



Primroses

THE QUARTERLY OF THE AMERICAN PRIMROSE SOCIETY

AUTUMN 2005

VOL. 63

No. 4



Primula in Atlantic Canada

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The purpose of this Society is to bring the people interested in *Primula* together in an organization to increase the general knowledge of and interest in the collecting, growing, breeding, showing and using in the landscape and garden of the genus *Primula* in all its forms and to serve as a clearing house for collecting and disseminating information about *Primula*.

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About the Covers

Front Cover: A double *Primula auricula* 'Brownie'. Bred by our own Rosetta Jones, and grown by Matt Mattus.

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Photo: John Byrne and Newfoundland/Labrador Tourism

This issue of PRIMROSES is primarily dedicated to the primula enthusiasts who collect and grow plants on the Atlantic Canada seacoast including Labrador, Newfoundland and Nova Scotia. Above, Western Brook navigates the glacier-carved fiords of Newfoundland.

PRIMROSES • The Quarterly of the American Primrose Society

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Autumn President's Message

ED BUYARSKI

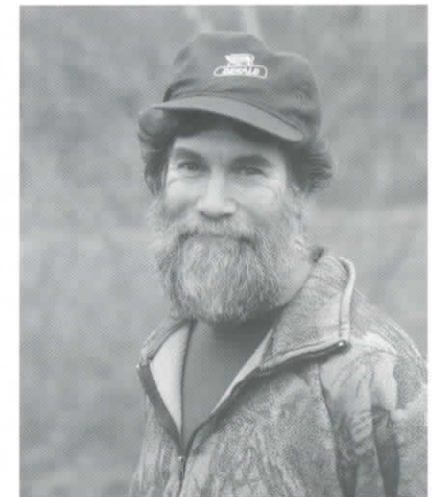
Greetings folks; are you finally finding the time to do your garden cleanup and get a rest from the summers' activities? Are you thinking about new areas to prepare for gardens next year; doing a better job of record keeping for your successes or failures; or even doing more timely weeding and dividing? These are all fine resolutions for the New Year.

Juneau has just gone through another green Holiday Season - this seems to be coming the norm rather than white.

More record high temperatures in November and December combined with one week that we received over 15 inches of rain! I hope the New Year brings some moderation. I'm glad I live on a hill!

What can we do to help you enjoy "Primroses" more? What topics and articles do you want to read about? How can we find and retain more members to make our local chapters and groups more interesting and inviting to others? We the APS Board need your input to help so please fill out our poll enclosed with the Seed Exchange Catalog.

Of course in the last Quarterly we were lucky enough to read our editor's accounts of his travels in Italy. We would certainly appreciate other travelogues with primroses involved.



Summer in Juneau started out strong with dry sunny weather but reverted to more normal conditions with plenty of moisture in July and later. For the first time I got pears from trees I planted 10 years ago so I'm happy I was patient enough to wait and not cut them down to make room for other plants. They were all picked in mid September along with our apple crop before our local bears helped themselves. Just before this harvest, my wife and I along with another couple were again north of Kotzebue, Alaska for our biennial caribou hunt and incidentally, *Primula* seed collections. It is ironic to me to find these plants in the ditches and wetlands in town and near the airport in saline meadows when I traveled all the way to China to find other species a few years ago.

Primula nutans is fairly common around Kozubue, and in silty moist areas near a lake where we hunted were found *P. anvilensis*. I would truly like to see these in bloom but the prospect of enduring the clouds of mosquitoes in June under 24 hours of daylight when they are flowering makes me hesitate. That and being 1900 miles away from Juneau also makes a difference.

Since some of the seeds I collected will be available through the seed exchange, I would like to hear the results of some successes growing them if possible. It is possible that some of the *P. nutans* may be mixed with *P. borealis* as they are both said to be present around Kotzebue and may be difficult to tell apart in fruit. I also realize that the challenge of growing these to flowering since they normally endure a range of temperatures from minus 60F to plus 80F may be tough. Let me know.

There are lots more Primroses that are easier to raise than that so be sure to start growing more of them too!

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Primroses in Atlantic Canada

STERLING LEVY

I live and garden in Fall River Nova Scotia, a bedroom community of Halifax our provincial capital. If you check a hardiness zone map of Nova Scotia you will see that Halifax is in zone 6 and also on the seacoast. We, however, are located seven or eight miles inland away from the moderating effects of the ocean. It is warmer in the summer and colder in the winter (often as much as 10 degrees F). Most likely we are closer to zone 5. We also miss out on some of the benefits of the coastal fog that helps keep the summer humidity a bit higher.

Our gardening season usually starts with the last frost in mid-May and lasts until the first killing frost around Thanksgiving (Columbus Day for our US friends). In the past 28 years the latest spring frost has been on June 7th and the earliest was on Labor Day weekend. The winter weather is variable. Sometimes we have periods of extreme cold for weeks without snow cover (lowest temperature has been -33 C) followed by a thaw. Snow cover is unreliable. Snowstorms often turn to rain followed by a plunge in temperature. These freeze and thaw cycles, along with our cold, wet springs, can make primula growing a challenge. Plants are heaved out of the soil and are "freeze-dried" or even washed away.

In recent years, periods of summer drought have become more common. We depend on our own well for domestic water so we need to limit watering the garden. Many of the plants have to fend for themselves. The drought is especially hard on self-sown seedlings. To help the plants cope, I plant primula

in shaded areas and attempt to maintain a high humus level in the soil. Too much shade can result in plants that are leggy and out of character. I've given up using mulches because they provide hiding places for the slugs that are our major pest.

When I think about it I guess I've always had a fondness for primula. My grandmother grew "primroses" and "cowslips" and a few of what I now know were auriculas. As a youngster I got to "help" her in the garden and was given divisions of plants for my own little plot.

In the early 1970's when we moved to our first house I started to look for these plants in garden centers without a lot of success. I managed to find a few plants at garden club plant sales. Attempts to grow from seed purchased from mail-order seed catalogs met with limited success.

In 1977 we moved to our current home in Fall River and needed plants to build a garden. I decided to try growing plants from seed. The quest for seed led me to search for and join plant societies with seed exchanges: The Royal Horticultural Society, Alpine and Rock Garden Clubs and in 1981, The American Primrose Society.

