

# International Rock Gardener





February sees a first article by Richard Green, who lives in central Scotland. He is one of the proof-readers essential to our team. He was persuaded that he should try his hand at increasing the number of globe-trotting International Rock Gardeners among those people who think that only specialised, dedicated plant hunting holidays (which are impractical for many of us) are capable of delivering a great plant related experience.

Cover photo: *Iris atropurpurea*, pictured in snow in the Mallorcan garden of Hans Achilles on February 4<sup>th</sup> 2012. Miriam Sason tells us that this iris has seen snow in its native habitat only once in the last century, about fifty years ago. This iris from

the *Oncocyclus* section [begins to flower in February](#) in its native land, Israel.

## So you want to become an International Rock Gardener? by Richard Green

If you have not seen many plants in the wild then these notes are intended for you. You are impressed with the stories and pictures in the IRG. However, your spouse or partner may



want a “proper” holiday and is probably not as interested in plants as you or I. Can you still have a holiday and see some good plants? Clearly the easiest way is to join an organised trip such as run by the SRGC or AGS or by several commercial operators, but it is also the most expensive way. This article is intended to help you do it yourself, even if you have only have been abroad once or twice on package holidays – so please read on. You will be nervous of the problems you may encounter and that it may all go horribly wrong. What do you do if you can see several large clumps of *Iris hermona* about 100m beyond a sign like that pictured (left) which we found in the Golan Heights of Israel?

In case you are wondering, the correct answer is to beat a hasty retreat and photograph the very

similar *Iris lortetii* in a nearby National Nature Reserve instead!



My international trips started with a cheap package holiday. Quite by accident my honeymoon was to Malcesine on the eastern side of Lake Garda in northern Italy. The cable car started only 200m from our hotel and it went straight to the top of Monte Baldo. This mountain is well known and rock plants can be seen outside the gondola station. This is a great way to introduce a new wife to rock gardening!

All of my plant hunting trips have to be taken as part of family holidays. This is usually the only spare time available for those of working age – unless you have a flexible job. After retirement you can arrange things differently. It is important to realise that a real holiday should be exactly that. If you spend all your time in the car zooming from one plant hot-spot to another, then you do not relax before you return to your office. Too much plant hunting can also be a recipe for marital discord.

Above: *Iris lortetii* in a Nature Reserve in Israel – located in advance on the internet.

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Where do you go? Where can you combine family holidays with interesting plants? There are plenty of suggestions in the [Travel section of the SRGC Forum](#). If you are new to this then I suggest that you start with the mountains of Europe, such as the French or Italian Alps, Austria, Switzerland, Greece, Cyprus, or anywhere in the Mediterranean (see picture). The Med is well served with package holidays, but it can be difficult to find suitable trips at the start or end of the season when the weather is cooler and plant people prefer to visit.



Your local travel agent can become your friend once they realise that you want an unusual holiday and may find you a bargain.

We once booked an entire April package holiday to Crete at less than the cost of the flights alone booked separately.

We used the flights and airport transfers, but vacated our beach hotel for an alternative in the mountains for the week, returning for the last night only.

If you prefer the flexibility of travelling yourself then here are some more helpful hints. As you become more experienced you

will organise your own trips, either driving abroad with your own car, or organising flights with budget airlines on the internet. We have booked self-catering accommodation regularly on the internet and it has always been excellent, if sometimes unusual.

We have spent a week in the French Alps in a 15th century private house with frescos on the walls. (see picture below). It costs around £20 to send your deposit in Sterling to a bank in Euros. Try to book without paying a deposit and promise full payment on arrival, but do confirm arrangements several times by email or phone before you travel.

Once you have visited an area and want to return things are much easier, just visit the local tourist office and obtain their accommodation list to take home with you. You can then write,

phone or download an updated copy of the brochure for the next year.

It is most important to research in advance the area you are visiting.

I trawl the internet for weeks when planning.

Send off for brochures from all the specialist holiday companies

which cater for walking, bird or plant holidays.

These give clues to the best places for visits and the best times. Some of these companies will send you itineraries which can be a good guide to suitable locations.



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How else can you find the correct places to go? I read all the books available and would never have found *Galanthus reginae-olgae* in the Taygetos Mountains of the Peloponnese without John Richard's admirable AGS publication "[Mountain Flower Walks – The Greek Mainland](#)". This pointed me in the direction of other suitable spots and once I knew that the bulbs prefer deep shade under *Platanus orientalis* trees, I was able to find them in many other places in the same conditions.

