Wisley's Alpine Log

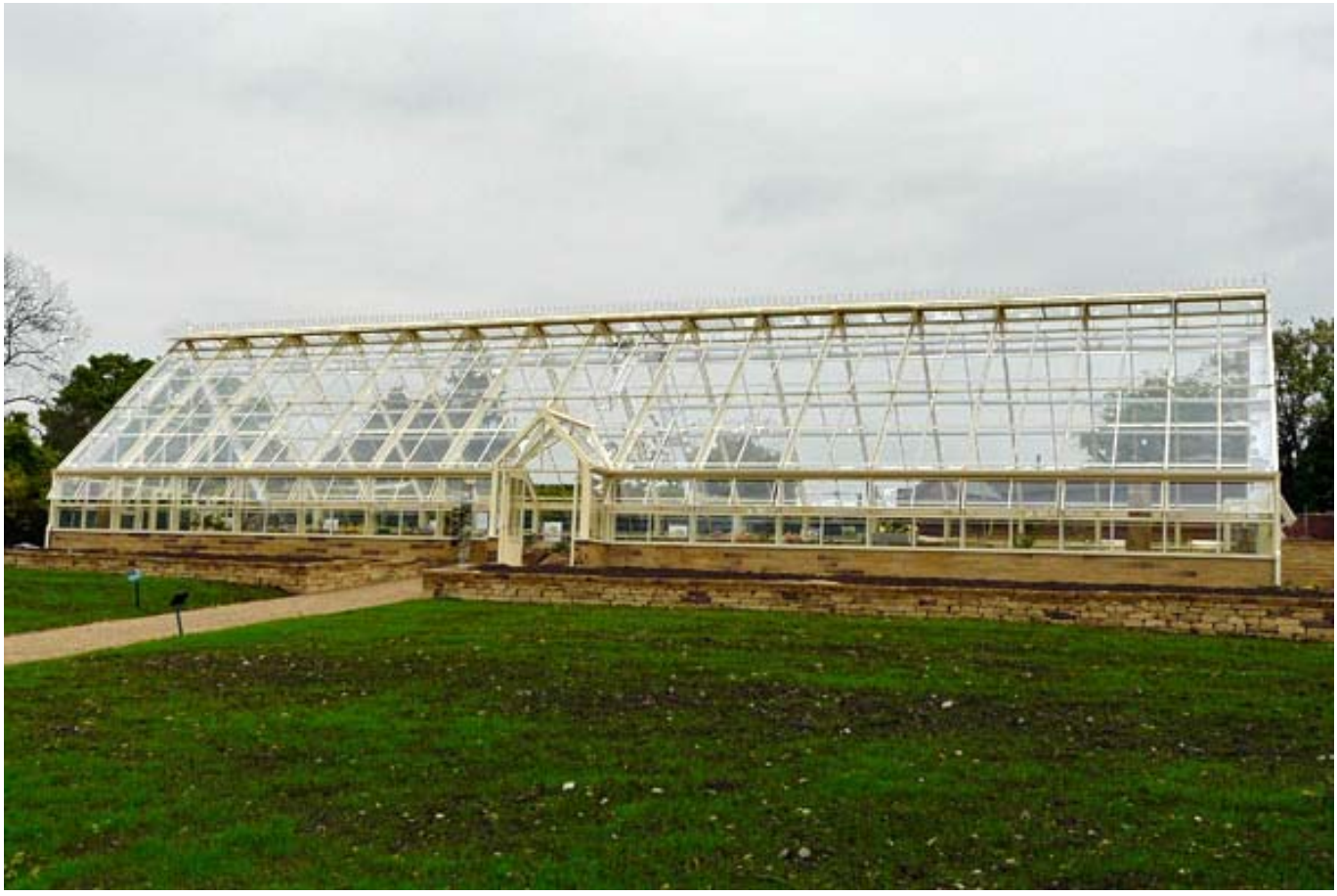
By Paul Cumbleton

Log 11 … 21st May 2009

This week I am handing the log over to Kaye Griffiths at our sister garden at Harlow Carr who has some exciting news for us. This is her log….