Now that I had access to the seed I still had to learn how to turn it into plants for the garden. Two things in particular made a great difference in my success rate with primula seed. I ordered seed from Herb Dickson who, along with the seed, sent detailed instructions for starting it. Also I found a copy of Doretta Klaber's book *Primroses and Spring*. The descriptions of the plants she grew in Pennsylvania and her seeding methods gave me ideas on what might grow in Nova Scotia.

There were lots of disasters and setbacks along the way that provided learning experiences. The one reassuring factor was that I could always try again with seed from one of the seed exchanges.

I now start all of my seed outdoors in late winter, usually in February. I use three-inch plastic pots and a moistened commercial seeding mix topped with a thin layer of silica sand. The pots are watered and allowed to sit indoors for 24 to 36 hours to allow the seed to absorb some moisture. To prevent wash outs and other problems the pots are put in plastic "fish boxes" with lids. These allow a bit of light to enter but keep water and critters out. Sweater boxes or other translucent storage boxes will do.

The boxes are put outside in an area with good light but no direct sun;

a north wall is good. As the weather warms in spring the boxes need to be checked daily and any germinating pots removed before the seedlings can get leggy. The new plants are kept in a bright and cool spot and regularly fed with 1/4 strength water soluble plant food until they are ready to transplant.

For potting on I use a combination of compost and peat based soils with coarse silica or poultry grit added for those that need a bit more drainage. I also use 6 oz. Styrofoam coffee cups as pots. I like these because they are cheap and I can get 27 in a standard nursery flat. The plants are grown in a shaded area with regular watering and feeding. Frequent checking for slugs is mandatory.

I have learned that, in our area, young plants planted in the garden late in the season usually do not survive their first winter. I now keep all the new seedlings in storage frames for the winter. The frame is simply a 4' by 8' by 12" box. The bottom is covered with 1/4 " hardware cloth stapled securely to the frame (Another sad lesson learned after losing 400 plants to a family of voles). The lid is made from a 4' by 8' sheet of standard lattice mounted on a 2" by 4" frame. (These are used as shade frames in summer as well). Pressure treated lumber will last longer but is not necessary.

In winter the lids are covered with 4 mil plastic sheeting stapled to the box. This small amount of protection has made a tremendous difference in the survival rate of my seedlings. They are then planted out in the spring with an entire season to build up reserves to face a winter in the open garden.

Over the years I tried as many different seed lots as I could get my hands on including seed from the Alpine Garden Society's 1994 China Expedition (sadly among the 400 lost to voles). My collection grew in spite of my many blunders, the weather and attacks by pests. Some species were short-lived, others thrived. A really bad winter or summer drought would wipe out enough plants to make it necessary to always be starting fresh seed batches. Job pressures and other responsibilities reduced the amount of time for the garden. As a result, areas became overgrown and many plants were lost, only the toughest persisted. Since retirement my wife and I have begun a renovation of the garden and the seed sowing continues (50 packets of primula seed this year). This year's bloom was the best we have had in years. Another new bed is under construction.

Most of the plants in the garden are grown from various Seed Exchange selections and may be hybrid or not correctly named. I am very grateful for

all the people who have collected and donated the seed over the years that has allowed me to grow these wonderful plants.

The following list is of some of the plants grown here at various times.

P. vulgaris, **P. veris**, **P. elatior** and their mixed progeny thrive and self sow but commercial hybrid polyanthus do not survive.

P. denticulata, **P. rosea** (short-lived likely due to lack of moisture).

P. japonica, **P. pulverulenta**, **P. burmanica**, **P. cockburniana**, and **P. aurantiaca** all seem to do well although the last two seem to be short-lived. The other yellow and orange species have not done well but we keep trying.

The Asian Woodlanders **P. sieboldii** (the best, has started to self sow), **P. cortusoides**, **P. polyneura**, **P. kisoana**, and **P. jesoana** are great in shady areas.

In the Sikkimensis group **P. alpicola**, and **P. sikkimensis** are reliable, **P. florindae** needs more moisture than I can provide so does not reach full size.

P. secundiflora, **P. chionantha** / **P. sinopurpurea**, **P. vialii** & **P. waltonii** hybrids attract attention from visitors because of their un-primula like flowers.

The Auriculastrum group provides some of the best plants for the rock garden. **P. auricula** and its garden hybrids do well if they get enough sun, **P. marginata**, **P. minima**, **P. hirsuta**, **P. wulfeniana**, **P. spectabilis**, **P. x pubescens** and various hybrids(?) do (have done) well. The smaller plants are often overwhelmed in the open garden so we are trying them in "fish box" troughs.

Primula farinosa, **P. frondosa**, **P. modesta** and the others in the group make good rock garden or trough plants. **Primula scotica** has been reluctant to settle down.

Primula capitata and **P. flaccida** are borderline hardy here. Some seedlings will survive in the frame but usually bloom very late and die. **Primula reidii** has survived and bloomed when wintered in a frame.

Primula parryi has been a complete failure. Plants have survived for several winters but have never bloomed. I need to try again.

It has been an interesting journey and I look forward to trying other species.

Primroses in Truro, Nova Scotia

DR. BERNARD S. JACKSON

Having spent the earlier part of my life in the British countryside, primroses feel as if they are a part of me. They are a reminder of gentle springs and woods full of birdsong - a reminder of a carefree, less hectic youth. They will never fail to give me pleasure.

Fortunately, for me, there are numerous types of *Primula* that will grow well in the gardens of Eastern Canada. Indeed, the genus *Primula* is such a versatile one, that there are species suitable for a shady woodland, a rock garden, a pondside or even a meadow. Also, there are those that are easy to grow, yet others that provide a bit more of a challenge.

At present, I am growing primroses in my own garden in Truro, Nova Scotia and also in the large new rock garden at the Nova Scotia Agricultural College just a five minutes drive away. My own garden is a woodland garden with dappled or filtered shade whereas the one at the college is open to full sun and scorching temperatures. Soil in both locations is a well-drained sandy loam. In the college rock garden we are amending the soil with sharp sand and 3/8" gravel whereas in my own garden I incorporate additional organic matter. For organic matter, I much prefer well decomposed leafmold if I can get it, but often have to use commercial baled peatmoss or 'clean' garden compost.

