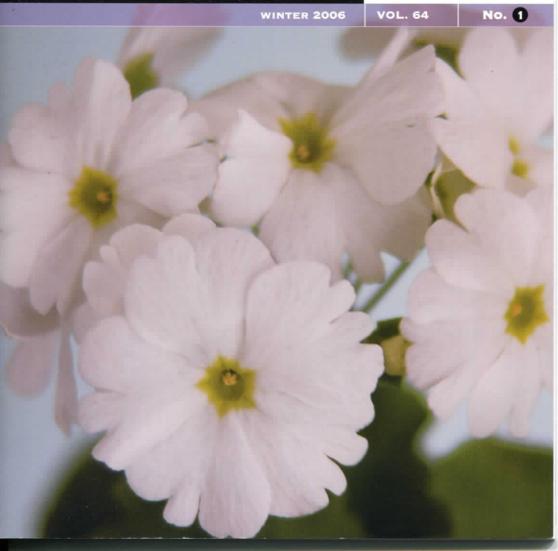


Primroses

HE QUARTERLY OF THE AMERICAN PRIMROSE SOCIETY



Primroses

The Quarterly of the American Primrose Society

Volume 64 No 1 WINTER 2006

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 Cover

Front Cover: A winter flowering Dutch hybrid *Primula obconica* brightens a winter day with it's delicately fragrant blossoms. Tender, *P.obconica* requires either indoor or greenhouse culture. Grown and photographed by Matt Mattus.

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Photo: Matt Mattus

Douglasia montana is an more uncommon member of Primulaceae, yet the blossom here does show the family resemblance. It is a high mountain alpine cushion plant with stiff needle-like leaves and is found above 6,000 feet in Montana, Idaho and Utah. It can also be grown in a raised bed, or alpine house.

PRIMROSES • The Quarterly of the American Primrose Society

Editor

Matt Mattus

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EDITORIAL Manuscripts for publication in the quarterly are invited from members and other gardeners, although there is no payment. Please include 300 dpi digital shots (to final print size), they will either be converted to black and white, or used in color. Photo prints on paper, transparancies, or slides are also accepted. Send articles directly to the editor at mmattus@charter.net. Articles composed in Microsoft Word are preferred. APS reserves the right to use submitted articles and pictures for other official APS uses. Primroses, The Quarterly of the American Primrose Society is created on an Apple Mac G4_using primarily the page layout software Adobe InDesign CS and Adobe Photoshop.

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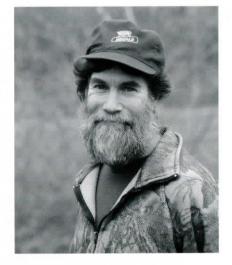
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President's Message

ED BUYARSKI

Greetings gardeners; Spring is hereofficially at least! I'm sure some of
you have primroses blooming in your
gardens and lots more to come. This
is probably my favorite time of year as
the birds return to the north, the plants
are sprouting and growing, and even
the king salmon will start to appear
in greater numbers around Southeast
Alaska. Lots of seeds have been mailed
out from the Seed Exchange and are being planted for future flowers.



In the second week of March we en-

dured our coldest weather of the winter with my own lows of zero to minus 5 F. With no snow cover this is likely to result in damage to some perennials as well as evergreen shrubs like rhododendrons to be seen in the next few months. As this is the third time in the past four years this has happened after very mild winters, we wonder what is going on. We'll watch to see its effects as our gardens begin to grow. The weather wizards say we are experiencing the La Nina effect in the Pacific again.

Again we must apologize for this late Quarterly and we are still searching for a new Editor to take Matt's place. Write-in ballots for two Board positions are in this issue.

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We do have Susan Gray taking over as APS Web Master so watch for changes there and email her with suggestions for improvements.

Sadly, we have lost two fine primrose gardeners in the last month-Caroline Jensen in Juneau and Rosetta Jones in Washington State. Both women were very influential in promoting our favorite plants locally as well as contributing to the Quarterly and in breeding and selecting new and hardy varieties that many of us can grow. More about them will follow.

The National Show near Boston is coming soon and I hope to see many of you there in May.

Please do continue to recruit new members, plant and share more primroses and beautify your surroundings.

Ed Buyarski

IMPORTANT WRITE-IN BALLOT BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Due to two open seats on the APS Board of Directors. We are asking all members to please take the time to either photocopy this page or cut it out, and write in two nominations for the available seats on the Board.

