

International Rock Gardener



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Dear Fellow International Rock Gardeners,

We are greatly encouraged by your positive and constructive responses to the first issue and already we have offers of contributions for the future. It is our hope to continue with a rich mix of items, concentrating on the flowers in the wild and in garden settings.

Please do get in touch, [whether by email](#) or via the [IRG Feedback pages on the Forum](#) to share your ideas.

In case you did not notice in Issue 1- you will see here that some words are highlighted by blue text –these contain hyperlinks to other relevant websites or to other parts of the SRGC website, such as [the SRGC Forum](#) – a left-mouse-click on these links will take you to the destination.

Cover photo by Zdenek Zvolánek: *Iris rosenbachiana f. nicolai* 'Cormozak'
...see REPORTS FROM THE BEAUTY SLOPE for more.....

----- GARDENS IN THE MOUNTAINS -----



Primula x forsteri - natural hybrid (*P. hirsuta* x *P. minima*)

Alpine meadows –photos Milan Halada

The first group of photographs shows alpine plants from the grassy areas above the tree line, where the humus in soil is mostly provided by means of short grasses (species like *Carex firma* are prevalent). These strongly eroded areas are called alpine meadows and their strategy is very elegant.

The amount of grasses, alpines and open gritty places are in pleasant balance. The grasses provide in their root systems havens for nutrients and nitrogen-fixing bacteria and this intelligent system of symbiosis is the reason that we can see such plants as *Primula x forsteri*, *Primula daonensis f. alba*, *Gentiana verna*, *Soldanella alpina*, *Pulsatilla vernalis* etc blooming in such areas.

----- International Rock Gardener -----

Alpine meadows.....

The technical term 'alpine meadow' in rock gardening circles brings to mind an interesting story harking back to when a Rock Garden Society which, from the beginning, was comprised of plant lovers from all over the UK and around the world, was formed in England in 1929. There was discussion about the focus of the society; Capt. Symons-Jeune suggested that there were two areas of interest, basically those people who love to build stony outcrops with plants in a natural setting and those for whom the principle interest was the plant itself; no mention of the meadow lovers! Within a year the name had become the [Alpine Garden Society](#), a name which might suggest to the public that its members grow only true alpine plants from the Alps of the World but members of all the various rock and alpine garden organisations nowadays have a much wider sphere of interest than the names of their groups suggest and we can see this is nothing new.



Primula daonensis f. alba

After the founding of that first society it did not take long for the father of trough cultivation Lawrence Elliott to begin to construct alpine meadows; flat areas with low plants and grasses and few, if any, rocks.

Of course, those grasses were too strong in competition with alpine plants when grown in lowland situations and even if replaced with *Thymus* varieties, these were also rather too vigorous for living together with small fine plants. So the result was not as pleasing as had been hoped.

As time has moved on, clever growers like Alan Furness, in Hexham in N.E. England, have successfully improved this flat design into natural looking screes, which work nicely in cool and wet countries but in hot and dry ones must be treated more as a sort of steppe.

