



Alpine Line

Newsletter of the Allegheny Chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society

January/February 2006

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PRIMULA ROSEA 'GRANDIFLORA'

By Alice Hills Baylor

Primula rosea 'Grandiflora' and its smaller counterpart, *P. rosea* 'Petite Pink', make most satisfactory subjects for the shadier portions of the rock garden. This primrose gives a display of bright pink flowers early in the season; April into May in Vermont. It makes a stunning color combination with white *Draba carinthiaca* and purple crocus.

This primula is a Himalayan species that grows in a tight clustered crown of glossy pointed leaves four to six inches high (Petite Pink is smaller). After the early period of bloom it sets seeds that ripen quickly, probably in memory of its alpine home at 10,000 to 12,000 feet throughout Kashmir and Afghanistan. The seed capsules are red and are not unsightly in the garden. One must be watchful if one is to gather the seeds, as the pods burst quickly. The most attractive foliage remains handsome all season.

Much has been written about the need of certain plants for lime, their tolerance or their disregard of it. It is true that many plants adapt themselves admirably to a wide variance of pH in the soil, and *P. rosea* seems to be one of these.

It is planted in several locations here, under a spruce, in the nursery under deciduous trees, and at the foot of a low retaining wall in the terraced auricular garden. Above it in the crevices of the wall are plants of *Campanula garganica* to give a summer display. The terrace has a deep underlying bed of ashes piled there by former occupants of our 186-year-old house, so that there is a lime reaction as well as perfect drainage. The foliage of *P. rosea* growing above this layer of ashes is a brighter green, the flowers are more colorful, the stems are more rugged, and the plants develop larger clumps. So I would suggest such a base, with topsoil fertilized with well rotted (or dry) sow manure and a mulch of leaf mold. *P. rosea* is the only member of its section that I mulch with this medium. All others are mulched with our native Vermont gravel, which is largely granite glacial debris. Indiana limestone chips make the best mulch for the smaller alpine *P. glaucescens* that is also an early bloomer with clusters of blue-lavender flowers, as well as for the garden auriculas.

P. rosea 'Grandiflora' should be divided directly after the seeds have been gathered. The roots are wire like and tightly bound together. It is not easily pulled apart but the effort is worthwhile as the divisions quickly put forth new leaves and develop into fine plants for another early spring display.



Chapter Volunteers

Officers

Chair:

Jerry Pottmeyer724-935-3157

Vice Chair:

Amanda Haney.....412-363-0895

Secretary:

Gina Teams724-774-3616

Treasurer:

Stan Hofstetter412-364-3954

Committee Chairs

Awards:

Connie McKeever.....412-823-7250

Banquet:

Sylvia & Bob Lynch412-795-0736

Host:

Jerry & Earland O'Leary...412-935-1233

Library:

Patty McGuire.....412-366-8364

Membership:

Dennis Banks412-766-2948

Plant show & Sale:

Jerry Pottmeyer724-935-3157

Programs:

Amanda Haney.....412-363-0895

Newsletter Coeditors:

Al Deurbrouck412-653-0281

Len Lehman412-233-5902

Newsletter Production & Distribution:

Debra Meyer412-734-2039

Seed Exchange:

Patty McGuire.....412-366-8364

Website:

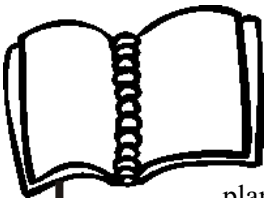
Sylvia Lynch.....412-795-0736

The center of distribution of *Aethionema* is the Anatolian plateau, which is well nigh arctic in temperatures: I was recently looking at current isotherms at various centrally located Turkish cities on the web (Erzerum, Kayseri etc.) and was astonished at how much colder it was there right now than it has been on the Great Plains. I suspect the bulk of the genus will be reliably zone 4 hardy provided they are grown "hard" (i.e., in gravel or crevices of rock). I have a number of *Aethionema grandiflorum* that sowed onto tiny crevices of large boulders fifteen or twenty years ago and are still growing there lustily--forming picturesque bonsai, as a matter of fact, and showing no sign of senescence. So much for short-lived.