I sometimes use 'raw' fallen maple leaves chopped-up with my lawnmower two or three times the previous fall. These are dug into the soil prior to planting, usually in spring, and though this technique is not generally recommended my primroses do not seem to mind it. As we all know, woodland primroses like a moist, well drained, well aerated organic soil. I believe that my sandy loam would benefit from a little more clay to help retain the moisture, but certainly not too much!

In the rock garden I mulch with 1/2 inch gravel but in my home garden I use partly decomposed mixed wood chips or the aforementioned chopped maple leaves. Here in Truro, Nova Scotia, it can get very hot and dry for a couple of months in the summer, so additional water has to be supplied according to the weather and soil type. Water is supplied by sprinklers connected to our main water supply, though there have been occasions when I have used the family wash water with no ill effect. Indeed, so long as there is no bleach or disinfectant present, this 'grey' water used judiciously, appears quite beneficial. Since soap is a penetrator this allows one to give individual plants a quick, deep soaking; particularly useful if a plant is flagging.

I do not fertilize my primulas but always apply a little bonemeal to the hole when siting a new plant. I am somewhat lackadaisical about splitting up my plants and usually wait until the clumps are getting too large or congested. However, I have found it advisable to split up my Gold-Laced Polyanthus every few years to maintain their vigor and their presence. Incidentally, I had trouble acquiring reliable hardy stock of this plant. I purchased plants from a number of sources but to no avail, then a friend kindly gave me a large clump of the variety 'Invincible' which I split up into a number of smaller clumps and have enjoyed them ever since. As we all know, some gene pools are hardier than others.

The latter comment also appears to apply to *Primula vialii*, for though this plant does have a tendency to fade out after flowering, it seems to me that some strains are definitely more hardy than others. In the memorial University Botanical Garden in Newfoundland, we had a huge clump that showed up reliably year after year, but in my home garden three years was the longest it ever performed. They may have lived longer if I could give them a wetter site, since I do have a small moist site by my pond, but this is now over-run with hardier genera. In better times, I grew *P. florindae*, *P. bulleyana*, *P. chungensis* and *P. japonica* at this site.

A woman living on the same street had such a population of *P. japonica* that she dug up large clumps and put them in her garage sale! These are all glorious primula and hardy here but they do need constant moisture at their roots and room to spread out. A lack of sufficient moisture could be the reason why the lovely drumstick primrose, *P. denticulata* and its more vigorous variety *cachemiriana* don't do well for me. They grow well in the area but, I believe,

find my soil too dry for I have managed to keep them for only a few years.

Primula sieboldii grows very well for me and never fails to put on good show, but since its leaves disappear shortly after flowering one has to be careful not to dig them up unintentionally. *Primula veris* and *P. veris sp. macrocalyx* are as hardy as nails. I have some red and some orange forms traceable back to well over one hundred years. *Primula vulgaris* can be temperamental in my garden but at present I have a double red, a double white and a double yellow all seemingly quite happy. My spring garden would never be the same without some forms of *Primula X pruhoniana*, the Juliana hybrids. I have 'Betty Green' (maybe it's 'Berry Green'), 'Kinlough Beauty', 'Dorothy', 'Lady Greer', and of course 'Wanda', which is possibly the best known and most often grown of the Juliana hybrids.

Though they will indeed grow in ordinary garden soil, I find that *Primula auricula* grow far better in our climate when planted in well drained soil of a rock garden. They are particularly happy when they can send their roots well back into a dry stone wall. Also for the rock garden is the spring flowering *Primula marginata*. This plant produces funnel-shaped, lilac-blue flowers, and, if not hit by prolonged heavy rain, its toothed green leaves are heavily overlaid with white meal. This 'mealy' dusting makes the plant attractive even when not in flower. *P. marginata* is best planted in a crevice, scree or dry stone wall where it will receive the perfect drainage it requires. It is also an ideal trough plant so long as the trough has sufficient volume to protect it during our severe winters. I am able to grow it both in a crevice and a trough.

We have not yet worked on acquiring a collection of Primula suitable for our rock garden or trough collection but do have the odd one or two such as *P. scotica*, *P. farinosa* and *P. x venusta*. The former two are somewhat short-lived but are easily raised from fresh seed. All are particularly nice when grown in an alpine trough. Though the Truro summers are hotter than those in Newfoundland, I feel that it would be well worth our while to try their native primroses such as *P. laurentiana* or *P. mistassinica* in some cooler aspect of the garden. Both are delightful when seen in their native habit.

Given the right garden conditions and attention, I believe that there are other lovely Primula that we can grow and enjoy in Nova Scotia. All we need are a few enthusiasts to become seriously involved with them and then to pass on their findings to the rest of us.

PLANT PORTRAIT

Primula alpicola

ROBERT TONKIN

Primula alpicola might possibly be the ultimate posy sniffer's primula. This beautiful and fragrant species was brought into western gardens by legendary plant hunter and explorer Frank Kingdon-Ward in 1924. He collected seed in the valley of the Tsangpo River in southeast Tibet in the fall of that year. It is quite possible that all plants of *P. alpicola* in cultivation are from that original collection. Other populations are known to exist in Bhutan and northeast India.

As a member of the Sikkimensis group, *P. alpicola* will share many of the characteristics of habitat and appearance as other members of the group; *P. florindae*, *sikkimensis*, *secundiflora*, *ioessa* and *waltonii*. All are found in moist meadows, shady bogs and wet areas of conifer forests, and all are especially fond of making stream embankments their preferred habitat.

John Richards' concise botanical description of *P. alpicola* can hardly be improved upon by this dirt gardener, so I believe it proper to just quote his excellent publication, *Primula*. He describes *P. alpicola* thus... "leaf blades very distinctive, being olive green and narrowly oval but with a rounded base, unwinged stalks and with a very close-set rugosity. The flowers are sweetly fragrant and most commonly have a single umbel in cultivation; they are broadly funnel-shaped to saucer shaped rather than bell-shaped, and can be white, yellow, cream, flushed pink, rose, claret, purple or violet, although smothered with white or yellow meal on the face, while the corolla-lobes are always notched."