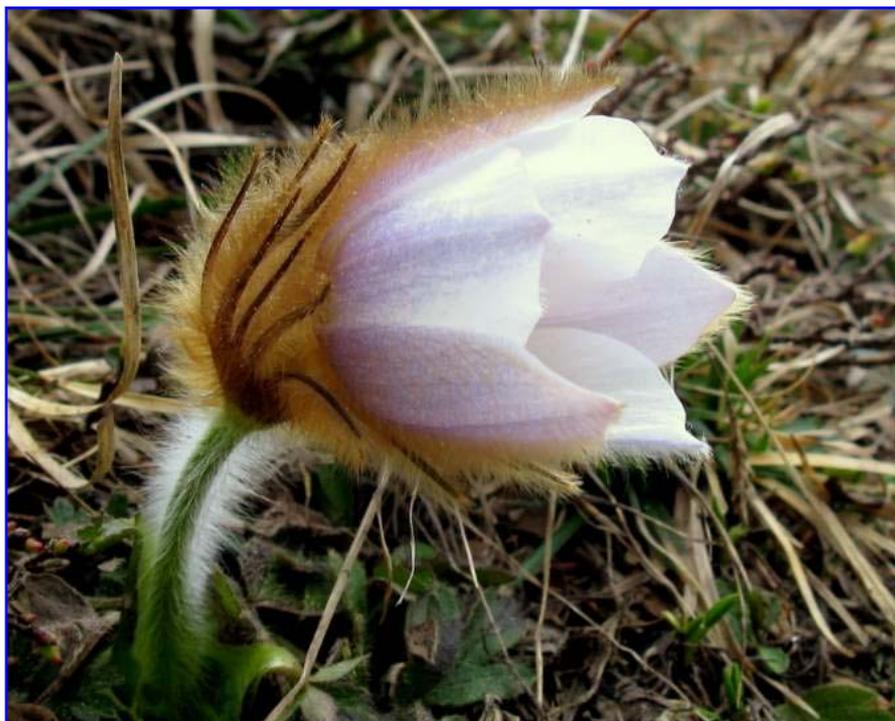
In Austria, where the summers are dry, hot and sunny, [Franz Hadacek](#) has achieved a wonderful 'grassy' alpine bulb meadow using *Achillea millefolium* (Yarrow) to replace much of the grass.

Gentiana verna



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Alpine meadows.....



Pulsatilla vernalis

These pictures were taken on a trip to the area around Lake Garda in Northern Italy, to illustrate some of the most charming plants of the true alpine meadows. They are from Czech rock gardener Milan Halada, a relatively young and very keen grower from Czech Karst area near Prague, who borrowed a camera to be our photographer.



Soldanella alpina

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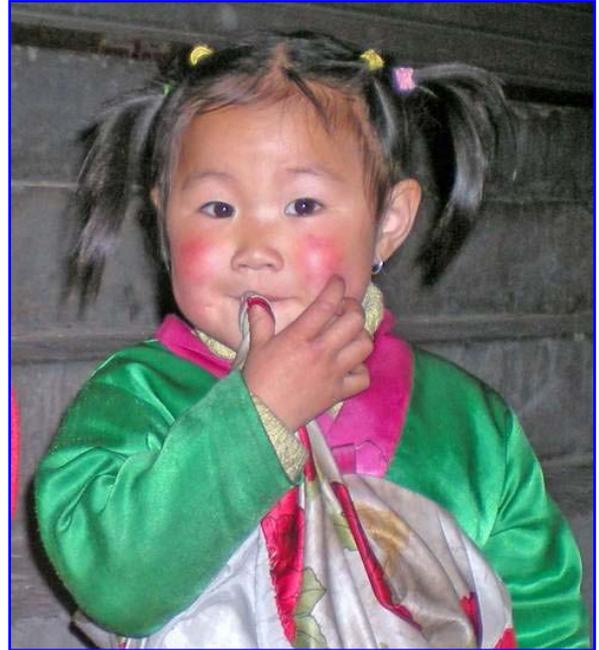
Alpine meadows.....

Caltha scaposa (syn. *C. palustris* var. *scaposa*)

Czech seed collector [Mojmír Pavelka](#) photographed ***Caltha scaposa*** at an elevation of 4300m in the Bai Ma Shan in Yunnan, China.



Another small Himalayan beauty....



Caltha scaposa

This dwarf relative of the marsh marigold, only 5- 8 cm tall, has large (3 cm) thick petal-like orange-yellow sepals and glossy green leaves. In seed the stems can elongate up to 25 cm. Seed is black. This Himalayan meadow alpine is easily pleased in rich moist conditions.

It can grow well in gardens in humus-rich beds because in nature it also grows in more peat rich areas (from 2800 m).



Bai Ma Shan, Yunnan

Mojmír Pavelka

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-----MOUNTAINS IN THE GARDENS-----

The Spirit of Crevice Gardening by Zdeněk Zvolánek

This electronic journal can be a source of information about the modern institution called 'the crevice garden'.

February is the best time to dream about building an outcrop with vertically placed layers of stones and filled with fine mineral substrate or just good sharp sand.

