



83. Side cliffs of crevice garden of sandstone sheets in Dortmund, Germany
(Vojtech Holubec)

84. Pieces of igneous rock (diabas) (Zdenek Zvolanek)



In.....

this way every crevice has one straight edge and one irregular. During construction of the rock work the vertical position of the flakes and approximate width of crevices is fixed by chock-stones, pieces of kneaded clay, or a small amount of heavier soil. One English builder fixed crevices between large sheets of sandstone using one-inch thick boards with excellent results. When a portion of rock work is completed and adequately anchored, crevices are tightly packed with soil.

Special care must be given to closing the steep crevices at the faces of layers properly. In some designs, they are in the form of a vertical front cliff. These can be quickly and temporarily closed with kneaded clay with chock-stones hammered through. During permanent planting, starting from the bottom of a steep crevice, we use chock-stones between saxatile plants and a minimum of clay. The gently inclined crevices are entrances (and exits) for water so they must not be completely closed. I suppose that in a wet climate tighter closing improves the function of the surface drainage of the crevice garden.

Slate splits into parallel sheets, suitable for making fissures. After construction of a deep, one-inch-wide crevice, we pack it with soil mixture and later fissures are made with extra thin slate slivers. A good chisel and hammer are perfect for making top dressing from slate. All purists agree that top dressing needs to tone in with the rock used.

MATERIAL

We must adapt what we can get to suit our purpose, but generally speaking, we have to select rocks with two parallel sides. Sedimentary rocks like limestone and some sandstones, slate and metamorphosed mudstones, are the best. We have good experience with quartzite for our rockwork at an altitude of 3000 m above sea level with the Panayoti Kelaidis project at Mt Goliath, Colorado. With careful selection of approximately rectangular rocks we can use igneous material such as granite, granodiorite, basalt and dolerite. Perfect crevice gardens are possible from hard sandstone that was cut for pavement. With good luck you can obtain broken pieces for a reasonable price. In British Columbia I enjoyed rock work with tufa slabs. In England, with Ron Beeston and Joyce Carruthers, I made "frames" from tufa and the space inside was filled with layers of old bricks connected with sphagnum moss and with hidden deep vertical crevices packed with soil. The top was a surface of crumbled tufa. Holland is a land with little obvious rock, and that is naturally hard, and local rock gardeners there are very active using suitable substitutes:

they make crevice gardens from hypertufa slabs, flat pieces of concrete and recycled tiles. I know that hunting rocks is exciting like hunting alpine. Under the leadership of Ron McBeath, and with the agreement of the farmer, we collected rocks from the edges of fields in a January gale, when everybody got flu. Rocks were exchanged for beer and I was close to a brave death. I have seen enormous old abandoned quarries full of jolly good slate in North Wales, inviting a society to organise a big contract to provide material for their membership. What a poor nation that has the only available flakes stacked in dry walls dividing sheep. Many a cash-poor farmer would willingly sell some stacked stone from broken walls for it is financially impossible to repair them.

SOIL

From experience, there is no need to worry about drainage or preparing a special mixture. The excavated material, free of perennial weeds, can be used. All soil mixtures with a mineral content and with water retentive qualities are suitable for crevices but a good loam is the best. The economic way is to screen some excavated material and improve it with mineral ingredients. In our dry, steppe climate in the Czech Republic, with wet winters, we never mix in leaf-mould or peat. We prefer heavier soils with a clay content, because they hold moisture and are richer in mineral nutrients.

LOCATING THE CREVICE GARDEN

Should a crevice garden be exposed to the scorching sun? Well, the less the better. For giving details and reasons why, we must refresh the old and excellent observations of James Backhouse who wrote before 1870: *"I believe the best location for very high alpine are narrow fissures catching the sun for several hours each day, but having a gentle slope to the northward. If the rockwork can be so arranged that a high range or 'crag' at its eastern end may cut off the sun till near noon from the great fissures above alluded to, so much the better. Screen from heat is worth double as much in the morning as it is in the afternoon. An eastern exposure is dried up at a very early hour during hot summer days while the dew often lingers on plants having a western exposure (or a northern one screened to the east) till near noon, and the great heat is cut off for four or five hours, the day (as a time of endurance) being curtailed practically by so much. The fact of eastern exposure being screened in the afternoon from the hot rays is of comparatively little advantage. The air is roasted all the day and there is no more reviving dew till late in the evening. So that from 'dew to dew'"*