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Primula Cusickiana is one of our loveliest American Primulas, it grows in Northeastern Oregon, in Union county and the Wallowa mountains; it is difficult to find, difficult to grow, difficult to bloom. No one of whom I know has been completely successful with it, though I know of three instances where it flowered in cultivation: in Mrs. Nettie Gale’s wonderful nursery of native plants, in Dr. Gabrielson’s first garden, both of these in the open, and once, in a pot, for me.

It is such a lovely thing: the flowers deep purple with a yellow eye, and at times as fragrant as a violet. To me, it is one of the loveliest Primulas I have ever seen, the appeal is not on the spectacular side—just the perfect proportion, beautiful color, and fragrance.

Several times after collecting it, I have sent plants and seeds to England, to people who were skillful growers of other Primulas. So far no one has bloomed it. But in one garden, where the seeds germinated, it has come up and died down each year for four years. I was told by someone in Wallowa that it takes from five to seven years for the plant to reach blooming size, surely a record of some sort. Two and a half years ago I sent some plants to England, and one or two are still alive, perhaps there is still hope of flowers.

It is not an easy plant to find, out of bloom you could pass it easily without recognizing it; as it goes dormant, it resembles a Dodecatheon, but the seed-pod is a true Primula one. I have seen it growing in such diverse situations that I hardly know what would be best for it. The first plants we found were growing within 25 feet of the trunk of a large pine tree, growing in a semi-circle, part shade. The second time on a sunny slope, where a tiny rill of water cascaded down, the plants growing up on little humps of soil and grass. The third time, we had given up hope of finding it, and were just going to sit down for lunch, when the wind blew a most heavenly perfume toward us. We dropped everything, dashed over the brow of the hill, and there it was, growing in profusion. I even found two special color forms, one white, one rose. How I wish I had left them there, instead of bringing them home to an untimely death.

But one of the plants collected then lived and bloomed in a six inch pot. I cannot remember the mixture of soil I gave it, it is so many years ago. But after it went dormant, I put the pot on the north side of the house, and gave it a little water—very little—once a week, and kept it in the cold frame over the winter. The next spring I had my reward. Alas, that was the plant I gave to Will Ingwerson to take back to England with him. I thought I had learned how to handle it, but never again have I been successful.
Last spring I saw it again, in the Wallowas, this time the loveliest of all. Growing under a pine tree in a semi-circle, so thick together it was a wonder how it survived and this time with more shade than sun. I dug up just one plant, the roots were shallow, there was, perhaps, two or three inches of rubble in which they rooted, below that the ground was riddled with pebbles (drainage) but felt hard and unhospitable for plant roots, they evidently did not like it because the roots had not penetrated at all.

Does this Primula dry out completely in summer? I wonder. In some places I think so, in others, not. When Dr. Gabrielson pointed out to me in July where he had collected it in May, (incidentally it was growing and blooming through the melting snow) it was a place as hard and dry as a rock. But in other places, I am certain there is a trace of underground moisture and there surely are summer thunder storms in those mountains.

I have often thought that plants from Union County might be more amenable to cultivation, it is so much lower than the Wallowas, but so far my search has gone unrewarded.
did it finally sprout. For Sieboldii, even the freshest seed, something approximating nature’s process seems necessary. In the colder sections the seed can be sowed in late fall and left out all winter. In warmer localities the seed can be artificially frozen and planted in the coolest part of the year. The extra effort spent on growing Sieboldii from seed is compensated for by having a Primula which is frost and drought resistant and hence can be grown anywhere in the United States.

R. E. Kartack, Baraboo, Wis.

The merits of P. Sieboldii, as a garden plant, are not generally recognized. This may be so because it cannot easily adapt itself where winters are mild. In all the territory from the upper Mississippi Valley to the Atlantic the winters are long and cold supplying a condition agreeable to its temperament. Once established a colony of P. Sieboldii will tolerate the hottest and driest summers. Even though neglected, and obliged to struggle for existence, it will hold its own; and will continue to flower and increase in numbers year after year.

From the time the crisp, light green, plumose foliage emerges until the flowers fade it is a charming plant. After seed bearing it becomes dormant and completely vanishes except for the rhizomes which tend to work to the surface and are finally exposed. In their natural state a mulch of leaves and dying vegetation covers the rhizomes. In cultivation we can do a better job by placing a layer of leaf mould over the bed to the depth of about an inch. That, aside from keeping the weeds in check, is the only care the plants require until there is evidence of crowding. When the flowers diminish in size it is time to break up the bed and reset the rhizomes in more commodious quarters. They like a fibrous loam, well drained situation, and some shade.