March could be good for transport of selected local rock and April can see the construction made with three virtues: ART+SCIENCE+CRAFT.

This subject is further explored in the [SRGC Forum](#) thread "[Crevice Gardening- In defence of Rock](#)" and in pages about "[Denmark's giant crevice garden](#)".



The earliest constructor of a crevice garden in 2010 is the Irish gardener- [Liam McCaughey](#). Luckily he has a very strong (minded) wife, [Joan](#), to assist his creation.

They placed the first rock in the middle of January in their garden in Northern Ireland. I only hope that this couple of enthusiasts will pull the rope in the same direction! Another hope is that Liam will provide for this electronic paper some photographs to show us the progression of their work.

.....Joan places the first stone.

Now to the construction of a sunny rock outcrop which capped one edge of an old formal swimming pool in the horticultural university in Bernburg, Germany.

The layers are from igneous rock called porphyry, which sometimes, like some kinds of granite, has strongly planar cleavage meaning that relatively flat stones and slabs can be selected.

The picture shows an area of pavement around the outcrop, which is made from the same stone placed in lines parallel with layers in the main rockwork.



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The Spirit of Crevice Gardening.....



I am very pleased that the renowned horticulturist [Fritz Kummert](#) from Austria is showing in this young journal his new alpine house framed into steep crevice beds. It has the look of a small chapel erected at the holy mount.

He is probably praying every evening in it for his difficult children of the mountains.

Showing the faces of layers of igneous rock

I heard from somebody that another purpose of the house (a church is the no.1 use) is a special shelter for local bats, which in the night shift together with big Styrian moths, do perfect pollination of flowers of Daphnes.

Every morning he collects the droppings of the bats because, if strongly diluted, it is perfect for fertilizing his lowland plants..... But may be that it is not the absolute truth.....



bat resting after tough shift



Alpine house with a Bohemian looking for top dressing

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-----Plant portraits-----

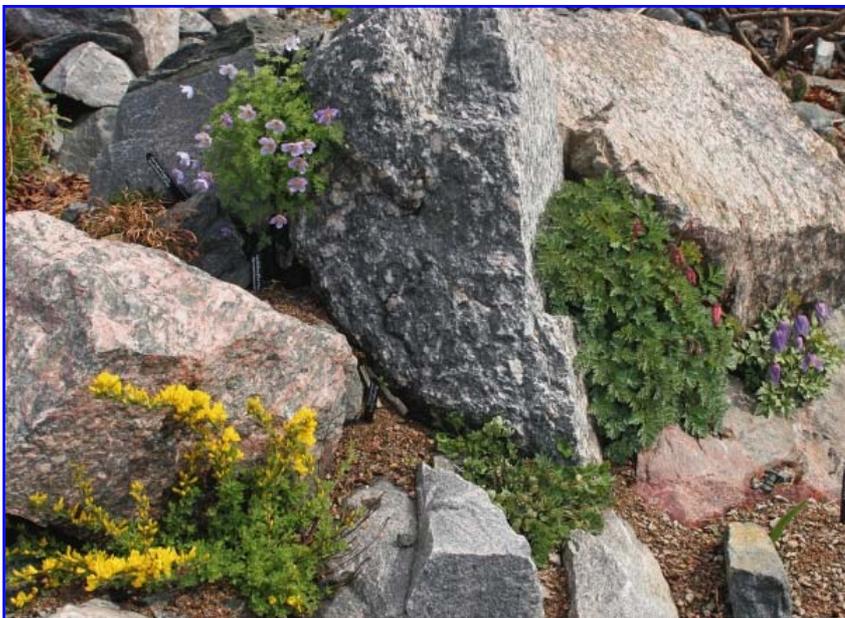


The Japanese Blue Enigma: *Miyakea integrifolia*

Peter Korn

Everybody knows the Sphinx, that woman's head with the body of a lion: with its flowers of a sky blue pulsatilla and leaves of a herbaceous globularia: this lovely plant, endemic to the island of Sakhalin and first described in 1935, is somewhat similar. Botanist Alexander Taran collected seed of this species in 2003 and [Henrick Zetterlund](#) first germinated it in the [Gothenburg Botanic Garden](#) in the same season. This wild seed had good germination for two years.