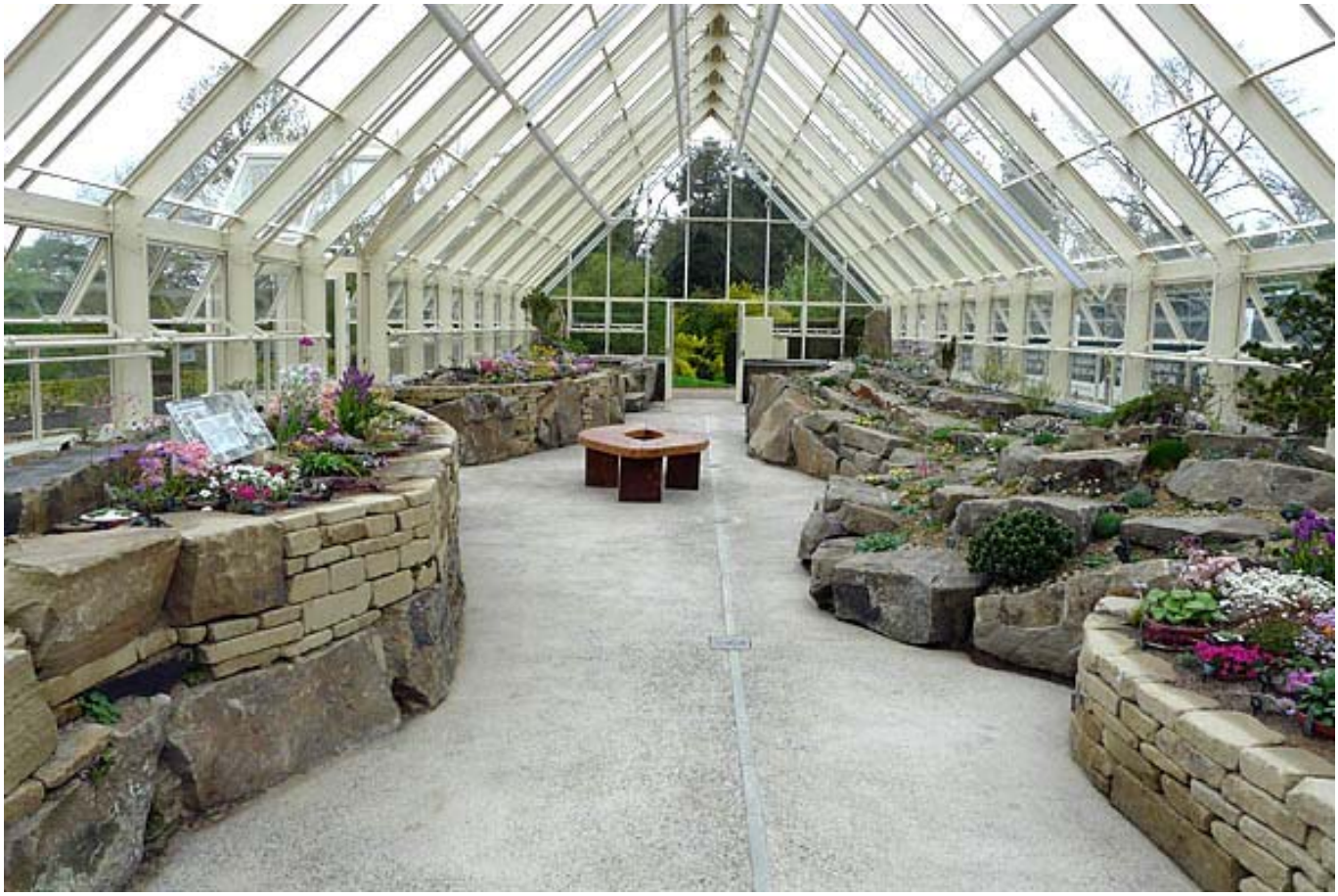
<u>The new Harlow Carr alpine house is open!</u>

