



THE ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY

Ireland - Southern Group

168 Sandyford Road,
Dundrum,
Dublin, 16.

July, 1984.

The Southern Ireland Group of the Society has now been in existence for a little over six months, and since the inaugural meeting last November well over one hundred members have joined. The committee has been enlarged from the original four, and its composition is as follows:-

Carl Dacus, Ivanhoe, Spencer Villas, Glenageary. (809602)
Chairman.

Ken Kinsella, 41 Granville Pk., Foxrock. (893216)
Vice-Chairman.

Joan Carvill, 168 Sandyford Rd., Dundrum, Dublin.(983956)
Hon. Secretary.

Richard Sullivan, Camelot, Bray Rd., Cabinteely, Dublin.(854235)
Hon. Treasurer, & Show Sec.

Rosemary Brown, Graigue Conna, Old Connaught, Bray, Co. Wicklow.
(822273)

Billy Moore, 32 Braemor Park, Dublin, 14. (975726)

Bill Kavanagh, 29 Oakdale Drive, Dun Laoghaire. (854287)

Valerie Keegan, Narin, Oldcourt Pk. Bray, Co. Wicklow. (862616)

Dermot Kehoe, 3 Rostrevor Tce., Rathgar, Dublin (979150)

Attached to this newsletter is a list of members as at 12th May 1984. This may help members to get in touch with each other in their own particular parts of Dublin, or the country.

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At the last two evening meetings, we have made available river sand, grit, leaf mould, fertiliser, plastic pots and labels, and also seed which was obtained from the Alpine Garden Society, from members, and from Barnhaven, Chiltern Seeds, and New Zealand. These will continue to be available through the rest of the year, so please don't hesitate to get in touch with any committee member should you require any of these items.

A contribution by Alpine Gardeners to plant conservation.

When the Wildlife Act came into force in 1976, it contained a section in which provision was made for the protection of rare plant species. In November 1980 An Order was made that named 52 such species that are now protected by law in Ireland. They cannot be cut, picked, uprooted or sold and, importantly, their habitats also are protected from damage or alterations that could threaten their survival. The list contains plants from many different habitats, from wetlands and sea shores to mountains and meadows. Most of these plants are extremely rare and occur in only one or two Irish localities. A second category, twelve species in all, are protected because of their rarity on an international basis and find in Ireland their main remaining headquarters.

Despite the legal protection that these plants have been afforded, their survival in Ireland is by no means assured. Accidents can and do happen and the remaining plants of a species can be destroyed overnight by the drainage of a marsh, removal of an old stone wall, ploughing of an old meadow, polluting a river and so on. The Burren in Co. Clare has its fair share of rare species. They include the Hoary Rock-rose, Helianthemum canum; the Pyramidal Bugle, Ajuga pyramidalis and on the Aran Islands, Seakale, Crambe maritima, and Purple milk-vetch, Astragalus danicus. The recent reports of fertilisers being spread all over the Burren landscape by air will certainly not help to ensure the survival of these. Connemara is well famed also for its flora and so, as might be expected, has a number of protected species growing there. The Dorset heath, Erica ciliaris survives on a single roadside bank there and Canadian St. John's Wort, Hypericum canadense grows in a small number of peaty flushes surrounding one of the lakes there. Famous plants such as the Killarney Fern, Trichomanes speciosum are also protected by the recent legislation but this too could easily become extinct as a result of some thoughtless or unknowing picking.

For some years, the Trinity College Dublin, Botanic Gardens, has been carrying out a programme on the cultivation of these rare and protected species. Under licence, plants or seeds were collected from the wild for cultivation in the Gardens, so that a safe 'reservoir' of plants in cultivation can be maintained in case the extinction of the remaining wild plants. Only small numbers of each were collected so that undue damage was not caused to the remaining populations. Over the years, seed has been collected from cultivated examples so that now, for many species, large stocks of seeds are stored from an originally small supply. These seeds are kept in a deep-freeze seed bank at low temperatures. This treatment greatly helps to increase the viable life of many seeds so that from a handful of plants a large stock of viable seed can be built up over a number of years.