Please mail ballot by May 21, 2006 to:

Rodney Barker 49 Woodcliff Road Newton Highlands, MA 02461



Write in candidate # 1 _	
Write in candidate #2 _	

Growing Primroses From Seed Under Lights

RON DRISKILL

It began like this. Either God, fate, or bad primrose seed conspired against me that first year of sowing, because the first time I ordered a batch of primrose seeds, not a single one (well, maybe one) germinated. Feeling thoroughly burned, I put off ordering primrose seeds again for probably three years until I had fantastic luck with *Primula japonica*, *P. veris* and *P. denticulata*, which I had bought as transplants at a nursery for 99 cents each. Except for *P. denticulata*, the plants produced so many seeds that the ground outside looked like a green carpet the following spring when they germinated. I was amazed!

Figuring that if they could do that well, others could do it, I ordered several varieties from a well-known company in France—Barnhaven Primroses—and in a masterstroke of ingenious decision-making, promptly let them sit in the refrigerator for a year and a half, ignoring them as I continued to landscape the yard with other plants.

In my enthusiasm to get them, I had not properly weighed the consequences and received the seeds before I could prepare beds for them. Anxiety built up as time passed because, despite the refrigeration, I was worried that the seeds might lose their viability.

Then, in August of 2005, I said, "That's it. They're getting sown." And I immediately took half of them out of the refrigerator and sowed each variety in plastic packs that measured 2 in. deep, 3.5 in. wide and 5 in. long. It was the depth of the container that mattered more than anything.

Now, a lot of people would say, "What is that fool doing? Doesn't he know you're supposed to sow them in the spring so they can get a good rooting sys-

tem on them by the time fall rolls around?"

Well, yes, you are. But I also thought, "Why can't they be grown under lights? If you can do it with African violets, why not primroses? They both like shade."

So I planted the seeds anyway and left the other half in the fridge, just in case my theory didn't succeed. At least I wouldn't lose all of my seed if it didn't.

Germinating Your Seed

Many of the books say to germinate your seed at room temperature (between 60 deg. F. and 75 deg. F) if you don't put them through the alternate freezing and thawing cycle outside. I found this to be true, except for *Primula japonica* and its strains, Postford White and Bartley. According to Barnhaven Primroses, these seeds should go through the alternate freezing and thawing process anyway. My room temperature stayed at around 75 deg. F., but I have also germinated store-bought primrose seed at 60 deg. F. in the basement. It just takes a little longer.

The 3.5 x 5 containers that I used were filled almost to the top with a store-bought potting soil consisting of mostly peat moss and some perlite. To make sure the seeds didn't dry out, which had to be sprinkled on top of the soil after it had been wetted down with a soluble fertilizer of 15-30-15 at half strength, I covered the containers with clear Saran Wrap and kept the containers inside the house but out of sunlight.

Germination took about two weeks.

Pricking Out and Transplanting

When the plants each had four leaves on them (in some cases two, because they germinated later and I needed to get the job done), I transplanted them into cell-paks (six cells to a pak) and put the paks into plastic trays with no holes. By the time I was finished, I had 256 plants in eight trays.

Then I carried the trays into the woods where the primroses could sit in the shade. What sun they received took place late in the day, when the angle of the sun was lowest and less likely to overheat the air inside (the trays were covered with transparent, plastic lids).

Even the two-leaved seedlings survived the transplanting.

Growing Outside and Watering

By using hole-less trays, I was able to water from the bottom when I found the soil was getting too dry; but that was seldom, as the covers kept the moisture in. Whenever I thought the plants could use some fresh air or needed a release of heat, I would lift the lid up for a few seconds and put it back down. Rocks were used to keep the wind from blowing the lids off.

This is where the plants remained until mid-October, growing very nicely under the covered trays. I fertilized only one other time, again with a half-strength solution.

By mid-October, however, the plants were ready for transplanting to 4 inch pots, which I quickly transferred them into, using the same potting mix as before. Again I used a half strength solution of 15-30-15.

Growing Primroses Under Lights

Waiting for the plants inside my basement was a \$1,150, four-tiered fluorescent light stand that held four fluorescent bulbs at each level. I had bought the stand in preparation for the primroses.

Making sure I had alternating "warm" and "cool" fluorescent bulbs at each tier of the stand (two bulbs of each), I placed the plants under the lights around October 15th and kept the lights about four inches above the primroses as they grew.

The basement temperature stayed between 56 deg. F. and 60 deg. F.