I had to look up the word rugosity. It means "having a rough, wrinkled surface, as in certain prominently veined leaves." This leaf type is very typical of many primula and I assume its structure is used to collect any moisture and funnel it to the crown and then the roots of the plant, however small that amount of moisture may be. What this definition also infers to me is the suggestion attempting to grow *P. alpicola* in a garden susceptible to long dry spells or hot humid weather, without constant watering or soaking during those spells, most likely will prove fatal to the plant.

Of the colors referenced by Richards, three are typical of the predominant variations in the species. Yellow flowers are typically found in var. *luna*, white flowers in var. *alba* and the colors pink, rose, purple or violet in var. *violacea*. Some sources I read note that not only will all three variations cross breed in the garden, but all three will also cross breed and produce hybrids with *P. florindae*, producing red or brown flowers. I have always found the leaves to be more of a deep evergreen than olive, but that is just my experience.

OK, that's the "formal" findings for *P. alpicola*, what about actually growing and enjoying the plant in your garden? I have three plantings in my gardens of both var. *luna* and var. *alba*. I have been unable to find var. *violacea* seed although I continue to look (hint hint!). My oldest planting is about five years old now, and in fact should probably be dug up, split and replanted. It spreads out in front of a large stand of hosta near the sidewalk where all the local dogs (most on leashes if you can believe it) use the stand as the "beacon of the block". The other two plantings are up in more protected garden areas. All plantings typically bloom in late June through July here in southeast Alaska. They provide mid season color as well as fragrance once the *P. auricula*, *dentikulata*, *juliae*'s and polyanthus have past bloom. They fill a niche between the end of the spring blooming primula and the onset of bloom of the other members of the Sikkimensis group noted above, being the first in that group to flower. Of all the dozens of primula in my gardens, this one gives the "most show for the least effort". Once established they thrive in well composted, well drained soil. During our infrequent dry spells I soak the ground and am rewarded with displays of no worry, low maintenance, beautiful and fragrant yellow and white primula arising out of deep evergreen leaves. Most grow to about 18" tall and are extremely hardy. Some days I walk out into the gardens and can smell the *P. alpicola* twenty feet away. Whenever I walk a guest

through the garden during that time of year, I always clip a flower to bring to the nose (the upper garden plants, not the ones down by the sidewalk).

I will close this portrait with a quote from Frank Kingdon-Ward's wonderful read *Pilgrimage For Plants* describing his discovery of *P. alpicola* in the Tsangpo valley. "On July 6 we continued our march down the main valley. There was no clear path. We just pushed our way through the meadow near the bubbling stream, knee deep in the closed ranks of [*P. alpicola*], trampling them underfoot at every step. It was sacrilege, but to avoid them was impossible. Not until we were a mile or more down the valley and well into the forest did the pressure of [them] begin to relax. Our progress stirred up clouds of fragrance which rose in an almost invisible mist, and my eyes ached with the unrelieved sheets of yellow flowers, all alike. I grew giddy with the feast of scent and color. It was something I had never experienced before, and am not likely to see again."

This description comes from a man who dedicated his life to plant hunting on the rooftop of the world. He certainly has my gratitude. If you possess the growing conditions it would be a shame to omit this beautiful and easy to grow primula from your garden. It's almost always listed in the APS seed exchange. I think you'll find it worthy of your efforts.

Robert Tonkin is currently the Juneau Chapter president, past editor of *Primroses* and past secretary of our Society. He can be reached at primroses@gci.net

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Photo: Dr. Sterling Levy



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Some Primula grown by members from Newfoundland. Above, two photos of *Primula chionantha*. Below, a violet *P. denticulata* basking in the warm sunshine of a Newfoundland spring, and a closeup of *P. denticulata* 'alba'.



Photo: Michael Hockney



All other Photos: Todd Boland



Photo: ©2006 Michael Hockney



Photo: ©2006 Wayne Sturge



THIS PAGE: Newfoundland provides the perfect climate for cold loving primroses. Above left, the pale yellow *Primula elatior*, above right, a garden specimen of *P. glaucescens*. Right, a rock garden grown *P. hirsuta*. OPPOSITE PAGE: Clockwise from top right, a violet *P. "Betty Green"*, below that, *P. belluensis*. Bottom left, a pot of *P. x. Berninae*, center, a striking *P. capitata*, and top left, a pale yellow garden grown *P. veris*.



Other Photos This Page: Todd Boland



Photo: ©2006 Ned Pratt - Newfoundland Tourism

Plant photos: Todd Boland



THIS PAGE: Primula juliana 'Kristy' bred by Mary Kordes.

Photos: Jay Lunn



THIS PAGE: An impressive display representing the British Columbia Primula Group, designed by member Roxanne Muth at the Alpine Garden Club of British Columbia. Here, this years' display features vintage garden ephemera including antique Primula seed packets, old watering cans, weathered seed boxes combined with primrose plants perfectly forced all within a recreated potting shed transports the garden show visitor back-in-time to old England.

Pins + Thrums

noteworthy bits



Endangered Primulaceae in Hawaii

The Hawaiian islands have more endangered and extinct species than any place else on earth. One of the rarest now added to the list is a precious shrubby form of *Lysimachia*. *L. maxima* is a lesser known shrubby member of Primulaceae, with golden yellow blossoms. There are fewer than fifty plants on windward side of the island of Molokai. A single known population is located within Pelekuno Preserve and is immediately adjacent to state owned land. Experts are studying the plant in order to reproduce it.

A new Primulaceae discovered in Yunnan, China

The Kunming Institute of Botany announced that they have formally named a new sub-species of Primulaceae native to Mt. Wuliangshan, Jingdong County, Yunnan, China. *Primula sinolisteri* var. *longicalyx* D.W.Xue & C.Q.Zhang, is described and illustrated in a recent journal. It is different from the typical form by having corolla with a ring-shaped appendix at the throat, and glabrous outside, and calyx subequal to corolla tube in length, 7-10 mm long.



ABOVE: *Primula marginata* grown in a garden in Newfoundland.

The climate in Newfoundland and Labrador is harsh for most plants, yet the short summers do provide surprisingly warm temperatures.

