



THE ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY CENTRAL SUSSEX GROUP



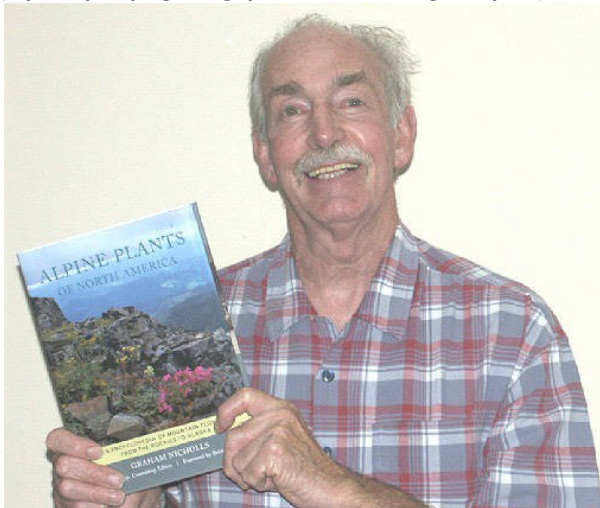
NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2008

GRAHAM NICOLLS - TIPS AND TRICKS OF GROWING ALPINES

APRIL MEETING CANCELLED see last page

In 1990, after taking early retirement, Graham started a nursery at 'Southcroft', Timsbury, Bath. Although he had no formal training in the nursery business, he was an enthusiastic grower who enjoyed propagating plants. The digital projection show began with a few slides of rock gardens –



Kew (272/176), a much smaller one with grass right up to the rocks (easy to weed kill), that of Panayoti Kalaidis (Denver) before he moved, showing that it is possible to grow Mediterranean plants in a climate with freezing winters and very hot summers by moving them outside in summer partial tree shade. Beds can be of any shape – circular ones, a 60ft. long raised bed, one curving around a path and a crevice garden. They can be grown in plastic bowls or in ornamental ones and of course troughs. and raised beds. Positions need to be found to emulate, as far as is possible, conditions in the wild.

Aquilegia chrysantha (286/489) with attractive blueish foliage grows under wet cliff faces and *Douglasia idahoensis* (286/489) with reddish-purple flowers only on north slopes in central Idaho where snow melt lasts longest; cuttings are taken as new growth starts to flush. *Pulsatilla occidentalis* (189/218) opens in snow melt – do not water before the first shoots emerge. Summer flowering *Telesonix jamesii* (225/243, 248/153) is found in compressed rock crevices and its roots need to be restricted before it will flower such as in a scree bed jammed between two rocks; on germination pots are brought into the alpine house, but check for tiny black slugs before doing so. Seeds like *Astragalus* and *Oxytropis* with hard skins need to be nicked with a knife or if tiny, rubbed between sandpaper. Seedlings of *A. coccineus* (258/450, 263/38, 422) will appear in 6 weeks and having long roots need to be transplanted before they start to tangle; it is a Californian with silvery-grey woolly leaves with bright scarlet pea flowers on stems to 4". Silvery-grey mats of blue and mauve flowered *Oxytropis nana* will sprout in 10 days. Pale *Townsendia* seed, should be discarded as they are non-viable. *T. incana* (278/407, 290/477) needs to be sown straight away with germination in 6 weeks. Those of *Inula rhizocephala* (262/404, 272/179) are very light



Aquilegia chrysantha

and easily fly away. If growing the New Zealand *Clematis marmorata* (218/391, 223/74, 276/76, 288/185), remember you need both



Clematis tenuiloba

male and female plants; this and its hybrids like *C. cartmanii* 'Joe' (226/365, 234/313, 249/294) are all different and beautiful. *C. tenuiloba* 258/428, 291/98 is a low creeping Rocky Mountains species to 6" with blue to mauve flowers that are like a diminutive *C. alpina*; an excellent pot/show plant or for trough, it also needs immediate sowing, but this one runs and can be propagated by detaching young shoots after flowering or in late summer. The gun-metal flowers of *C. fremontii* from Kansas and Texas are long-tubed with very reflexed tepals and must be grown from seed. *C. hirutissima* (214/337) is much easier with masses of roots but takes 5 years to flower.

