

The Scottish Rock Garden Club

Aberdeen Show 16th May 2015

What is a flower show? When asked this question, SRGC members think of our own shows or of big events like Chelsea or Gardening Scotland. Ours are held in solid structures like town halls or church halls with more walls than windows while RHS shows like Chelsea and Tatton Park are held in a huge marquee whose cloth like structure offer protection like a hall but with the added advantage that light can permeate the walls and roof and bathe the plants in the displays in a semi-natural daylight. The Aberdeen SRGC organisers went one better than the RHS by holding their show in one of the exhibition 'lean-to' greenhouses in the city's Duthie Park.



The drive up the A9/A90 to Aberdeen is along another of Scotland's beautiful routes. I drove home via the coast road and stopped to buy smokies in Arbroath. It is a delight to combine the seaside with rock gardening.

Previous Aberdeen SRGC shows have been held in the Music Hall, the Cowdray Hall and laterally in Ruthrieston West Church Hall. For various reasons, there has been no SRGC competitive show in Aberdeen for the past couple of years. Instead the group held non-competitive displays in the Duthie Park's David Welch Winter Gardens, one of Europe's largest indoor gardens and Scotland's third most visited garden. In its own words, 'it boasts a beautiful floral paradise all year round, with many rare and exotic plants. On



the show day, the SRGC added more beautiful plants to this 'floral paradise'. Sandwiched between the arid beauty of cacti and succulents and the steamy warmth of the tropical house the alpines provided extra interest. Outside the Japanese garden and the herbaceous borders were waking up for summer, despite a cold wind.

Where else might you see alpines and rock plants with cacti to one side and tropical plants on the other? I reckoned that perhaps somewhere in the Peruvian Andes such conditions might exist. I couldn't think of other places where jungle, desert and alpine zones meet unless perhaps parts of China or the Himalaya. Leaving my pondering aside there can be no disputing the fact that our alpine and rock garden plants looked superb sitting on the greenhouse benches bathed in full light. Here we saw our plants at their perfect best. [I use 'our' as in 'SRGC members' as I was a bad person and did not exhibit any plants of my own].

Keen local support coupled with large entries from Stan and Cyril from the south ensured that this was a quality show with plenty of interest. Who can tell which visitors to the show came especially to see rock plants and which found us on a visit of Duthie Park and a leisurely tour of the Winter Gardens. I was delighted to see how many young parents and children passed favourable comments and showed an interest in the exhibits. Perhaps the SRGC should arrange to hold more events in public places.

Because of the relative level of exhibitor experience, section II was the more difficult to judge as there were large entries in many classes. Group members rallied to Convenor Mike's call for support. There were lots of well presented plants. With plenty space it was easy to appreciate each plant.



The brightest flowers in any show at this time of year are those of *Lewisia cotyledon*; those denizens of Oregon and northern California. Many people grow them in crevices in the rock garden but they don't like winter wet seeping down into their crown. We are advised to plant them on their sides. If you can find a way to protect them from this rot then by all means plant them in the rock garden. For me they do best in an unheated cold frame with plenty of air circulation. The big plants which we see at shows are probably without exception grown under glass. Over the years nursery men have worked with this species to produce plants whose colours would never be found in nature. One of the first 'true' bright strains was Jack Drake's 'Sunset Strain' which gave flowers in deep reds and oranges. In recent years other fabulous hybrid *Lewisia* strains have been developed. I remember gazing enviously at a planting of yellow flowered *L. cotyledon* on Ian Christie's stand at one Ayr Flower show. Ashwood strain are neat compact plants with a more mounded habit. Then there is *L. Pinkie*, a fine plant for a trough and available in several shades. I admired the new *Brynhyfyd* hybrids on the stands of Kevock Nursery at Chelsea and at Gardening Scotland this year. Bright compact plants which are more tolerant of our Scottish conditions than *L. cotyledon* itself. These and no doubt many other *Lewisia* strains prove that there is always something new in rock gardening.

In the picture above the pale plant at the front right is another *L. columbiana*. It always has smaller flowers than *L. cotyledon*.