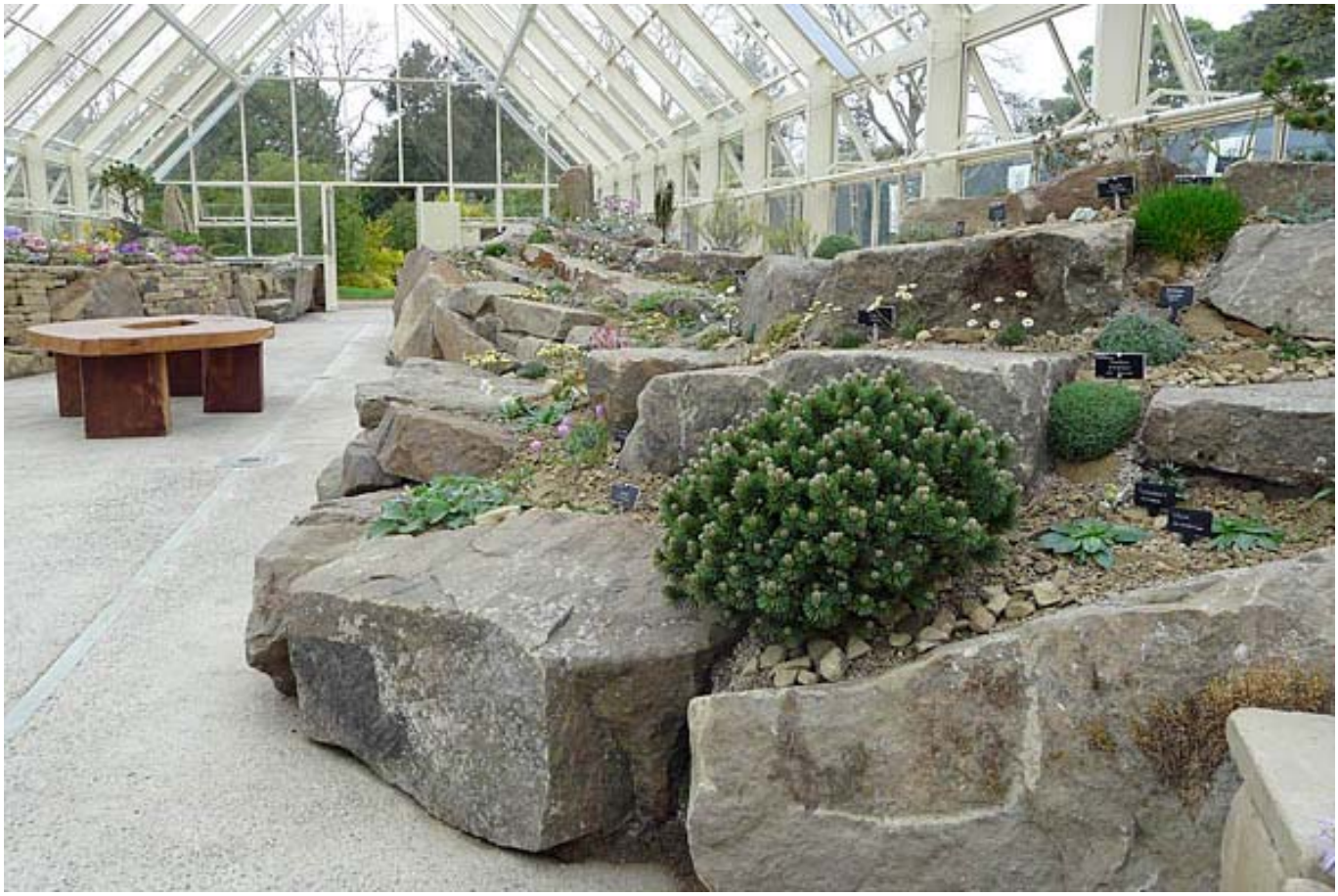
After a year of hard work the new alpine display house is now open for visitors at Harlow Carr.



