**

A new nursery is in business this spring, featuring primrose and auricula stock from Herb Dickson. April Boettger has worked for Herb for the past few years and not only inherited his love of auriculas and primula, but also has some of the strains he developed for sale.

The catalog is informal and informative — lots of notes on how to grow plants successfully. The inclusions are selective this year, but expect more to follow. But do write for a copy — where else can you find a new marginata raised by and now named after Herb Dickson? For a copy write to: A Plurah of Primula, April E. Boettger, 244 Westside Highway, Vader, WA. U.S.A. 98593

**MORE ON TROUGHS**

At the very same time that we featured an article on troughs, the American Rock Garden Bulletin, spring, 1994, was dedicated to the subject.

This issue is a great resource on the topic — why and how they are used, selected plants, construction and care (in an article by APS member Anita Kistler), and lots of wonderful photographs to give you ideas for arrangement and design. Borrow this issue from a friend, or read it at your library, but go and look at it!

Journal Report

**by Anna Lunn**

**Held April 9, 1994, Beaverion, Oregon**

The meeting was called to order by president John Kerridge. Sheryl Genheimer has made a moving tribute to Etha Tale and her many years of dedication to the American Primrose Society, She will be greatly missed.

John Kerridge presented the awards to winners in the national show.

Herb Dickson presented the Dorothy Dickson award for 1994 to Maediythe Martin for editing an outstanding bulletin which stands up to comparison with any other publication. A vote of appreciation was held.

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Barbara Flynn read the minutes of the last meeting.

Ann Lunn introduced Marie Skonberg, APS seed exchange coordinator, from Alaska.


TANTALIZING PHOTOGRAPHS

Journals this spring from the British Isles have included superb, colored photographs of rare and unusual primulas. The January 1994 issue of *The Journal of the Scottish Rock Garden Club* features pictures of *Primulas marginata*, and *reptans*. Margaret and Henry Taylor saw and photographed both species in the Rohtang La region of India.

The March 1994 *Quarterly Bulletin* of the Alpine Garden Society includes a photograph of *P. verticillata* flowering to a sheer rock face in the Asir Mountains of Saudia Arabia. It seems a strange place to find a primula.

Recent seed collecting expeditions have introduced into cultivation many unusual species for the primula enthusiast. An article in the same issue of the AGS *Quarterly* describes *P. barnardiana, P. pinnatifida, P. tullensis, P. primulina, P. gemmifera var. zambalensis, P. usiflora* and *P. palustris* (with accompanying photograph of the last — an amazing color of blue). The more commonly grown *P. duenensis* is illustrated; some of the flowers having attractively recurved petals.

Of particular interest to primula growers, an accompanying article by Norman Runham tells the reader everything he or she ever wanted to know about the biology, eating habits and control of slugs and snails.

continued on page 35
Primula rosea in the Rock Garden

by Thea Oakley

Last year in the spring I visited the Vancouver Rock and Alpine Society annual show in Victoria. They always have lots of seed for sale at 25 cents a package and I found Primula rosea among the primrose seed.

When I got home I planted them right away. They came up fast and were transplanted into trays with one inch divisions. They continued to grow until they were so big they needed to be planted out. Then the problems started.

The only place I had to plant them was in the rock garden. I was worried they would get too much sun, or it would be too dry. But there was no other place, so out they went in late April.

The Primula rosea plants made a great show this spring. They bloomed for a long time, for the place they are in gets morning sun and shade for the rest of the day. I’m not going to move them since they are doing just fine. There was even lots of seed from these plants which will go into the APS seed exchange this fall. Then other APS members can enjoy this lovely primula.

The Pictorial Dictionary

by Maedythe Martin, Coordinating Editor

An update of the American Primrose Society’s Pictorial Dictionary has been called for a number of times over the past two or three years. The board took the decision not to do a revision of the Pictorial Dictionary and members may wonder at the reasons for this. Unless you attended the board meetings or read the minutes closely, you may not even realize the decision had been made.

The Pictorial Dictionary is a period piece. It was first published in the Quarterly Bulletin in 1954 in installment under the direction of the editor, Mrs. James (Susan) Watson. The second edition, published in a separate cover, came out in the summer of 1967.

Many of the species names, based at that time primarily on Smith and Fletcher, now have been changed. Botanical exploration has given us new information on the species and the plants included in various sections, and even the sections themselves have been reorganized and renamed to reflect the new information. Section Vernales is now section Primula. (Refer to the list in Kris Fenderson’s book for more changes.)

But there were other reasons to leave the Pictorial Dictionary intact. The contributors were the stars of the Primula constellation of the 1950s and 1960s. They are no longer with us. But cultural information from “Barnhaven field notes” by Florence Bellis, or comments from Mrs. A.C.U. Berry, who left her gardens in Oregon to posterity, can still be found there and are irreplaceable.