Aethionema grandiflorum is lovely indeed: and quite variable. Most of what is called that now (and used to be called *A. pulchellum*) is a rather pale pink. I grew a much darker pink form for years that was wild collected in Turkey by the Archibalds, but which I have long since lost. *A. grandiflorum* is by far the largest of the genus I have grown: the smaller sorts are really just as showy, quite distinct in their own right, and seemingly just as long lived and tough. I have grown upwards of a dozen (and seen many more in the wild and in gardens I have yet to grow). My favorite may be *A. capitatum*, a soft pink like the old *pulchellum*, but much more compact and very long blooming. *A. subulatum* is a dark pink tufted one. *A. membranaceum*, *A. thomasianum*, *A. glaucescens*, *A. caespitosum*, *A. iberideum*, *A. schistosum* and quite a few other names have all yielded terrific rock plants in a wide range of colors from pure white to deep rose pink and all manner of habit and seed pods--each is distinct enough that I seek to maintain them all and seek new ones (as different from one another as most silver saxifrages are, or the range of variation between members of the *Auricula* section of *Primula*). Last spring I saw a fabulous garden--possibly one of the finest gardens I've ever seen--in Holland where *Aethionema creticum* was ramping about wildly: THAT I need to get! And when you Google *Aethionema*, all manner of new names pop up: I suspect there are some fine ones among them. I would rate this genus quite high on the hit parade of plants for our semi arid steppe climate. A rung or two beneath *Eriogonum*, perhaps, or *Penstemon*. On the order of *Aubrieta* or *Arabis*--two other underappreciated and essential genera of Cruciferous rock plants with similar low esteem in gardens.

The only duds in the genus that I have thus far grown are plants under the names of *Aethionema coridifolium* and *A. saxatile*: both produce tiny, tiny flowered shrublets (definitely Botanical Interest Only), although their seedpods are admittedly vaguely attractive. Not enough to justify the space they occupy (these are both now gone). A *saxatile* has been found a few years ago growing in an extremely remote corner of Colorado far from farms, roads, people--seemingly native. I was confronted a bit accusingly by one of the botanists who found it (as if I had the time, inclination or arrogance to "plant" new taxa in the wild): I tried to explain that if I had tried to naturalize an *Aethionema* in the wild, I would at least try to pick a pretty one.



EDITOR'S NOTES

by Al Deurbrouck

Let's all look to 2006 as the year we finally put in the new rock garden and acquire those exciting new plants we have always wanted to try but just never made the move. Well now is the time to plan, and to visit the various online nurseries. I've listed a few below that always feature something new and the plants they ship arrive in A-1 condition.

Please our Chapter's newsletter, the Alpine Line, is only as good as we make it. We don't need scholarly works, but they are certainly welcomed, we do need something that you can pass on to the rest of the Chapter members. Did you finally successfully grow and bloom a plant that you had always failed with in the past? Did last years new primula bed bloom well beyond your wildest dreams? Chances are at least a few other members could benefit from the knowledge you could pass on. Just send us a brief description of your favorite rock garden plant in your garden, or a friends garden. If you visit a public garden that blew you away, let us know what you saw. Even if it an article you find that would be of interest send it in. **RESOLVE TO SEND IN ONE ARTICLE TO THE NEWSLETTER THIS YEAR.**

Choice sources for rock garden plants:

Laporte Avenue Nursery - no website
1950 Laporte Avenue
Fort Collins, CO 80521

Mt Tahoma Nursery - www.backyardgardener.com/mttahoma
2811 112th Avenue East
Graham, WA 98338

Beaver Creek Greenhouses - www.rockgardenplants.com
PMB#364
4155 Deep Lake Boundary Road
Colville, WA 99114

Odyssey Bulbs - www.odysseybulbs.com
604 Boothbay Road
Edgecomb, ME 04556

JANUARY & FEBRUARY MEETINGS

January 15, 2006 - Northland Library 2:00 PM. Members "I" through "P" are asked to bring snacks.

Al Deurbrouck will open the year with a slide presentation on the Plants of the Drakensberg Mt., South Africa. The flora indigenous to these mountains is surprising unique but yet many have been proven suitable for our gardens, including a number of delosperma you may be familiar with and a few gladiolus that will immediately be on your must have list.

February 19, 2006 - Northland Library 2:00 PM. Members "Q" through "Z" are asked to bring snacks.

Members, Sylvia & Bob Lynch, Carol Przyborski and Debra Meyer will give a powerpoint presentation on the 2005 NARGS National Meeting in St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada. You will see a wide diversity of ericaceous shrubs and other acidophilic plants. You will see Cape Spear (the easternmost point in NA), Cape St. Mary (home of the third largest seabird colony in NF and Memorial University Botanical Garden's rock garden and alpine house.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

by Gina Teams

NOVEMBER MEETING

The Allegheny Chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society met at the Northland Library on November 20, 2005. The meeting was called to order by Chair at 2:05 p.m. The treasurer reported a chapter balance of 3060.83 and after an outstanding expense is paid the new balance would be 2460.83.