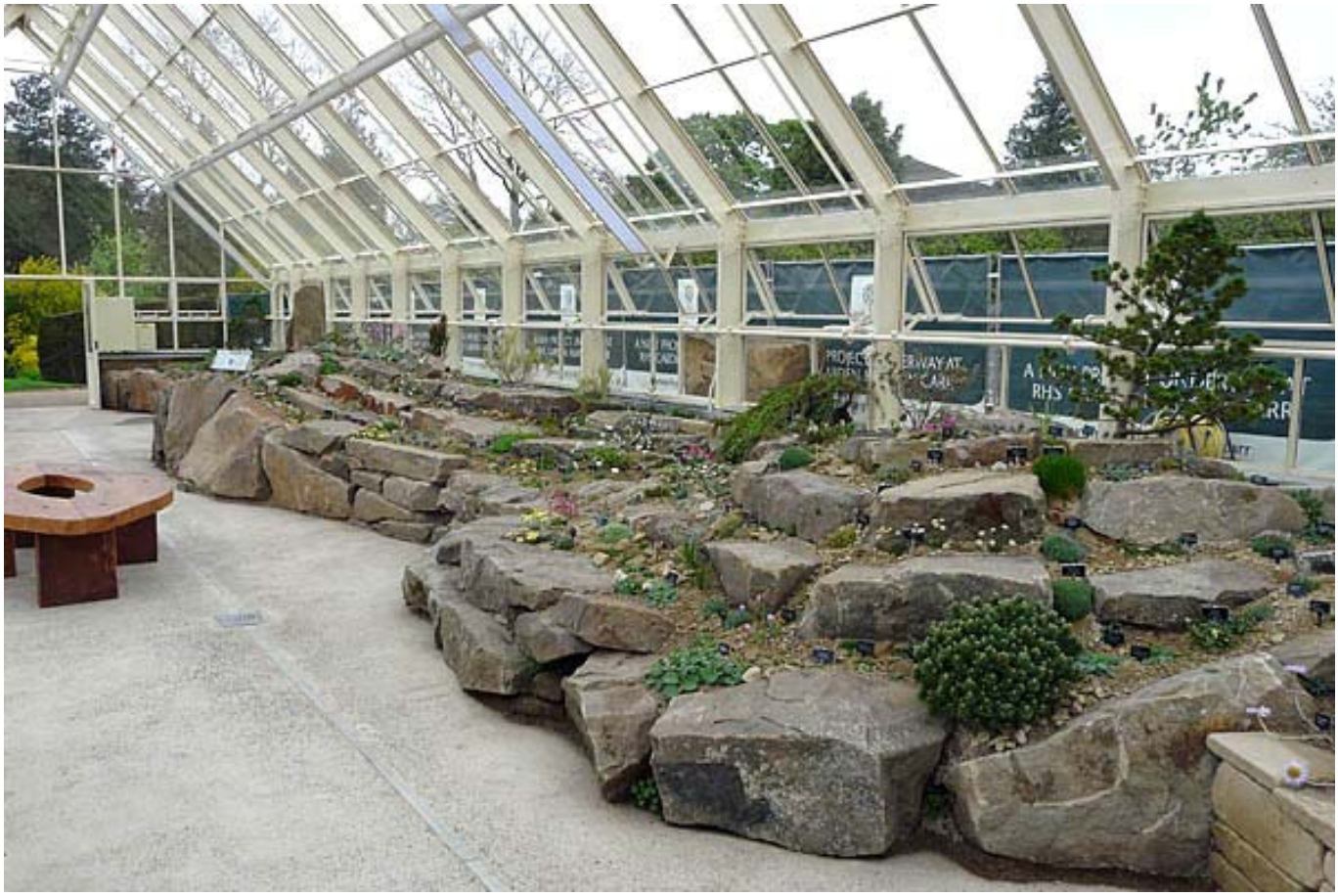
The much loved original alpine display houses dated from 1950 and 1969 and became beyond repair, so work began on re-developing the area in May 2008. The new Display house, which is supplied by Hartley Botanic, measures 24 x 7m and is 30% larger than the two old display houses combined.

Inside the glasshouse, there are naturalistic rock-scapes made from large sandstone boulders, most of which we already had in the garden from the old Sandstone Rock Garden. Over 40 tonnes of stone was used and to complete the landscape extra sandstone was bought in from Johnsons of Wellfield quarries in Huddersfield, which is a great colour match to our existing stone. To accentuate the height of the glasshouse, monoliths were selected and fixed into the interior and exterior of the house.

