

# International Rock Gardener



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September 2011



As autumn begins to make its presence felt in the Northern Hemisphere - the leaves are already colouring in Scotland – our friends in the Southern Hemisphere are enjoying the excitement of their burgeoning spring. The Show season has begun in Ferny Creek, Victoria, Australia with lots of rhododendrons included and the Crocus are still spreading colour in Dunedin, New Zealand while in the north the bulb lovers can celebrate the autumn-flowering Crocus and the magnificent Colchicums. It probably is a good time of year for us all!

At least if the weather is too bad we can begin to process the photographs we took over the summer... there never seems enough time in the winter for that task. We'll include some of the recent Forum photos here to tempt those of you who haven't visited the [six thousand five hundred topics in the SRGC Forum](#).



Cover photo: flower scene in Val Gardena in the Dolomites, by Cliff Booker.

[Extra photos from Cliff's "Parasite" article can be found here in the SRGC Forum.](#)

Below: Ferny Creek Horticultural Society Show - rhododendron section - pictures by Mr Fermi de Sousa.



Above: *Rhododendron nuttallii* x *lindleyi*



*Crocus minimus* 'Bavella' Lesley Cox, N.Z.



*Colchicum* 'Wine Cup' Hagen Engelmann, Germany

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---Gardens in the Mountains---

“IT’S OK BEING A PARASITE WHEN YOU GIVE SO MUCH BACK”



Parasites always seem to get a very bad press ... take, take, take - giving nothing in return ... but I have a soft spot for parasitic plants and especially for parasitic and hemi-parasitic plants from the alpine zone.

It's hard enough to survive at such altitudes and devious (or deviant) strategies should be applauded. We don't condemn *Geum reptans* for sending out its adventurous runners or *Clematis alpina* for hitching a ride on an adjacent alpenrose, but underground approaches are portrayed as underhand and beneath contempt.

There are over 4000 species of parasitic plants in 19 families and they each derive some or all of their sustenance from another plant. Parasitic plants are incapable of deriving nutrients from the soil or by photosynthesis and must commandeer the roots of, often species specific, hosts. Hemi- (or semi-) parasitic plants derive water and/or additional nutrients from a host, but often boast green photosynthesising leaves and can therefore survive and even flourish without a benefactor.

Dodder (*Cuscuta*) and Mistletoe (*Viscum album* in Europe) are hemi-parasites that tap into the stems rather than the roots of their hosts.

Alpine gardeners may be surprised to discover just how many of their beloved species are hemi- or fully parasitic. Alpine bartsia (*Bartsia alpina*), Indian Paintbrush (*Castilleja*), Broomrapes (*Orobanche*), Louseworts (*Pedicularis*), Eyebrights (*Euphrasia*) and Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) are some of the most prominent examples, but other less well-known species can be included.

We have observed several of the above in various locations across Europe and the USA and I have included images captured during our travels. I am particularly taken with the Paintbrushes and the Broomrapes and, while identifying individual species is usually beyond my less than botanical mind, I find them both interesting and beautiful in equal measure.

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I have concentrated on three locations; The Dolomites; The Gargano peninsula in Southern Italy and The Picos de Europa in Northern Spain for my illustrations, but the first set (montage) shows a diminutive *Euphrasia alpina* (with an annual gentian); a fine *Pedicularis sp.*; *Castilleja miniata* (growing with an *Iris sp.* in my garden) and *Lathraea clandestina* (Purple Toothwort).



I will start in our favourite mountain destination, the glorious Dolomites of northern Italy, where this tiny *Orobancha sp.* (below, left) was found growing with *Gentiana utriculosa*. I have also included images of other plants (non-parasitic obviously) that flourish in these beautiful peaks.

*Silene acaulis* hugging the contours of a limestone boulder and *Saxifraga oppositifolia* on an exposed ridge.



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Broomrapes proliferate in the meadows and boulder fields of the Dolomites and colours range from buff through bright orange to red and chocolate brown. Never green though - as these plants cannot produce chlorophyll. The same meadows and high rocky areas host *Rhododendron hirsutum* and the slightly incongruous *Lilium bulbiferum*.



*Pedicularis verticillatus* in a florally rich meadow growing alongside a delightful campanula.



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Broomrapes and Louseworts often grow alongside hardy orchids (for which they are often mistaken by newcomers to the mountains) and hikers can explore upland meadows rich with *Gymnadenia*, *Dactylorhiza*, *Nigritella* and *Platanthera* intermingled with many species of hemiparasitic plants.



