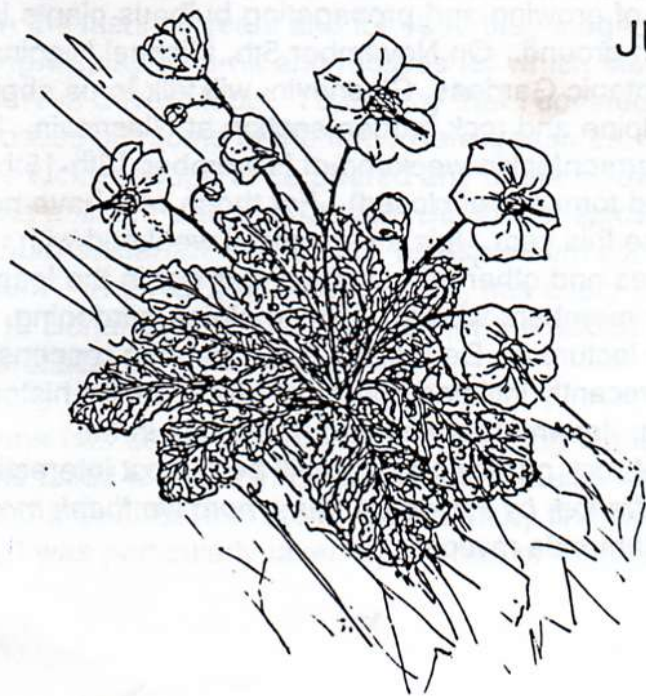


ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY

DUBLIN GROUP

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What a Spring! And what a Summer! They have been almost enough to cure the alpine gardening addict. Thank goodness for vicarious gardening through the medium of lectures and shows. The latter are covered later in this newsletter but because of pressure of space, if you missed the lectures, you will not be reminded of them here.

Our autumn programme is included with the newsletter. Note the dates in your diary. The meeting on September 17th relies on contributions from members. Please bring a few slides or plants (or any thing else that is not too far off the theme of alpine gardening) that you will be prepared to talk about. The visit to Beech Park on September 27th, courtesy of Neil McDermott and Seamus O'Brien, will give members an opportunity to learn about the plans for this famous garden. Phil and Gwen Phillips, our lecturers on October 15th, have travelled and photographed widely. Many members will have read their superbly illustrated articles in the Bulletin. The bulb workshop in Trinity Botanic Gardens on October 17th, courtesy of Professor Mike Jones, Dr David Jeffrey and Dr Steve Waldren, will be led by George Sevastopulo and Carl Dacus, and will be a practical demonstration of growing and propagating bulbous plants in pots and in the open ground. On November 5th, Michael Higgins from the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, will talk to us about plans for the alpine and rock garden section at Glasnevin. Book soon for the Termonfeckin weekend of November 13th-15th (the programme and form are enclosed). For those who have not been before, do come this year. It is a very social weekend with splendid lectures and other attractions and is not in the least intimidating for members who are new to alpine gardening. John Page, who will lecture on December 3rd, has been responsible for setting up the recently initiated specialist group on the history of rock gardening. Ireland has an honourable role in the development of rock gardening - this will be a most interesting talk. *The cover illustration, by Peggy Parker, whom we thank most warmly, is of Ramonda myconi.*

GREENMOUNT 1998

What a morning! I left home at 6 a. m. on 4th April in torrential rain, which stayed with me almost all the way to Greenmount. It was a miserable journey, not helped by the fact that for various reasons I was alone. Immediately on arrival, however, the usual warm welcome dispelled any gloom and spirits were fully restored by a mug of hot coffee.

In spite of the early date and the unusually mild weather in February and March, which had advanced the season significantly, the Ulster group's 1998 Show was a resounding success. If the benches were not quite as full as usual there was still much to admire among the many fine plants exhibited. Opportunities to augment one's collection were provided by the Group's excellent plant stall as well as three commercial stalls. There was a good attendance by the general public although the number of visitors from the South was noticeably down, perhaps due to the weather.

Glasnevin's non-competitive exhibit has become a feature of the Shows in the last few years and for 1998 they staged a most interesting display of ferns and mosses for which they received a well deserved Silver Medal. I can't say that I coveted any of the many mosses but some of the ferns were treasures. Don't hesitate if you are lucky enough to be offered any of the following :

Cheilanthes affinis, *Paesia scaberula*, *Blechnum spicant*, *Polystichum setiferum* 'Ramosum' or *Asplenium scolopendrium* 'Undulatum'. The AGS, north and south, has every reason to be grateful to Donal Synnot and his team for the added dimension that their exhibit brings to the shows.