BELOW: *P. frondosa* pumps up the volume with with pinkish lavender blossoms

Plant Photos This Page: Todd Boland



Japanese Primrose Festivals in April

There is more than one Japanese Primrose festival in Japan, a country where flower festivals are far too numerous to list here. One of the best Nihan Sakurasoo (Japanese Primrose) festivals to attend is held in Ukima PARK, in the suburbs of Tokyo. Held every April since 1965, the festival is sponsored by a local primrose club called the Ukimahaharu Sakurasoo Hozankai, which is dedicated to preserving the native primula species of *P. sieboldii*.

Photos: Masashi Yamaguchi



Primula in Newfoundland

TODD BOLAND



ABOVE: Many visitors to Atlantic Canada are surprised by how well *Primula auricula* thrive in gardens.

Photos: Plant photos, Todd Boland
Scenic photos, by permission of the
Department of Tourism, Newfoundland and
Labrador.

Newfoundland is a challenging place for gardening. The first permanent snow generally begins in early December and often the ground is snow-covered into early April. Snowfall may be deep (over 600 cm or 20 feet in the winter of 2001 is the record) or only fleeting (some winters the snow is never deeper than 30 cm or a foot). Frost heaving in spring is the main stress-factor for plants. Spring is a time when cold damp fog is interspersed with scattered sunny, warmer days that hold the promise of summer. Summer is short and relatively cool with an average temperature of about 20 C (70 F). One or two days each summer may reach 30 C (85 F). The first killing frost of autumn is generally not until mid-October. Rainfall is abundant from September until April while the summer months, at least in recent years, can be relatively dry. Overall, we have the wettest climate of eastern North America.

I have not painted a rosy picture of our growing conditions. As if the weather was not challenging enough, in eastern Newfoundland we have little real soil and what we do have is rocky and very acidic. However, having said all that, if you prepare the soil properly, you can create spectacular flower beds. As our summers are relatively short, our blooms are very concentrated throughout June to September. Many visitors are amazed at the exuberance of the floral displays.

Rock gardening is especially suited to our climate. European and Sino-Himalayan alpinists do exceptionally well as they dislike hot weather. As it happens, one of the most important groups of European and Himalayan alpinists are *Primula*, and that is one group that does very well under the Newfoundland growing conditions.

By far the best collection of *Primula* is housed at the Memorial University Botanical Garden. There, they are growing both outside in their expansive rock garden or under pot-culture in the alpine house. Perhaps the most spectacular primula grown there are from the *Auriculastrum* section. Most of the European alpine primroses seem at home in Newfoundland. Among the collection at the Botanical Garden are *P. allionii* 'Elliot's Variety', *P. pedemontana*, *P. latifolia*, *P. hirsuta*, *P. villosa*, *P. glaucescens*, *P. clusiana*, *P. auricula*, *P. palinuri* and perhaps my favourite, *P. marginata*. Beside the species itself, they also have three selections and/or hybrids of *P. marginata*; 'Linda Pope', 'Janet' and 'Drake's Form'. Some *Auriculastrum* hybrids growing there include *P. 'Belluensis'*, *P. 'Clarence Elliot'*, *P. X berninae*, several *P. X pubescens* selections, *P. X seriana* and *P. X venusta*. There are several unnamed hybrids of *P. auricula* as well as 'Rowena', 'Chorister', 'Dale's Red', 'Camelot', 'Matthew Yates' and 'Susannah'.

The *Primula* (*Vernales*) section also do well here. Nearly every serious gardener (and many novices) in St. John's (my home city) grow the standard polyanthus primroses. The newer, nearly stemless hybrids, popularly sold at nurseries between Valentines and Easter, seem to lack the hardiness to survive our winters, but the old-fashioned polyanthus do exceptionally well. Among the species, the Botanical Garden is home to *P. vulgaris*, *P. veris* and *P. elatior*. There are also many old-fashioned polyanthus hybrids, some modern double-flowered types as well as the ever popular *P. X juliana* 'Wanda' and 'Betty Green'.

Perhaps the most popular primrose in Newfoundland is the drumstick primrose, *P. denticulata*. Certainly few other species make as impressive a display. Locally, they peak around mid-May but may open by early April in sheltered sites. Of the many other Sino-Himalayan primroses, the easiest to grow locally are from the *Cortusoides*, *Sikkimensis* and *Proliferae* (*Candabra*) sections. Most local growers grow these in damp, semi-shaded locations and at our Botanical Garden, they are grown mostly in the woodland beds, peat beds or shaded nooks in the rock garden. Most of the common species within these sections are grown either at the Botanical Gardens or by local growers. Among the *Cortusoides* we grow are *P. cortusoides*, *P. jesoana*, *P. kisoana*, *P. polyneura*, *P. saxatilis* and *P. sieboldii*; in the *Sikkimensis* are *P. alpicola*, *P. florindae*, *P. secundiflora* and *P. sikkimensis*; and in the *Candabra*

are *P. aurantiaca*, *P. beesiana*, *P. bulleyana*, *P. chungensis*, *P. helodoxa*, *P. japonica*, *P. poissonii*, *P. pulverulenta* and *P. wilsonii*. In our Botanical Gardens, the display of *P. bulleyana*, along the 'mountain stream' of the rock garden is a show-stopper during mid-July.

I have grown several primroses from the *Nivales* section, but they have proven to be short-lived at best; rarely do they last more than 3 years. Among them have been *P. sinopurpurea* and *P. melanops*. The *Capitatae* section have been equally frustrating. Limited success has been achieved with *P. capitata* and *P. glomerata*. Among the *Muscarioides*, only *P. vialii* has proven to be reliable. If the growing area can be kept wet enough, *P. rosea* and *P. warshenewskiana* will thrive. To my knowledge, no other Sino-Himalayan species have been successfully grown here (mostly due to lack of access to plants or seeds). Having said this, I am trying *P. forrestii* for the first time this year.

What about primrose species from closer to home? We have trouble growing the western US primroses from the *Parryi* section. I have tried *P. rusbyi* and *P. parryi* with no success. The other North American primroses are from the *Aleuritia* (*Farinosae*) section. This section is the most widespread in the world, with species native to North America, Europe, Russia, Sino-Himalaya and even a disjunct species from the southern tip of South America, namely *P. magellanica*. They are mostly short-lived in Newfoundland and require regular re-seeding every 3-4 years (a notable exception for me is *P. frondosa*; my plant is now 12 years old!). They require consistently moist soil and will quickly expire if allowed to get dry. For us, they do better in pots where they can be more carefully monitored. Species I know that are growing locally include *P. algida*, *P. darialica*, *P. halleri*, *P. farinosae*, *P. scotica* and *P. frondosa*. The closely related *P. luteola* is also successful.

