Photo Contest Winners!
President's Message

This issue of *Primroses* is in honor of our friend Herb Dickson, a long time active member of the A.P.S. who passed away a few months ago. Herb was a man dedicated to growing plants, especially primroses and auriculas, and was a great inspiration to all who knew him. He served on the A.P.S. Board of Directors for a number of years. One of the main exibitors at the various Primrose shows, Herb introduced many of the lesser-known species of primula to the general public.

After closing his Chehalis Rare Plant Nursery in Chehalis, Washington, he "retired" to Lebanon, Missouri to be with his family. No rocking chair for Herb — retirement meant building new greenhouses where he could propagate more primroses and sell seed. This was a challenge indeed, considering the difficult climate in that part of the USA.

Herb was a keen traveler. In January, 1996, I met up with him at a plant conference in Christchurch, New Zealand, where he enjoyed trips to the mountains to see alpine plants. He was always eager to see and learn something new. Over the years he attended many Primrose shows and was one of the main exhibitors and prize winners.

It has been a sad year for the Society with the added deaths of Thelma Genheimer and Allan Jones — both long time friends of Herb and the A.P.S. They will be greatly missed.

I feel that one of Herb's greatest wishes would be for all of us to work at growing more primroses and auriculas, introducing new hybrids, and promoting the A.P.S. It is a challenge I hope we all will take up in the years to come. I feel honored to have known him.

June Skidmore, Mercer Island, Washington

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Primroses

Quarterly of the American Primrose Society

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COVER PHOTO

Garden Auricula Photo Contest Winner! Soft lavender blossoms are highlighted against green leaves, rocks and gravel mulch. More photos, Pages 4-11.

Photo by Mary Kordes
Garden Auriculas
By Claire Cockcroft, Redmond, Washington

As this issue of Primroses focuses on the Garden Auricula Photo Contest, it is appropriate to begin with a definition of a garden auricula. Herb Dickson wrote that garden auriculas fall into a catch-all exhibition category at A.P.S. shows, being defined as any robust auricula hybrid, not a species, that cannot meet the standards of a show or exhibition alpine auricula. That's a pretty broad definition. Other societies' judges narrow it down a bit by differentiating between garden auriculas and border auriculas, similar classifications that might confuse you. A border auricula has farina on its leaves, petals of one (mostly) solid color, and a light eye with some meal. For the purposes of our garden auricula photo contest, photos of both garden and border auriculas were acceptable.

Hardy hybrids of Primula auricula, garden auriculas are thought to have arisen from natural and garden crosses of P. auricula and P. hirsuta. No doubt spontaneous mutations or 'sports' also contributed to the gene pool. Unlike show auriculas, garden auriculas are noted for their ability to withstand extremes of temperatures, wet weather, and a wide range of soils. A good garden auricula should require little attention if planted in well-drained soil in partial shade, out of the hot summer sun. It should carry umbels of well-colored flowers on sturdy stems above healthy foliage. It may require dividing every three or four years.

You might find it hard to believe that auriculas were originally grown outdoors as border plants in cottage gardens. Their leathery leaves, green the whole year, combined with their fragrant and often dazzling spring blooms, make them a natural for edging a garden path. Geoff Nicolle's pictures (back cover and on the facing page) demonstrate that garden auriculas can serve as stunning bedding plants. They are equally at home in a rock garden, enjoying the gravel mulch and excellent drainage required by their more temperamental alpine companions.

One thing to keep in mind is that these primulas require good light to maintain their form and to bloom well. Don't be tempted to plant them in too much shade, for they will not perform as well as in the bright light. In this fashion they differ from most other primulas.

Early forms of garden auriculas exhibited a wide range of colors and flower forms, including striped and double flowers. Flower colors were once described as dull or muddy. But thanks to two hundred years of hybridization and some recent work by dedicated growers such as Herb Dickson, we may now choose from a wide range of attractive colors. Excellent lavenders, clear blues,
Garden Auriculas, continued

sunshine yellows, and deep reds are often available. Garden auricula seed strains have been improved to provide a high percentage of the expected color ranges.

I have had excellent success raising garden auriculas from seed. A good source of garden auricula seed is our own A.P.S. Seed Exchange, which usually lists hybrid seed by color strain. (This summer I even had an icy yellow double auricula bloom from A.P.S. seed — but that’s another story!) Seed listed in other exchanges as Primula x pubescens often turns out to resemble its auricula parent as a strongly growing garden auricula (although it may be a more diminutive imitation of P. hirsuta). Lately I’ve found several commercial seed houses offering garden auriculas in my local nurseries’ seed racks, and have had excellent germination with all of them.

You can sow auricula seed in flats, in pots, or in plug trays with good results. Consult past Primroses for instructions on soil mix, light requirements, watering, etc. I’ve even tossed auricula seed onto my rock garden gravel mulch and had it germinate like lettuce. The resulting plants were slower growing than those coddled and fed in the hoop house, but they’ve been perfectly hardy and forgiving of the copious amounts of rain we have here in the Pacific Northwest.