In the same last few years some fine new monographs on Primula have appeared. Many of the species known and newly discovered are listed and described in Josef Halda’s 1992 The Genus Primula in Cultivation and in the Wild with charming and revealingly accurate drawings by Jaromila Halova.

Journal Report

continued from page 27

SPEAKING OF SLUGS

For an organic method of killing slugs and snails, the March, 1994, issue of Hortideas, a monthly newsletter describing the latest research, methods, plants, and other good gardening ideas — describes a spray of one part vinegar and one part water to control the mollusks.

Since a spray of more concentrated vinegar has been shown to harm some plants, it is best to test the spray on one of your plants before putting it to general use. Equal parts of agricultural lime and aluminum sulfate sprinkled around new seedlings will protect them. “Slugs only need to touch it and they begin to dry up.” Use a cheese shaker or some other container with large holes to sprinkle the mixture.
News from the Chapters

Primula Notes
by Don Keefe

MARY BAXTER AND HER PRIMULA
Mary, a warm, friendly person and a member of the American Primrose Society's Eastside Chapter in Washington state, decided to reduce the size of her primula garden this year. She invited Chapter members to visit her garden and take some of her mostly Barnhaven seed-grown primulas home with them. I have been fortunate to visit her garden three times during the past two years.

Mary has a homy, shady residence with tall trees, woodland paths and a nice creek that divides the acreage in half. The ground is covered with many native woodland plants. It is a pleasure to wander around her place near Bothell, on the outskirts of the Seattle metropolitan area.

It seems that many years ago Mary purchased some primula seed from Florence Bellis, which Mary stored in her refrigerator. Years later she planted the seed and the rate of germination was terrific. I was fortunate to visit her place recently when the primulas were in bloom. As I walked through her garden the blooms of hundreds of delightful Barnhaven polyanthus, 'Cowichan', 'Juliana' and anomalous primulas created a kaleidoscope of fragrance and colors. It seemed like a tour through heaven.

Mary told me about her visit to a Tacoma Chapter show about nine years ago. At the show Cy Happy showed her how to pollinate a primrose. Cy used pollen from his Primula juliae plant to pollinate Mary's amethyst 'Cowichan'. At least, I assume it was an amethyst 'Cowichan' since Dr. Benedict wrote, "This form of the species is larger in all parts, including flowers and scape. Although it sometimes develops capsules of normal size, no seed are produced. In friable soil it is a vigorous spreader and requires no special effort to maintain.”

Dr. Benedict gave him a start of the triploid Primula kisoana many months ago after I managed to obtain a piece of it. Evidently Dr. Ralph H. Benedict introduced the plant to primrose growers in the APS years ago. In response to my query in the Summer 1993 issue of Primroses, Gordon Emerson of Rock Creek, Ohio wrote, "This form of the species is larger in all parts, including flowers and scape. Although it sometimes develops capsules of normal size, no seed are produced. In friable soil it is a vigorous spreader and requires no special effort to maintain.”

Dr. Benedict gave him a start of the triploid plant in 1992.

Noting the many articles by Dr. Benedict published in back issues of the APS Quarterly,

continued on page 32
From the Mailbox

Letters from our readers

To the Editor:
April 18, 1994

I'd like to add some advice for those seeking information on micropropagation. Plants from Test Tubes, by Lydiane Kyte is the best practical guide. The Winter 1994 issue of Primroses mentioned this being listed by Batsford, an English book source (p. 20, "Notes from the Editor").

The publisher of Plants from Test Tubes is Timber Press in Portland, Oregon. It shouldn't be necessary to order from England.

Primula Notes
continued from page 31

and the many achievements for which he has been recognized, I feel that he deserves an article in Primroses. In the meantime here is some information I have gathered.

Dr. Benedict was a veterinarian, a graduate of Michigan State. For two of the 33 years he worked as a veterinarian, he worked at Sequim, Washington, on the west coast.

Both he and his wife, Dorothy, are now 80 years of age. Dr. Benedict was crippled with polio at the age of three and has had Parkinson's disease since age 75. He has problems communicating because of the disease and the medications he takes for it.

Dr. Benedict was awarded a life membership in APS and was given the Peter Klein Hybridizing Award by the society in April 1978. This award recognized his many years of hybridizing primulas, particularly with the objective of developing lines hardy in the Midwest.

Dr. Benedict has grown double forms of Primula japonica, many small double-flowered 'Juliana' varieties and a double form of P. sieboldii from Ralph Balcom seed.

Dr. Benedict has also successfully hybridized some rare and beautiful ferns. Then starting with 20 or so common hosta varieties, he began seriously working with this plant. He now has 40 registered hosta hybrids and a collection of 1,500 species and varieties. He has been offered up to $2,500 for the first hosta with red in the leaves. The American Hosta Society has recognized his many contributions to the world of hostas with numerous awards.