Right: *Galanthus reginae-olgae* in the Taygetos Mountains

Look through the indexes for the [SRGC Journal](#) or the [AGS Bulletin](#) online at the society websites. Sometimes you can find magazines for sale at Shows and many SRGC Journals and AGS Bulletins are now available on DVD.

You will find it helpful to discuss travel plans with your contacts at Local Group meetings. One of the best orchid sites I have seen was where X marked the spot on a dog-eared "Treasure Map".

This was drawn for me on the back of an envelope by a friendly SRGC member at a local SRGC Group meeting.



Above: *Orchis italica* on Crete.

Left: *Ophrys heldreichii*, at the same site. Photos Richard Green

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What is the best way to travel once you arrive? The easiest way is to take your own car or hire a car for part or the whole of your visit. It can add substantially to the cost of a holiday but when time is short, public transport is quite impractical. Holiday reps can organise car hire for you, or you can hire one yourself locally. We now prefer to hire online before we arrive, as this avoids wasting half the first day. However, in the past we have arrived at our holiday hotel in the wee small hours, only to have the hire car man wake us from a deep sleep only 5hrs later, as it is usual to have your hire car delivered to your hotel in Crete. You will always find problems on the roads. Different countries have different customs, not least of which (for a UK driver) is that most countries drive on the right; however one notable exception is Cyprus. Drivers in many countries use the car horn regularly and overtake on any side, especially in towns or cities. Do keep your eyes on the road to avoid drivers or other hazards in the road such as goats coming unexpectedly round a corner. Plant spotting is best left to your passenger – my wife frequently feels safer driving so that I can pick out the interesting plants from the car and shout “Stop!” when necessary.



Goats crossing- a typical road hazard



Take care when searching for plants as your enthusiasm may get the better of you and lead you into tricky situations.

I was photographing orchids above a gorge in Cyprus, scarcely noticing that the river was over 100m directly below.

Left: Richard, the careless plant hunter, too busy with his camera!

Photo: Jan Green

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Our most recent trip was to the Peloponnese between 16 and 25 October 2011. The story of this holiday illustrates some of the points I made earlier. First, we considered a travelling holiday finding our accommodation wherever we happened to be in the late afternoon. However, we were tired and wanted a relaxing holiday, so we booked all of our week in one place – in self-catering accommodation in Kalamata. We found this by searching on the internet and emailing the owner direct.

