



SRGC

Bulb Log Diary

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Rhododendron auriculatum



Rhododendron auriculatum is one of the later flowering species and its large white beautifully scented flowers have just come into bloom in our garden which introduces an interesting theme for this week's Bulb Log.

Inverewe Garden has had a lasting influence on us since we first visited in the early 1970s and one of the memories was of the many large rhododendrons that formed the structure of the garden. In a little over a month's time the SRGC will be working along with the Inverewe Garden staff to regenerate part of their large rock garden, based on the crevice style.



The rock garden sits right on the edge of Loch Ewe where in the 1930's the slope down to the loch was formed into a series of terraces using the stone from the old house that had burnt down.



Terracing was a practical solution to dealing with the slope and at that time was one of the most commonly used forms for rock gardens. While not entirely new, in recent decades more people have become aware of the crevice style gardening that has been practised in many gardens in the Czech Republic and now the enthusiasm for this style is spreading out across the world.

To see some of the Czech gardens check out my special reports in [Bulb Log 2017](#) and [Bulb Log 2117](#)



This is the main section that we will be working on at Inverewe it is around eight metres by four at its widest point and to lead the project we are being joined by two of the world's foremost practitioners Paul Spriggs from Vancouver Island and from the Czech Republic, Zdenek Zvolanek.

So what is crevice style rock gardening?

First and foremost it is mimicking some natural rock strata where soils can build in the fissures allowing plants to grow.

In many ways it is taking the traditional retaining wall that may have some plants growing in the gaps or crevices of the vertical face and turning it round to lay flat or undulating across the ground.

Last year I planted some *Haberlea rhodopensis* into this vertical crevice and they have settled in extremely well.



Haberlea rhodopensis

While we do not have a single large crevice garden bed we do have many troughs and raised beds which are landscaped in various versions of the crevice style.

The basic principle is that the surface should be covered in rocks with plants growing in the gaps between them. In the truest form the rocks are stood vertically, with most of the rock being buried, forming the crevice and the plants roots are encouraged to grow deep down, exploring into the gaps between the rocks.



Here in one of the raised slab beds you see dwarf willows and other plants growing in a crevice style landscape built from large rocks.



In this shallow trough I have used old roofing slates to create a crevice landscape which effectively builds up the



planting depth giving the plants a deeper root run. By creating height like this you also create additional habitats with different aspects.

In my view this style of landscaping makes troughs look much more interesting than those that are planted on the flat.



Once you understand the basic principles behind crevice gardens you can go and create your own versions. They do not have to follow a rigid format there are many styles that you can adopt - in reality the nature of the landscape you can create will be influenced or dictated to by the shape and type of materials available.

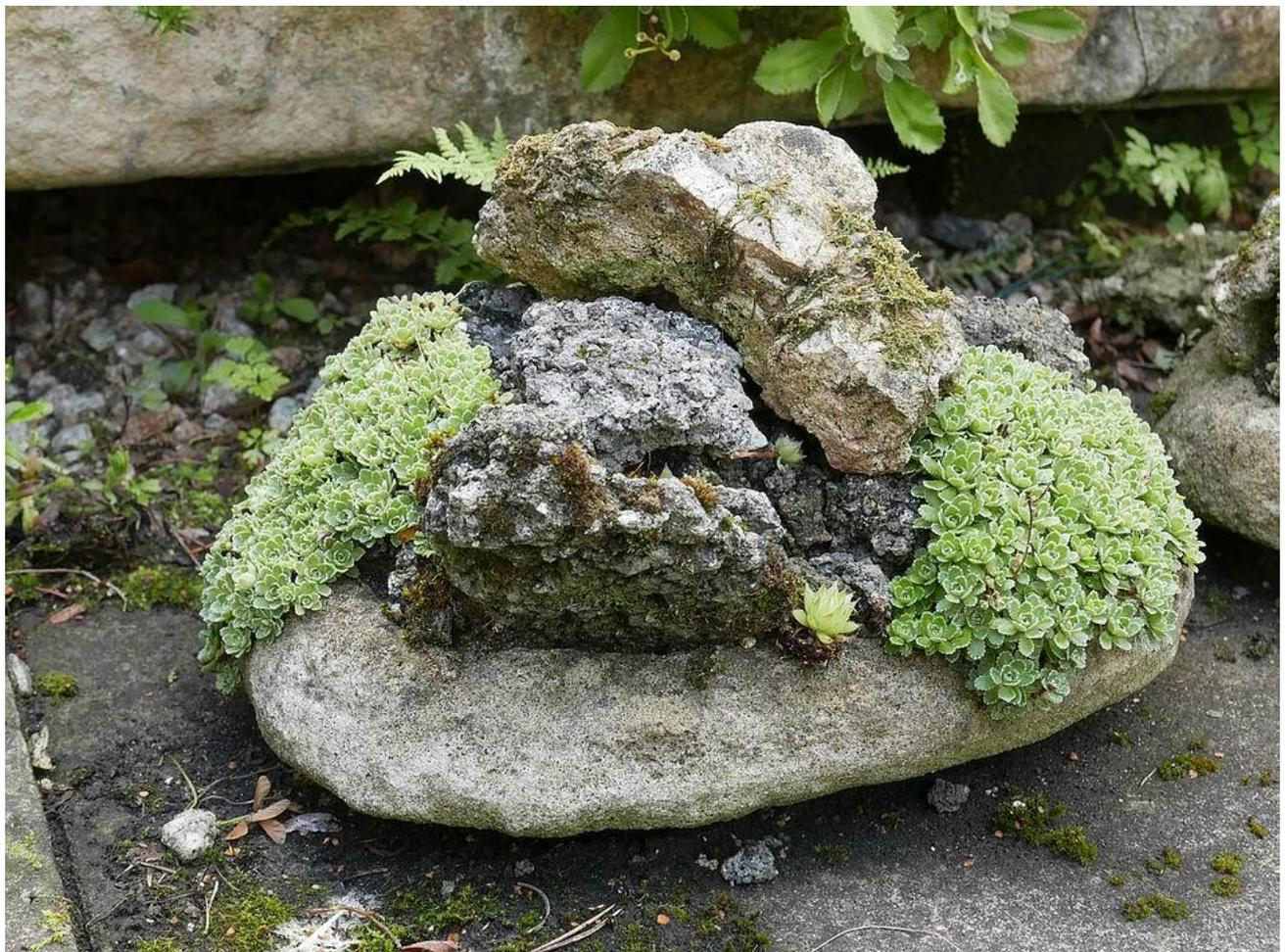
I often use broken concrete block as shown in this slab bed where I have combined it with a seam of granite sitting alongside the concrete.