Eastern North America is rather poor in native primroses. In fact, only four species are known from this part of the world. However, as it happens, all four are native to Newfoundland. Our native primroses are mostly restricted to limestone areas of the Island; primarily located along the west coast and Great Northern Peninsula. Here they grow among a multitude of lovely arctic-alpine plants such as *Dryas integrifolia*, *Saxifraga aizoides*, *Saxifraga oppositifolia*, *Iris setosa* ssp. *canadensis* and *Silene acaulis*.

The most common species in Newfoundland is *Primula mistassinica*, a species which is found across Canada and into Alaska and the northern US. This

is a relatively small primrose which looks superficially like a pale-flowered *P. scotica*. The foliage is farinose, with rosettes to 5 cm and wiry flower stems 4-10 cm tall. The flowers are typically lavender-pink but the alba form is also known locally. In the wild, they grow in peaty pockets on limestone or in fine limestone gravels. They can tolerate very wet soil, even being inundated for days at a time, yet of our four native species, will tolerate the most dryness. I have grown this species successfully in pot culture but the plants are apt to be short lived. They do set seed freely and germinated readily.

Our largest and the most showy native species is *Primula laurentiana*. This species is endemic to the Gulf of St. Lawrence area of Atlantic Canada. While uncommon overall in Newfoundland, it has the widest distribution on the Island, growing along the northeast coast as well as the west coast and the Great Northern Peninsula. Size is variable but they are mostly about twice the size of *P. mistassinica* with hemispherical heads of lilac-pink flowers atop stouter 10-20 cm stems. Very good forms may have flower heads that appear like a miniature *P. denticulata*. The leaves and stems are heavily farinose. I have had great success with this species in pots and even limited success in the open. Again, they are apt to be short-lived but set copious amounts of seed that germinated without fuss.

Our smallest native species is also the only one that typically has white flowers. The Greenland Primrose, *Primula egaliensis*, is found across northern Canada into Alaska, as well as Greenland. This species was once classified as a member of the Aleuretia (Farinosae) section but is now placed into the Armerina section since it has efarinose foliage. The rosettes are quite small and the thin 2-10 cm stems are topped by only 1-6 flowers. While typically white, pink-flowered specimens do occur. This species has proven quite challenging for me; best success might be in shallow, undrained pans of limey-peaty soil.

Our rarest native primrose, *Primula stricta*, was only discovered in the Province a few years ago. A small population grows at L'Anse-aux-Meadows National Historic Park at the northern tip of the Great Northern Peninsula. This site is the only confirmed settlement of Vikings in North America and dates back to around 1000 A.D., some 500 years earlier than Christopher Columbus' historic voyage. Strangely enough, *P. stricta* is fairly common in Scandinavia, Iceland and Greenland, the other countries once occupied by the

Vikings. Could there be a connection? Due to its scarcity and the fact that it is located in a National Park, I have never collected seeds of this species. It looks like a smaller version of *P. farinosa* and would most likely be challenging to maintain in cultivation. Unlike our other native primroses, this species is found on granitic rock rather than limestone.

While we can grow a wide variety of primroses, they are not without their problems. As with most gardeners, slugs and snails are a constant bother. They appear to feed more on the foliage of the large, leafy types but the actual blossoms of all primroses may be devoured. However, our most problematic pests are the larvae of vine weevils. The adult weevils are a bane to rhododendron growers, as they create scalloping on the leaf edges as they feed. The little white 'grubs' of the weevil appear to prefer primrose roots over any other plant. They are a persistent pest for primroses grown in the open but especially troublesome for pot-grown plants. I have lost count of how many times a healthy-looking primrose in the alpine house has suddenly collapsed. Upon examination of the plant, hardly a root was left and many little white grubs were in evidence. Since the Botanical Garden does not use serious pesticides (we use nothing stronger than insecticidal soap), we have to live with this perennial problem. So needless to say, we have lost a few primroses over the years (the weevils are also a pest to other Primulaceae namely Dodecatheon and Cyclamen).

I would be keen on trying some of the more obscure Sino-Himalayan species, but as noted earlier, access to plants and/or seed had been limited. The Tromsø Arctic-alpine Botanical Garden in northern Norway has been more successful with some of these primroses, and, since they have similar growing conditions to us, we might have a chance. Certainly, if excess summer heat is the limiting factor, we have little to worry about! So if you are ever in Newfoundland from late April to late July, then I invite you to visit our Botanical Garden to view the Primula collection, not to mention the over 1500 other taxa growing here!

CHAPTER REPORT

BRITISH COLUMBIA PRIMULA GROUP



The B.C. Primula Group is small, about 10 members per meeting, but we have intense primula discussions, and fun, as well. Over the past year, we have had 4 meetings, a plant sale and display, and group members have entered in the primula classes in the local alpine show.

In March we discussed *P. marginata* and *P. allionii* plants, particularly ones the members brought. In May we had a summary of a lecture by Ron McBeath, presented at the 1991 Primula Symposium. Michael Plumb did a masterful job, and we learned things we hadn't realized about this diverse and late-flowering group.

In April the Alpine Garden Club of B.C. puts on its annual show. The Group always has an attractive decorative and educational display of primroses and auriculas, and primula memorabilia, put together by Roxanne Muth. She has spent years gathering the old primula seed packets, primrose prints, old garden shed furnishings and even rustic sections of old fence. While the show is being judged, we have a sale of primula and other plants outside the hall, which supports the Group's expenses throughout the year.