Another Swedish cultivator of this plant is [Peter Korn](#), who sent the photo above and these comments on cultivation: He grows it in a wet and cool sand bed or peat bed with good drainage. Seed is collected in the green state and immediately sown. Germination is in 2-4 weeks or never. It takes 2 years to come to flower. The plant has both the hairs and requirements of *P. vernalis*. A hybrid between Miyakea and some *Pulsatilla* appeared at Peter's extensive garden and we are looking forward to its first flower.



Now rock gardens and plant portraits come together in this report from [Geir Moen](#) who also grows *Miyakea integrifolia* with some success.

In Norway, some 70kms north of Oslo, Geir is fortunate to have a rock garden which provides a setting and climate as close to those "in nature" as might be wished.

"My scree, situated in a southwest faced slope, consists of 24 tons of stones of different sizes. The stones were just dropped off by a lorry! But after that it was a lot of work to spread and arrange them....."

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Miyakea integrifolia and the scree.....

“The deepest parts of the scree are about 50 cm; the lowest about 25 cm. After the stones were arranged, I used about 4 tons of sand that I spread out on the stones, and washed down in between with my garden hose. This took days to complete, but I believe that it is of great importance to make sure there are no air pockets in the ground. It is not easy to plant in new plants into the scree. When you start to remove a little stone you can be sure there will be a bigger one under...and when you remove that one, all the stones and sand around fall into the hole, but after all this is a scree.



Miyakea integrifolia

Geir Moen

In the hole I can add some more humus, lime or other materials that I may find suitable for each plant, but in most cases the sand will do the job. After all, these plants are experts in sending their roots to great depths to find what they are searching for.

I have experienced that it is easier for me to kill a plant by being too careful, than if I almost pay no attention to it at all.

I try to find the optimal spot for each plant's needs; this means that even if the slope is faced to the southwest I can grow species that prefer shadow by placing them to the north side of a rock.

I also create vertical crevices where species like *Androsace helvetica*, *Paraquilegias*, *Campanula fragilis* *Callianthemum* and other crevice specialists seems to do very well.”
The *Miyakea* clearly likes his garden.

***Miyakea* showing evergreen leaves and a flower bud.**



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-----Plant portraits-----

Saxifraga x caroli-langii and its parent species



***Saxifraga x caroli-langii*, dwarf seedling**

The first hybrid between the Greek species ***Saxifraga marginata* var. *coriophylla*** and the Caucasian ***S. dinnikii*** was named and described by Z. Zvolánek as ***Saxifraga x caroli-langii*** (See AGS Bulletin **73/361**)



Saxifraga marginata* var. *coriophylla - at the Beauty Slope

Specialist breeder Karel Lang made the cross: his aim was to obtain a cultivar with the ease of cultivation and vigour of Greek mother and the lovely colour of the Caucasian pollen parent. But destiny decided otherwise. It is white (slightly pale rose) like *S. marginata* and temperamental (difficult to please) like its handsome father. More than 30 similar intermediate siblings were discarded -or killed in open garden of Karel's friends -including the dwarf individual pictured below. One plant was kept and named 'Verona' - increase is sadly slow!

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Saxifraga x caroli-langii and its parent species.....

Everybody loves this plant with crystalline white flowers but the plant is better suited for a life in the colder highlands than in the hot lowlands of Bohemia.

Both parents are saxatile plants so a protected cultivation site in a tufa hole (or thin fissure) with a cool position is recommended.



Saxifraga marginata in the Tromsø Botanic Garden, Norway

Viggo Urfsjord



Saxifraga dinnikii photographed by [Kirsten Andersen](#) in her garden in Denmark

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-----Plant portraits-----

Gentiana szechenyi Syn. *Gentiana callistantha* Diels & Gilg *Gentiana rosularis* Franch.