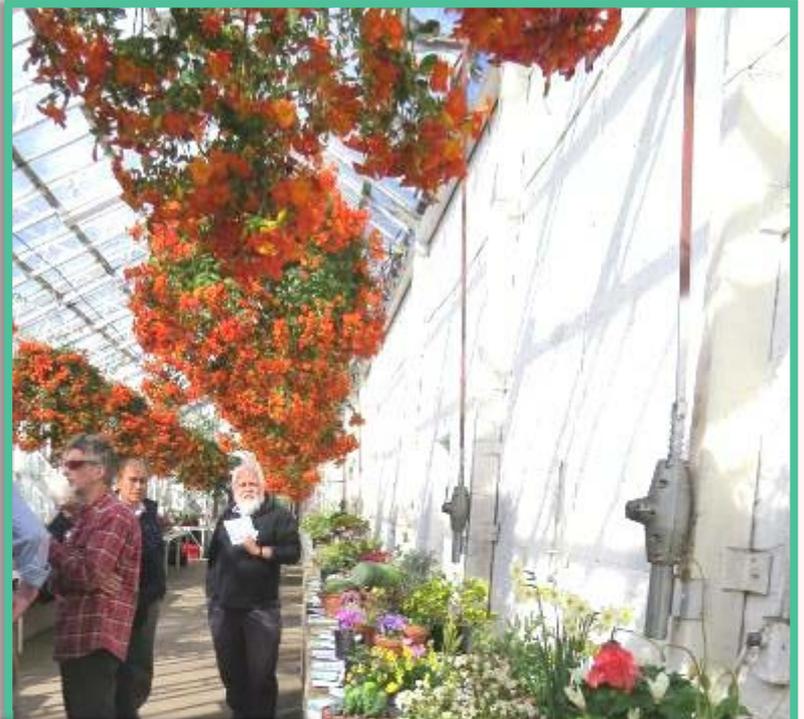
Mike Hopkins led his troops with this excellent entry of :- *Lewisia cotyledon* 'George Henley' with *L. columbiana* and *Trillium luteum*. Three North American plants.





A six pan entry is never easy to find but Stan da Prato's prize winning entry of one Trillium and five Ericaceaeous plants, namely three rhododendrons, one Andromeda and one Erica was much admired.

Stan has several of these great Andromedas!





Daphne calcicola 'Napa Hai'
 & *Wikstroemia gemmata*
Corydalis tomentosa
Trillium luteum
Verbascum dumulosum
Fritillaria affinis 'Sunray'
Rhododendron 'Wren'





SEDUMS

Top *Sedum humifusum*, *S. fufura-*
ceum, *S. pachyclados*
Sedum trollii, *S. acre*, *S. dasyphyllum*
 Bottom *S. reflexum* 'Angeline',
S. moranense





Stan's winning 6 pan entry in Class 2 included Phlox 'White Admiral' , Armeria 'Bevan's Form' and Primula aureata, which he grows better than most folk in Scotland. I find that a bit strange because he lives near the sea in East Lothian and I always think that most of these petiolarid primulas like cooler moister conditions.

The tall Ornithogalum reverchonii is heading for the EXIT. It is a stately bulb with good broad leaves and a spire of white outward looking bells. It hails from Southwest Spain.

Gypsophila cerastioides 'Ruby Stripe' is a dependable spreading wee plant which we used many times in raised beds at our SRGC displays at Gardening Scotland.

Sedum pilosum is one I missed out on the SEDUM page. It is superb plant and one of the most beautiful of all the genus. It is monocarpic but comes readily from seed. It was shown to its best advantage by Nick Boss, who reminded me on his label that it grows at 7,000 to 10,000 ft in the Mountains of North Iran, the Caucasus , Transcaucasus and Georgia. Nick always provides helpful info on his labels.

Sedum roseum is an excellent plant and doubly so since it is a Scottish native.





MORE SCOTTISH NATIVES

Saxifraga caespitosa 'commonly' known as tufted Saxifrage is an arctic plant, one of those circumpolar plants through which Scotland can claim its place in hosting a very special mountain flora. It can be found on mountain tops in North West Scotland and in 'tundra' on Orkney. Abroad it grows in Iceland, Norway, Svalbard, North America as well as Siberia. In North America it is found in the tundra of the Rocky Mountains growing on ledges and gravelly planes. Like many other plants from extremely inhospitable places it tends to retain its old leaves on the flowering stems. It has a deep tap root to anchor it and to find the moisture it needs to survive these conditions.

Salix lanata grows near me on Ben Lawers above Loch Tay. It needs to be protected from sheep on the mountainside. It is a good garden shrub. I look forward to its huge catkins and furry leaves opening in late spring. In winter its branches are tinged with gold.

Viola lutea seems to abound in Angus. I remember when the new A90 opened as a dual carriage way that there was a fabulous flowering of it in the central reservation beside MacDonald's turn off at Forfar!

Primula veris appears increasingly often on road verges as well. It seems to be being sown on road-banks by councils to brighten our journey or to increase habitat diversification. Whatever the reason it is great to see it. Not all grow as lushly as this show plant.



BEAUTY FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Anacyclus depressus from the Atlas mountains of Morocco

Lewisia rediviva : mountains & high plains in western USA

Delosperma congestum album from South Africa

Dodecatheon meadia from the USA

Narcissi from Spain

Dactylorhizas from home

Cypripedium calceolus from England and the Alps





Meconopsis x cookei 'Old Rose' and one of its parents
The blue M. quintuplinervia. The other is Meconopsis
punicea. 'Old Rose' is perennial— sounds like an old
biddy in a village in the 18th Century!

Corydalis cashmiriana and c. 'Balang Mist'. An old fa-
vourite and one that is more recent in finding its way
into our affections. These are all specialities of Ian
Christie.

Below Angie checks to see which plants need some water, having already served
tea , coffee, rolls and cakes to all the visitors. A visitor!!





FIRST FOR THE FINDERS
Clematis x cartmannii 'Joe'

Well done and thank you, Margaret & Henry Taylor