Herb Dickson “discovered” primulas in 1955 and threw himself into the breeding of better garden auriculas with a gusto that never flagged in the ensuing 43 years. Try growing the likeable, easy going garden auricula and you too may find yourself caught up by their charm.

REFERENCES

Garden Auriculas

Continued

Winners and Participants

First a Thank You! to all of you who sent pictures for the Garden Auricula Photo Contest. There were twelve contestants, entering nearly one hundred photos.

The winner of the photo contest was Mary Kordes of Ahmeek, Michigan, whose stunning photo of ruffled lavender auriculas graces the front cover of our magazine. Mary wins $25 — congratulations! Second prize, winning $20, goes to Geoff Nicolle of Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire, Wales, for his photo of bronze auriculas, seen on our back cover. Third prize of $15 goes to Cheri Fluck of Juneau, Alaska, for a photo of a group of cherry red auriculas, also on the back cover.

Again, thank you and congratulations to all who sent photos for the contest.

Bob Brotherson
Revere, Pennsylvania
Ruby Chong
Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada
Roger Eichman
Juneau, Alaska
Jan Gault
Colorado Springs, Colorado
Cyrus Happy III
Tacoma, Washington
Mary Kordes
Ahmeek, Michigan

Lars Lärkäng
GRÅBO, SWEDEN
Geoff Nicolle
Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire, Wales, U.K.
John A. O’Brien, Sr.
Juneau, Alaska
Jane Potter
Beaverton, Oregon
Toben Skov
Sørvad, Denmark
Dorothy Swift
Wickford, Rhode Island

Garden auriculas can be single, semi-double as seen in this photo, or fully double.
Photo credits

Page 8
Roger Eichman (top),
Cyrus Happy III (bottom);

Page 9
Lars Lärkäng (top left and right),
Jane Potter (bottom);

Page 10
Jan Gault (top left),
Lars Lärkäng (top right),
Torben Skov (bottom);

Page 11
Geoff Nicolle (top),
Roger Eichman (bottom).
Plant Portrait

By Ann Lunn, Hillsboro, Oregon

PRIMULA PAMIRICA

Several years ago, we received a plant labeled Primula pamirica. We wanted to verify the identity, but after consulting all the available resources at that time on primulas, we found only one that listed it. That book was an early work by Josef Halda on Primulas and, unfortunately for us, it was written entirely in Czech. Thanks to Latin names and a good illustration, we felt that our plant was correctly identified. We couldn't read what cultural requirements were needed or any information about the plant's habitat. Sadly, the plant died a couple of years later. Therefore, I was delighted to see seed of P. pamirica listed on this year's APS Seed Exchange List.

Primula pamirica was described in 1952, as the name implies, from a collection in the Pamir Mountain range in a part of Soviet Central Asia now known as Tajikistan. Later collections were made in China and northern Pakistan. The natural habitat is wet alpine or meadow areas or along streams from 8,400 to 16,000 feet. In lower elevations P. pamirica blooms at the end of April or first of May.

The inch-long leaves are roundish-oval with smooth margins and long petioles. The plant is small and compact; however, the flower stalks rise ten to twelve inches above the loose rosette of leaves and may contain 6 to 20 flowers. The deeply cut petals are usually pale rose to lilac. The yellow eye of each flower is surrounded by a prominent white ring. Elongated, clasping bracts encircle the base of the umbel. These bracts resemble those of P. involucrata to which P. pamirica is closely related in the Armerina Section.

No farina is present on the plant. Underground, the root systems contain rhizomes that only last for one growing season. The plant itself is deciduous with a small, winter resting bud.

Primula pamirica grows well from seed although it is rarely found in cultivation. Plants can be divided carefully in the spring as the rosettes of leaves begin to appear. Plants need a cool, moist, well-drained location in the garden or they may be planted in pots situated in a shady plunge bed. In May, the plant should reward you with a mass of pale rose flowers.

Plant Portrait: Primula pamirica

Continued

Mystery Plant Identified?

Angela Bradford of Barnhaven Primroses, France, writes:

I have just received the Summer 1998 issue of Primroses and I was intrigued to see the photo of the "mystery plant" on page 13.

It is difficult to judge the scale of the plant from the photo, but one possibility that does not seem to have been considered is Primula involucrata. White forms are common, and it grows from a rosette of slightly spoon-shaped meal-less smooth foliage. It is a fairly accommodating plant as long as it has adequate moisture in the growing season. An added bonus is that the flowers are very sweetly scented.

I hope you do manage a positive identification before too long. Please publish the result — the suspense is excruciating! ✿
Gold-Laced Polyanthus and Others on Trial

By Maedythe Martin, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

You may remember the gold-laced polyanthus at the national show this year, since named 'Beeches Premier'? It is from a strain of gold-laced polyanthus developed by Lawrence Wigley, the honorable secretary of the Southern Section of the National Auricula and Primula Society in Britain.

Lawrence entered this strain in the polyanthus seed trials with the Royal Horticultural Society, the 1996/97 series, and — guess what? He was granted an award of garden merit. There were lots of strains entered, a total of 135, including Cowichan and the Victorian one, (one presumes like the Barnhaven Victorians, which are shaded and striped) but none of these stood up to the rigors of the garden at Wisley.