Czech seed collector [Josef Jurášek](#) writes about this little plant from alpine meadows c 3000-4800 m. which is appearing more on the market. One of the charms of this gentian from Kudoa Section is its great variability of flower colour. He saw, in China, plants with nearly white, pale blue, rose and lilac (always with blue stripes and green dots) in its 5-6 cm long flowers. Lanceolate basal leaves are hard and leathery, 4-12 cm long and 0.3-10 mm broad. This species prefers, in nature, alpine meadows with short grass on northeast stony slopes, which are not too wet. He photographed nearly white forms in granite in the Batang Mts. at elevation 4500 m, where it was in association with *Iris ruthenica* f. *nana*, *Incarvillea compacta* and *Leontopodium pusillum*. The gentian was growing on the low slope behind the lake.



Gentian locality in Batang Mts. 4500m

This gentian hates permanently wet conditions in the garden and can rot in summer or in winter. So keep it in drier conditions and avoid too hot and dry place in the summer. The substrate used by the author is good loam with some peat. Propagation is by uncovered seed or cuttings.



Gentiana szechenyi
f. *alba*

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-----Plant portraits-----

Russian photographer, traveller and gardener [Olga Bondareva](#) brings us this portrait shot of *Gentiana szechenyi*. Olga is based in Moscow and has a country garden around 100kms east of the city.

We are most grateful to Olga and the other photographers for the use of their pictures here.



Gentiana szechenyi

Olga Bondareva

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----- WORLD OF BULBS -----

Sternbergia fischeriana by Igor Minjarík, Southern Moravia



The genus obtained its name in honour of the Czech botanist-aristocrat Kaspar Maria Sternberg. The beauty of *Sternbergia lutea* infected me in autumn 1994, when I saw its strong golden flowers on the background with dark blue grapes of the sort 'Blue Portugal'. Later after success with this tough beauty I ordered from Potterton and Martin one bulb of the rare *Sternbergia fischeriana* (syn. *S. vernalis*) but this British immigrant showed no flower for seven years. When I finished new special bulb bed (50 cm deep, framed by brick wall and filled with mixture of Baltic peat, zeolit and forest leaf mould and which can be covered by glass in winter) I planted this untamed spring *Sternbergia* 20 cm deep-as a punishment-for non co-operation.

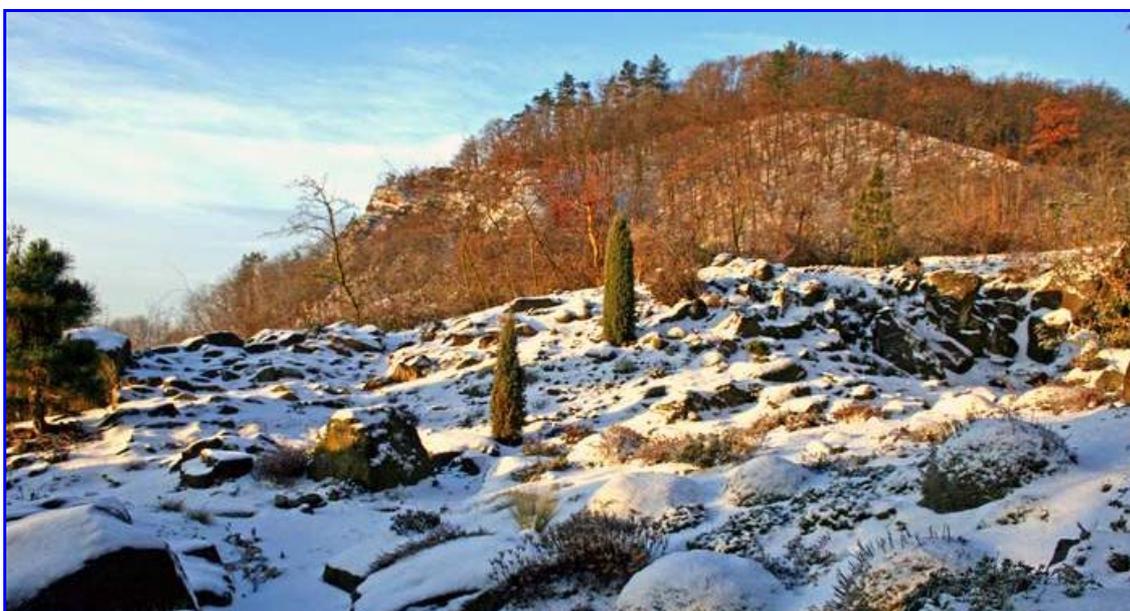
My dreams came true, when 4 months after moving the bulbs, just after Christmas, I saw a good shoot of coming but had to wait several weeks for the exciting view of the first flowers. After this premier offering my spring *Sternbergia* flowered regularly for six years