Liam Byrne has developed the habit of winning the Open Section, a habit he failed to break in Greenmount. He also won an AGS medal and a Certificate of Merit. Of the many fine plants that Liam showed, I was particularly taken by his pan of *Pleione formosana*

alba, one of the finest pleione exhibits I have seen. He had several lovely specimens of *Primula pubescens* 'Harlow Car' in different classes, as well as a very good *P. reidii williamsii*. It is a tribute to Liam's skill as a grower that he manages to maintain this plant year after year. I think it's my favourite primula and I can't grow it.

John McWhirter's lovely three-pan entry of *Corydalis solida*, *Cassiope* 'Badenoch' and *Andromeda polifolia* 'Macrophylla' won a well deserved first. Carol McCutcheon's immaculate pan of *Aciphylla pinnatifida* was awarded the prize for the best plant from Australasia. Jim Price's delicate *Cystopteris dickieana* came first in the open fern class. The ever-affable Hugh McAllister won B Section and Linda Cairns, C Section. Sheila Holland got a first for a lovely saxifrage, *S. 'Karel Capek'*. Someone asked me if it was named after the Pope! Harold McBride had his usual quota of perfect plants on display, one of which, *Primula wigramiana*, particularly appealed to me.

Among the bulbous plants, George Sevastopulo's *Corydalis schanginii* ssp. *ainiae* was outstanding, as was his three-pan entry of *Muscari coeleste*, *Fritillaria latakensis* and *Narcissus x cazorianus*. Ciaran Burke's three-pan entry of South Africans, *Ornithoglossum* sp., *Lachenalia* sp. and *Moraea* sp., was delightful. Congratulations to Anna Nolan for her two well-deserved firsts with *Corydalis flexuosa* and *Astelia alpina*. It's great to see an accomplished gardener like Anna overcoming an innate reluctance to show and succeeding so well.

There were several fine plants of the lovely *Anemonella thalictroides* on show and *Trillium rivale* was almost commonplace. I could continue to list the many other wonderful plants, which delighted visitors to the Show, but I don't want this short report to become a catalogue. Suffice it to say that Pat Crossley and her team delivered the goods once again in difficult circumstances, thus maintaining the proud show record of the

Ulster Group. Next year will be a special one for Pat as it will be the 60th Show staged by the Group. I believe a special memento will be presented to all exhibitors, so why not enter in 1999.

Finally, to avoid any accusations of false modesty, I must mention that, to my great delight, my pan of *Saxifraga strobilata* was awarded the Farrer medal. Whoopee!

Billy Moore

CABINTEELY 1998

With the topsy turvy weather of the Spring, Valerie Keegan must have been wondering up to the last minute whether we would have a Show this year. In the event our members and those from the Ulster Group rallied round and the benches were well filled with an interesting range of plants.

The Farrer Medal was hotly contested. The judges were left to decide between a superb *Cypripedium calceolus* shown by Helen Dillon and John McWhirter's magnificent pot of *Fritillaria affinis*, which won by a short head. Other plants that I admired were a dwarf form of *Trillium rivale* and *Kalmia microphylla alba* in Harold McBride's small six pan entry; an unidentified lemon yellow member of the Iridaceae, *Babiana* 'White King' and a beautiful violet blue *Babiana* sp. in Ciaran Burke's three pan bulb entry; and all the Orsi dwarf conifers, particularly *Abies koreana* 'Pinnocchio'.

Congratulations to Liam Byrne for once again winning the Open Section, to Hugh McAlister from County Down for winning B Section and Margaret Orsi for winning C Section. Congratulations also to Lorna Kelly for winning the Brian Wood Trophy with *Pulsatilla vulgaris*. This trophy is awarded for the class restricted to entries grown from seed in C Section. Bringing plants that have been raised from seed to the show bench is one of the most satisfying facets of showing. The National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin who have been such tremendous supporters of our

Show were awarded a Silver medal for an exhibit of ferns and mosses. Finally congratulations and thanks to all those who contribute to make our show the success that it is.

George Sevastopulo

THE CHAIRMAN'S GARDEN

He wasn't at the lecture on the previous Thursday evening. Speculation was rife. Was he down on his knees praying for good weather, or was he preparing the garden for an onslaught? Whichever way he worked the magic, the sun shone out of a clear blue sky and the garden was in great condition. There was something for every one - plenty to admire (and plenty to covert).

The front garden is a series of beds, with a raised bed running next to the railings and a second at right angles to it. Each had its own selection of alpine gems such as *Daphne arbuscula*.

At the rear of the house the scale was different with herbaceous plants and shrubs. The central focus was a pond shaded at one end by an old apple tree. Near this was a particularly fine combination of the dark velvet blue *Iris pumila* and *Viola* 'Penny Black'. Other eye catching plants included *Abutilon x suntense* 'Jermyns' which had a prominent position at the rear of the pond and *Rhododendron* 'Elizabeth Lockhart', with its chocolate brown leaves, close to the house under the window.