Promotion of these majestic mountains is totally unnecessary, the stunning white peaks and an incredible flora speak for themselves. Here we can see large cushions of *Silene acaulis* (Moss Campion) thriving under the imposing cliffs of Boe and the rich ochre-stained blooms of this 20cm high Broomrape.



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Colours complement when a bright orange broomrape flowers alongside a *Traunsteinera globosa*.



An interesting article on Pedicularis, written by Heather Smith from Ulster for her AGS Group, can be found [here](#).

Pedicularis species in yellow and pink ... lovely louseworts locally abundant in the high passes.

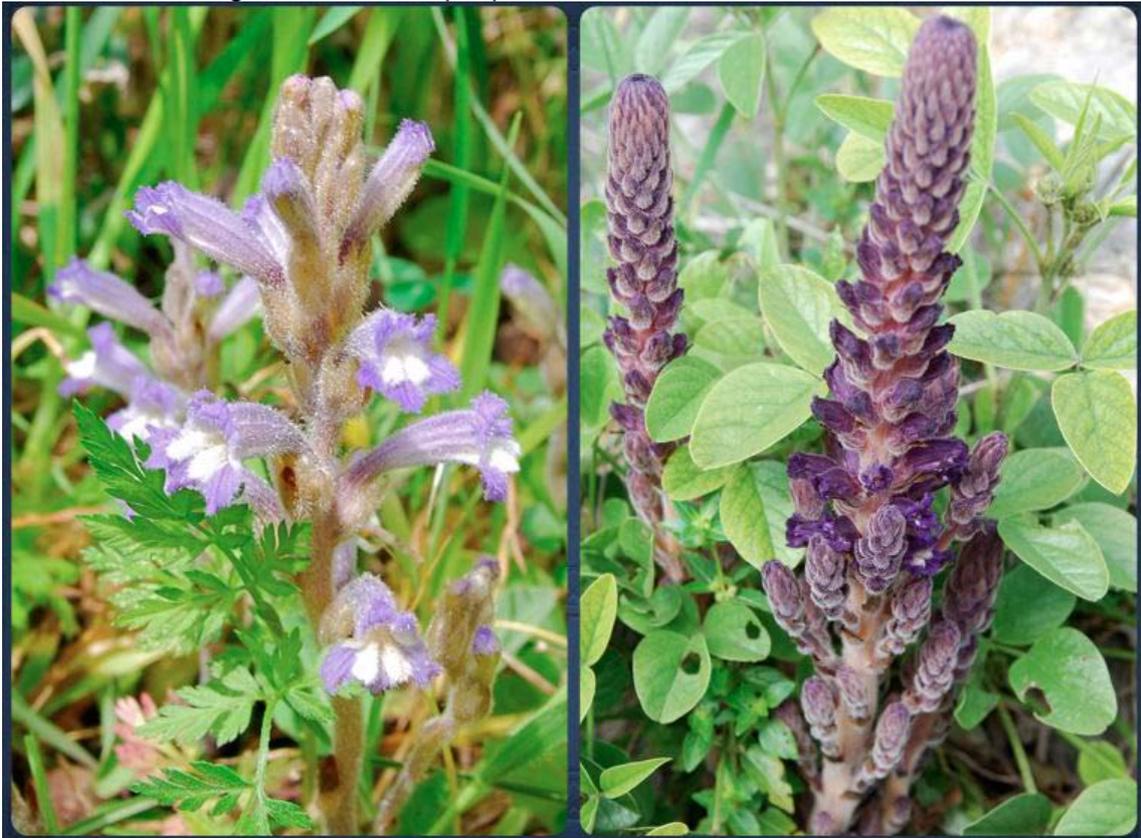


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We travel south from northern Italy to the Gargano peninsula where orchids grow in profusion and where the mild climate supports a coastal, woodland and mountain flora of exceptional diversity. The coastal plain near Vieste was awash with colour in April, as were the meadows, forests and roadside verges. Tourists were conspicuous by their absence and the narrow country roads were free from traffic but, unfortunately, certainly not free from litter. This glorious National Park is sadly being desecrated by fly-tippers and it is such a shame.



*Orobanche* proliferate in the Gargano and the colour palette of these unearthly looking plants ranges from cream through lilac to dark purple: *Orobanche ramosa* on the left.