Other winners were the Crescendo strain entered by Ernst Benary Company from German, in about four color selections, and the Rainbow strain, in three colors, entered by Floranova Ltd., Norfolk, England. Plants were selected on the criteria of color, habit, hardiness, floriferousness, and resistance to disease, and if scent were present, this was considered a bonus. All of this information is from the circular Lawrence sent me, announcing the results of the trials.

Lawrence Wigley is to be complemented on his garden-worthy strain of gold-laced polyanthus, and we are fortunate here in the Pacific Northwest that we have it growing and available in small numbers. Lawrence told me in his recent letter that the strain is now grown in Japan, New Zealand, Spain, Denmark, Canada and the Unites States.

A Friend to All — Allan Jones

By Teresa Richardson, Duvall, Washington

"Well, sure!" When you heard that phrase, you knew that somewhere nearby was a long-time friend of the A.P.S., Allan Jones. Allan wasn’t a grower — he was a helper! Whenever a problem cropped up at a meeting or a show, there was Allan, studying the situation with a steady, humorous gaze from underneath that rakish cap. And then, rolling up his sleeves, he would exclaim, "Well, sure!" and get the job done!

Allan’s capable, can-do generosity and easy going amiability made him a friend to all. He brought out the best in those around him, because he saw those qualities in them.

Thelma Genheimer

By Dorothy Springer, Tacoma Washington

She would not have wanted a flowery tribute, so this will not be one. Thelma Genheimer passed away July 25th, in Beaverton, Oregon. She had celebrated her 81st birthday on April 25th. Thelma was a member of both the Valley Hi and Milwaukie APS chapters in Oregon, as well as the Tacoma Chapter in Washington state.

Thelma was a perfectionist — a great organizer who served as show chairman for both clubs in Oregon, planning the shows and the plant sales. She was also actively involved in planning and working on the APS 50th Anniversary Symposium. Thelma was an APS judge, and served as APS Treasurer during the lean years of the 1970s.

She was awarded a life membership in 1977 and was the proud recipient of the Dorothy Dickson Award. She was a fine grower, winning many awards at shows, including the coveted Bamford Trophy and the Rae Berry Trophy for best species for a beautifully grown Japanese Sieboldii from the symposium.

Thelma looked forward to the shows each year and to the club’s picnics, which she usually hosted at her home. She enjoyed trips to Vancouver where the BC group staged shows.

Friends gathered at her home one last time for a memorial service following her death. She would have loved to have been there!
Remembering Herb Dickson

By John Kerridge, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Once I said to Herb Dickson, “I suppose you have a degree in Agriculture.” “Nope”, he said, “but I taught it! I do have a degree in journalism — that’s why I write so badly.” Such comments were typical of Herb, all with that twinkle in his eyes. Then he added, “There were 156 graduates in my class. By the end of the year only four were in journalism, and three of those worked for their fathers’ newspapers.”

Herb had a gift for growing anything, sensing every plant’s needs. Many people have had my experience of taking his healthy plants home and watching them wither, as we did not continue to give the right conditions and did not have that special touch. Herb had no trouble raising Periolarids, for instance. His way was unorthodox, perhaps, when you watched him with that huge hose soaking the greenhouse as if putting out a fire.

He had many rare shrubs and trees at his Chehalis Rare Plant Nursery, not just primulas. We were heart-broken when these were stolen one night as he slept. Out in the “back forty”, he planted acres of priceless and rare fruit trees, but they became overgrown in recent years. Finally the bulldozer has scraped the land flat for industrial development.

Herb was born in Missouri and returned there in recent years to be near his daughters. He had some 80 acres of land there. I asked if that was enough. “No!” he said. “I wanted 640 acres (about a square mile) but couldn’t afford it. That’s what I was brought up on in Wyoming.” He didn’t stay in journalism, but told me he took jobs elsewhere for $16/week, then went into the Penitentiary Service. By that time he was interested in primulas, and regularly used to drive up to Vancouver for the meetings of the B.C. Primula and Alpine Plant Society (now the Alpine Garden Club of B.C.). As this was several hours each way, he would arrive home at 2 or 3 in the morning, then work as usual the next day.

When I started to become seriously interested in primulas, I would go down to help Herb over the weekend and stay with him. It was then that I realized how resolved he was to get people growing more, especially his beautiful garden auriculas, in spite of his multiple medical setbacks. He had to handle many medications, and was already a bionic man from prior operations.

Herb was convinced that fresh milk was a cure for his arthritis and would lubricate his artificial knees! Therein lay a problem because his stiff hands had difficulty milking the cow. Also the cow was mean and would kick him. He had her produce another calf to see if either would be better. One dark stormy night he went out to feed them but didn’t return for ages. On investigation I found him stuck in mud halfway up those rubber boots he lived in, with the mean cow attacking. I think he went off the raw milk theory soon after that.

He wore a toque made by the Native Indians in the Cowichan Valley, which we gave him as a reminder of his love for Cowichan Polyanthus. When he bred an orange Cowichan, he was so excited! What happened to that plant? I seem to remember that he pollinated it so much that it became exhausted and died. But if any seedlings survived they’d be a great tribute to Herb.