However the plant that stimulated most of the oohs and aahs was in a rather unusual place. So that he can grow plants from very dry areas, Carl has constructed a raised bed covered by a perspex roof approximately one metre above the bed with the sides enclosed by netting. In this was an exquisite *Lamium garganicum* ssp. *striatum* var. *microphyllum*. Its silver foliage and pink flowers, with a small reflex lip, gave the effect of a cock's comb. This plant definitely stole this show, and would any other I should imagine!

I cannot end without thanking our host and hostess, the former dispensing information from under his Chilean footballer's cap and the latter dispensing all sorts of goodies from the kitchen.

Brian Lynch

TROUGH GAZING

Trough gazing or people watching?

We might have been at a garden party. A pleasant summer evening in Dalkey. The threatened rain held off while we partook of Brian Wood's wine and delicious savouries. Many of the doyens/doyennes of alpine gardening were there. Little gatherings at the lower level admired the new circular lawn garden, a nice idea for a very small garden. On the opposite side there was a wonderful mix of plants all blending together to make attractive combinations of shape and colour. The stars of the piece for me were the wonderful blue *Anchusa azurea* 'Dropmore' and the very fashionable *Cerintho major*.

Up above, the balcony was festooned with a beautifully trained wisteria and the steps leading up were filled with the scent of *Jasminum polyanthum*. On the terrace there were 'oohs' and 'aahs' as a little group gathered around *Psoralea pinnata*, covered in blue pea flowers against its attractive needle foliage. This was glyn on the wall of the house for extra protection. Another group admired the new white *Diascia* - from my eavesdropping I could tell it would 'run' out of Murphy and Wood's garden centre next day! Around the side of the house a perfect specimen of *Tropaeolum tricolorum* blended with the soft blue plantings in the trough beside.

Troughs, pots and containers of all kinds were filled with perfectly grown plants - numerous hostas and not a slug or a snail in sight - I wonder did Brian banish them all to the Northside. A particularly

small variegated hosta, H. 'Masquerade' was admired by Anna Nolan - it must be special. *Philesia magellanica* was flowering in a container with blue and pale pink ramondas and a lovely soft blue corydalis - could it have been a restrained *C. flexuosa*? The clematis were another great interest - 'Bees Jubilee', most unlike a clematis, and the lovely 'Duchess of Edinburgh'

A wonderful evening of trough gazing, wine sipping and just a little gardeners' gossip! Many thanks, Brian.

Rose Sevastop

CLARA, COUNTY OFFALY

The first rain of the day started spotting the coach windows as the last of the group boarded the coach to return to Dublin. Those who had just been out on the bog to see naturalised *Sarracenia purpurea* had been rewarded for their soggy trek by a beautiful sight : the red-purple nodding flowers gently bobbed in the breeze above their modified leaves which are various shades of purple striped with green. The leaves, specially designed to trap insects, are like inflated pitchers, hence their popular name 'Pitcher Plant'. They keep company with the bog cotton (*Eriophorum* sp.), which looks as though someone has stuck a piece of cotton wool on the tip of each plant. Also growing happily were the sarracenia's carnivorous cousin, the sundew (*Drosera* sp.), *Polygala serpyllifolia* with blue flowers, and starry yellow bog asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*).

The visit to Woodfield Bog was the perfect end to the day which had started early in the morning in Ballsbridge in overcast conditions. By the time we had arrived in Clara for our first stop at Ravensberg Nurseries, the sun had come out. When preparing to disembark, some of us questioned our Chairman's wisdom when we observed him taking off his jumper as the rest of us put on our jackets. We wondered whether he was not just trying to show off

his hardiness as a true alpine man, but he was proved right - the breeze was warm and the sun continued to shine.

Jan Ravensberg welcomed us to his five acre wholesale nursery which he runs with the help of his son and three full time employees. After a walk around the old stable yard garden adorned with climbers such as *Billardiera longiflora* and *Vitis coignetiae*, Jan led us on a tour of the nursery. Here we saw many trees, shrubs and climbers at various stages of production. Everybody was impressed by the high standard of husbandry at the nursery and also by the quality of the plants. How could so much work be done by so few? Jan answered our questions as we walked through the nursery and then led us to the area where he has planted many interesting trees. Oaks (*Quercus* spp.) are his main interest and he grows many species which differ in their growth habit, foliage and colour. Other trees also attracted attention, including *Crataegus laciniata (orientalis)*, a small tree with silver cut leaves, which bears white flowers and later a profusion of deep red berries.

From Ravensberg Nursery, we travelled the short distance to Woodfield, the home of Keith and Helen Lamb. We ate our picnic lunches outside and then were ready to wander through the garden.

The giant *Echium pininana* standing proudly at ten feet tall by the front door, is probably there to prepare visitors for what they are about to see, for there are many great plants in each of the gardens. The rockery, the walled garden with its raised beds and the woodland garden, known as 'The Jungle', are home to plants from around the world; they all seemed so happy, luxuriating in the care and attention that the Lambs obviously heap upon them.