Our members fill the primula classes in the show with entries. A total of 80 pots of primula were entered in 2005. This year *P. x forsteri* won the best primula in show trophy. The best gold-laced polyanthus trophy was won by Maedythe Martin with a seedling plant from her own saved seed. In the show auricula class, 'Marion Tiger' took a first prize ribbon, as did a grey-edged red-ground fancy seedling, both entered by Maedythe Martin. In the *P. sieboldii* classes there were named forms of the plant from Japan, entered by Ruby Chong. 'Kinyasyu' was a deep pink snowflake form, with a white eye. 'Hein' was a simple pale pink flower, with a darker pink reverse and edge. 'Eki Ji No Sura' was a cupped pink flower with a white eye. It is a treat

to see these special plants from so far away in our show at the West Coast of North America.

In the species classes a very floriferous plant of *P. rusbyi*, the native North American, caught the eye. Entered by Michael Plumb, it was in perfect condition, with fresh flowers of a striking rose-pink.

An interesting display of *P. x marginata* seedlings was tucked in at the end of the show bench. About 20 seedlings in a picturesque wooden box, all in bloom, demonstrated the variability of seeds from one cross. Ian Gillam, show steward, had crossed 'Linda Pope' with 'Margaret Marcham', a purple



auricula, which we think is from New Zealand. Many seedlings were white, but there was a very dark purple, as well as a plant with flowers reminiscent of 'Linda Pope.' A few magenta and lilac flowers rounded out the color spectrum.

After taking the summer off, the Group's September meeting focused on soil mixes and potting up plants. This was presented by Rhonda and Michael Plumb. And the final meeting of the year provided an opportunity to distribute seed. A few members had some crosses of their own, and others brought surplus not sown in previous years. There was also some APS seed exchange seed from earlier in the year. We like to sow our seed here at the West Coast in December so it has a good jump on making roots to get it through the summer.

Everyone has a great time and there are always "show and tell" plants to admire and discuss, even to covet, or beg pieces of in the future. We have some interesting programs planned for next year, as well.

Maedythe Martin, *President*

Primula juliana 'Kristy'

MARY KORDES

I grew *Primula juliana* 'Kristy' from seed obtained through the American Primrose Society in 1995. The seed had been donated to the society's Seed Exchange by Jay and Ann Lunn and was listed as Hand Pollinated. The pod, or mother plant, was *P. juliana* 'Betty Green', a deep velvety red "pin", with the stigma protruding above the stamens in the throat of the blossoms. The pollen parent of 'Kristy' was a white juliana, a thrum form, with its shorter stigma remaining in the tube and the stamens displayed above it. It is felt, in breeding with hybrid primulas, that the best pollination and resulting seedlings are obtained by crossing a pin form with a thrum-form plant.

I grew two seedlings to maturity from this cross, one of which produced lovely small pink blossoms on long stems over small light green foliage.

I feel the second seedling I grew from that cross is stunning. It has beautifully bronzed foliage that compliments the yellowish buds and peach-colored blossoms which gradually change to lovely shades of mauve. The most exciting characteristic, however, are the deep mauve stripes on its flower petals which are present the minute the blossom opens. Neither its pod nor its pollen parent were striped. In fact, stripes in julianas are a rarity.

I watched that special seedling for 8 years, growing it in partial sun, and was pleased with its hardiness and its ability to produce so many blossoms that they created a cushion of yellow, peach, and mauve.

The flowers, borne singly as well as in polyanthus form on the same plant, are produced on short slender stalks of glossy burgundy. The tube, which encases and protects the reproductive organs at the base of the flower, is a rich glossy mauve and displays a third of its length above the sepals. The one-half-



inch bronzed-green sepals with burgundy overtones are fused for part of their length with a very pointed tip at the top of each segment.

The petals of the 1-inch blossoms are deeply notched and somewhat ruffled, with a small yellow eye that has a gold stripe extending to the center of each petal base. Occasionally this gold joins a mauve stripe to form a pleasing starburst of color reaching to the notch at the petal edge. The blossom is a thrum, with small anthers tightly attached and clustered in the mouth of the tube, while the pistil is cradled deep down in the tube.

The rich burgundy of the flower stalks compliments, and enriches, the glossy dark green bronzed foliage. The crenulate leaf (finely crenate with small rounded teeth along the margins) eventually grows to two inches long by 1 inch wide with deeply indented veins on top of the leaf, and a web of raised veins on the leaf back. The leaf blade extends down along each side of the petiole. The petiole is well covered with tiny burgundy dots, which blend to our eye, and color the petiole. That same color extends into the mid-vein of the leaf and, in some cases, to part of the leaf blade.

Being a typical juliae-family plant, this hybrid expands by sending up rosettes of leaves on its creeping roots, but tends to stay in a cushion form

rather than a loose plant which forms when the rootstock spreads further. It begins to bloom very early, soon after the snow melts away from it here in my northern Michigan garden, and blooms for several weeks in cool spring weather. It endured heavy frost and snow squalls when in bloom this spring with no visible damage.

'Kristy' grows well for me in either spring sun, where it stays shorter and more compact, or in partial shade where the leaves and flowers are larger. As with most plants of this species group, it usually retreats into dormancy during summer heat, but revives with the return of cooler autumn temperatures.

Together, the burgundy of the flower stalks, petioles, and leaves supporting a cushion of peach to mauve blossoms, creates a lovely plant. I named this plant after our daughter, Kristy, several years ago.

I sent crowns of this plant to three friends in 2004, each gardening in a different climate in the U.S., to trial it for hardiness and vigor. All reported the plant survived and bloomed for them this spring, showing it is a very adaptable plant.

My friend, Judith Sellers, benched her plant of 'Kristy' at the 2005 American Primrose Society National Show and won a blue ribbon for the best *Primula juliana* in that class as well as being awarded, as inscribed, "The Ivel Age Award for Best Julie Hybrid on May 1, 2005 at the National Primrose Show in Boston, Massachusetts." I feel very gratified that 'Kristy' was judged worthy of these awards.

The creation of 'Kristy' through the cross made by Jay and Ann Lunn points to the vast gene pool lurking within the seeds of primulas. One never knows what combination of genes will result from a cross and there can be pleasant surprises. This recombination that results in new forms is found in every seed produced. Seldom do two seedlings, resulting from a single cross of two cultivars, exhibit the same kind of flowers. Obtaining a "true" clone of a cultivar is accomplished only by dividing that plant.

I am indebted to Jay Lunn for information on the parent plants of my *Primula juliana* 'Kristy', as well as to *The Book of Primroses* by Barbara Shaw, and *Primroses & Polyanthus* by Peter Ward.