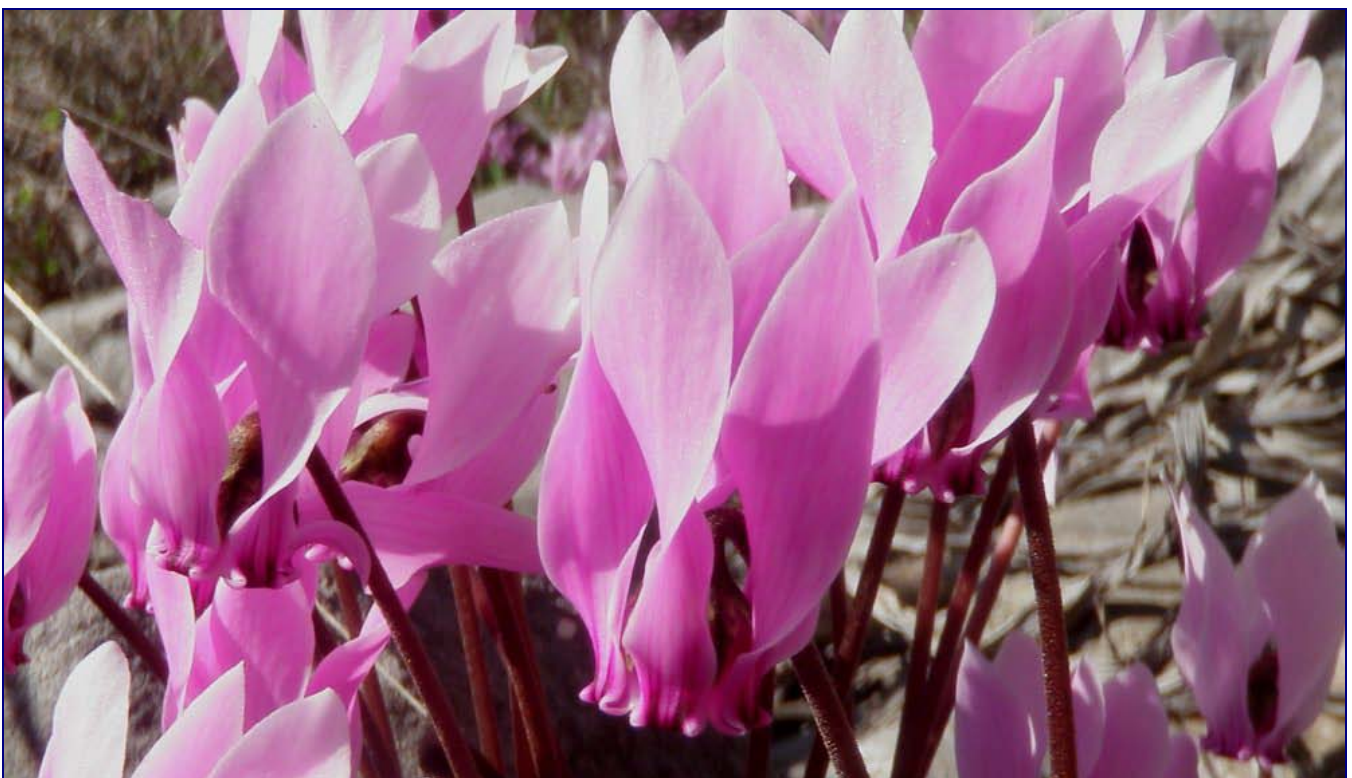


We had arranged flights with Easyjet from Edinburgh to Athens and had pre-booked a hire car for collection at the airport – both online. Most airlines encourage you to book flights and car hire at the same time.

Our first night was also pre-booked in a hotel only one hour from Athens. We knew from experience that we were arriving late in the evening and that driving many miles to find a hotel in a strange country after a 4 hour flight and a heavy week at work is not the easiest way to start a holiday.

Left: The Corinth Canal

It was raining on arrival at Athens, but luckily we found our hotel after only a couple of wrong turns. It helped that I had printed maps in various sizes from [Google Maps](https://www.google.com/maps). The next day dawned cool, but dry and sunny and we were able to sightsee around the Corinth Canal and we found our first *Cyclamen graecum* (below).



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We experienced fog, ice and snow and at the top of Mount Menalo later that day, whilst holidaymakers basked in sunshine at the coast. Weather can be very difficult, especially as plant lovers often travel in early spring or late autumn, rather than during the summer.

Snow can fall in July anywhere in the Alps. Be prepared and take all types of clothing with you. However, the Sternbergias did not seem to mind the snow.



Above: Sternbergias in the snow



Our holiday was rather too early to see all the six or so species of Crocus for which this area is famed, but some *Crocus hadriaticus* were up, if not opening their flowers in the cool conditions near the village of Manthirea.

Both this village and the Mount Melano site, along with many others, are given in the "Mountain Flower Walks" book. I doubt that we would have found them on our own without some guidance.

Left: *Crocus hadriaticus*

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There are some golden rules regarding food. Always keep some food and a bottle of water in both your rucksack and in the car, you never know when you will get hungry. We also carry a packet or two of Glucose tablets for energy.

I find that it is essential to eat lunch before searching a likely site for plants as it improves everyone's tempers!

I was able to spend time photographing the *Galanthus reginae-olgae*, (see picture, page 4) and this *Sternbergia sicula* in the Lagada Gorge because we had eaten our sandwiches and so were comfortable and happy.



*Sternbergia sicula* in the Lagada Gorge

It is important to keep a sense of perspective when travelling and avoid rushing from plant to plant. This allows more time to enjoy and take pictures!

Everyone intending to travel abroad either with an organised group, or on their own, should read Mike Hopkins' excellent article "A Botanical Tour Survival Guide" in The Rock Garden (July 2011 issue Vol:127 p84-91) before they travel.



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We take a keen interest in many other things apart from flowers. Mosquitoes and spiders may not be everyone's friends, but Praying Mantis are very friendly and one spent several minutes with us on our lunch table one day.

Left: friendly Mantis

*Crocus boryi* was in evidence almost everywhere we went around the Mani Peninsula. We did not need a book to find it. As with all plants once you have seen one,

then you can pick them out from a car even when travelling at some speed.



*Crocus boryi* (above) is recognised by the divided stigma and white anthers and is one of the first autumn-flowered crocuses to emerge.



The olive groves were full of *Narcissus serotinus*, (left) with flowers only 30 - 40mm in diameter.