Herb was the backbone of our society for so many years. His garden auriculas and petite hybrid picotee auriculas have brightened the world, just as Florence Bellis’s Polyanthus did years before. Thanks for so much, Herb. We will miss you badly.

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Herb Dickson in his greenhouse, surrounded by thousands of blooming primulas. This is how most of us remember Herb — work clothes, jaunty hat, amid glorious blossoms.

Potting mix was made in a cement mixer. We would stand on either side of it and shovel in different ingredients two or three to one, then tip it into his sterilizer boxes. One day the power failed and we worked all day restoring it, finally determining that the underground cable had burnt out. Herb purchased 200 feet of heavy duty cable, but the installation was scary — 220 volts and pouring rain — Herb standing in rubber boots in water at the pump house outlet box, while I ran up and down the house to shut off power, then turn it on for a trial. We did manage to repair the power and that cable remained strung up along the path and greenhouse, working well.
To Herb, With Love

By April Boettger, Vader, Washington

How do you say GOODBYE to your "bestest" primula friend? The answer is with tears in your eyes and a crater of a hole in your heart. How do you say THANK YOU to a person who took you from petunias to primulas? And when you have a memorial article to write about that friend, how do you condense the story of the most remarkable eleven years of your life into a few pages?

Many of you were fortunate enough to know Herb and his nursery — you also know that he had a passion for working in utter chaos. I had driven past his nursery many times (stopping only once) and remarked to my husband, “I sure would love to work there and clean that place up.”

I finally met Herb Dickson in May of 1987 through the unemployment office in Chehalis. They sent me over to his nursery for a job interview and I was hired on the spot. I was thrilled.

Herb was 78 and I was 34, but he simply wore me out that first year. If he had one lazy bone in his whole body, it simply wore me out that first year. If he didn’t want to go home. There was so much to do, so much to learn — not just about Herb’s treasures, but about Herb, too. He truly fit the saying that you shouldn’t judge a book by its cover. He seemed to be this slightly scruffy, slightly quaint, totally unorganized, rather dear old man. He was all of that, but none of it!

Herb grew up on a farm, had a degree in journalism, spent time in the armed forces, worked in the prison system (and grew plants there), started a nursery in Seattle and moved it to Chehalis on 18 acres. He was married three times: the first to the mother of his three daughters, a second brief time, and finally to the widowed Dorothy Stredicke in October, 1959. Together Dorothy and Herb had magic in his fingers. I remember one spring he had about 100 growing, most of them blooming, an incredible sight and scent. He also grew Primula muscarioides shown by Herb and Dorothy Dickson in 1982.

He grew primulas and assorted plants until November, 1983, when Dorothy died of cancer. He once referred to her as the love of his life.

Throughout his life Herb belonged to numerous plant societies, but he stayed active in the A.P.S. even when age finally slowed him down. It was through Herb that my husband, Fred, and I became involved in the A.P.S. Herb’s night vision became so poor that Fred started giving Herb a ride to the primula meetings, and I usually went, too.

Besides primulas, Herb taught me about daylilies, hardy geraniums, campanulas, gentians, alpine plants, dwarf conifers, and bonsai — there are just too many plants to list. My enthusiasms shifted with each new encounter, but I think I most fondly remember my first Primula vialii, Gentian septemfida, and a breath-takingly lovely pink cyclamen that showed up in a potted sorbus tree.

Herb would tell me about sending his garden auricula seed all over the world, with orders from Israel, Germany, England, and many other places. I didn’t understand just how special a person my boss was until 1992, when I ordered a seed catalog from England. In my letter I told them of my plans to carry on his work. But in the end he wasn’t totally unsatisfied with me doing it, for at least the work didn’t stop as it has with so many other growers.

Finally, on June 27, 1994, on his 85th birthday, Herb moved to Missouri to finally retire. Instead, he proceeded to build a new home and a huge greenhouse and shadehouse on 40 acres! He did not plan to sell plants, but to concentrate on hybridizing garden auriculas for better colors, and on perfecting his picotee-edged garden auriculas. But two years after his move, Herb wrote that he was going to the local farmer’s market with some vegetable starts and a few columnbine and ...

What was Herb’s favorite primula? He grew many, including choice species like Primula reidii. I remember one spring he had about 100 growing, most of them blooming, an incredible sight and scent. He also grew P. sapphirena — what a delight, and a very rare species.

Yet for both of us the auriculas are/ were our truest loves. We spent many hours hovering over his auricula tables discussing the merits of his garden auriculas. Not that he didn’t grow some choice exhibition and double auriculas! My favorites changed often, especially when new batches of seedlings began to bloom. Herb had the best answer, though; he always said that the one he was looking at was his favorite.

In December, 1997, Herb fell and broke his hip and ended up in a nursing home, hoping to be rehabilitated. I went to Herb’s treasures, but about Herb, too. He truly fit the saying that you shouldn’t judge a book by its cover. He seemed to be this slightly scruffy, slightly quaint, totally unorganized, rather dear old man. He was all of that, but none of it!
To Herb, With Love, continued
to see him in February and his main concern was still his primulas. He sent home with me the remainder of his primula seed and all of the rest of seeds that he had saved. I guess I knew then that he wasn’t likely to live much longer.