How long they stayed under the lights each day varied, as I did not have an automatic timer. So they were flooded with light when I remembered to turn them on and they were flooded with darkness when I forgot to turn them on. Sometimes they would go for 12 hours or more without light and sometimes they would get a full 24 hours worth of light. The least amount of light they ever received was six hours. I suspect this latter amount would be just fine every day if a person had an automatic timer.

Because of the width of each tier and the fact that I had four lights at each one, I was able to lay the trays crosswise and give all of the primroses maximum light except for the very ends; but because they are shade loving, this didn't cause any real problems. All I had to do was occasionally turn the end

plants around so they would grow straight—or nearly so.

Watering and Fertilizing

Watering was something of a challenge. If I watered from the top, the water ran off the leaves into the tray, especially as they got larger, and I could never be sure if enough of the liquid was getting to all the roots. So I watered from the bottom.

Even so, the heat from the overhead bulbs and the dryness of the basement evaporated the water more quickly than I anticipated and I often found the plants in the wilting stage when I went downstairs.

A good rule of thumb seems to be—fill the trays with water about every 3 days but try not to leave the roots standing in water.

You may want to fertilize at least one more time with half strength 15-30-15. There sometimes is yellowing of the leaves, especially as the plants get older. As time goes on, some of these leaves will turn brown and die. This may be due mostly to the watering-wilting problem, but it could also be due to the roots standing in water too long.

Other possibilities are too much light, lack of fertilizer, and genetics. For instance, some of the plants germinated yellow and have remained so, but none have died. Some are even starting to develop more green.

All varieties that I germinated are successfully growing under lights and they are as follows: Spice Shades (Polyanthus), Double Primroses, Mixed Cowichan, Indian Reds (Polyanthus), Mixed Julianas, Springtime (Acaulis) and Daybreak (Polyanthus). All are now in flower (February) and will be planted outside when the spring comes. Obviously, primroses can be grown as ornamentals for inside the house as well.

There is a lot more work needed to determine which varieties and species can grow under light and the best way to do it. This is where the research of others can come in handy. I will be trying other varieties and species and will be trying to perfect the technique as time goes on.

Ron lives at the easternmost tip of Zone 5B in Hubbards, Nova Scotia. He is growing several different varieties of primroses under lights and is planning to test them outdoors to see if they can survive the winters there. Ron holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology, Geography, Agriculture and Geology, and has several years of teaching experience.

Primroses Enrich Lives and Gardens

ANITA G. ALEXANDER

Why grow primroses? There may be as many reasons as there are people who enjoy them. What I will focus on are people of the past whom I credit with creating public knowledge and use of primroses in their vast variety. The first person I'd like to mention is Florence Bellis. Her maiden name was Levy before her marriage to Bob Bellis, about the same time as my 1954 marriage to Lu, and my subsequent move to Portland, Oregon. Florence published a catalogue that instructed and entertained, convincing the reader that these plants are essential to a happy life.

Now Daniel Hinkley of Heronswood, in Washington, publishes a cat-



A photo of Florence Bellis, from the October 1953 Quarterly of the APS.

alogue of magic words. His knowledge and humor remind me of Florence's catalogue of Barnhaven primroses. Florence grew primroses to survive the Depression, when being a concert pianist did not earn a living wage. At first she grew tomatoes for market and lilies for Jan deGraaf while the English seed she ordered sprouted and grew. Her objective was to create perennial plants in the (below left) Vernales group that were superior in color and form to what was available at the time, and able to reproduce true to color and the same or better in form. Once she selected a plant and used it for seed, she discarded

it, because the seedlings from the cross would have some superior offspring to use for future breeding. Her basic income was from sales of plants. Local publicity sold the plants and a share of the seeds.

Through talks to horticultural groups and newspaper articles, Florence Bellis created enthusiasts that helped her to form the American Primrose Society in 1941. The first quarterly was mimeographed. In the winter 1967 (vol. 25) Primrose Quarterly I quote from an interview with Rae Berry concerning the early years of the Society--- "So few realize what a really great editor she was, that decade or more of the early years. She was so resourceful, so imaginative---a splendid Editor". This is high praise from Rae Berry who allowed no deliberate hybrids in her garden, excepting her magnificent show auricula. When she felt she was getting ready to retire, Florence searched long and hard for someone to sell her Barnhaven line to. In the late 1970s, she found that Jared Sinclair had her eye for color and form, and he was also an effective businessman.