Seed Exchange Coordinator's Report

by Marie Skonberg

The seed orders were completed right on schedule. All orders were mailed out by March 31, 1994. For a while, I didn't think I would get them out on time but, with a bit of determination, we made it. This would not have been possible without all the wonderful people who helped: the donors; those that stuffed envelopes; those that ordered seed. Many thanks to all that assisted.

To help speed the process of getting members' orders out, I had some volunteers to pre-package seed. Many people liked the way the seed arrived. I used bubble-wrap, with the seed packets taped inside, to cushion the blows of the mail service.

With each seed order I enclosed a thank-you note containing this very important question: "How can we improve our seed exchange?"

I received many replies — from members in Canada, the United States and overseas. Your comments were very good ones and I was thrilled to get so many responses. Your letters showed so much devotion to our wonderful society. It's such a delightful experience for me to be a part of this. We all share our love of primula! Many of your letters have been answered and, if you will be a bit patient, I will answer them all very soon.

All your ideas and suggestions will be considered seriously when the next seedlist is put together.

I wish to share some of the ideas that were presented to me. Many reported fair to good germination. This is what I want to hear, as we need you to grow the primula seed with good results.

Some members would like their seed sent earlier; more seed per packet; more wild collected seed; cultural suggestions, including exposure, soil type, country of origin. For the rarer seed, information on annual rainfall and conditions in the local habitat was suggested.

Someone suggested a great idea: include an instruction sheet on how to pollinate and collect seed to send to the seed exchange. Someone else suggested enclosing an instruction sheet on growing from seed and getting the seedlings to survive.

Many wrote that you will probably send seed to the APS seed exchange this fall. I encourage you to do so, as we need your seed to make our seed exchange. Without your contribution, we would not have this wonderful opportunity. I have asked some of the growers to put together an instruction sheet on hand-pollinating, gathering seed, growing from seed, soil type, exposure and other climatic conditions for some of the rare seed that will be listed for next year's exchange.

I plan to have all next year's seed orders out on or before February 28, 1995. "The earlier one can plant their primula seed the better," is one suggestion from a member that I promise to take to heart.

Now is the time for all the growers and novices to be hand-pollinating their primula with hopes of having many great crosses to grow next year. Please try to do a few extra for our seed exchange. You will be giving to a multitude of gardeners who will appreciate your efforts.

This brings me to a final comment I received in one of the letters: "Have you ever thought that you are giving MORE than just primula seed?" Sharing and growing primula seed shares a little bit of your soul!
Letter to APS Seed Coordinator

April 7, 1994
Dear Marie:

In the Winter, 1994, issue of Primroses, which arrived today, you asked for feedback on the seed exchange.

Within a very few days of receipt, I planted those seeds in cell-packs and placed them in a cold frame. The attached data speaks for itself. I would not like responsibility for any more plants, even though I was sorely tempted to order some from the surplus seed list. Let’s see how I can do with these now.

In years past, I tried pots in the frame with poor luck. We have long, hot, humid summers in Raleigh, North Carolina, with dry spells and I lose nearly all my seedlings.

Fellow APS member, Sandra Ladendorf, has encouraged me to plant in the fall rather than the spring. And I have lost all plants purchased from the former Montrose Nursery (Nancy Goodwin, proprietor) that were planted in the spring.

Last fall I got a white P. denticulata at the rock garden plant sale grown by Sandra Ladendorf commented, “Oh, I have killed three of those plants.” That comment was actually very encouraging to me; if a gardener writer has troubles, shouldn’t a beginner have them, too?

Sincerely,
Maurice Farrier,
Raleigh, North Carolina

1994 SEEDLING PERFORMANCE REPORT
Submitted by APS member Maurice Farrier, Raleigh, North Carolina

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<td>59</td>
<td>P. polyneura</td>
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<td>63</td>
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I liked and appreciated getting the APS seeds in the cold season. The comment from someone this far south is “the earlier the better.”

As I pointed out to a fellow rock gardener, every once in a while one will see in the seed catalog the words “crop failure” stamped over a variety. Even the professionals lose some. At one rock garden meeting I attended, Sandra Ladendorf commented, “Oh, I have killed three

News from the Chapters
continued from page 30

Washington State Chapter
Meets the second Friday of each month except July and August at the United Good Neighbor Center at 305 S. 43rd St., Renton at 7:45 p.m.
April program: held in conjunction with setting up the show at the South Center Pavilion
May program: a review of the show and Rosetta Jones on pollinating primroses.