Were we perfect friends? No! How do you put chaos and orderliness together and not get an occasional bang, huh, Jerry? (A family joke!) I kept trying to sort things out and Herb kept creating magic and chaos, of course.

Did I learn very much from him? Oh, yes! Now that I am my own boss, I understand how beauty can come from chaos, how it can come in spite of the fact that you never really get caught up. I think that I can even pile my paperwork higher than Herb!

I guess the best way to sum up Mr. Primula is that he was a man with a compulsion to grow — especially primulas!

The improved garden auricula — ruffled petals, lots of flowers, healthy foliage — is the legacy that Herb Dickson has bestowed on primrose growers throughout the world.

American Primrose Society - Fall 1998

Journal Report
By Mary Frey, Kent, Washington

TO HAVE AND HAVE NOT
The June 1998 The Rock Garden of the Scottish Rock Garden Club includes two contrasting articles: how to grow it and how to kill it. The first, “What to Grow Where” by Alastair Mckelvie, explores growing methods of Himalayan plants. He dismisses the myth that the key to raising healthy plants is by duplicating their wild habitats. However, Mckelvie does concede that “natural conditions are... the best” and he uses the example of successfully growing lewisias. He advises to withhold watering after flowering to copy nature but soil type is not important because lewisias grow in such a wide variety of textures and pHs.

Mckelvie also examines the issue of a plant’s character in its natural state. Feeble-looking wild rhododendrons hardly resemble their robust offspring found in the home garden, nor do many other alpines exhibited in shows. Primula forrestii won an award for best primula at the Aberdeen Show in 1995 (in Scotland) but the plant did not look like its wild relatives. Mckelvie asks, “Was it in character? Opinion was obviously divided that day among the cognoscenti.”

Generally, Mckelvie believes that the more common a plant is in nature the quicker it is to domesticate. Conversely, rarer plant varieties require particular growing conditions that one must emulate and test. He implores gardeners to not rely on their green thumb common sense because “great advances have resulted in people of genius who have gone beyond accepted practice.” Works for me.

Collette Coll gives witty and practical advice about garden pests in “Detect a Pest — A Beginner’s Guide.” She describes the notorious notching of vine weevils as “so common it may surprise you to learn that rhododendron leaves are not supposed to have serrated edges.” She also illustrates caterpillars, earwigs, aphids and, of course, slugs. This slimy beauty, I learn, has a queer mouth made up of rows of small curved teeth that once worn out, grow again.

Coll advocates practical pest control methods. First, check all new plants thoroughly before planting. Second, alter the habitat for the pest and improve the territory for natural predators. For instance, remove unnecessary rocks and plant pots because these are perfect shelters for earwigs and slugs. Do encourage frogs, birds, snakes and plant flowers such as phacelia to welcome the hoverfly. Coll also believes that insecticides are not “a panacea to all pest problems” and she cautions to use them sparingly. She describes a unique slug control method using hair clippings. Apparently, the hair coats a slug and not only chafes it but also penetrates the skin. However, one wonders if this fashion keeps them warm on those cold autumn nights.

FANCY FOAMFLOWERS
Dan Heims titillates about tiarellas in Plants: A Journal for New Plant Hunters Issue #13. Heims is the chief propagator and owner of the innovative wholesale nursery Terra Nova located in Tigard, Oregon. In “Fascinating Foam-
flowers", he praises these shade-loving, spring blooming plants that are swell pals with hellebores, pulmonaria, and primroses. Tiarellas, members of the Saxifrage family, are woodland beauties with maple-like foliage and clusters of starry white or pink blooms. Heims writes that tiarellas grow well in deep shade to light sun in the Pacific Northwest but they require more shade in other parts of the United States. Also, calcium and magnesium are insufficient in Eastern soils for proper foamflower growth but gardeners can add dolomitic limestone and Epsom salts.

Heims describes several tantalizing varieties including Tieralla cordifolia collina ‘Montrose Selection’ from APS member Nancy Goodwin’s selection. This plant has pink blooms and shiny heart-shaped leaves with a central blotch on each leaf. Other notables include T. Cygnet’ with its deeply lobed leaves and fragrant pink flowers, T. ‘Ninja’ with leaves imprinted with maroon-black and T. ‘Spring Symphony’ with abundant dark pink blooms and freckled leaves. E-mail address: MLFREY@AOL.COM

1999 Dues Reminder

1999 membership renewals are due November 15th and delinquent after December 31, 1998. The annual rate for both domestic and foreign memberships, either individual or household, is $20 US per year ($21 for renewals postmarked after January 1, 1999), $55 for three years, or $275 for an individual life membership. Membership is based on the calendar year. The year your membership will expire is printed in the upper right-hand corner of the address label affixed to the envelope used to mail your copy of Primroses.

If you are an overseas member and wish to have your quarterly sent via airmail, include an additional $10 US to cover the cost of postage.