Rae Berry of Portland, Oregon, grew seedlings in flats in her house early on. Rae and her husband purchased land on what was then the outskirts of Portland, with a variety of growing sites, from bogs and a spring, to woods and dry sunny areas. They had an established garden there when we became friends in the mid fifties. The plant no one else had was the one she wanted, because her objective was to increase the horticultural base in the Pacific Northwest. Rae had five focuses; primula; rhododendron; magnolias, alpines, and natives. She traveled extensively, selecting and importing from many continents. She bought shares in plant expeditions in the early 1900s to places such as Asia and South America.

Plants from the expeditions are in her gardens. She had been deaf since childhood, and learned to read lips. Rae could read Florence's lips but not mine, and once told me that I was a hopeless case. She talked to me and I wrote notes in return, and even letters when she asked for details. Once, when I admired her courage, she laughed in return, "at least my journeys are quiet" she replied. Rae had no expectation that her garden would survive her death. "It is important only to me" she once said.

Rae's garden was featured in the spring 1967 Quarterly (25 v. 2). The banker selling the estate was given a copy. He called me and four other people, each representing the plants groups she had collected, to help him set a price

on the plants. We formed the idea of saving Rae's collection as a botanic garden. Ed McRae evaluated the garden to see if it had the potential to become a botanic garden.

Ed had held a managerial position at the Edinburgh Botanic Garden for years before he came to Oregon to manage and do lily breeding for Oregon Bulb Farms. He thought creating a botanic garden with Rae Berry's garden was possible, and offered to help if the five of us could raise the money. Fundraising to purchase the garden, and negotiations with neighbors and developers, were successful, and the Berry Botanic Garden became reality in the mid 1970s. Ed and I served on the Berry Garden board for a long time. He expanded the primula beds, as he could get seed from botanic gardens worldwide. He still thinks lilies are easier to grow than primroses.

In the late 1950s, I joined a horticulture group touring gardens and was lucky Maude Hannon's was included. The candelabra beds intrigued me. Never had I seen such beauty in a boggy place. Maude was not there, so I wrote a thank you letter expressing my gratitude and interest in acquiring seed.

Below, in a photo from the July 1956 issue of the APS Quarterly, Mrs. Maude Hannon is seen in her potting shed with the winter stores of leaf mold and sand. She sifts equal portions of the (No Longer available) 'Blue Whale' Impregnated Peat Moss, sand and the best loam obtainable into the wheelbarrow, through a quarter inch screen mesh.



Our acquaintance ripened into lifelong friendship.

Maude was the daughter of American missionaries in China who had arranged her marriage to someone she did not like. She could not get a divorce, but she left the marriage and supported herself selling Remington typewriters in towns up and down the Yangtze River. Several Inns had candelabra primroses edging little streams. She was determined to have those, some future day, when she might have a garden of her own. She left China and came to Portland when she was middle aged. She paid her way to Oregon teaching passengers how to play Mah Jong, a fad at the time.

A Portland attorney, the very Irish Patrick Hannon, secured her divorce. They became friends, and married. He was proud of the Chinese influenced house and acres of gardens she created. Sweeping lawns and terraces faced Oatfield road in front. She had perennial boarders, one backed by a rock wall containing a rock she had taken from the Great Wall of China. It was about the size of my fist and getting covered with lichen when I saw it. She still felt guilty about taking it, so I was quite honored to be shown her rock of memories. Several acres of land behind the house had a high water table with little creeks and bogs. By the time I met her, these capable people were elderly, and their financial circumstances had changed. She had one gardener, an ailing husband, and her Asian primula in the remaining garden.

In the 1940s there were many local members of the American Primrose Society. I think these three women, Florence Bellis, Rae Berry, and Maude Hannon, were key in increasing primula knowledge and use among gardeners in the Pacific Northwest. These three women and their helpers created plantings in many public places, such as roadsides and city parks, and the Bonneville dam grounds. As a result of their efforts, many people learned about the great color range and plant diversity in this large genus.

Dorothy and Herb Dickson in Seattle Washington contributed a lot in the 1950s and 1960s for the rest of us to build on. Dorothy learned judging from Florence Bellis. Herb belonged to every plant society with a seed exchange. He planted and grew a great variety of whatever he could get. His seed flats were stacked in rows outside, out of the wind. He covered the tops with white cloth, and paid enough attention to it to take the cloth off when the seedlings poked up. The Dicksons were most generous, sharing information and plants,

and leading study groups. They always had the coffee pot on, the cookie jar full, and new pictures and stories to tell. Alice Hills Baylor and Elmer Baldwin were active members of the APS in the northeast during this time period. They provided leadership in their areas and served on the national board for many years.