Celmisias usually are the centre of attention and the fine specimens of *C. semicordata* 'David Shackleton' was much photographed. The little annual *Omphalodes linifolia* sporting its

dainty white flowers was admired as were the cypripediums. In the woodland garden abutilons towered high above lusciously leafy hostas and dramatic rogersias.

As always, when the time came to leave, we were all wondering when we could return to this marvellous garden where we had been made so welcome.

Ciaran Burke

LIMESTONE PAVEMENT AND IRISH GEOLOGICAL HERITAGE

Some gardeners are tempted to use water worn limestone in rockeries and borders because of the aesthetic beauty of such naturally sculpted rocks. Collectively termed 'karren' by geomorphologists, these fluted shapes form on exposed limestone and beneath soils. Whatever the cost of these rocks at garden centres, their use in gardens may result in a far greater cost to the countryside.

Limestone pavements - the best known examples are in the Burren - are a finite resource. It has taken thousands of years of weathering to produce the pavements of today, and they will not regenerate within our, or our childrens', or our grandchildrens' lifetimes. They are part of the distinctive limestone scenery collectively termed 'karst'. Karst is found in much of Ireland, but it is a fragile part of the environment. Limestone pavement is being lost as farmers bulldoze, level and re-seed rocky scrub land areas. In other areas, there is an imminent threat of commercial extraction because protective Limestone Pavement Orders in Britain have meant that supplies for British garden centres are now being sought in Ireland.

The Geological Survey of Ireland has started a programme to identify our geological heritage, and to select both unique and important representative sites, which will be designated as Natural Heritage Areas by Dúchas, The Heritage Service. Karst has been

chosen as the first theme to be started, and site reporting and selection will be completed in less than a year. Some limestone pavements will already have been proposed as Natural Heritage Areas because of their intrinsic botanical interest. Irish Geological Heritage is aiming to identify the best pavements developed as a landform in the context of karst geomorphology.

The active involvement of groups concerned with all aspects of karst is welcome. We hope that members of the Alpine Garden Society will contribute, given the policy of the Society in relation to the conservation of limestone pavement. Any information or notice of particular sites will be welcomed. Opinions are sought as to whether a more vigorous mechanism of protection is needed; perhaps a 'stonemark' consumer symbol could be developed to allow use of responsibly extracted material from the top of existing quarries for those gardeners who wish to use it. Perhaps we should all be thinking about educational development in favour of the natural resource, instead of suburban replicas.

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Matthew Parkes

GROWING RAMONDA FROM SEED

I am very fond of the genus *Ramonda* and its close relative *Haberlea*, which are temperate members of the mainly tropical family Gesneriaceae that includes well known tender plants such as the African Violets (*Saintpaulia* spp.). Seeds of the three species of *Ramonda*, *R. myconi*, *R. nathaliae* and *R. serbica* are commonly listed in the AGS and other society seed lists. I have usually been much more successful in my application for seeds than I have been in raising the plants. In the past I have followed my usual routine of sowing seeds on the surface of a seed

compost (1 part John Innes No. 1, 1 part grit, 1 part peat) in a 7 cm square plastic pot, covering the surface with 1 cm of grit and standing the pot outside in light shade. The seeds, which are minute, germinate readily using this method, but the seedlings, which are also minute, grow very slowly and are eventually overtaken by moss and liverwort, despite the top dressing of grit.

Having produced numerous pots of well grown liverwort over the years but very few *Ramonda* spp., I decided to follow a new régime which I learned about from an international society devoted to gesneriads. Over my standard seed compost in 7 cm pots, I sieved a layer of fine peat approximately 1cm thick. I then poured boiling water onto the surface to sterilise it, covered the pots and left them to cool. The seed was sown on to the moist peat and the pots were wrapped in clear 'Cling Film' and placed on a north facing window sill. Germination occurred within three weeks and the seedlings have grown on strongly so that now, less than six months after sowing, they are large enough (leaves 5mm across) to handle and to be pricked out. During this time, I have steeped the pots once in boiled water to maintain the humid conditions. It is important to sow the seed as thinly as possible otherwise you will have to disentangle myriad fine roots when pricking out. I intend to grow some of the seedlings, once they have been pricked out, under the same conditions that they have experienced up to now. I think the warmth and moisture is much to their liking - an evolutionary memory from their tropical past. However, they will discover that all good things come to an end. They are destined for north facing crevices in retaining walls where they will have to endure the vagaries of the Irish weather.

George Sevastopulo

This issue of the Newsletter was edited by George Sevastopulo. The next issue will be edited by Julieanne Bailey, 6 Rockville Crescent, Blackrock, County Dublin. Copy for the next issue should reach Julieanne by the 1st December.