and made some babies: but when I tried to plant one young

bulb, as an experiment, into my garden community of bulbs, I discovered that my decision was wrong. After that (good luck that I did not kill more of them) I keep this species in winter under protection of glass. I have one advice for everybody who would like to have this species with true colour of the sun: if you often replant this *Sternbergia*, you will never obtain her trust and mutual understanding.



-----REPORTS FROM THE BEAUTY SLOPE -----
by Zdeněk Zvolánek



Flat top of the Beauty Slope under snow cover

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Level area at the top of the Beauty Slope in December

All the literature dealing with rock gardening and its aesthetic content stresses the need of pleasant view in wintertime when we are without the flowering chords. I present you one picture from dull December showing the effect of rock and evergreen cushions of different *acantholimons*. These hedgehogs evince sentimental memories about Turkey for me (more than 10 expeditions) but they grow so fast, that they soon take the space from other steppe plants and so risk being forcibly removed from the peaceful community. Even the high alpine *Acantholimon ulicinum* forms in Turkey not cushions but bolsters 120cm (4 feet) in diameter, so it is better to seek out the smallest species with good size of flowers like *A. venustum*.

There is in our hemisphere the same delicate procedure in every year in February: spring is coming. Irises from the Subsection Juno appeared in the warm southern slope of Standa Čepička (ten kilometres from my slope) around January 18th, so I must write about one February Juno -the one from the cover of this issue, shown below.....



Many memories of old friends can be found in a mature garden. These traces are embodied in the plants you obtained from them. Plants survived and many dear donors did not.

The late Václav Lajn visited my slope and himself planted two clones, which he collected in Tajikistan, of *Iris rosenbachiana* f. *nicolai*. They flower in the slopes of Czech Karst in mid February. This species is able to be adapted to our continental weather because in nature it experiences spring rains and grows in moister northerly slopes in clay.

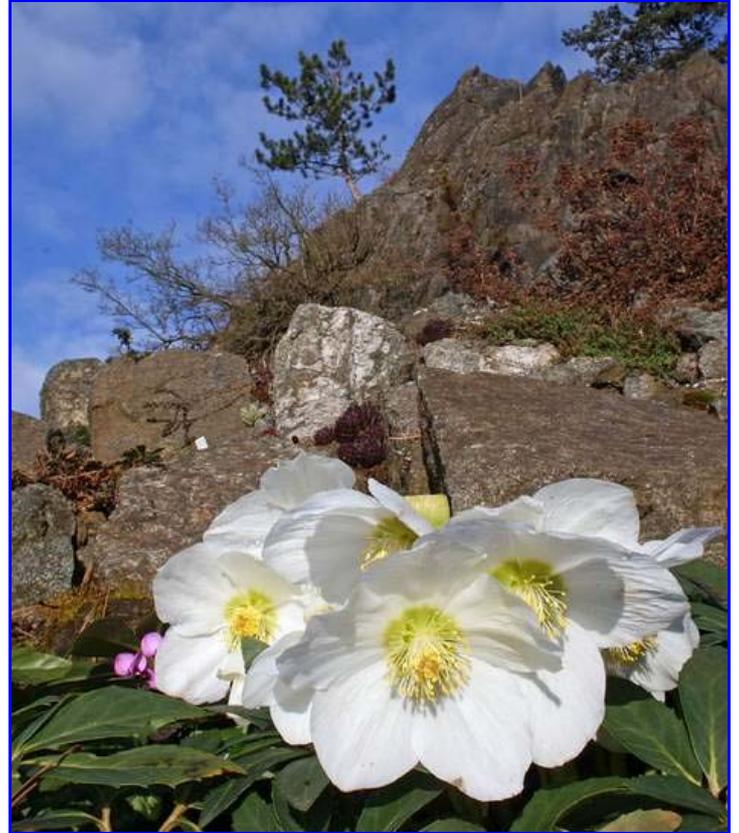
It is increasing in the Beauty Slope and one year produced seed. The clone 'Cormozak' (left) is distinct and only 10 cm tall in my conditions. Cultivation abroad in the sand beds is successful too.