Beth Tait is another Seattle member who contributed much to the Society for a long time. She served as Treasurer for many years, and did a great deal of work keeping people involved and their memberships up to date. We used to talk about her, forever wondering how in the world any one person could get all that work done in one day, day after day. She was another one with full cookie jars and coffee. Customers came daily for hen, duck, and goose eggs, and a variety of annuals and perennials, potted up and ready to go. She supplied display gardens with P. polyanthus, acaulis, and juliaes to display in large beds. Her seed stock came from Florence, then Sinclair.

Years before my marriage to Lu Alexander, while living near Bend Oregon, I had grown Barnhaven primroses. A decade later, in the late 1950s, I asked Lu to buy a dozen plants from Florence Bellis for my Christmas gift. She had a well-designed catalogue that sold the plants itself. I was also intrigued by Primula reidii var. williamsii I saw in a Portland garden show, and a garden tour of Maude Hannon's gardens that included "Pagoda" candelabra crosses in her bog gardens. When Lu bought the primroses from Florence, she told him to have me come out and see her garden. This kind of invitation was unusual for Florence; I can only assume she was charmed by my charming husband. We went out to visit and talked about plants for a long time. She encouraged me to join the APS and work with the plants she particularly liked. Once I joined the APS, I discovered most everyone was interested in auricula and vernales. However, I had a perfect boggy wet place for candelabras. I grew thousands in three areas. I was interested in trying to make the seedlings I had better, and started hand pollinating. My teachers were Florence Bellis and Maude Hannon. Maude had developed screens to keep insects from interfering with the hand pollination efforts. I screened the best plants. I planted the current year's seed in September, in flats, and transplanted into tilled ground in early spring. I grew other species in small patches. I grew a few hundred polyanthus, acaulis, and julianas in dryer ground, good soil for a variety of plants. My auricula lived in town where I could watch them more closely. In

early years I gave most of my seed to seed exchanges, and traded seed for nursery stock and seed to develop the area where we later built our house. My hand pollinated primrose seeds financed my trades for other seeds and plants. I like to stand under my big magnolias and brag that I grew most of these trees from seed. One of my favorites that I grew from seed is a Himalayan pine from Rae Berry's garden. This tree has produced hundreds of little trees for plant sales. When Florence sold Barnhaven to Sinclair, I traded candelabra seed to Sinclair for double auricula and other primrose seed.

Florence and Rae dragged me into editing the Quarterly. I inherited a Quarterly that was in debt. At the end of my three-year service, we had enough funds to print a dictionary. Back then we had to lay out the pages with cut-and-paste hand layouts. I enjoyed working with the printer. From then to now, I have continued my interest in the APS and in primroses. They are incorporated into my landscape. I have been involved in numerous garden societies and botanic gardens over the years. The great variety in primula species offers opportunities for gardeners in many climates, elevations, and soils. If you want an easy plant to grow, there is a primrose for you. If you want a huge challenge there is another primula just for you. My early interest in primroses created-a thread of great experiences winding through the years.



A photo of the author Anita Alexander (left) and her son Stephen from the Summer 1962 issue of the APS Quarterly. The photo was taken at the Milwaukee, Oregon Show.

Photo by Orval Agee



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Ron Driskill, a member from Nova Scotia shows us that one does not need greenhouses or cold frames to grow primula, he succeeds nicely with plants under lights where he can enjoy many primula, like these, during the long Canadian winter.