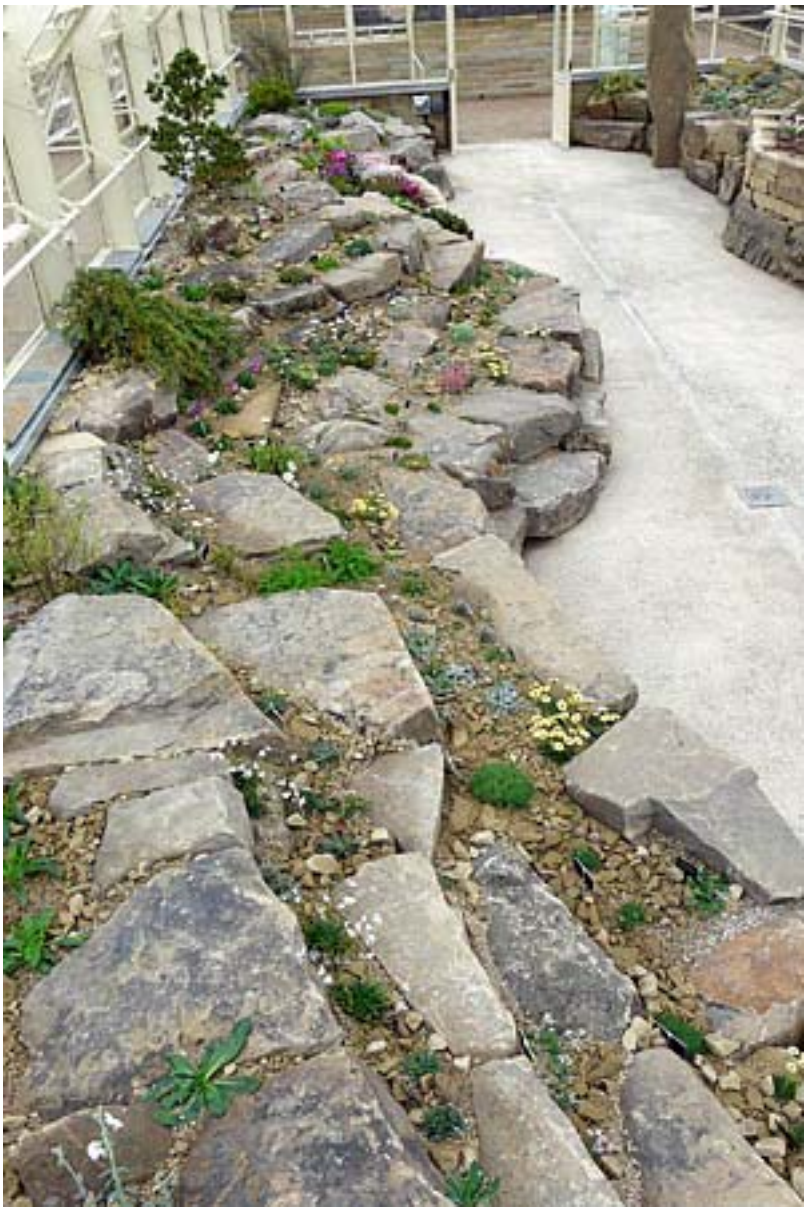




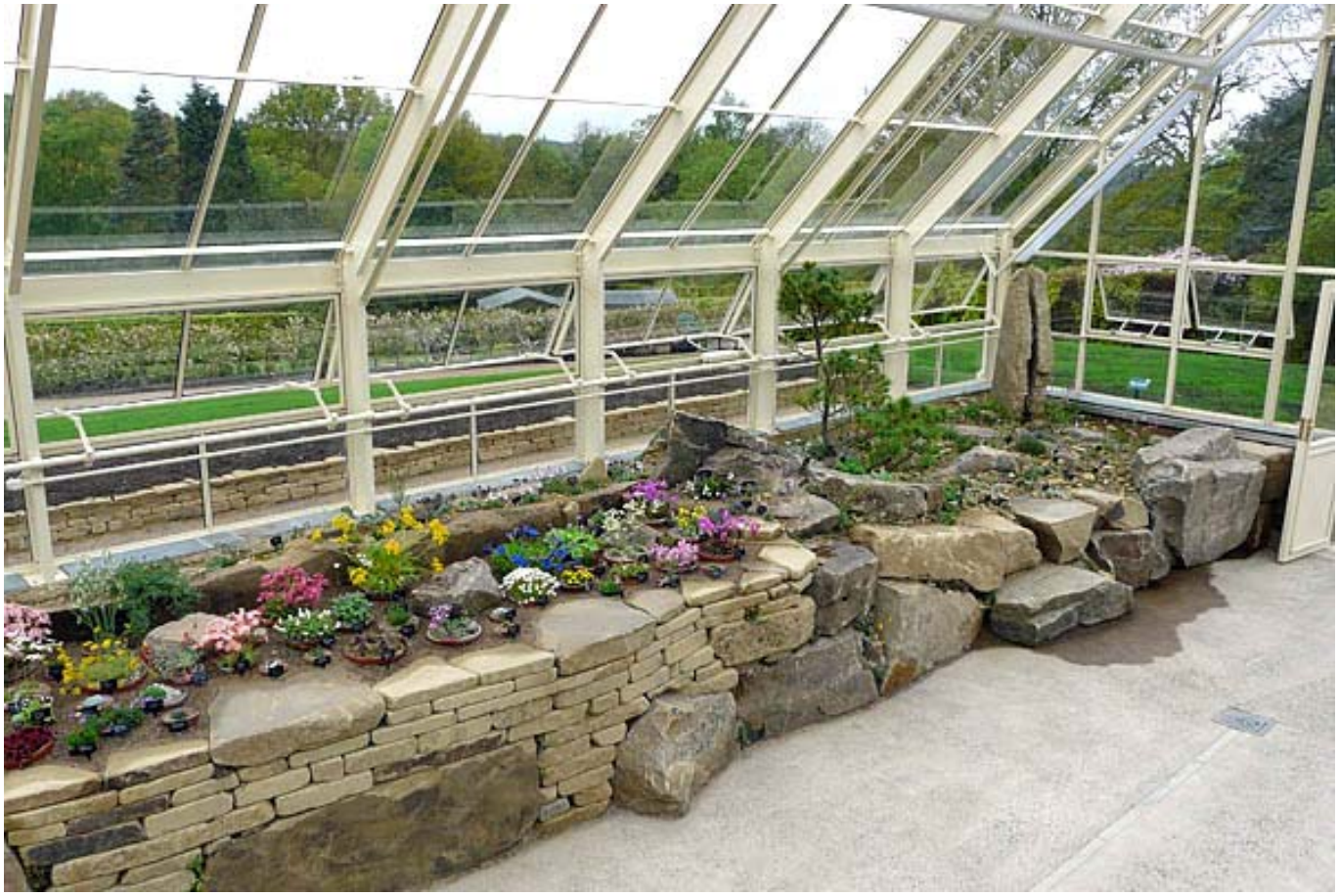
The interior rock-scape was constructed by the in-house development team and the aim was to give a realistic, flowing interpretation of a wild alpine landscape. Varying grades of gravel and stone chips have been used as a mulch to give the effect of the plants growing in scree.