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The Gargano promontory boasts a range of habitats, from extensive olive groves to the cyclamen rich Umbra Forest, from the uplands around Monte Sant' Angelo to the coastal lakes of the north, from profuse orchid meadows to sparsely inhabited offshore islands; from sandy beaches to barren limestone outcrops : Gargano blooms.



A magnet for orchid enthusiasts, the Gargano boasts a host of interesting species.

See [further photos](#) from this article in the Forum.

A 'trabucco' is an enormous wooden construction (for fishing), which consists of a platform anchored to the rock by large logs of Aleppo pine, jutting out into the sea, from where two (or more) long arms stretch out suspended some feet above the water and supporting a huge, narrow-meshed net known as a trabocchetto. They are dotted along the coast of Puglia.

Roadside verges are awash with colour in April.



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And now to the Picos de Europa, the lovely mountain range nestled in the north of Spain. We stayed in the beautiful market town of Potes and travelled into and around the heart of the Picos from this accessible base. Our visit (in May) coincided with the flowering of an incredible range of orchids, narcissus, *Orobanche* and high alpine species. Butterflies abounded in the lush meadows and birdwatchers were more than amply rewarded.



Carnivorous plants grew in abundance in the shady and moisture drenched cliffs and boulders. Parasitic and hemi-parasitic plants flourished in a range of habitats and *Orobanche* species could be found in an array of pastel shades.



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The Picos de Europa are truly beautiful mountains and a photographer's dream.



All photographs © Cliff Booker with the exception of the picture of Cliff - © Sue Booker

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## ---Plant Portrait---

### Six *Heuchera* that will R-O-C-K your garden! by Grahame Ware, BC, Canada

I've seen the embryonic beginnings of the popularity of *Heuchera* as a staple of perennial gardening. I remember the Gestetner-produced copies from Terra Nova Nursery and still have the little yellow-coloured catalogues of the Primrose Path nursery of Charles and Martha Oliver. As co-author of the first book published on *Heuchera*, the experience was worthy of a book unto itself. Just as in film-making, a lot of the material was left on the editing floor - some really good material. So with a little splicing and dicing, let's bring things up-to-date and make a documentary of sorts on my top six *Heuchera* worthy of your rock garden.

"And action!"



I've been intimately aware of so many early *Heuchera* cultivars most of which are now but footnotes in horticultural history. I still have some of them and their kin in my garden. Like me, they too are unfashionable and somewhat irrelevant from a commercial point of view. (Isn't semi-retirement and *underemployment* grand?)

It surprises many people to discover that I actually prefer the mountain/alpine species and smaller cultivars of *Heuchera*. This is likely due to the fact that as a certified country boy, I came into ornamental gardening from the mountain trail as opposed to the vegetable patch. I like rocks as a backbone in my garden design and I like it to have balance and naturalness. I prefer the smaller forms and do not find that the large, heavily-venated foliage of

the *americana* types exerts an attraction on me or my wallet. Neither do I find the *villosa* forms with their leaves the colour of suede leather shoes to be desirable. It's not that I find them distasteful *per se* but the lack of subtlety is off-putting. In this I am not alone and for all of us in that camp, there are fortunately many more species of *Heuchera* with this inclination of alpine subtlety and understatement. But boring? Hardly! After all, a good meal should not be competing with the wine but rather the wine should be complementing it just as the plants should complement the garden as a whole. Here's a toast to the alpine-partial *Heuchera* that can really rock.

Allow us to draw on Greek mythology for the terms of our two basic *Heuchera* types-

- a) The Dryads (Woodland nymphs) and
- b) The Oreads (Mountain nymphs).

We use the word *nymphs* in that we consider plants to be semi-divine and *Heuchera*, in turn, near the top of that firmament. The polytheistic nature of the Greeks' soul and mythology is well-suited to looking at this genus in that they have a rather 'interfertile' nature!

This makes this genus a wellspring of opportunity for the rock gardener as the Oreads love rock crevices and heat and, like the Great Garbo, to be left alone.



The Oreads are mostly small crevice dwellers of the Cordillera mountain system and grow in rocky places where their rhizome is a definite advantage for survival. As gardeners, the take-away from this is this: Drainage is as vital as sunlight. And most of my top six like limestone which, in turn, makes them a good neighbour for many other alpine.