I was seeing this plant for the first time and I was struck by the delicacy of the small flowers.

I was expecting something the size of *Narcissus poeticus* and I very nearly passed it by without noticing the first time.

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We did also see plenty of other plants and chief amongst them were the Colchicums.

Most of these are smaller than the garden varieties such as *Colchicum bivonae* (see next page).

Right: *Colchicum parlatoris*



Below: *Colchicum cupanii*



Later in the week we took day trips further down south into the Mani Peninsula. There is a considerable difference in climate as you drive further south, it being hotter and drier.

This area is one of the wildest in Greece and was the home of warring families until not so long ago.

Near Areopoli (below) the architecture still shows signs of the characteristic Tower Houses built by the inhabitants to protect themselves against attackers.



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*Colchicum bivonae* in the Taygetos Mountains of the central Peloponnese

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Other visitors to the same area slightly later than us in 2011 were [Janis Ruksans](#) and [John Richards](#) and they found more crocuses in flower. The weather was still too hot and dry in late October for most of the crocus species to be awake. However, *Cyclamen graecum* (below) was flowering in abundance underneath almost every piece of thorny scrub.



We had no problems on our trip and had a wonderful week in the Peloponnese. This was our first visit in autumn and we saw many flowers which we had never seen before in the wild. We returned to Athens to drop off our car and fly back to Edinburgh, arriving late on Sunday evening. By the Monday afternoon I was sitting at my office desk in Glasgow gazing at the grey cloudy sky and the previous week was already a memory. However, I went home that evening and viewed my pictures again. Then the brightness of Greece and her flowers came flooding back. Once you have taken your first plant hunting trip, then future ones are much easier to plan. You can follow in the footsteps of those who have travelled the world and become an International Rock Gardener in your own individual way.

R.G.

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## ---Plant Portrait---

Daphnes are ever popular garden plants and we are introduced here to two more species by [Kirsten Andersen and Lars Hansen](#) from Herskind in Denmark.



***Daphne glomerata*** Lam.      Text: Lars Hansen   Photos: Kirsten Andersen

Lamarck described *Daphne glomerata* in 1792. It grows in Northeast Turkey and the Caucasus in subalpine and alpine turf and screes up to approx. 3000m. It grows in humus-rich soil with grit and prefers a cool and light position. Most places where it grows are covered by snow in winter.

*D. glomerata* is a small, evergreen shrub from 10 to about 40 cm high. According to Holubec and Křivka's book "Caucasus and its flowers" there are two forms; one from limestone screes and crevices is low, sparsely branched and semi-prostrate in habit, spreading from underground stolons. The other form from acidic sites is more upright and branched.



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The stems are bare, with brownish-grey bark and traces of previous years leaves. Leaves are grouped in terminal rosettes on the stems. They are 2-4cm long, sessile, glossy, dark green, oblong, lanceolate or obovate.



The flowers are creamy white, tinged rose outside. They are sweetly scented, forming globular inflorescences (hence the specific name) with up to 40 flowers inside the leaf rosette. The fruits have a fleshy, orange pericarp.

*D. glomerata* has been cultivated over the last 25 years but is still not common in culture.

We have grown it in our garden since 1999. We sowed wild collected seed from Josef Halda in autumn 1996. Four seeds germinated in spring 1999 and one seedling survived in the garden. It grows in full sun in a well-drained soil with some humus and much grit. It grows rather slowly and is now a plant of about 15cm high and 12cm wide. Even though the soil isn't acidic, it is obviously the form

Holubec and Křivka describe from acidic

soil, a plant with many branches and no underground runners. We think it is a very nice compact *Daphne*.

Although the plant should be evergreen it loses the leaves when the frost becomes a bit tough. When in last winter we had much snow in Denmark, it did not lose the leaves so that is probably what happens in nature. Fortunately, the new leaves grow again in April. We have never had seeds from the plant but it is not difficult to root semi-ripe or tip cuttings, we do it usually in June.

It should be mentioned that the summer in Denmark is rather cool with about 15°C on average from June to August. Rainfall in Denmark is approximately 750mm per annum. During very dry periods in summer we water the garden.