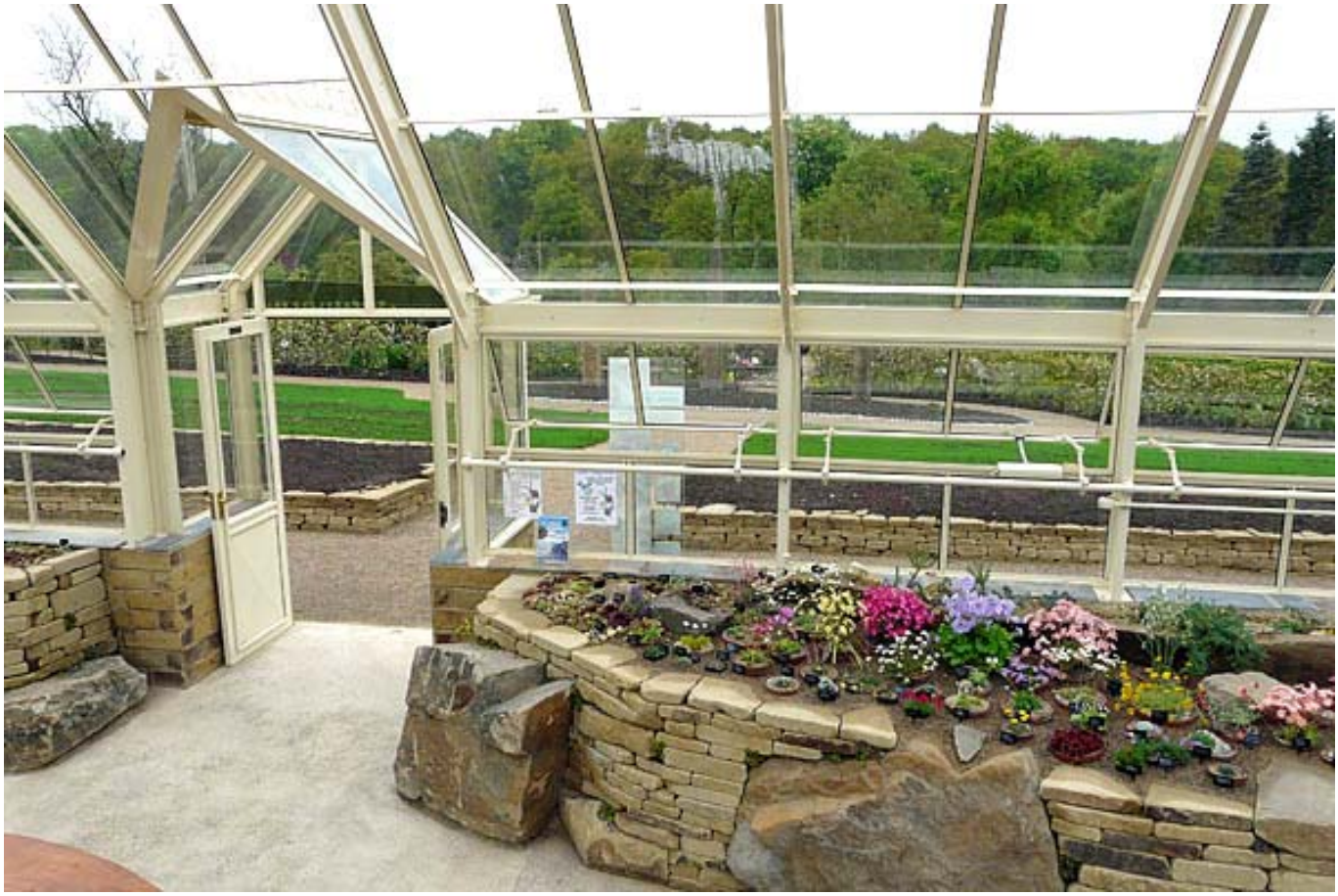


During the last year I have been busy propagating our plant collection and much of the planting in the house uses these. Some of the larger cushions in the collection have also been planted to give impact and a touch of maturity. Plants were planted in the beds according to their needs and how well I thought they would associate with each other. Cushion plants are concentrated on the two highest mounds so they have maximum all round light, excellent drainage and the least competition.



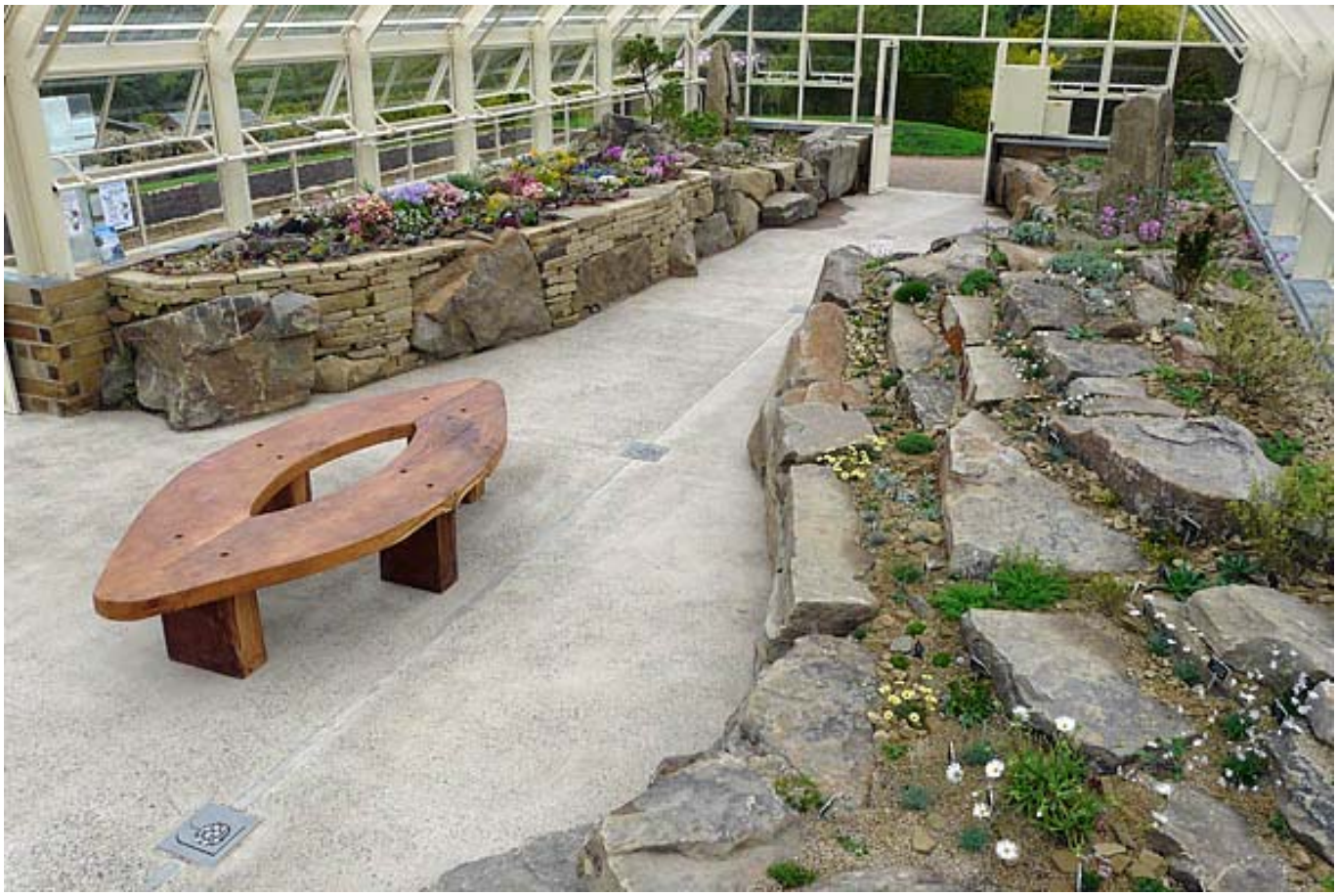
There are also three plunge beds incorporated into the landscape. These are made from tumbled sandstone walling stone and filled with sand. There is a thick layer of compost just behind the wall face so that plants can establish in the walls. *Ramonda*, *Haberlea*, *Erinus*, *Viola eizanensis* and *Androsace sempervivioides* have been planted and will eventually creep along the gaps between the rocks. The plunge beds enable a constant show of interest, plants being swapped in the beds as they come in and out of flower so there is always something different to see.