Under unfinished business:

The items of dues were brought up. All 2005 member dues were paid to date and the membership cards for the 2006 dues will be going out with the next newsletter. The dues for 2006 are \$10 for individual and \$15 for family. Patty McGuire has been filling in for Nancy Palmer when she became unable to continue the Vice Presidency. Amanda Haney volunteered at the last meeting to stand in for the remainder of the term. During the November meeting that motion was made and carried. We will happily inform Amanda at the December meeting.

Under new business:

The Aviary will be doing an expansion in the Spring or Fall of 2006. The new rock garden will not be affected but the old will be removed. Discussion was held about what all to try and salvage from the garden. Besides the plants, we would like to take away as many stones and rocks as we can but we will need heavy equipment. Larry Hankowitz has a dolly that can handle 600-700 lbs., if we can get the rocks onto it. Due to the number of people in attendance, we did not continue further on the election of new officers. Chair was asked if Soergels had been approached yet about the annual sale? Carl Gehenio will be growing plants for the sale. We may ask Dennis James if he has any new dwarf conifers or other plants suitable for our sale. We will have more information at the next meeting on the show and sale. Sylvia and Bob Lynch may offer to take on officer's positions at a later time. Carl Gehenio brought in many rosemary plants and donated them to the group for anyone who wanted one.

The business meeting was adjourned at 2:25 p.m. We did not have a raffle. Following refreshments, Chuck Olescyski made a great power point presentation showing the wide variety of sizes and colors available of the modern hostas, He also showed a number of slides of his lovely backyard hosta nursery. It looks like a great place to do some hosta shopping this spring

DECEMBER MEETING

The Allegheny Chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society met at the Northland Library December 11, at 2:00 p.m.. This is our annual non-meeting meeting when members show slides. *(Editor comment -- Should we rethink holding the annual members slides program we hold in December? This year only five people showed up. Last year was not much better.)*

As I ponder over the many interesting garden catalogues, I cannot believe another year Has come and gone; but now I'm looking forward to another interesting year in 2006 for our chapter.

Our program committee has once again arranged a fine group of speakers and programs to Please The most discriminate. A schedule of those programs is noted in your newsletter.

I'm pleased to report that we have some changes in officers in 2006. We are indeed happy that Amanda Haney has accepted the position of Vice-chair of our chapter. This position has been in limbo for sometime and I do Want to thank Patty McGuire for filling that post in the interim when Nancy Palmer had to relinquish due to health reasons. As you may know, the Vice-chair usually handles the chapter programs and we certainly realize what an important job that is and feel confident that we now have a person to head that committee. Thank you Amanda.

I want to thank all the members who helped with the events of 2005, particularly the officers and committee chairs who make this club what it is. As I said sometime ago, let your light shine and put forth your talent in any way you can to help our club be the best it can be. See you all at our January meeting at Northland Library.

Jerry

President's
Corner

Alpine Line

Al Deurbrouck - Alpine Line Coeditor

6915 Hilldale Drive

Pittsburgh, Pa 15236

Len Lehman - Alpine Line Coeditor

Debra Meyer - Alpine Line Production/Distribution

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MEMBERSHIP
DUE!**Join the NARGS on the website at <www.nargs.org>**UPCOMING MEETINGS & EVENTS IN 2006****January 15, 2006** - Northland Public Library at 2 pm and members 'I' through 'P' are asked to bring snacks.

Speaker: Al Deurbrouck will speak on his trip to Drakensberg, South Africa.

February 19, 2006 - Northland Public Library at 2 pm and members 'Q' through 'Z' are asked to bring snacks.

Speakers: Members, who attended the National Meeting in St. John's, Newfoundland, will speak on their advantages.

Eastern Winter Study Weekend 'A Master Class in Rock Gardening' January 27-29, 2006, hosted by the Manhattan Chapter, New York City, New York. For information contact Jacques Mommens, Registrar at nargs@advinc.com or 1-914-762-2948**Western winter Study Weekend 'Rounding the Rim'** March 2-4, 2006, hosted by the Vancouver Island Rock & Alpine Garden Society, Sidney-by-the-Sea, British Columbia, Canada. For information contact John Veillette, Registrar at ua024@victoria.tc.ca.**International Interim Rock Garden Plant Conference 'Plants of the Western Cordillera: Alpines in All Directions'** July 21-26, 2006, hosted by the Wasatch Chapter, Snowbird, Utah. For information contact Joyce Fingerhut at alpinegarden@comcast.net or 1-860-535-3067.