We prefer that foreign members make payment in the form of an international money order. However, payment may be made by personal check in currencies of Australia, Austria, Canada, Great Britain, Germany, New Zealand, Norway, and Switzerland. Checks payable from foreign funds should be in an amount based upon the current exchange rate plus five percent.

Make checks payable to the American Primrose Society and mail to:
Fred Graff
2630 W. Viewmont Way W.
Seattle, WA 98199
U.S.A.

Primula sinensis in Southern New Jersey

By Barbara Bruno, Pittsgrove, New Jersey

Like Maedythe Martin, from the 1997 seed exchange I also ordered and planted Primula sinensis seed collected in China. I doubted that “hardy” designation would really apply to my garden, but of the five seedlings that grew to transplant size by late summer, I resolved in the spirit of “nothing ventured, nothing gained” to risk two plants to the elements. They were set out in August 1997 in a partially shaded position close to my home’s south-facing foundation. Both plants were a healthy, vital green when I covered them with evergreen boughs after Christmas.

The mid-Atlantic area winter was unusually mild. Temperatures dipped toward 20°F a few times, but we had none of the usual prolonged periods of cold, the series of subfreezing days that can turn soil into a frozen mass for a month or two. In March, these two outside plants were still a healthy green under their pine boughs. This meant I could enter P. sinensis in the Philadelphia Flower Show Hardy Primula Class.

The three potted plants wintered in a mostly solar heated “orangery” I’ve rigged in an old farm building on my property. On the building’s south side is a leanto greenhouse. The connecting doors and windows are closed at night and on cloudy days to conserve gathered heat. The building gets by with only a small electric heater to maintain 32°F on the most frigid nights.

The potted plants started blooming as winter arrived. I believe the first blooms were opening by Christmas. Petals were mid-pinks, lighter than Martin’s plant. The palest plant had prettily fringed blooms. By show time in early March, they were all enormous (by primula standards) fountains of bloom.

I chose to enter the smaller of the three plants for convenience and less risk transporting to the show. Also, I vaguely remembered a warning the P. sinensis could cause skin and pulmonary irritation. Grooming even the smallest sticky, hairy plant would be time consuming.

The plant won “Best of Day” from the American Rock Garden Society, as well as a ribbon!

As spring progressed, the outside plants suffered from a leaking roof gutter and severe mole/vole infestation. I lost one plant to one or the other of these conditions. The second plant may have been stunted as well. It didn’t flower but still appeared healthy the following August, if not much grown from its former size. I considered setting out one of the potted plants, but decided on caution for now.

Caution also affected the decision to allow only a small amount of seed to set on the potted specimens. I wanted to assure their continued existence here. On the other hand, the plants struck me as the type that might die with the effort of serious seed production. I’ll risk one next year to find out. Naturally, the fringed bloom, being different from the other, especially interests me. 🌺
More Primula kisoana

By Gerald Taaffe, Ottawa, Canada

In answer to Jay Lunn’s implicit question in the Summer 1998 issue of *Primroses* (“Growing from the Exchange”), I planted a dozen seeds of *Primula kisoana* from the Scottish Rock Garden Club on February 3, 1997. I immediately placed them in an unheated garage and left them for about a month, exposing them to temperatures that were considerably below freezing during that time. In March, they went under lights, and were held in big vigorous tufts. They are thick textured and, to date, apparently unattractive to slugs and other pests.

What has surprised me is how well the six or seven seedlings have grown, completely contrary to Haldia’s warning that they grow slowly. The first summer they grew strong, thick tufts of leaves at least four inches high and wide. This summer, their second, the typical pink flowers were a good 2" across, each in umbels of four or six held a little above the developing leaves on sturdy, hairy petioles. They were very long-lasting, at least a month as I recall.

As the season has progressed, the leaves have grown to 5" to 6" across, held in big vigorous tufts. They are thick textured and, to date, apparently unattractive to slugs and other pests.

Seedpods seem to be developing on the plants, but very slowly. If they produce what appears to be viable seed, I’ll certainly send some along to the seed exchange. ♫

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SOIL ELEMENTS

A soil is much more than just “dirt”. Soils vary widely in formulae, but are composed of just a few basic components. One element is humus or organic matter such as peat, sawdust, bark, compost, etc. This supplies moisture-holding capacity, while soaking up nutrients for plant use and decomposition. Because organic matter decomposes, it tends to shrink over time and even seems to disappear. Remember this when you buy manure — essentially you are only borrowing it! However, this borrowed element is the difference between ordinary soil and the “rich” garden soil one reads about. Peat beds, composed entirely of peat, resist this decay.

A second component is inorganic matter such as grit, pumice, perlite, etc. These components of the soil are more or less permanent, and give most soils their basic nature. Particle size is variable — clay particles are tiny, silt are a bit larger, and then sand, gravel, stones, etc. are even larger. Most soils are either mostly clay, or mostly sand, or maybe a mix of the two. Screes are composed of larger particles, at least at the surface. Perlite and pumice are often used in professional soil mixes (which actually contain no “dirt”), because of their superior air and moisture-holding capacities. Grits of various kinds are often included, especially as a top dressing. Sand is often used in mixes, and I have heard that plants grown in sandy soil have better roots, but I have a different explanation — sandy soils don’t hold nutrients well, and the plants need those superior roots. If you have an opinion on this, I’d appreciate hearing it.

