



SRGC

# Bulb Log Diary

ISSN 2514-6114

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BULB LOG 15.....13<sup>th</sup> April 2022



Rock On



I choose the cover image because it represents what rock gardening is about to me. My fascination with plants began at an early age when I found the likes of *Armeria maritima*, Sea Thrift, clinging to the rugged exposed rocks at the sea side. When at the age of 11 I started to visit the Scottish mountains it was again the tiny plants, including *Armeria maritima*, clinging to life among the windswept rocks right up on the summits that drew my attention.

Since then I have observed the adaptations these plants made to grow in such harsh environments and that lead to trying to create or mimic those rocky habitats in our garden. One of the first

observations is that these plants are generally very low growing, forming cushions or spreading out as low mats among the rocks to stay out of the wind and we can mimic that in the garden. We quickly learn that we cannot control the weather but we can create gritty well drained soils similar to those in the wild conditions. I also want to be reminded of those wild places so have some bonsai in imitation of the craggy windswept trees, full of character, their growth stunted by the harsh conditions that I have seen at both the seaside and mountain top. The troughs of all sizes are the ideal place for me to create landscapes covered in rocks with the likes of ***Saxifraga marginata***.



***Saxifraga oppositifolia* 'Theoden'** Every year I fear that we are losing this plant because it has adapted by having extremely small leaves. These seem to shrink even smaller in the winter so it appears that it is only the wiry stems sprawling over the edge of the trough – but then these amazing large flowers burst from the tiny buds.



**Primula marginata** and **Saxifraga oppositifolia 'Theoden'** have been growing in this trough for over thirty years surviving in the very gritty free draining soil.



While we can modify our soils we can do little about the weather and this is looking back to the snow that arrived last week. Having evolved in harsh places makes these small plants resilient to this kind of weather and with the exception of a slight bleaching of the colour of the flowers they are unaffected by the snow.

## **Saxifrages flowering in the snow.**

There are hundreds if not thousands of saxifrage species and cultivars available.

However not all will be able to adapt to your garden conditions so it is a case of trial and error to select the ones that will grow. More correctly it is the plants that select you.

Growing from seed is the best way because the seeds go through

a natural selection process where those that grow to flowering size are those able to adapt to your growing conditions and climate. With cultivars it is different you just have to keep trying different clones until you find those that are compatible with your garden then propagate them from cuttings.



**Saxifrages after the snow.**



One saxifrage is doing especially well in this rocky landscaped trough.



All the saxifrages here were planted at the same time but with very different results the main plant has spread out well surrounding a second clone which can be seen to the right while others are struggling to survive. The position and orientation of the trough can make a big difference to the fortune of the plants.



**Primula marginata**



The difference in form and size between these two forms of **Primula marginata** is easily compared when they are growing side by side in the rocky landscape.



**Primula marginata**



A good gardener is one who has found the plants that grow best for them and one of those for us is **Primula marginata** which we plant widely across the garden.



Coming down from the harsh rocky environment of the mountain tops you descend through various habitat zones where the plants with larger softer growths such as bulbs and other garden favourites like Hellebores grow – these also find a place in our garden.



We have a number of self-seeding colonies of Hellebores in the garden.





Here again we can modify the soil in this **Bulb bed**; we mulch the free draining soil with humus to add goodness and retain moisture but we can do nothing about the weather.



***Fritillaria imperialis***



In recent years these *Fritillaria imperialis* have been cut down by storm force freezing winds - this year it was heavy snow followed by a few days of wind that flattened them.



The remarkable determination of ***Fritillaria imperialis*** is clear as the stems having been beaten down twist and turn rising up towards the cool sunshine to display their beautiful downward facing orange flowers.

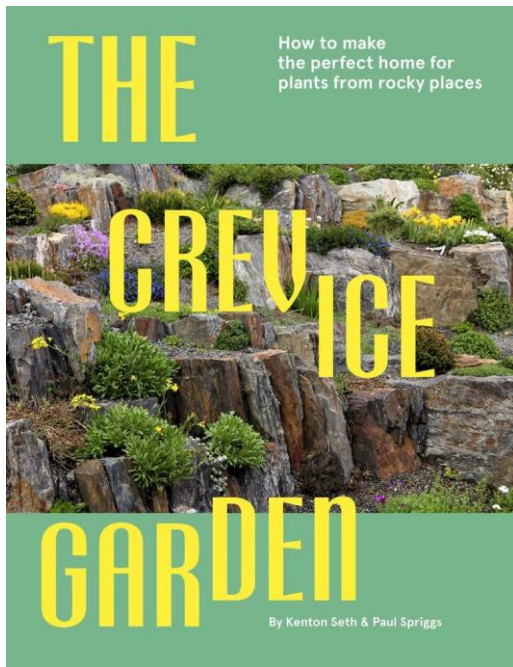


Another common feature in rock gardens is of course the rocks and we use them in a number of ways to create landscapes and raised beds such as this wall.