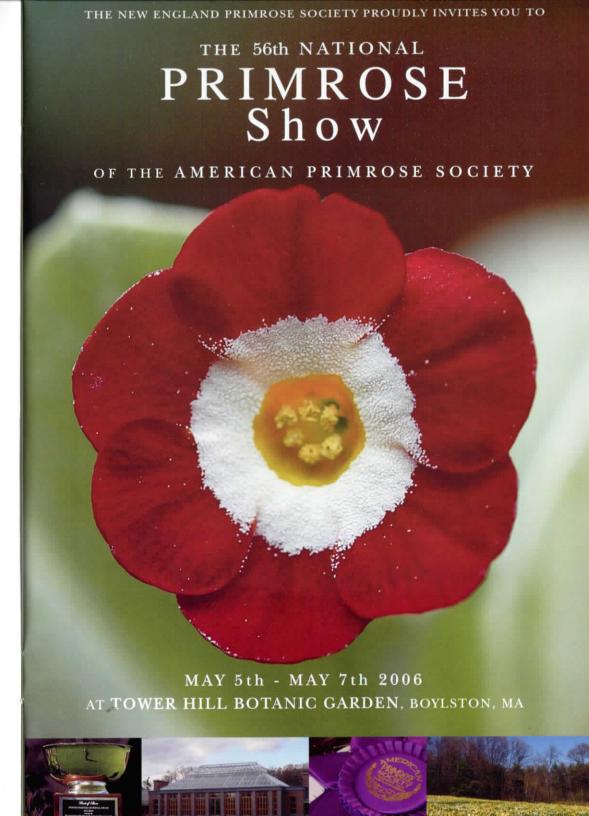
All Photos: Ron Driskill



ABOVE: The New England Chapter entered an award winning display in the 2006 New England Flower Show, in Boston in early March. Plants had to be forced under glass and lights by chapter members, throughout most of the winter, with the tricky task of getting the plants to bloom for the exact week of the show. Designed by Rodney Barker, Mark Dyen, Susan Schnare and Matt Mattus. Below: Plants wait to be loaded into the editor's car to be entered at 2005 National Show, in Boylston Massachusetts. Plan to attend this year and enter some of your plants.



Photos This Page: Matt Mattus





ABOVE AND RIGHT: In Larry Bailey's Sacramento, California garden, Gold Lace Primula are breaking the rules by growing in hostile growing conditions, proving that a clever gardener, can succeed if the right micro-climate can be found. BELOW: While the rest of the country waits for spring, winter-blooming species like this pink P. obconica thrive in a California winter. BOTTOM RIGHT: In Boston, P. denticualta is often the first primrose to poke through the ground in late winter.







Photos: Larry Bailey



Photos: Matt Mattus

ABOVE: A cold greenhouse in February, shows off its best blue and gold. It features not only hardy and tender bulbs from both hemispheres, it also can house frost tender Primula like *Primua x kewensis*, (center right) and *P. obconica* (upper right). This greenhouse at the home of Matt Mattus is located in central in Massachusetts and although it can be near zero degegrees F. outside, it never drops below 45 degrees F inside.

Pins + Thrums noteworthy bits



Photos: Matt Mattus

Never discuss Politics, Religion and Primula The Supreme Court, Darwin, and a Primrose?

Primula x Kewensis (P. floribunda x P. verticillata) is a vigorous hybrid raised at Kew in 1912. It remains a controversial plant since it is considered by evolutionary geneticists as proof of speciation. P. x kewensis has been mentioned in recent Federal Court articles as used in arguments against introducing intelligent design into the public school curriculum. Regardless, it is a wonderful, fragrant, albeit frost tender, primrose for a cool window or cold greenhouse. This plant, grown by Matt Mattus, was a gifted seedling from Judith Sellers. It has been in bloom since Christmas, and is still in bloom in mid-March.







Photos: Matt Mattus

ABOVE AND LEFT: In the alpine house, the first primula to bloom are often *P. allionii* hybrids, Primula x Berniae 'Windrush' (above) and *P. allionii* 'Broadwell Milkmaid' (left). Another primulaceae family member, the Cyclamen are finishing their season in March. The common florist Cyclamen is bred from the species, *C. persicum*, (below left), native to Algeria and Lebanon, *C. pseudo-ibericum* (below, right), is another middle eastern Cyclamen that too blooms in March, signaling an end to the winter Cyclamen season.





If one wishes to have primroses all winter indoors, perhaps no better choice can be had than *Primula obconica*. Once shunned by those with sensitive skin, modern hybrids have a reduced amount of primulin in the leaf hairs, the chemical agent that can produce dermatological irritation. Thanks to Dutch plant breeders, new hybrids are now marketed that not only are irritant free, they come in a wide range of complementary colors such as peach, periwinkle and salmon.

JUDITH SELLERS

Dr. William Glasser usually writes books of theory and advice for educators, but in his Positive Addiction, (Harper Colophon Books, 1976) he offers at least a partial explanation for why so many of us maintain an almost obsessive dedication to Primulas.

There are many activities which function as positive addictions in the sense that we feel compelled to do them, but unlike negative addictions, find that engaging in those activities is actually beneficial to our emotional and physical well-being. Glasser says that positive addictions "strengthen us and make our lives more satisfying,....increasing confidence, creativity, happiness, and usually, better health."