A third component of soil, surprisingly enough, is air. Air may be the most important part of a good soil. Air often occurs in soil in such small pockets that it cannot be seen by the gardener. A soil that is light and fluffy will contain a lot of air, and a compressed soil will not. An over-watered soil will have little air in it, and many plants suffer from overwatering.

OTHER FACTORS: THE PERSONAL TOUCH

Each gardener has a different watering pattern, and therefore the soil one gardener uses with success may not do so well for another gardener. “Know thyself.” Generally, the more one tends to overwater (or if one is growing “tetchy” plants), the more one needs perlite, and other air-holding materials. Over-waterers (you know who you are!) also do well with terra cotta pots, because they dry out faster. Another variable is how gardeners compress the soil when they plant a given plant. As a rule, when planting a plant or seedling,
DRAINAGE IN THE GARDEN

In the garden proper, there are several ways to improve drainage. Mixing in quantities of coarse organic material will work beautifully, but the bad news is that compost rots and the particles get smaller. Once the particle size gets tiny, air is excluded. Plants that demand good drainage need air at their roots, so you will need to keep digging in organic material. In addition, lurking in the ground is lots of assistance from the natural gardeners — the moles (yes, there is a purpose to their existence), and worms. Moles construct what are essentially drainage holes all over the garden, and if they didn’t tend to tunnel through all the good stuff in their search for weevil grubs, earthworms, and the like, they’d be most welcome.

The use of pumice, perlite (not vermiculite), and sometimes gypsum (if the soil is heavy clay), are longer-lasting solutions than the use of organic material. Gypsum is a mineral (the primary ingredient of plaster of Paris) that supposedly increases the amount of air space in a clay soil. I have never used gypsum and I have gardened on really heavy clay most of my life. Instead, I have always been “into” manure (and all the attendant re-digging that accompanies its use). The reason that heavy clays can be such a problem is that they hold little air due to their fine texture, and are extremely prone to compaction due to the shape of the minerals composing them. If clays are worked when too wet, they may form hard lumps that are almost like rocks. On the plus side is the fact that clays retain nutrients well, and don’t require so much watering in dry weather.

Raised beds are, in my opinion, the best solution to providing drainage to finicky plants in the garden. Underground drainage may also be necessary if the underlying soil is compacted or very heavy. It may also be essential to incorporate lots of organic material and pumice or sand. The depth of a raised bed is very important. If you build a low raised bed and don’t check to be sure that it is sitting on a porous substrate, you will have poor drainage. Here is a valuable principle: drainage is dependent on two factors, 1) how easy it is for water to pass through the soil (particle size), and 2) how deep that soil is. It’s the second item that gets people, because many of us have been trained to put gravel in the bottom of our pots before we add the soil. DON’T do this! It doesn’t improve drainage. You see, water flowing through soil slows at each “soil interface”, and if you delay drainage, you slow down the passage of water, you delay drainage.

SUMMARY

So, to recap, the ability of a soil to harbor air is crucial to drainage and to the health of plants. Texture of soil, deepness of soil, watering method, soil compression, and even the presence of varmints and worms can affect the drainage in both garden and potted plants. “Soil interfaces”, or the areas where soil types meet can slow drainage and have an adverse effect. How fast a drainage you require will depend upon what you are growing. Garden soil is fine in the garden, but don’t use it in pots because it doesn’t have enough air holding capacity. Instead, buy one of the mixes available, or mix your own (and hold the “dirt”). *
So What's Up at A.P.O.P.?

By April Boettger, Vader, Washington

Five years ago, we embarked on building a dream, a nursery of our own. Its name reflected our inspiration — A Plethora of Primula. Since that time, we've been growing and maturing. We have five years of experience and catalogs under our belts, and hopefully we are getting past the dumb stage—or the startup stage, if you prefer. We only lost three greenhouses getting there! Along the way, we've learned much about soil mixes, and bugs, and funguses, and being more efficient, and ...

We've learned that time can slip away very quickly — so quickly that we are more firmly setting our Number One priority to be to spend some time with our family, especially with the kids and grandkids.

Our Number Two priority is to mightily increase our inventory. We had been and will continue to build our auricula stock by division, but that method simply isn't fast enough to be able to continue listing the garden auricula by color, one of my greatest aspirations. So this spring we planted 12,000 auricula seeds, mostly of which were garden auriculas, but some were show auriculas, and doubles, too. Most of this seed came from Herb Dickson in February. Some of Herb's seed was pretty old and/or undated. So we haven't a clue as to how much will actually germinate, but we have many babies coming up.

We also planted about 3000 other seeds, primulas and a few perennials and some — I am not sure what — that Herb had in his collection with numbers but no names.

So how do you plant 15,000 or so seeds? Start with your spouse; a very patient spouse is good. Get him to hand fill several hundred sheets of cell packs with some soil and slow release fertilizer and then more soil. Then have him lightly cover the cells with very well-washed pumice and water them.