BRITISH COLUMBIA PRIMROSE GROUP
Meets every two months from January on the third Wednesday, at Southlands Nursery, 6550 Balaclava, Vancouver, B.C. ❖

APS Annual General Meeting
continued from page 26

The secretary received 118 ballots in the mail.

June Skidmore presented a program on her visit to England at primrose time, including a show near Birmingham.

Meeting adjourned at 9:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Barbara Flynn,
Recording Secretary ❖

American Primrose Society - Summer 1994
Beginner's Corner

The feature column for the novice primrose grower

I hope you will find answers to your questions on how to start seeds and grow primroses. I'm counting on your questions to form the basis of this column, and I'll find the more experienced growers to provide answers. So, send in all your questions to the editor and watch for a response here.

Glen Spurell from Toronto writes:

"I have lived with this garden for only two years. So it was just last week that I got around to testing my soil. Some plants have not been doing well so I thought something was odd. Well, my soil tested alkaline to very alkaline — from 8 up near 10 pH. My soil is very sandy and rather impoverished, so I have been busy spot-enriching every new planting with humus, including compost, composted manure, shredded leaves and peat.

"Now I know this should increase the acidity but I wonder if there is some other environmentally safe way to modify the pH of my soil. Are sulphur and aluminium sulphate okay for the water table?

"Gardening here in Toronto is difficult. We're listed as zone 6 but the uncertain snow cover and the frequent freeze/thaw/freeze cycle makes it more zone 5 in nature.

"Covering the primula beds after the ground freezes really helps protect the plants. But having really strong plants going into winter should be even better insurance against loss. Balancing the acidity of my soil should help me achieve this I hope."

The editor consulted one of the local grey-bearded gardening gurus who offers the following comments.

His first statement was "Go with the flow," or, don't fight what is a given. It is impractical to try to change a garden that is so alkaline. It is not so much the alkalinity, but the presence of a lot of calcium that is affecting the plants. The soil is probably full of ground up shells from eons ago.

Adding sulphur will increase the acidity in those patches where it is added but it will not take away the calcium. So, consider instead growing members of the genus Primula that will tolerate lime.

The book, Primulas of Europe and America, by H.E. Smith, B. Burrow and D.B. Lowe contains information on species found in the Alps where many of the mountain ranges are limestone in nature. My gardening guru states flatly that the flora on limestone slopes is usually richer than that on granite, which is acidic.

Peruse the species in this book, and you will find that the auricula and its Pubescens hybrids, which include such fine plants as 'Beatrice Wooster' and 'Faldonside', should do in alkaline soil. Another group, Primula marginata and its named hybrids, add to the acceptable array. You will find others.

Experiment with those whose distribution indicates they will tolerate lime. Many of the cowslips, oxlip and true primrose subspecies are widely distributed and may adapt to an alkaline soil. The addition of leaf-mould, compost and humus can only help to produce strong plants.

If you desperately want to grow primulas that prefer moist, acidic soil, the suggestion was to use pots in an insulated coldframe for which you can prepare a special soil mix. Any mix based on soil from your garden will continue to be alkaline. But consider if the effort is worth it.

"Gardening here in Toronto is difficult. We're listed as zone 6 but the uncertain snow cover and the frequent freeze/thaw/freeze cycle makes it more zone 5 in nature."

Another reference source with good basic advice on garden soil written from the eastern North American perspective is Wyman's Gardening Encyclopedia. You may find information on soil improvement in there.

Coordinating Editor
fossil makes a good show all year long.

Douglasia montana is a great favorite of mine. It can vary greatly in size and color of bloom, as well as the length of the stems. This plant does not root very well for me from cuttings so I grow many from seed. This allows me to select good forms and some of these good forms have the added bonus of rooting as they creep along forming mats, which makes them easy to propagate. Most plants of the species are tap rooted and cannot be divided. This plant is a good alpine house plant when rooted and cannot be divided.

There are several other Douglasia from Alaska and the Yukon which have been described but are not known to be in cultivation at this time. I am hoping to put together a trip to their habitat in the near future to photograph the plants in nature and collect seed for distribution to specialist growers.

If anyone is out there growing the Alaskan Douglasia at this time, I would sure like to hear from you.

End of column.

Continued from page 16

Douglasia montana grows in nature at high elevation in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming on exposed ridges and screes. There are several other Douglasia from Alaska which have been described but are not known to be in cultivation at this time. I am hoping to put together a trip to their habitat in the near future to photograph the plants in nature and collect seed for distribution to specialist growers.

If anyone is out there growing the Alaskan Douglasia at this time, I would sure like to hear from you.

Rick has written about a member of the Primulaceae family in his column this time — not strictly a primula. Please let us know if you like this column with information on a member of the Primulaceae family, or do you want information on the speciality primroses about which Rick knows so much. Send your comments to the editor.