Finally, every one of these selections makes a really good trough/container plant that fits in a small space and hangs well with other plants such as dwarf conifers, bulbs, etc.

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Let me cut to the chase and give you my top SIX *Heuchera* for the rock garden.

**1) *Heuchera elegans*** (and especially its hybrids 'Canyon Duet' and 'Canyon Belle').

This is one of those species that really takes your breath away if you are fortunate enough to be in the San Bernardino Mountains in the spring. Its home is in the Los Angeles and Ventura Counties in those mountains, between 1500-2500m. Its common name is the Bridger Mountain Alumroot. It has very attractive, large white-pink flowers almost like little Harebells. We have not found it terribly difficult to grow and keep it in a dry perennial bed or a boulder/crevice structure. The late [Dara Emery](#) of the [Santa Barbara Botanic garden](#) used this species when he crossed it with *H. sanguinea* to create his first hybrid in 1985, 'Canyon Delight'. He hoped for more hardiness with the *sanguinea*. Over a decade later he used this foundation hybrid and backcrossed to *elegans*.

A generation later after repeating this cross he came up with a new Canyon series that includes the very garden worthy 'Canyon Duet' (dark rose tipped white) and 'Canyon Belle' (rich red). Thus these latest crosses by Emery are largely a result of *elegans* line-breeding with a little more vigour and a little more flash. 'Canyon Duet' is more compact than its sister and sends up 12" stalks in profusion: Such sweet music from this duet.



Above Left: *Heuchera* 'Canyon Duet' photo Todd Boland, Newfoundland

But don't forget to try the species for it is a real charmer too: *Heuchera elegans* (above right ) Mt. Wilson, San Gabriel Mountains, California, photo by [Jason Hollinger](#).

## **2) *Heuchera pulchella***

I've had this *Heuchera* species growing in my garden for almost 20 years. The seed was collected by Panayoti Kelaidis (when he and his former wife Gwen still owned Rocky Mountain Rare Plant seedco. - the company they started) at 3231m (10,600ft). It was offered in the '92 Rocky Mountain Rare Plants catalogue as 92-255 and also the following (and final) year. Logically it must have been collected near the limestone face of the Sandia Crest for that collection altitude. It follows then that my seed clone should probably have the handle of 'Sandia Crest form'. Back then they said in their RMRP catalogue, "*possibly the loveliest coralbells*".





Above: *H. pulchella* [growing on the limestone of Sandia Crest](#) photos David Conklin



In New Mexico, it can be seen *in situ* in Bernalillo, Sandoval, and Tarrant counties in the Manzano and Sandia mountains outside of Albuquerque.

Nowhere in those places is it really abundant. Floriferous and hardy, it is a very good rock garden plant that gets a bit larger (20-25cm stems instead of 15-20cm *in situ*) than that in the lowlands. (See the picture of it, left, in my garden.)

This is a star species for it does thrive in limestone and it thus makes a good companion for your other lime-loving alpines, such as *Campanula*, *Dianthus*, *Saxifraga*, or *Veronica*.

Left:  
*Heuchera pulchella* 'Sandia Crest form' in my garden June 2011

3) *Heuchera hirsutissima* 'Santa Rosa'



'Santa Rosa' close-up of the flowers in my garden June 2011

This has been an excellent little guy for me. The scalloped leaves are quite small but the flowers are flared and have a jaunty air of quality to them, not the subdued quality that one usually sees in many of the Oreads. The dark pink colour of the calyces contrasts nicely with the white flowers and they tend to be in clusters of 4-5 that adds to the fullness. It's a good display. Not the longest flowering sequence of the Oreads but very showy when it's on form.



Left: 'Santa Rosa' coming up in one of my small troughs

It hails from the area around the Santa Rosa Mountains that is part of Riverside County in S. California. It was collected by Ted Kipping ([the Treeshaper of San Francisco](#)) at an altitude of approximately 2438m (8000ft).



It is not an abundant plant in this area as witnessed by a [recent survey](#) by Tom Chester *et al* in 2008-9. It (the species) is listed as rare and endangered by the State of California. Note that 'Santa Rosa' is an alpine, more compact form than many of the straight species that I've seen.

Left: Close-up of 'Santa Rosa' in my trough June 2011

Right: *Heuchera cylindrica var alpina*  
'Wenatchee form' photo [Paul Slichter](#)

#### 4) *Heuchera cylindrica var alpina*

This is one of those species that has been used by many hybridists that were looking for toughness.