Plants come readily from seed, which is here produced in abundance. If seed is wanted a very close watch must be kept as they mature during the hottest weather. The capsules suddenly burst and the seeds shed. We find fall sowing, in an open bed, is best; allowing nature to effect germination in its own way. The seedlings will show up in May, but development will be slow. It is wise to sow the seeds sparsely and let the young plants remain in the seed bed until the end of August. Then they can be safely moved. As there are likely to be more inferior seedlings than good ones, it is a good plan to set the seedlings in a trial row until they flower. Then the best can be selected and transferred to permanent beds.

The Cortusoides Section, in addition to Sieboldii, embraces a number of relatively easy species. Cortusoides, Kisoana, and Polyneura do well here, but none surpass Sieboldii in ease of culture. All are Interesting species, but Sieboldii is the best of the Section.

Many years ago when Primulas were doing their pioneering in our garden—probably the first determined effort to grow them in Wisconsin, I found a clone of Sieboldii in an old garden on the shore of Lake Michigan. I had never before seen a Sieboldii, and could not then identify it. It being a Primula and I a persistent Primula enthusiast I could not suppress my curiosity as to its history, nor my desire to possess it. The best informa-

Mrs. John M. Young, Portland, Oregon

I have not found Sieboldii hard to grow. They seem to do well in any shaded area of my garden. I have moved them around from place to place; even though the situation differs somewhat, they seem to thrive. My soil is a mixture of clay and gravel to which I have added from time to time leaf mold, peat, rotted sawdust and compost.

I have planted seed both in summer just after it was ripe and in January. Results in germination seem about the same. They have grown easily for me with one exception. One July when seed was ripe I planted Auricula, Polyanthus and Sieboldii at the same time in the same growing medium. In a couple of weeks some began to sprout—only the Sieboldii did not show. I kept all pans moist but in September I concluded the Sieboldii were not going to grow so I put them aside, intending to throw the pot of soil out, though it was not done immediately. Winter snows were heaped on the pot. Later when tidying the yard, I picked up the old Sieboldii pot to empty it, when to my great surprise, there were my hand pollinated seedlings—all up! That pot of seed had no water from September to January. I did not dream they would ever show life. This experience may explain the difficulty some have had in trying to germinate Sieboldii seed. Apparently they are able to resist periods of drought.

I am accustomed to dividing them often, annually, or at most every two years. In the fall the roots have a tendency to rise to the surface of the ground. At this time they will fall apart easily for division. If not divided these exposed roots should be covered with soil or compost.

Garden pests have not attacked my Sieboldii. Recently there was an infestation of Strawberry root weevils in an adjoining garden. At that time I lost many Juliae and Polyanthus though Sieboldii seemed not to be affected.
Part of a well established colony of Primula Sieboldii

Photo: The Clarkes, Clackamas, Oregon
One of the keenest delights a grower may experience is to produce through his own efforts, or accidentally, something that may win recognition as being a little better than the ordinary either in flower or fruit—to find one day a blossom of a shade more exquisite, a color more beautiful, a design more perfect, a stronger stalk, or even an onion of more delicate flavor.

So it is with the primrose grower. He will lift that plant to a more favorable location, yearn over it, cherish, cultivate, and reproduce it. He will be on the alert for the first blossoms of the offspring, to see if perchance the commendable qualities of the parent are repeated. If successful, after experimentation and multiplication, there is a desire to make known his creation, to have his neighbors rejoice and share with him.

To distinguish it from others he gives it a name and calls it his strain. He works, not only to keep most of the seedlings true to the parent, but to improve upon them until the special qualities are fairly "fixed", and his "strain" becomes known as different.

Thus have developed the Munstead strain, the Pfitzer strain, the Bartley strain, Carter's strain, British Gold Medal strain, Pacific strain, and many others. Each one proclaims some trait of superiority, peculiarly uniform, of that strain.

According to horticultural authorities the term "strain" is rather loosely defined, not strictly circumscribed. E. L. Seymour states regarding strain—"a group of individuals within a variety or race which constantly differ in one or more characters from the variety or racial type. An illustration would be an improved sor. of pea, bean, or other vegetable developed from a well-known variety by a grower or seedman who would work up a supply of seed or plants to be sold as his 'strain' of the given variety. However, it should be kept in mind that a catalog variety or strain bearing the name of a grower or firm cannot always be clearly differentiated from the variety, of which it is supposed to be an improvement" (1). He also states that a "strain" may be developed as a sport from a single plant.