Seed of two native Irish and protected species are offered to members who would like to grow them. The first, Trifolium subterraneum, the Subterranean Clover, is so called because it buries its flowers in the soil and so ensures that its seeds will be sown for the following year. It is extremely rare and grows in a single locality in Co. Wicklow only. It grows in a vulnerable habitat in an urban setting that could be easily damaged or disturbed and so become extinct in Ireland. The second, Lotus hispidus, the Hairy Bird's Trefoil, is restricted to a small number of localities in Co. Cork. It is a pretty annual plant with yellow flowers and relatively easy to grow. This seed is being distributed to members who are interested in conservation and who will attempt to establish them in their gardens. At the end of the season, members are requested to gather seeds from their plants and send it to the Trinity Botanic Gardens for storage in their seed bank. It would also be valuable if members could continue to grow these plants each year and so ensure that the plants are safely in cultivation in a number of different gardens. In future years, it is hoped that other species can be supplied and stock of each can be built up for preservation. In this way, members of the Alpine Garden Society in Ireland can help with the practical conservation of plant species. Seed supplies are strictly limited so are offered on a first come, first served, basis.

Peter Wyse Jackson.

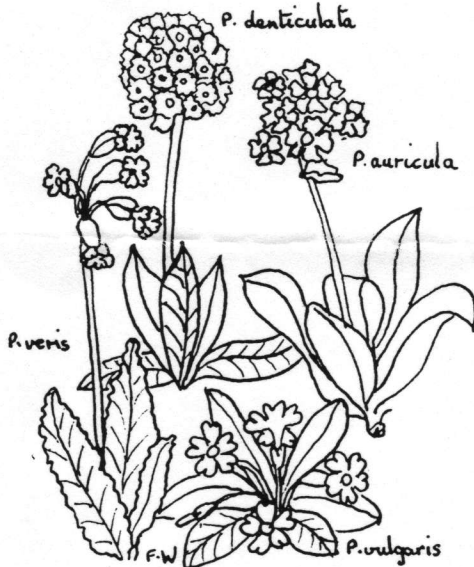
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We have recently discovered that we have a very talented artist among our members. Francis Wortley, from Athy, has very kindly contributed a delightful drawing of Primulas to accompany Rosemary Brown's article.

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There is no lovelier sight than the first Primroses of Spring. No garden plant seems to have the capacity to stop the beholder in his tracks as Primula veris growing in a wood or in a ditch by the roadside. I suppose the same impact hit the first travellers and plant hunters in the mountains of India, Tibet and China when they first saw Asiatic Primulas growing there in the valleys and mountainsides. Thanks to their efforts we are now able to grow many of these plants from the descendants of the seeds they brought back with them. There are an enormous number of different species in cultivation now and I have only space to mention a few of my own favourites, those of relative ease of cultivation. I warn readers that once they have been bitten by the bug, they will become as enthusiastic a collector as I am!

Those I have chosen are, naturally, my own favourites and pride of place must go to P. pulverulenta because of its superb magenta flowers growing in whorls from a stem which is covered in white farina held above the toothed leaves.



It comes from the hills of Szechuan and likes to grow in rich damp loam. The Bartley and Hidcote strains produce flowers which vary in colour from pale pink to the original magenta. P. pulverulenta belongs to the Candelabra section as does P. aurantiaca which comes from the Yunnan Province of China where it grows alongside the mountain streams and in damp meadows. It has reddish orange flowers. P. bulleyana is a deep orange yellow colour, and also comes from Yunnan and is found in a similar situation. P. helodoxa carries up to six whorls of yellow fragrant flowers and grows naturally alongside streams in Yunnan and Upper Burma. Two other candelabra

primulas I have grown with success are P. poissonii, with purple flowers and a white eye which comes from Szechuan and P. ianthiana, from Sikkim, which has violet coloured flowers. All the Candelabra Primulas bear their flowers in whorls above the stem and develop from the base upwards. They all like a damp rich soil.

There is a further group bearing flowers flattened to a head which are called Capitatae; they include P. glomerata, from the foothills of the Himalayas in Nepal and Sikkim. P. glomerata has blue coloured flower heads and the leaves are covered with farina when young. Similar is P. capitata which has a flattened head of purple, pendant flowers, and both like moist soil with leaf mould added and light shade.

Seed of most Primulas can be obtained by members of the Alpine Garden Society and the Royal Horticultural Society from their respective seed lists, or from Chiltern Seeds, Bortree Stile, Ulverton, Cumbria.

Rosemary Brown.