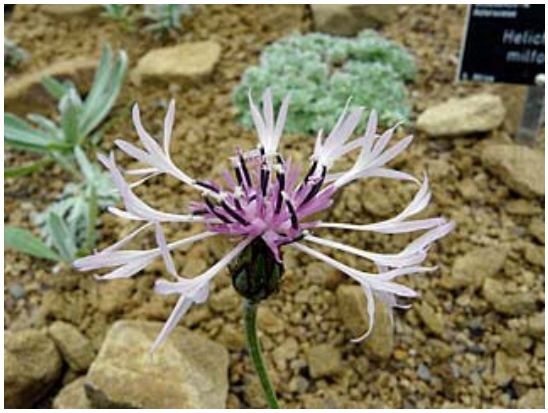


The new glasshouse is well ventilated with ridge vents along the whole top of the glasshouse,

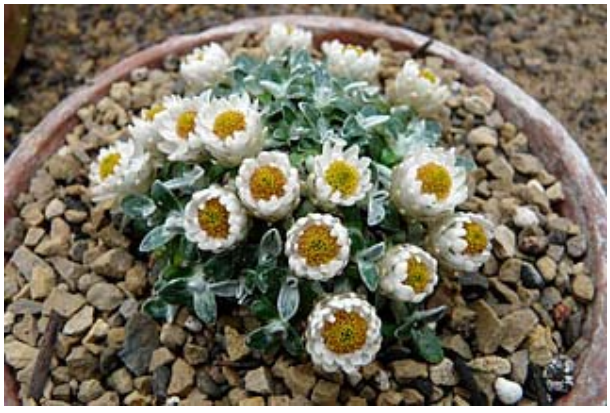
side vents running the entire length and some more on the ends. There are three doorways and these are left open all day to enhance ventilation. The ridge and side vents are automated and open and close according to temperature and there are also roller blinds which help to reduce heat and scorching; these are electric and are operated manually. We have also installed the facility to harvest rainwater from the roof and down-pipes. The water is pumped through a filter and into an 8000 gallon capacity harvesting tank.



The planted beds are watered with a leaky hose system that snakes through the planting underneath the mulch and keeps the beds moist. The mulch keeps the moisture in the soil and prevents the plants' crowns from becoming too wet. The compost mix used is two parts of super coarse perlite, 1 part John Innes 2 and 1 part of New Horizon peat free compost. This gives an extremely free draining and airy yet moisture retentive compost which these plants will thrive in. The next phase of work is to continue to develop the landscape outside. A raised dry-stone wall bed will house a limestone rock garden and there are going to be vertical tufa walls. A crevice bed will fill one corner and the raised beds will be planted up as a boulder-scape with a selection of conifers, shrubs and ground cover plants.



Centaurea achtarovii



Helichrysum sessiloides

With the better conditions in the greenhouse – no roof leaks and a more airy atmosphere - I hope that we will be able to grow a greater range of more challenging plants actually planted in the beds. It will be interesting to see how they grow!

Kaye Griffiths
Senior Gardener – Alpines
Harlow Carr