A crevice garden can be any size from very large scale constructions involving many tonnes of material down to tiny vignettes such as these two min-gardens or troughlets. I planted up the landscape with tiny cuttings which of course take time to grow but this is better than trying to stuff a large plant into such a small growing space

Some of the broken concrete I used in this one crumbled so I am attempting to rework it with minimal disturbance to the established saxifrages by adding in a lump of natural rock.





Aberdeen is famous for its granite and there is plenty of it around but due to its irregular shapes it is not the easiest type to work with but a few months ago I decided to rework this old trough with some bits of granite that I had.



Experience has taught me not to try and go for an instant mature effect it is much better to use small plants allowing them to grow naturally into the spaces between and moulding onto the shapes of the rocks

The *Erinus alpinus* around the edge had seeded into the original trough so I have left them undisturbed.

Sometimes it is difficult to prevent the sand or soil from pouring out from the gaps, crevices, between the rocks you can try sticking bits of rock in but these often look artificial. I prefer to use plants and to this end I have a number of cuttings, mostly saxifrages, rooting in sand. Once the cuttings are well rooted I will plant them into the gap and the roots system will hold them in place as I build up the infill of sand. I will wait until late in August or when the weather conditions are cooler before I do this.



Looking down on these troughs you can see that not all the plants will grow well – it is especially worth propagating from those plants that are thriving by taking cuttings to use around other troughs.



Troughs





Rounded stones are readily available and with some care these can also be used to create an interesting landscape.



I have constructed a high landscape using limestone marl which is planted with saxifrages - the Erinus has planted itself.



I replanted this trough with tiny rooted cuttings taken from proven plants last year and now they have rooted into the crevices and are starting to grow.





You do not need to have an all over crevice garden you can incorporate elements in with other styles such as I have done around this bed.



Some of the troughs I have used as edging for this bed were already landscaped in crevice style and I replicated that into parts of this new bed including resolving this awkward gap between two of the troughs.



Two more views showing some of the rock work around this new bed and the surrounding troughs





Rock gardeners have always been using the vertical crevices of a wall and in this section, which slopes back towards the top, more usable or adaptable planting spaces between the rocks are provided.



If allowed, the plants can grow to completely obscure the rocks so I have to find an aesthetic balance between them.



We grow a lot of plants from New Zealand, including in this trough, and our love and interest in them was nurtured by that first visit we made to Inverewe Garden and our many visits to Jack Drake's Inshriach Nursery which raised an especially good selection of these plants. That brings me nicely back to the Inverewe Rock garden project and as the planting there has always focused on the NZ flora we have a large selection of such suitable plants ready to be planted into the new landscape that will be created.



Beinn Airigh Charr

[Inverewe Garden](#) is surrounded by the beautiful scenery of the west coast of Scotland such as this view towards Beinn Airigh Charr from Poolewe.

In addition to the construction work on the rock garden we have arranged two talks which will be held in the Inverewe Garden Café.

7pm Friday 6th September - Rock Gardening in Troughs and Containers – Ian Young

7pm Saturday 7th September - Crevice Gardens - Paul Spriggs

Subject to the weather a demonstration of landscaping in troughs and containers will take place near the rock garden at 2pm on Friday 6th and again on Saturday 7th September.