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For the Autumn, we are indebted to Mrs. Hume for very kindly allowing us to visit her lovely garden early in September. This will be a fitting opening to the coming season. Later in the month, there will be a panel of speakers, each giving their own personal preferences among alpine plants. During October, David Mowle is coming from Lancaster to talk on "Alpines in a Small Garden", and in November Brian Wood will share with us his wide knowledge of trough gardening. On October 6th, we have been invited by the Irish Garden Plants Society to look after the Alpine Section of their Plant Sale at Kilruddery, and we are asking you all to produce as many plants as possible to contribute to this sale.

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It has been decided, in some fear and trepidation, to hold a "Show" next Spring. Many of our group, though experienced gardeners, are new to alpines, and new to exhibiting also, and those of us who went up to Greenmount in April saw plants well-grown and beautifully presented, and this must be our aim for the future. It is hoped that many of you are getting plants ready for our first show; now is the time to produce good strong plants that will come through the winter, and be in good condition by April. In recent years particularly, there have been very few exhibitors here, and perhaps our Society can make a fresh start, with first-time exhibitors next year, who will thereby gain experience and go on to become expert.

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By the time this reaches you, the seed from Trinity Botanic Garden of endangered species will already have been sown and is hoped growing into good plants; anyone who would like to take part in the scheme in 1985 should write to the Hon. Sec. enclosing (as always) a stamped envelope, and they will receive seeds next year.

Seed Sowing.

The following are the methods which I use to propagate from seed. I will concentrate on sowing and germinating alpines and other plants suitable for rock gardening and similar situations.

Equipment needed:-

- a. 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ / $\frac{3}{4}$ " plastic pots for small quantities of seed; half to full size seed boxes for larger amounts.
- b. plastic bags, to hold one seed box or two pots.
- c. John Innes Seed Compost.
- d. Lime free sand. Not building sand.
- e. Lime free compost, for lime hating subjects.
- f. Plastic labels and lead pencil (H)
- g. Liquid copper or Cheshunt fungicide, used according to manufacturers' instructions.

Mix J.I.S.C. three parts to one of sand. Place a little coarse peat over holes in bottom of pots or boxes, and fill with compost. Do not over firm. Sow fine seed on surface of compost. For flat seeds, make slits in the compost and drop in seeds on their edge. Cover large seeds with a layer of sand or fine compost to the same depth as the diameter of the seed. For ferns, pour boiling water over the compost in pot and allow to cool before sowing spores.

Some seeds of the pea family and also cyclamen, need to be soaked in warm water for 24 hours. I fill a jar with water as hot as possible from the tap, drop in the seeds and allow to stand for 24 hours. Seeds in berries are best removed from the pulp and, if not too small, rinsed on a fine sieve under running water to remove inhibitors.

Mark all pots with a label with the name of the seed, date, source, and if possible the number of seeds sown. The reason for this I shall explain later. Use only lead pencil, as marking pens will fade or wash off.

When sowing is completed, fill a basin of water to half the height of the pots. It is wise to use liquid copper in this water to help prevent seedlings damping off. Place the pots in this, and when the top of the compost is damp, take out the pots and allow to drain for a short time. Then place in plastic bags, tie tops, and place outside in a cool shaded position, and check once a week or so for germination. When seedlings appear, move into stronger light, but do not allow sun to shine directly on bags, or the seedlings will cook! Germination times for wild plant seeds can vary from a few weeks to a number of years; many will require a period of cold weather with possibly a period of warmth as well.

In many cases, not all seeds of a species will germinate at the same time, so when the time comes to prick out for example a pot of primulas, you may get a second flush of seedlings later on, which may be better than the first. This is the reason for trying to give yourself some idea of the number of seeds sown.

As most seeds which fail to germinate probably did so because the compost dried out, I favour plastic bags rather than sheets of glass or newspaper. It also means that you can go away for a holiday knowing that not too much can go wrong.

The best time to sow most alpines is mid-winter to early summer. The main idea is to produce seedlings as large and strong as possible before the next winter.

All I can do now is to wish you the best of luck and good growing. If you have any problems, please feel free to contact me at 309602.

Carl Dacus.

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Enclosed with this newsletter is a leaflet giving details and advantages of membership of the Alpine Garden Society. The Journal which is issued quarterly is a very fine production, well illustrated with many photographs, and is a mine of information.