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Our Southern slope with the dark rock is a place of quick changes in February. Rock warms up instantly at this optimal solar angle and fresh snow melts rapidly. If you have plenty of space in the rock garden, **Genista horrida** is spectacular flat pancake with golden yellow flowers. My mature plant is 2 meters (over 6 feet) in diameter and I have just begun to trim its edges. I like the horrible looking spines of this Spanish beauty because it defies the tender cats of my neighbours to roll in it.



Genista horrida under snow blanket



Helleborus niger enjoys sunshine



I have decided to be 'deciduous'; to keep pace with many of our plants and have nice lazy over-wintering, full of rests.

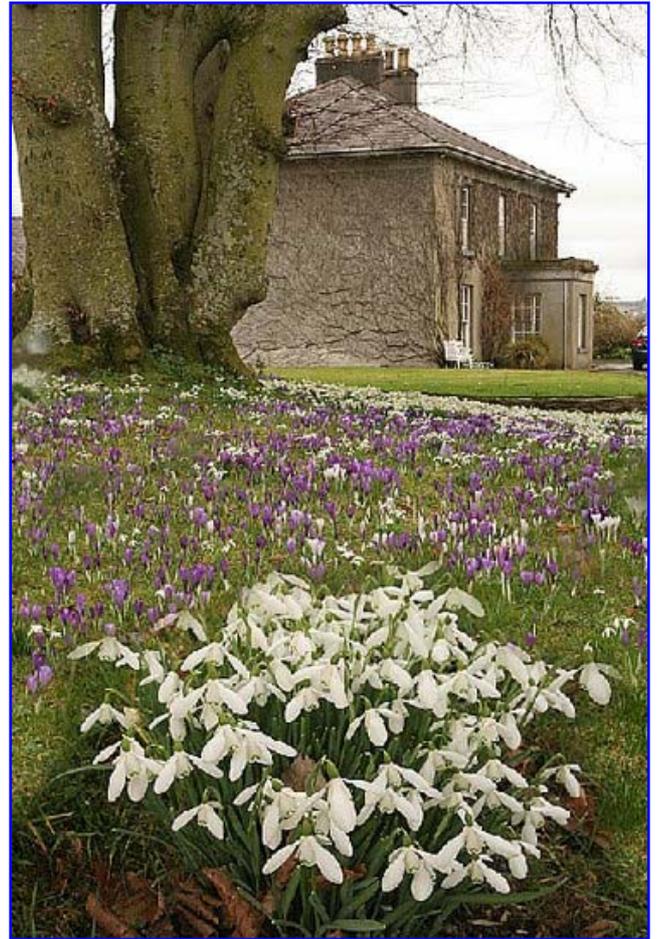
It is kind of hibernation decorated with plenty colour dreams about the blooming time. It is the haven and paradise of meditating inside the cave of my stony dolerite house, which I really need when I am getting deciduous.

Some of my younger friends travel now to the opposite hemisphere just to prolong their rock gardening activities (and keep high level of adrenalin).

One of them, Martin Hajman (a Czech gardener in the [Botanic Garden of Tromsø, Norway](#)) is just back from Southern Africa and we can enjoy his fresh picture of a **Helichrysum** peeping nicely out of an African rock.

Helichrysum aff. *milfordiae*

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February is month of snowdrops: photographed by Liam McCaughey in the “Beauty lawn” of June Dougherty in Northern Ireland where a mass *Galanthus nivalis* is supported by thousands of *Crocus tomassinianus*.



Galanthus plicatus ‘Diggory’

John Weagle