## ---Mountains in the Garden---



Southern bed with *Daphne circassica* at upper right

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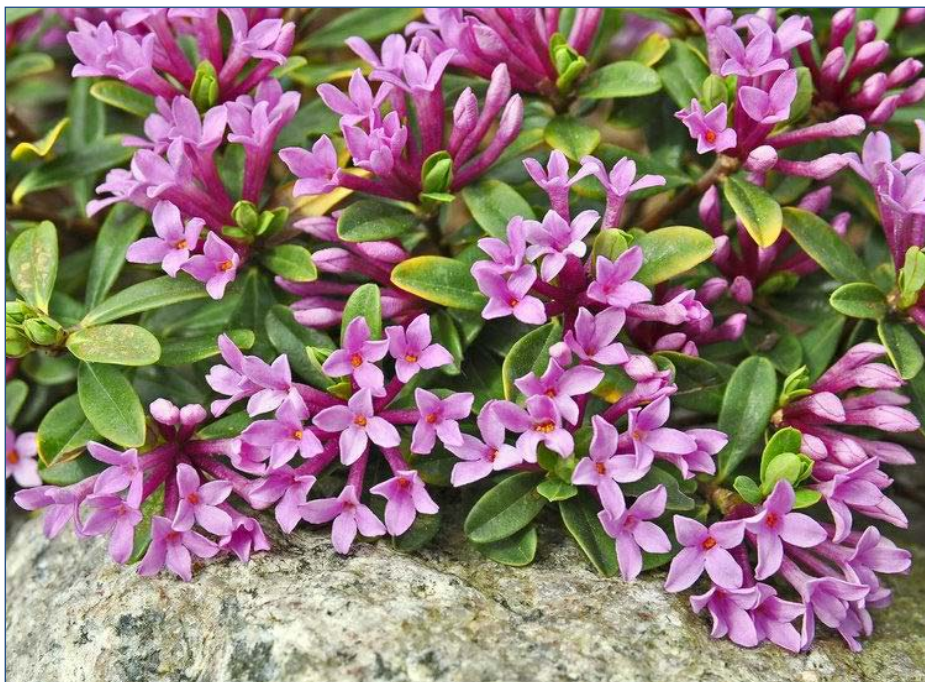
***Daphne circassica*** Woronov ex. Pobed. Text: Lars Hansen Photos: Kirsten Andersen

*Daphne circassica* is endemic to the Western Caucasus. It grows in screes and grassy stone slopes in the alpine and subalpine zone up to about 2400m. It is a small evergreen, densely branched bush forming well-shaped cushions, 20-30cm high and 60-90cm wide. The leaves are glaucous green, elliptical and 1-2cm long. The flowers are dark to pale pink, red in buds, fragrant and are produced in terminal inflorescences on the growth from last season.



*Daphne circassica* was introduced in the mid nineties. We got the seeds from Josef Jurasek in 1996. A single seed germinated and the seedling was planted in the garden in the spring 1998. It is planted in full sun in a mixture of sand and soil (50/50) with a neutral pH value. It has always been healthy and has never been protected or fertilized.

The plant is now about 25cm high and 90-100cm wide. It is in flower every year for three to four weeks in April/May and again for a few weeks in August on the new growth. The flowers keep the colour almost until they wither.



We got wild collected seeds again from another source in 2000. The surviving seedling from these seeds does not grow quite as fast as the first plant but it is also healthy with a lot of flowers.

We have never had seeds from any of the plants but it is not difficult to root semi-ripe or tip cuttings: we do it usually in June.

*Daphne circassica* from NARGS seed

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Ed.: All the material in cultivation is from two limestone peaks- Mt. Ošten and Mt. Fišt. Two forms raised from seed of Josef Halda (JJH) in Canada have very decorative thick leaves, but the size of their flowers is small. One of these plants is seen in crevices in Victoria, B.C. ( below)



## ---Plant Portrait---

Aethionema species, sometimes given the English name Stone Cress, have featured several times in the IRG. ZZ introduces us to another of these appealing crucifers.

### **CONFUSING STONE CRESS** by ZZ



*Aethionema caespitosum* in the garden.

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When they are in flower, be prepared to find that you have some problems in identifying some of the dwarf *Aethionemas*. For some natural reasons the leaves produced on flowering stems are very different from the basal leaves, which are hidden down in the compact cushion. The situation is even worse with one *Aethionema*, which is so distinct from the common ones, that it was described in the genus *Eunomia* or *Iberidella*.

I will write about this confusing stone cress named *Aethionema caespitosum* (syn. *Eunomia caespitosa* and *Iberidella caespitosa*), which appeared in my garden. This gem, after being neglected (with no propagation attempts made) for 3 years, disappeared without a sign.