Alan Bloom, in England, used this species to create his 'Greenfinch' while there is another selection called 'Chartreuse' that doesn't seem terribly different.

Charles Oliver crossed this species with a 'Brizoides' to come up with the stunning 'Coral Bouquet'.

However, it is with the subspecies *alpina* that things start to get interesting for rock gardeners. In the snake pit that has been *Heuchera* taxonomy, this subspecies in the past has been referred to as *H. alpina* and *H. ovalifolia*. This is a gem and not bland like many of the kin of this species.

This subspecies has some style.

The Wenatchee Mountains in the State of Washington have their fair share of gems (*Douglasia nivalis*, *Lewisia tweedyi*, etc.) and this one is no exception. There must be something about the basaltic rock on which it thrives. As alpinists we are used to those strange looks from the "it's-gotta-be-big-and-showy" herbaceous crowd.



Slichter 2008

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Patience rewards those of us that take the time and fend off the slings and arrows of scorn for our love of 'wee things'. After 3 years, *Heuchera cylindrica* var. *alpina* is such a plant that your forbearance shall be required.



*Heuchera cylindrica* var *alpina* 'Wenatchee form' (Klickitat River) photo by Paul Slichter

Once established, it's a real four season plant to boot. In the winter, the cold transmogrifies it into exotic and mysterious shades of red (Lobster red?).

The transformation in the spring is equally interesting as the colour bleeds away. Then, strong reddish stems rise up and at one point their colour matches perfectly the colour of the leaves! Eventually they are adorned with chunky, pink-tipped white flowers that are sweetly clustered.

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You might want to sow directly into cracks and crevices. Josef Halda used to recommend direct sowing for *Paraquilegia microphylla* as a way of ensuring success with that species and I would say the same with this one. Look at your toughest cracks and spots and then go 'asprinkling' into that good space. Coming from a hot clime, they will take a lot of heat but a spot just out of the mid afternoon sun is likely the best depending on your climate and situation. In your garden, this one might be a full-on sun-lover.

### 5) *Heuchera* 'Bouquet Rose'

I received 3 small plants in 2001 from Monique Chevry of Nancy, France the home town of the great "horticulteur", M. Lemoine, the man responsible for this fine rock garden cultivar. This plant impresses me year after year with three attributes: 1) it has compact *H. americana* var *hispidula* forma *purpurea* foliage that is a tight rosette with a wonderful shade of pinkish bronze early in spring not unlike some of the zonal Pelargonium; 2) it has long, elegant stalks with really lovely, good-sized flowers of rose-pink; 3) finally, and so importantly, its flower power is on display for months!

Obviously it owes a great deal of these qualities to 'Brizoides' (not *x brizoides* as so many people mistakenly refer to it), the first *Heuchera* hybrid offered to the public - that year being 1897. (For more details on the confusion and origins of 'Brizoides' read my discussion on p.110-111 in "[Heucheras and Heucherellas](#)".)

Suffice to say, in the 1897 Lemoine catalogue they refer to the original 'Brizoides' as, "A plant of absolute rusticity, forming small, acaulescent tufts and palmate, dentate leaves that are clear and shiny with red-bronze colour during development and green-bronze during the summer." Bingo!..sounds like 'Bouquet Rose' and note the 'small' reference. This leads me to speculate that BR may very well be a true yet quite compact form of 'Brizoides'. Furthermore, the *sanguinea* part of the makeup has endowed it with good-sized flowers but *not* the neon sign red that reads "OPEN" for hummingbirds. Bouquet Rose as the name says is a rose pink colour. This was a selection by Émile Lemoine who was responsible for the *Heuchera* crosses.

Note that I feel quite certain that I have the real thing from the Lemoine museum. But just like Golden Retrievers (themselves a mélange of golden lab, Tweed spaniel and Irish Wolfhound), one must rogue the oddballs and keep to the type and standard. I haven't seen what is on offer at the European nurseries (mostly France) but know this - my 'Bouquet Rose' still has a very small rosette (3"-4") after 10 years. It is a versatile and bone-hardy rock garden plant that will reward you year after year.