The gaps between the rocks of the walls have for many years been the ideal places for the likes of **Primula marginata** to grow. Down the years plants have seeded into the gaps between the rocks and so nature has taught me how many more plants will grow in these cracks.



Vertical stone walls such as this have been planted up for more than a century but not necessarily described as a crevice garden. With the growing popularity of crevice gardening we can see that a vertical crevice garden is exactly what they are which leads me on a much anticipated book 'The Crevice Garden' which I am delighted to review.



The Crevice Garden ISBN: 9781739903909 by Kenton Seth and Paul Spriggs, subtitled “How to make a perfect home for plants from rocky places”, will be published on 21st April 2022 priced at £25.

**Kenton J. Seth** is a Colorado-based garden designer who works at home and abroad specializing in crevice gardens, drought-tolerant natives, and meadows

**Paul Spriggs** is a professional gardener and landscaper who learned to build crevice gardens directly from one of its innovators, Zdeněk Zvolánek, of the Czech Republic who contributes the Foreword.

For some years since I first learned that KS and PS were working on a book on crevice gardens I have been looking forward with anticipation to its arrival. At this point I must declare my interest that both authors are friends of mine so I know the reason we have had to wait has been because of the amount of research, fact finding and pictures the authors were accumulating. Gathering all that information involved visiting and photographing natural landscapes as well as examples of crevice gardens across the world especially Czechia - for completeness they also delved into history taking us back to the earliest mention of the crevice garden in 1870. All their work has resulted in a comprehensive exploration and explanation of the science, art and style of the crevice garden. The book describes how to build a crevice garden but equally important to me are the texts and illustrations explaining why crevices work for such a wide range of plants from the mountains, deserts and coastlines of the world.

The book guides the reader through the step by step process of the crevice garden from location, orientation, the amount of materials required, onto construction - explaining, through their understanding of soil science and micro environments, how such formations of closely placed rocks helps the resilience of plants enabling them to tolerate a wide range of gardens and climates.

Notwithstanding the vast hands-on experience of the authors, in the chapter on Case Studies, they have drawn together some actual examples illustrating crevice gardens in private and public gardens across a variety of climates which demonstrate crevices of all sizes from small containers though an array of sizes displaying a wide range of styles and rock types from natural stone to concrete including work done by other exponents, many from the Czech Republic, such as their mentor and teacher Zdeněk Zvolánek.

An illustrated A-Z recommending a range of 250 plants gives the reader suggestions appropriate for most garden climates from summer moist, through dry, to cacti and succulents suitable for deserts.

Once you have built your crevice the ‘living with a crevice garden’ chapter gives tips on long term care and maintenance covering topics such as labels, irrigation, fertilising, weeds and propagation.

Crevice gardens are very appropriate in our climate conscious world helping gardeners address environmental concerns, beyond conservation of rare plants, by re-using waste materials such as concrete, creating wildlife habitats and making permeable, plant-friendly structures which should have a place in even the smallest of gardens.

With the exception of the title and chapter pages every spread has photographs and /or detailed paintings by KS alongside the explanatory text. The reader could learn to build a crevice garden from the images alone but reading the very understandable text will explain the science and horticultural principles that make them successful. As well as the authors I will congratulate the Designers, Studio Noel, and Publisher, Filbert Press, for delivering such an attractive well laid out illustrated book that inspires, guides and educates the reader in a logical way from the very question of what makes a crevice garden through all the practicalities of constructing, planting then long term care of these fascinating creations.

As well as injecting the book with their own passion and international experience of building many crevice beds in private and public garden the authors ‘invite you to build upon and explore what has gone before’. I recommend this book: it will act as a reference, a guide and an inspiration to anyone who wants to rock into the world of the crevice garden.





The above selection of images are just a sample of the clear attractive layout of the book.



