



Sand Beds

I am sure we have all noticed how easily plants grow in our sand plunges when seeds self sow in them, or trailing stems layer themselves, rooting readily. So it may not be too surprising to consider using sharp sand alone as a growing medium in some situations. Sand beds are an example, but there is more to using sand in them than it simply being a good rooting medium. One of the key purposes of using a sand bed is to reduce disease pressure on plants. As it is an inert medium with no organic content, there is nothing to decay which may harbour or attract more pathogenic fungi. Also, the surface dries out quickly after rain, leaving the bases of the plants dry and the overall drainage is of course excellent. Using a sand bed – especially if you cover it in winter to keep it dry – you can grow plants which while being otherwise hardy, sometimes cannot cope with wet winters outside in the UK. We built our first sand bed at Wisley early in 2006 and another a year later. These are the two raised beds that are just outside of our Landscaped Alpine House. Here is one of them:



With absolutely no nutrient in the sand we have found it necessary to do some feeding – we give a light scattering of slow release fertiliser in early Spring and sometimes an occasional liquid feed to any individual plants that seem to need more. But overall the nutrient level is kept very low. We water plants well at first until they are established, but thereafter our whole idea is

to have a bed that requires little if any watering – all the moisture is down below and the roots grow long enough to access it. I will say more about planting and maintenance in the next log, but meanwhile, having had 3 or 4 years of experience with these now, it has been interesting to see what has done well. Silver leaved plants perhaps unsurprisingly do well and none more so than *Tanacetum haradjani* whose vigorous spread now threatens its neighbours:



Andryala agardhii also likes the conditions and occasionally self seeds.



One plant that was doing very well but which then succumbed to the cold winter this year was *Eriastrum densifolium* ssp. *austromontanum*:



The bed this was in is planted entirely with plants from North America, while the second sand bed has more of a mixture of things. Among these is *Montiopsis sericea*, grown from seed from a Flores & Watson collection from Chile. This *Calandrinia* relative has done better for us out here in the full sun than it has in pots in the alpine house, producing more of its brilliant flowers:



In this bed I also wanted to try some of the hardier succulent type plants, even including a cactus. This was the hybrid *Chamaelobivia* 'Susan Dace'. I say "was" because just as it was beginning to settle down and started branching, someone dug it up and stole it.



But *Crassula sarcocaulis* has done very well:



Also in the succulent vein, *Bergeranthus vespertinus* goes from strength to strength:



Delospermas have also proven a good choice. These are *Delosperma sutherlandii* (left) and *D. congestum* 'Gold Nugget' (right):



Daisies of many kinds do well, especially many of the Townsendsias. Some of these are long-lived while others less so. In the latter vein, *T. parryi* is usually an annual or biennial plant, usually dying after flowering. We raise some from seed every year and plant them in to provide some early colour in the bed. Sometimes they produce quite long stems carrying the large flowers, while on other occasions they produce almost sessile flowers. You can see examples of both situations in these next two pictures:



Townsendia parryi



There are some other annual plants which we sow and plant in every year to extend the season

of colour, particularly *Eschscholzia*. The well known garden favourite *E. californica* is too large for the scale of things, so we use smaller relations such as *E. lobbi* and *E. mexicana*:

Eschscholzia lobbi



Eschscholzia mexicana