



Providing an eye-catching display in the Alpine House on 364 days a year is a challenge and the high summer months of July and August are the most difficult for us. Most of the things we grow have either already done their thing or are awaiting autumn glory. So it is difficult to provide a lot of colour in the house right now. Instead we use plants with fine foliage or structure. While this means the house is a lot greener in summer, it still has plenty of interest.



This area is largely a mixture of ferns and saxifages

Small hostas and a *Petrocosmea* also mix well with the ferns.



The house is not entirely without colours other than green. One or two late campanulas give a little blue and an *Ipomopsis* still has some striking red flowers:



Sempervivums are invaluable to us at this time of year and we put a lot of them out on display. While their flowers are not especially spectacular, the leaves can be so colourful and architectural. Here is just a small selection of ones currently in the house:



Above: *Sempervivum* 'Flamingo'
Below: *Sempervivum* ciliatum





Above: *Sempervivum* 'Director Jacobs'
Below: *Sempervivum* 'Koko Flanel'



One thing none of us had expected to see in the house was this visitor:



This young Grass Snake had panicked a foreign visitor who came across it and did not know if it was venomous or not. When I assured him it was harmless he joined with the rest of us taking photos of it. It soon slithered away down a dark drain hole outside to escape the attention.

In a bed just outside the house is *Convolvulus cantabricus*. From warm, dry places in southern Europe, this is a delightful, perennial, non-invasive member of the family. The stems all radiate out from a single central, woody rootstock and bare pink flowers up to 2.5cm wide.



Also in pink, but softer, the flowers of *Crepis incana* are always popular with visitors whose expectations before seeing this plant are that all “dandelions” are yellow:



In previous logs I have mentioned that as well as the alpine areas, our department also tends the Monocot Borders. This and other plantings in amongst our alpinas extend the range of plants we care for. Two things at their best right now are the *Agapanthus* and the *Kniphofia*. One of the former is a bit like the *Crepis* in that its colour is a surprise to visitors. This is *Agapanthus 'Windsor Grey'* which as the name suggests has blooms of an unusual shade of greyish blue – the colour is hard to capture well on a photo but the one opposite gives some idea. The flower heads are also very large and held on tall stems.

I will end by showing four of the many *Kniphofia* we have in and around the department:



Above: *Kniphofia* 'Painted Lady'

Below: *Kniphofia* 'Star of Baden Baden'



Above: *Kniphofia uvaria* 'Nobilis'

Below: *Kniphofia linearifolia*