Pursuits as diverse as painting, sports, model building, music, meditation, hiking, and gardening all qualify as positive addictions because they provide us with activities in which we may 'lose ourselves.' Time passes without our awareness, the cares of the world fade, and we gain a sense of contentment when we are engaged in these activities. Most of these things are done alone, with time to think and reflect, in quiet surroundings, often close to nature. While 'gardening' in general may be an excellent hobby, the breadth of activities it encompasses is too great to qualify as a really intensely positive addiction. Reading, designing, shopping, planting, arranging, digging, weeding, and a host of other things are necessary for 'gardening,' so one is never done: no one has a 'finished' garden. Each of us has probably developed a narrower set of activities involving just a few species or plants from our favorite genus. We have better control of, and gain greater satisfaction from, a more focused interest.

With growing auriculas in pots, to expand the theory through just one example, there are specific tasks, such as mixing composts, seeding, repotting, hand pollinating, removing faded flowers, picking off dead leaves, watering, and charting results. Each task forms a pattern, follows set rules for proper com-

pletion, has a proper time and method (though these may vary greatly from one gardener to the next) and each requires us to make small, but important decisions. When the tasks are done, (though we may say we dread the prospect of even beginning them, and know they will have to be done again,) we feel a sense of completion and success. If we choose to place plants on the show benches, there is an additional set of tasks, also very rewarding and satisfying, specially if the rewards include cards or ribbons, social status, and good company.

The next time you are working in your garden, greenhouse, frame or window with your plants, or even reading a catalog or book about Primulas, stop to examine your state of mind for a moment. If Dr. Glasser is right, you will feel generally well, knowing that you are doing something worthwhile, and hoping that it is something you will be able to continue to do, expand upon, or become even more familiar with. It's nice to know that Primulas contribute to making us more healthy, happy, confident and creative people, and that it is actually good for us to succumb to this addiction.

Primula acaulis blooms a day after being covered with 6 inches of early spring snow.



Gold Lace in Sacramento: Larry's Believe it or not

LARRY BAILEY

"You've got to be kidding!" A knowledgeable horticulturist friend proclaimed when I confided in him that I had a few Gold Lace Polyanthus secretly growing in Sacramento. "Have they bloomed yet?", he suspiciously asked.

Admitting that I had never seen them bloom, I went on to explain to him that they were struggling with the heavy shade, lack of watering at times, dogs running loose and digging in the flowerbeds, and customers and workmen stomping through the beds.

That was a couple years ago, when I still had a few of the plants in the courtyard of our bookstore and coffeehouse. The courtyard was covered by a very heavily shaded arbor that never saw any sun and was overgrown with Kiwi. This past year, we closed the store, sold the property and I moved a few plants out of the courtyard into our small back yard at home. Some of those plants were the very small remnants of the plants of the Gold Lace Polyanthus that I had never seen bloom.

I planted them in a partially shady area under a young apricot tree and an area that was in full shade from an aging wood fence three months in the winter. During the summer months, the plants do get some direct sun for a few minutes in the morning. The yard, like most urban yards in the Sacramento Valley, has an automatic sprinkler system. During the hot, dry summer months, if a person forgets to water the garden for a few days the plants are toast.

The Gold Lace plants were originally given to me by a friend, Kris Tondee, who purchased them in a Bay Area nursery some years ago. After he planted them he said, "Of all the people I know in Sacramento, you are the only one that might be able to grow these plants".

When I transplanted the Primula plants in the early spring of 2005, I was intrigued that the root structures on each cultivar were different. All the plants were very small, showing the neglect and lack of sun they had received in the courtyard. I planted the plants with lots of sterile cow manure. (Our back yard is a typical, older, urban back yard; full of roots, buried building materials, and what not. The growing condition changes every few feet in any direction).

Much to my delight, the few plants grew and thrived. They lasted through the very hot, dry summer months of June, July and August (Sacramento does not usually receive any rain from mid May until mid October), and the cold, damp heavy monsoon seasons of November, December and the first part of January. At the end of January and now, into February and March they are blooming. The leaves are full, deep green and look really great without too many mite, aphid, heavy slug or other insect bits (I do not think they have found the plants yet!). Although the blooms are not show quality (thrumed, etc), they are, without doubt, Gold Lace Polyanthus. A couple of the cultivars show very acceptable lacing characteristics. I am looking forward to trying my hand at pollinating the more promising cultivars.