The book shows crevice gardens of all sizes and we have made good use of this style across the garden such as this tiny section of crevice used to resolve an ugly joint between two troughs that form the edges to a raised bed



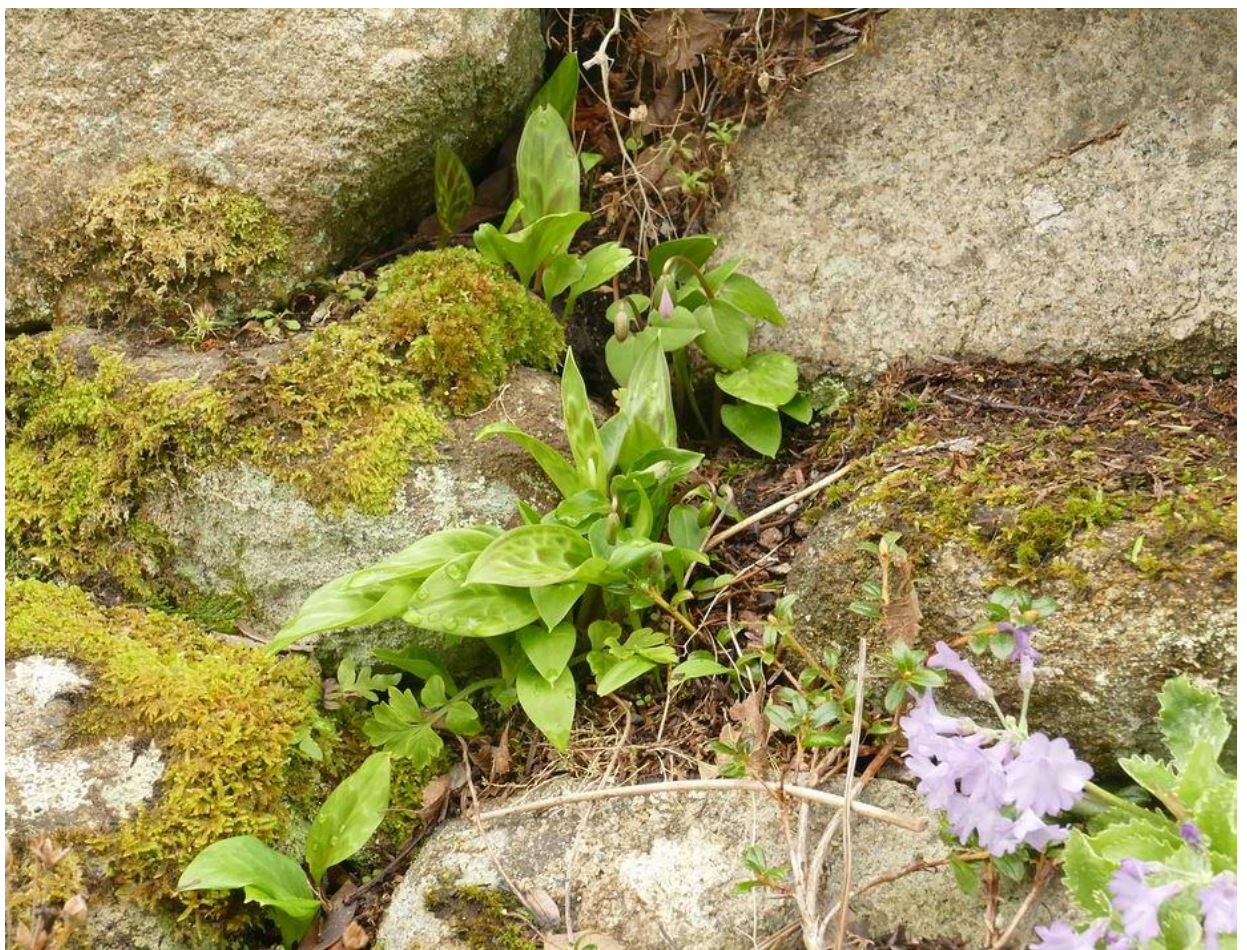
A number of troughs are positioned to form some of the edges of this raised bed.



Erythronium may not spring to mind when you are planting a crevice garden but again I was guided by nature when some seed fell into one of the gaps in the wall. I added a helping hand scattering seed into more cracks and now we have some self-seeding colonies of erythroniums growing in the walls as well as above and below them.



Erythronium are self-seeding and growing in the crevices of this rock wall.



Erythronium and **(Pseudo)Trillium rivale** growing in the crevices of the vertical wall.





One of my long term projects is to get more plants growing in this section of wall I had to rebuild a few years ago, A group of Erythronium can be seen on a ledge towards the left see detail below.





**(Pseudo)Trillium rivale**



Regular readers will be familiar with the colony of **(Pseudo)Trillium rivale** that I have been establishing in this wall and each year it just gets better –watch for a lot more pictures as the flowers open in the coming weeks.....