Norman Taylor describes strain as "a not easily definable category of plants within a variety. The word 'strain' is most often used to indicate a group of plants within a variety with some character insufficient to make them worth describing as a distinct variety, but different enough to be entitled to some designation—Strain, as a horticultural term, is not much used, and seldom with precision" (2).

To assist in clarifying the definition, the term "variety" is described from the botanical standpoint as a group or class of plants within a species separated somewhat from the typical form by some constant characters (3).

In view, then, of the absence of a strict botanical definition and of a rather liberal usage of the term "strain" by horticultural authorities, it would appear that in most instances its use by modern primrose growers should be accepted as legitimate, and as a point of convenience in the description of plants offered by the various growers, hybridists, and commercial producers.

The development of a strain is a fascinating occupation for both the amateur and professional grower. Polyanthus and other Primula offer wide scope to the enthusiast. The whole field of new and varied colors, and other commendable qualities, in a bunch of seedlings is thrown open, and the possibilities of future new "strains" seems endless.

After a plant has been selected, the work of perfecting should be continued, by selection, cultivation, and by careful and planned cross-breeding. Once a plant group of novel or richer coloring, or other distinctions above its predecessors, has been established, it will never be discarded as commonplace (4).


NOTES FROM THE SECRETARY

In September, the Board of Directors regretfully accepted the resignation of Mrs. John M. Young from their number. In her place they persuaded Dr. Matthew C. Riddle to serve the last two months of the year. Dr. Riddle has worked so admirably with the Iris Society that we consider it fortunate that he consented to work on our Board.

Last June the Society received some fortunate publicity. The New York Times had a nice article on primrose culture, and gave the office of our secretary as reference. Through that publicity we directly have several fine new members, among them, Mrs. Angelo Patri, who writes, "Auricula, officinalis, polyanthus (Munstead), cashmeriana, denticulata, Japonica, are the sorts we plant."

Another new member from this source is Mr. Duncan MacPherson of Philadelphia. He writes, "Up to this year I have grown only a few of the better known sorts, acaulis, polyanthus and veris. This fall I planted Auricula, Juliae Wanda, Sieboldii, rosea grandiflora and denticulata."

A new member in Georgia is Mrs. Corinne Kibler, recently from San Jose, where her daughter says her primroses attracted a great deal of attention.

Have lost our member in the Canal Zone—but we are pleased. Mrs. Ray J. Bunnell has returned to her home state of Oregon. She says "Will see primroses next spring!"

A member recently joining is Mr. E. Wiper of Vancouver, B. C. Many
Across the Oregon Trail from Illinois with his parents in 1853 came a young boy, William Conklin Cusick, whose eyes and heart were alert to the rich plant life along the way. From this time on he must have spent many pleasant hours roaming the mountains and plains of eastern Oregon. The year 1913 he spent in and around the University of Oregon arranging and cataloging his collection of approximately ten thousand specimens of plants which he sold to the University.

Strangely his education had not included Botany though he had always been interested. It is said that a Portland friend gave him a copy of Gray's First Lessons in Botany. This no doubt had an effect on his work. He attended an Academy in Dallas, and Willamette University—the latter in 1864. Each time his education was interrupted with periods of teaching.

Another period of volunteer army service in Crook and Union Counties of Oregon and in Idaho gave him more collecting opportunities. He once wrote that he had found wild onions which were a welcome addition to a bacon and bean diet.

His later years were spent in Union County where he died in October 1922.

(continued next page)

Q. 2. My soil is a fairly heavy loam with clay subsoil and I would like

certain. As for fall appearance our plants are fully as good as any I

(Continued next page)
to know how this can best be treated to grow good primroses.
R. A. Knapp, Victoria, B. C.

Ans. (2) Add humus, rotted compost, peat or rotted cow manure. Clay subsoil will hold moisture which is especially favorable for Asiatics. See issue of April '49.

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Books may be had after February from Mrs. Earl Marshall, Sec'y, American Primrose Society, 1172 S.E. 55th Ave., Portland 15, Oregon; Florence Levy, Gresham, Oregon; or direct from the Hon. Sec., R. H. Briggs, "High Bank," RAWTENSTALL, England.

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