*Heuchera* 'Bouquet Rose' June 2011 after driving rain

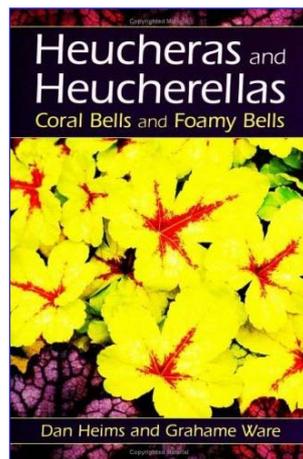
## 6) *Heuchera hallii*

Hall's *Heuchera* has been used by many hybridists over the decades. Marcel le Piniec, the nurseryman from Brittany who was such an advocate for rock gardening on both coasts of the USA (especially with *Kalmiopsis* and *Lewisia* and starting the Siskiyou Rare Plant Nursery) created the diminutive 'Mayfair' using *hallii* and *sanguinea*. This was quite likely the first alpine hybrid *Heuchera* produced in the USA. Charles Oliver of Pennsylvania also used *hallii* in so many of his early hybridising *Heuchera* programmes. In the early 90's, Oliver used *hallii* and *pulchella* to produce alpine-partial plants that he initially dubbed the Miniature Hybrids before getting more specific and labelling them the San Pico Hybrids and especially the star of that group, 'San Pico Rosita'.

The latter became the foundation of the Petite series. This series had as their criteria: compact habit, silvery overlay on the leaves and good, substantial flowers on 10"-16" stalks" (25-38cm). So many good ones were produced over the next few years with the most popular one being 'Petite Pearl Fairy'. 'Petite Ruby Frills' is another good one to keep an eye open for from [The Primrose Path Nursery](#) .



*Heuchera* 'Petite Marbled Burgundy' photo Charles Oliver



[Grahame Ware](#) is a plantsman, nursery owner, garden designer, writer, broadcaster, teacher, jazz enthusiast and bird lover who lives in Yellow Point - a peninsula northeast of Ladysmith on Vancouver Island, an area that is warm and protected by forest cover and the Arrowsmith massif that flanks its west side. His 'Heucheras and Heucherellas' book (left) was written with [Dan Heims](#) and was published in 2005 by [Timber Press](#).

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### --- Mountains in the Garden ---

*Saxifraga brunonis* by [Ian Young](#), Aberdeen.

*Saxifraga brunonis* Wallich ex Seringe (1830) [*S brunoniana* Wallich ex Seringe (1828)] is a true Himalayan species from the section Ciliatae subsection Flagellares.

I got a plant of this lovely Saxifrage from [Kevock Garden's](#) sales table at the SRGC Discussion weekend in October 2009. It seems to be grown from a Chris Chadwell accession; CC5315. Despite the suggestion that it would probably grow best in an alpine house I planted the single small rosette outside into a trough landscaped with limestone marl.



The following year it sent out a mass of thin, red, thread-like runners. At the end of each was a tiny rosette searching for suitable conditions to send down roots. The new rosettes established all over the trough; not only in the areas of compost between the rocks but in other established saxifrages and onto the rocks, especially where moss had taken a hold. Not content with



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colonising one trough some of the runners leaped the gap to start a colony in neighbouring troughs while others rooted into the moss that grows on the paving slabs under the troughs. Although it produced no flowers in the first year it was still worth growing for the beautiful pale green rosettes covered by the very delicate bright red runners, looking as though they were decorated by spun sugar.



Flower and rooted plantlet

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By this summer (2011) many of the rosettes produced branched flower stems with a succession of small yellow flowers. Many stems had up to seventeen flowers. The yellow flowers are 15mm across on stems up to 120mm high. The rosettes are 40mm across and the stolons can make growth up to 200mm.

Like many Himalayan plants this plant enjoys our cool moist summers and I suspect it might prove rather more difficult to establish in warmer climates. It has also coped well through the last two extremely cold winters we have experienced. The plant is easily propagated by placing the runners onto moist sand where they quickly make roots. The seed capsules are swelling and look like they will produce viable seed which I will sow immediately when the capsules split.



It would seem that this plant is nomadic having developed a strategy of growing, flowering and moving on, as the runners plant the many offspring around the parent rosette (that will die after flowering). I can just imagine it spreading out on damp mossy rocks in its native habitat much as it is colonising the trough we are growing it in and any suitable spot it finds to put down a root.



It would seem that it is has never been grown widely in cultivation and the only written references I could find were in Malcolm McGregor's excellent book "[Saxifrages](#)" and a couple of photos on the Sax database of the [Saxifraga society](#).