Most of the Primula grown in the Sacramento Valley (Polyanthus, P. obconica, P. malacoides, etc.) are planted as early spring annuals for quick splashes of color, without any intent of utilizing the perennial characteristics of the plants. But, with some filtered shade during the summer months, water and organic fertilizers, the common Primula forms can be easily grown as perennials in the Sacramento and Central Valley of California. The neat thing about growing Primula around Sacramento is the little garden pests (slugs, snails, mites, aphid, cutworms, etc.) have not yet developed the full appreciation for tender Primula leaves, petals and roots like their gluttonous cousins in the Pacific Northwest. With a little care, the chewed petals and leaves can be kept to a minimum. Because of the tempered climatic zones, these Primula start to bloom in January and extended their blooming season until the end of March into April.

After the Gold Lace finish blooming this spring, I do plan on dividing and transplanting them to other areas of the garden and sharing them with friends. I do not think that I have started another Gold Rush, but maybe with a little encouragement, other growers might pick up the challenge of growing these show plants. My next efforts will be *P. auricula*.

PLANT PORTRAIT

Primula sikkimensis

ROBERT TONKIN

Primula sikkimensis occupies perhaps one of the largest native geographical regions of all primula, encompassing over two thousand kilometers from Nepal through the Chinese provinces of Yunnan and Sichuan, into Sikkim (where it get's its name), through Tibet and extending all the way into Assam and northern Burma. The species also supplies the name to the Section, of which it is a member, along with P. alpicola, P. florindae (for which it is often mistaken), P. waltonii, P. ioessa, and a few lesser know members.

The plant was brought into western cultivation by Hooker in 1849 from plants returned from Sikkim. Ludlow and Sherriff, Ward and Forrest have all introduced variations since then, attesting to the very wide geographical range in which they can be found. All described the native habitat from which they came as very wet alpine meadows, usually in glacial valleys. All were found in abundantly fertile, moist, humus rich soil that was well drained. Alpine stream banks, scree, and open meadow all provide home to a very vigorous and easily self sowing primula. Cool and moist seems to be the best environment to enjoy success with the plant; a habitat shared by most other primula.

Similar to ofher members of the section, *P. sikkimensis* sports large deep green elliptical leaves rising from a foot to about eighteen inches. Stems can grow two to three feet tall. At the top of the stem erupts a spray of yellow, individually calyxed (one stem a few inches long to one flower) bell shaped blossoms that are usually all facing down (nodding). Blooms often number one to two dozen off the larger stem top. You will find the tips of the flowers to form a sharper "point" than most of the other members of the section, which

tend to have more of a curve to the flower petal edge.

P. sikkimensis is often confused with P. florindae. One of the methods to differentiate between the two is by noticing that the leaves of P. sikkimensis are narrower and attenuate. "Attenuate": another one of those botanist words to be learned by this old dirt gardener. Attenuate means 'to make slender, fine or small... to become thin, weak or fine." So... the leaves of one are broad all the way down to where the leaf ends on the stem, the other leaf gradually narrows to the stem. Already mentioned is the observation of the flower petal being less curved than P. florindae. I have also found the calyx to be noticeably longer on P. sikkimensis plants than on P. florindae. This may be a local trait, but I don't think so. Plants bloom mid season, usually June, and always provide plenty of seed if allowed to do so.

In a garden setting the best way to describe the difference is in overall form. *P. florindae* tends to be a bit more "coarse", meaning a plant that is larger and fuller both in leaf and blossom. *P. sikkimensis* tends to be a bit more "refined", with each calyx and blossom given enough room off the top of the stem head to "show its stuff" in an un-crowded fashion. The effect can be quite pleasing to the eye, especially against a back drop of iris or other blue or purple plants. I have seen pictures from native habitats where acres of them grow along side *P. secundiflora*, with its purple bells, similar in stature to *P. sikkimensis*, and the image is nothing short of breathtaking.

Robert Tonkin is currently the Juneau Chapter president and past editor of Primroses.

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IN ERATTA

We appologize for the errors with photo captions that occured in the article "Finding Primroses: Great Plant Explorers in the summer 2005 issue of *Primroses*.

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p.13 - The image accompaning the article is actually of Joseph Rock on horseback

p.14 - George Sherriff is holding the umbrella, not Frank Ludlow

p.17 –This image is of the Moongate of the China Inland Mission in Dali (Tali or Talifu) in 1904 or 1905.

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