Even after a year's growth, *Anemonella thalictroides* (187/57) it is possible to tease apart the small tubers – variability is seen in many forms (202/399, 234/361, 238/313, 31, 274/461, 280/209, 284/373); they need a pumice/vermiculite growing medium. The selection *A. 'Betty Blake'* (270/403) with lemon-green changing to pale yellow and white is still an extremely rare form – divide clusters of tubers after the foliage has died. *Dicentra 'King of Hearts'* (294/418, 302/414) a *D. peregrina* x *formosanum* hybrid has panicles of purplish-pink flowers on 8" stems with deep roots and is much easier to grow than *D. peregrina*. Avoid micropropagated ones as these have no staying power. There are desirable species of *Campanula* with runners such as *C. hercegovina nana* (275/64), a beautiful dwarf form that is as good in the garden as on the show bench. The plant slowly forms a clump, never becoming invasive, dying back in winter and reappearing in late spring. It should be propagated annually by pulling the plant apart and potting up the pieces, which can be done from the time the new shoots appear above ground in spring, right through the growing season until early autumn. Seed has never been found by Graham in the capsules, but several self-sown seedlings have appeared in pots where sale plants had been kept in the alpine house. These grew very quickly, flowering and filling a 7-cm-square (3-in.) pot in the first season. *C. zoyssii* must also be propagated all the time and grown on early. The blue form of *C. zoyssii* (144/145, 241/274, 284/146) builds up over about three years into a power-packed plant that blooms with hardly any rosette showing. Unfortunately after flowering, the stems and their rosettes die back, sometimes resulting in the death of the entire plant. It is a priority to propagate before this happens so that you have smaller plants coming on to replace the "big one"-which inevitably dies. *C. rainieri alba* was just starting to shoot in February – again pull off pieces and root. Completely herbaceous *C. carpatia alba* should not be disturbed in its dormant period (no moisture in winter) and does not set seed; there are two clones, one long and leggy, so take care when buying. Cuttings taken from rosettes such as *Lewisia tweedyi* (233/249) can be rooted in sand – some taken on 19 June were potted on in July – peat and grit are not successful. If you find that *L. cotyledon* rots over winter, try *L. columbiana* which can be grown in all weathers. Two Penstemons well worth growing are *P. erianthus* (249/275, 299/97), a lovely plant that sets seed regularly and is always listed by Graham. It is easier to grow than their dry steppe habitat suggests. *P. hallii* (248/162) with large campanulate blue/violet flowers on large mats is another fine species.



Dicentra 'King of Hearts'

Kelseya uniflora (212/135, 223/50, 287/61) forms compact cushions of tiny leaves with white flowers and pink stamens; to get seed flick your fingers across the top of the flower. *Nototriche macklenii* (291/67, 73/451) from southern Peru has fine woolly foliage and pale blue to lilac flowers and unfortunately apt to rot. *Myosotis albosericca* (290/490, 298/429) is a rare New Zealander with silvery leaves and lemon flowers on stems 5-7 cm long. – avoid watering the foliage in summer. You have to hunt for the seeds. *Callianthemum anemoides* (226/346, 250/393, 394/ 269/253) is a compact plant with large white/pink flowers and need plenty of water in May and June. Seed in fat pods must be sown the moment they fall, as must those of the lovely *Ranunculus segueiri* (247/40, 271/59, 286/493, 292/161) which a long time to produce a good plant. but its mass of roots can be teased apart. in early spring or autumn. *Dodecatheon* are surface rooters and should not be allowed to dry out; take two seasons before planting out. *Silene hookeri* ssp. *bolanderi* (262/407, 287/73, 294/377) must be hand pollinated and cuttings taken in March; plants will rot unless kept only damp in the dormant period. The seed of the whiskery pompoms of *Eriogonum holgrenii* (295/101) are like tiny tears. A serpentine lover, *Epilobium rigidum* (271/111) is a hairy plant – grows from seed. If you have only one *Androsace lehmannii* (251/29) propagate it or you will lose it. *Eritrichium nanum* is difficult in winter – grow outside under cover. It will germinate in 6 weeks and do not water from the top. *Aquilegia beckwithii* (256/133, 267/81) from N. California into Oregon is short lived. Cuttings of a true alpine *V. flettii* (175/75, 259/61) can be taken. *V. pedata bicolor* has a very thick root stock which can be pulled apart or cuttings taken which need to be rooted well down; done in December they will start shooting in March/April. Tiny cuttings is all you will get