When I saw this small plant covered in flowers I loved it at first sight. As usual, there was no label, so I didn't know if it was a seedling from my trips to Eastern Anatolia or a gift from Milan Halada or Josef Jurášek. I was so confused with the anatomy of its strange stem leaves, that I thought it might be an unknown *Thlaspi* or other genus of the large family of Brassicaceae.

The base of the plant looks like a loose shrublet. The flowering stems have broader (lanceolate) leaves and lavender-pink sub-spherical inflorescence (resembling *Eunomias*) and it was only 5 -7 cm tall. At present I have the correct name but not a new plant.



*Aethionema caespitosum* in the [Gothenberg Botanical Garden](#)

*Aethionema caespitosum* in nature, growing in dry stony highlands (at about 2000 m), forms mats at most 8 cm in diameter, with tufts of narrow linear leaves. In Turkish high summer you must kneel in front of it to recognise its presence. I saw it only twice in fell-fields of steppe, somewhere towards Lake Van, together with small *Draba* and *Alyssum* and the bedrock was probably igneous or acid (surely not limestone).

This species can reach altitudes of 2600 m and that is a signal that it will be not easy in cultivation. It looks for cooler nights and some protection against winter wet conditions. Surely a good insurance is to have one plant in a pot in a covered frame or in alpine house where you can have a beautiful bun (see the plant which I photographed in Gothenburg Botanical Garden).

*Aethionema caespitosum* loses nothing from its beauty grown under glass.

If I grow this plant again, I will plant it in a north-facing crevice (as I do with *Eunomia oppositifolia*) and propagate it from seed in springtime.

There are other dwarf *Aethionemas*, pretty and obedient sisters, but this confusing dwarf beauty is a challenge forever.

Z.Z.

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---Mountains in the Gardens---

**THE BEST DWARF BROOM FROM SCOTLAND** by McPavlis photos from The Beauty Slope

In this strange winter when we hear tales that gorse (*Ulex*) and broom (*Cytisus*) have been flowering out of season in Scotland it seems appropriate to consider a garden-worthy example of that family.

The reader can feel my tact not to write in the heading 'Scottish Broom' because the ubiquitous European *Cytisus scoparius* is the desperate killer of Pacific Coast landscapes and their fine flora. The subject of my writing and admiration is the harmless ***Cytisus x 'Cottage'*** a sterile hybrid with the advantages of good flower production and robust constitution.

It is always nice to have a good story about the birth of a beautiful hybrid and it is even more valuable if the hybrid was born in cool and conservative Northern Scotland. For this story we must go back towards the time when nurseryman Jack Drake was a wise old wizard and his gardener Ron McBeath was a young and handsome lad.

They had in bloom at Inshriach the French dwarf wild golden yellow ***Cytisus ardoinii*** (the famous mother of many old and for ever good hybrids) and there was pollination with another decorative small broom, which is unknown to me (the pollen could be derived from ***Cytisus x beanii***).



*Cytisus ardoinii*



The resulting assorted hybrid seedlings were planted at different places in this alpine specialist nursery near Aviemore and the best example was one which flowered near the cottage of another gardener called John Lawson. So this is the Ron McBeath's explanation of the origin of the cultivar name 'Cottage'.

Left: Susan and Ron McBeath photo by [Jackie Potterton](#).

[John Lawson](#), who died in 2010, took over Inshriach after Jack Drake retired. Ron McBeath, who went on to have such an

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illustrious career with the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh and as famous plant hunter, with various plants named after him, such as [\*Muscari mcbeathianum\*](#), has recently retired from his own nursery at Lamberton. Such is the passage of time in the life of this plant.



*Cytisus* x 'Cottage'



*Cytisus* x *beanii* and *Daphne* *cneorum*

*Cytisus* x 'Cottage' is a low evergreen shrub ideal for larger rock gardens which in April and May is densely covered with cream and soft yellow flowers of a good size. This shrub forms mounds 40 cm tall with a decorative network of greyish succulent short branches well seen when the plant is out of flower. If required it can be pruned after flowering. Poor gritty alkaline soil and exposure to full sun is needed for slow, compact, healthy growth. This hybrid is 100% hardy in the continental climate and plants are long lived.

Cuttings of firm wood should be inserted in the propagating frame in early August and allowed to remain until rooted the following spring. Repot only when necessary after flowering, remembering not to disturb or damage the roots.

The Internet will lead you to the pleasant nursery keepers Cath and Terry Hunt at [Edrom in the Scottish Borders](#), and others who list this extremely floriferous shrublet.