NATIONAL SHOW REPORT

NEW ENGLAND PRIMULA SOCIETY

Now a fond memory, the 55th National Primrose Show was held at Tower Hill Botanic Garden, Boylston, Massachusetts on April 28, 29 and May 1, 2005. Supporting the event were fifty-seven registered attendees, including twenty-one exhibitors who benched one hundred eighty-seven entries. Over seven hundred visitors, including many New England Chapter members who could not stay for more than one of the days, enjoyed this early spring happening. The commemorative book, 'Alice Hills Baylor and Primroses for Eastern Gardens' was introduced and was highly popular with visitors.

Primula judges included Thea Oakley, Ed Buyarski, Kris Fenderson with student judge Mary Irwin. Phil Cook and Linda Montanardo served as clerks. Novice exhibitors Kathryn Petuck and Clifton Below won Best of Show for a fabulous pot of lavender *P. denticulata*. Attendees choice for their Best in Show was Mark Dyen's single purple alpine auricula. Paul Held received the Wesley Bottom Trophy for his large pot of beautiful light yellow polyanthus hose-in-hose (from Barnhaven seed). Judith Sellers captured the John Keridge trophy for the most species in bloom and, with oodles of blue ribbons, won the sweepstakes award.

Participants who were in town Thursday night, before all the other happenings, were treated to something very special, a not-so-private party at the home of our editor Matt Mattus, open to all members who we're in town a day early. The following day, a garden tour included the gardens of Richard Redfield, Paul Held and garden writer Sydney Eddison.

The keynote speaker was Angela Bradford, formerly owner of Barnhaven Primroses. She and her husband added a wonderful presence with her personal sharing, including talks entitled 'Primula and Folklore' and 'Hybridizing New Primula'. Other speakers included APS President Ed Buyarski, who presented 'Alaska and Yukon Primula and Wildflowers'; Paul Held presented 'Primula 'Sakurasoh' from Japan, and Arlene Perkins, shared long established beauties along her primrose paths.

Elaine Malloy, Show Chair

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American Primrose Society Minutes of the Board Meeting November 5th, 2005

Present (online): Linda Bailey, Rodney Barker (Director), Ed Buyarski (President), Judith Sellers (Vice President), Mark Dyen, Susan Gray, Elaine Malloy (New England Chapter), Matt Mattus (Editor), Arlene Perkins (Director), Joe Philip (Webmaster), Michael Plumb (Secretary), Robert Tonkin (Juneau Chapter)

Regrets: Julia Halderson (Treasurer), Thea Oakley (Eastside Chapter)

Meeting opened at 1:18 Pacific Time 1. The Minutes of April 30th, 2005 (printed on page 43 of the Winter Quarterly, 2005); Accepted as presented (Judith Sellers/Linda Bailey).

2. Treasurer's Report To be published in the winter issue of Primroses. Membership is still falling. Although the seed exchange has made money over the last four years, Robert said the Society is still spending \$3500 more each year than it is receiving. Elaine reported that profits from the Baylor book sales could now be deposited in Society funds. Judith suggested placing a boxed insert in each summer or fall Primroses to remind members to renew. Ed told the Board that using cheaper paper for Primroses would result in minimal savings.

Summary:

- Total liabilities and equity as of September 30, 2005: \$20,141.95 [September 30, 2004: \$22,701.03]
- Total income less expenses for the period July 1, 2005 to September 30, 2005: (\$4,960)
- Membership as of September 30, 2005: 435 [January 4, 2005: 481]

The Treasurer's report was accepted (Judith Sellers/Linda Bailey) **3. Chapter Reports** The Board agreed that chapter reports should be included in Primroses. Action: Matt will ask the chapters for their news and reports, together with any photos they may want to share. Judith will help Matt by encouraging chapters to submit reports for the Winter Primroses. Matt will also restore the page in Primroses which gives organizational information on each chapter. He will also consider smaller print for the reports. The chapter reports were accepted (Susan Gray/Judith Sellers) **4. Primroses Quarterly** The Board suggested some ideas for material to include in the publication: standard articles; reprints of old articles; inclusion of the full Treasurer's report; the announcement of upcoming themes and topics to facilitate contributions from members; a "Plant Portrait" series; printing the membership list in spring rather than fall; printing the membership list on a separate sheet. Action: Matt and the Editorial Committee will consider all of these. Matt announced that the fall issue would contain articles on Atlantic Canada. Recent typographical errors were discussed. Matt said these resulted from font changes, which he does not get to see. Action: Ed will ensure that Matt receives a printed copy for final editing and proofing. Michael and Judith offered to help proofread, so they will also receive copies. **5. Seed Exchange Report** Action: The Seed Committee (Juneau Chapter) will send the seed list out towards the end of January as an insert in Primroses to save postage, though in future years timing may be too difficult to do this. There were two suggestions: that purchasers include an SASE with their order to save the Society money, and that we no longer accept payment by credit card because companies take 8% and some seed purchasers submit incorrect card numbers. No action was taken on these two suggestions. **6. Webmaster's Report** Joe needs information for the website from chapters. Action: Judith will contact chapter presidents to encourage submissions. The current web host is expensive. Action: Susan and Judith will discuss possible new web hosts with Joe. Judith suggested a box be inserted in Primroses to solicit contributions to the website. Robert suggested that each chapter have its own web page to make reports. It was also suggested that materials could be sold online. **7. Bookstore Report** None submitted, as Thea had been ill. **8. National Show** The NE Chapter will host the 2006 National Show (Judith Sellers/Rodney Barker). The dates are May 6-7. Juneau will host in 2007 (Robert Tonkin/Michael Plumb). Michael will approach the BC Group about hosting in 2008. **9. Search for a Replacement Board Member in Europe** The board agreed to invite Angela Bradford. Action: Matt will approach her. **10. Recruitment of New Members** The Board agreed to Robert's proposal for a special meeting on membership. Action: This special meeting will be held online at 1:00 pm Alaskan time on November 19.

The meeting was adjourned (Rodney Barker/Mark Dyen) at 3:09 pm Pacific Time

Michael Plumb, Secretary

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MAY 5th - MAY 7th 2006

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