Dianthus microlepis 'Rivendell'



Campanula 'Timsbury Perfection'

from *Dianthus microlepis* 'Rivendell' (227/66, 250/426, 285/332) a lovely clone which forms tight cushions covered with pink flowers. and one of earliest of the genus to flower. *Primula allionii* 'Mary Berry' (221/286, 296/196) although long in cultivation, is still one of the best with large carmine flowers - take off all yellowing leaves. *Arisaema sikokianm* (268/196, 301/267) seeds easily, but all flesh has to be taken off and will flower in 3 years. Split and pull apart *Fritillaria glauca aurea* bulbs – the centre ones will flower the same year, the outer ones after 2 years. There are bulbils on *Calchortus gunnisonii*. (250/383, 260/187). Plant *Erythronium graniflorum* (249/279, 273/319, 278/332) well down – if in a pan at the bottom. Don't bother with tulips – some take 7 years to flower. *Campanula sarmatica* is one of the easiest of its genus with fringed bells and the seed behind the petals. From *C. rotundifolia*, you get all sorts from seed, including *C. 'Timsbury Perfection'*. (286/546) one of Graham's own selections which carries masses of blue flowers on compact plants. It received a P.C. at 'Alpines 2001'. *Campanula 'Cantata'* (298/438) is a recent hybrid of *C. zoysii* x *C. pulla* with deep blue tubular flowers. and is vigorous and free flowering. Deciduous *Lewisia brachycalis* (263/74) has large stemless pale to mid pink flowers in spring. and was just coming through in February.

With 50 years of growing and three gold bars to his name, plus his nursery experience and many overseas travels and contacts, Graham was well equipped to impart some of his knowledge – he certainly had an encyclopaedia of tips and tricks! See his books 'Alpine Plants of North America' – descriptions and cultivation 'Dwarf Campanulas' Review by John Good on AGS web site

His article in Bulletin254 on 'So you would like to grow Americans?'

books.google.co.uk/books?isbn=0881925489...

Graham's home page at <http://members.aol.com/graplant/> Can be a bit awkward to use, but plenty there.

RM

APRIL MEETING CANCELLED

To all members of the Central Sussex AGS Group.

Dear Member,

Our scheduled speaker for 19th of April has requested that I should try and obtain an alternative speaker as she did not want to let us down at the last minute. I know at least 3 of our members are unable to be present at that meeting, and having consulted members of the Committee, it was agreed that I should inform you that the April 2008 meeting has been cancelled.

All is not gloom. I have some good news, John and Olive Gilbert have agreed to act as host for an Open Garden Fund Raising Event for the Group starting with a light lunch at 12 for 12.30pm on Saturday, the 12th of July, at their home, 17, The Heathway, Chaldon, Caterham. CR3 5DN. I would be grateful if you will enter this additional function in your diary and hope you will want to come and join us. A charge of £5.00 is to be made for lunch. Would you please advise Olive on 01883 340115 not later than Saturday the 5th of July if you will be coming for lunch. John and Olive have a different but very interesting garden up on the North Downs with lots of trees and shrubs, and much to admire. They will also give instruction to enable any aspiring croquet players to have a game on their lawn!. If you have always wanted to but have never been able to play croquet, come along and take up their offer!.

Best wishes,
Keith.

Please note my change of internet service provider, at long last I have got myself on to Broadband!

<keithmoorhouse@btinternet.com>