The next step is to plant the seeds. At first, I planted one little seed at a time—or maybe two fell in. Finally, I just got a pinch of seed and moved my thumb and finger along the holes and maybe one or two or three or a few fell in. Of course, about two thirds of the way through, I decided that this maybe wasn't so fun and it was very time consuming. What about that seeder thing Herb sent me?

What an awesome and easy thing it turned out to be. It was ordered to fit the 10/20 seed flats, but after doing several dozen cell packs I wasn't carefully placing each individual seed anyway, so why not try it on the cell sheets?

The seeder has a little tray, 10" across, where you dump the seed. There are several pipes or wands with variously sized holes notched along it. Pick the size you want and insert it under the seed tray, and as you turn the knob the seed falls off. For the auricula, you pick the wand with the smallest holes. So you just scoot the seeder down the cell packs as you go, and tip the handle, and the seeds fall in.

In about twenty minutes I had planted the fifty cell packs that my spouse had spent a couple of hours filling, instead of forever and ever and ever. I thought — I might as well take a nap while waiting for the next lot to be finished!

The cell sheets we use, with 50, 72, or 200 cells, fit our 10"x20" flats. The really old or undated seed was planted in the 200 cell sheets. The larger primulas such as candelabras or Section Primula (vernales) were put in the 50's, while the 72's were mainly used for auricula seed, but also for a few perennials. If we just have a few seeds of something, we also use 4" pots.

Tentatively, our plan is to leave the seedlings in the cells until we see a flower bloom. They will go from there to the compost if ugly or into band pots to be sold the following year. We have tried the auricula and other primulas in assorted sizes of band pots, and the auriculas respond wonderfully to pots 2-7/8"x 6" deep. They love the root run and like their roots touching the walls of their pots, which we think rather well simulates their natural growing conditions in rocky areas.

I will never likely do as much as Herb did with respect to diversity of plants and interest. I learned to love so many things from him: daylilies, alpine plants, dwarf conifers. But my priority just has to be primulas and especially his garden auricula. Can you just imagine 20,000 or even 50,000 in bloom? It will be a truly awesome sight! I don't know how many Herb ever had in bloom at one time; he never let me count them, even though I offered several times. But I know his large greenhouse that held his stock plants took me three or more weeks to transplant, so I would guess it held several thousand.

I can hardly wait for my own greenhouses to be filled with auriculas in bloom! Stay tuned!  ♦

Twins

Would you like to join an overseas primula group, but you're confused about international currency exchange rates? Becoming a "TWIN" will make it easy for you. A.P.S. members in Canada and the U.S. can pair up with members of the National Auricula and Primula Society (NAPS), Northern Section, where A.P.S. members pay the annual A.P.S. membership for their English twins in return for membership in NAPS, Northern Section. For details, please contact:

Dennis Oakley
10060 Dennis Place
Richmond, BC V7A 3G8
Canada

Pat Wilson
APS Seed Exchange Coordinator
9621 Kelly Court
Juneau, AK 99811
USA

Phone: 907-789-0505
E-mail: pwilson@ptialaska.net

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APS Seed Exchange Coordinator
9621 Kelly Court
Juneau, AK 99811
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Plant Societies

National Auricula and Primula Society
Invites all auricula and primula lovers to join in this old society. Membership includes yearbook.

Northern Section
D.G. Hadfield
146 Queens Road, Cheadle Hulme, Cheadle, Cheshire, England.

Midland and West Section
Peter Ward
6 Lawson Close, Saltford, Bristol, England BS18 1BG.

Southern Section
Lawrence E. Wigley
67 Warnham Court Road, Carshalton Beeches, Surrey, England SM5 3ND.

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Officers of the Chapters

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P.O. Box 33077
Juneau AK 99803-33077
buyarski@alaska.net

Doretta Klaber Chapter
President, Dot Plyler
18 Bridle Path
Chadds Ford, PA 19317
Tel: (610) 459-3969
plylerd@aol.com

Valley Hi Chapter
President, Addaline Robinson
41809 S.W. Burgarsky Rd.
Gaston, OR 97119-9047
Tel: (503) 985-1048

Tacoma Chapter
Co-President Candy Strickland
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Puyallup, WA 98373
Tel: (253) 841-4192
Co-President Cy Happy III
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Tacoma, WA 98499
(253) 588-2585

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E. 170 Dunoon Pl.
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Tel: (360) 426-7913

Seattle Chapter
President, June Skidmore
6753 W. Mercer Island
Mercer Island, WA 98040
Tel: (206) 232-5766
jskidm4011@aol.com

Eastside Chapter
President, Thea Oakley
3304 288th Ave. NE
Redmond, WA 98053
Tel: (425) 880-6177
othea@halcyon.com

British Columbia Primrose Group
President, John Kerridge
4660 10th Ave. W. #1102
Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6R 2J6
Tel: (604) 224-7813

APS COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

EDITOR
Claire Cockerlfi
4805-228th Ave. N.E.
Redmond, WA 98053
Tel: (425) 888-6788
E-mail: ccrfl@halcyon.com

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BACK COVER PHOTOS
Second place in our Garden Auricula Photo Contest goes to Geoff Nicolle (bottom photo), while third place goes to Cheri Fluck (top photo).

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