

Discussion Weekend Polmont 2010



This weekend is about friends, new ones and old ones, talks on plants known and unknown, food and drink and plants in the show. Most of all this is a social occasion.



The show always has fewer entries than our spring shows but there are always interesting things to see. This year as last year no Forrest medal was awarded because although there were lots of nice plants, none was outstanding. I joked that the other interpretation was that they were all equally meritorious and you couldn't choose between them. Why no star plant? Funny Season! Too hot in June! Too wet in August! Exhibitors went on holiday at the wrong time! They were better last week! The reasons go on and on but this uncertainty is one of the challenges in rock gardening. It's not like vegetables or fruit where you can grow lots of the same thing and choose your best. Most of our exhibitors have only one or two pans of any species or variety.

The trophies were split two ways between Stan da Prato and Sandy Leven, two each! Stan won the Mary Bowe Trophy for Most Points in Section I and the J.L.Mowat trophy for Best Conifer. Sandy won The East Lothian Trophy

[Class 1] and The Jim Lever Trophy for Best Cyclamen [C.mirabile].

Aberconwy Nursery's superb display was awarded an SRGC Gold Medal. Star plants in the display were Gaultheria Pearls, Aeschynanthus buxifolius, several Gentians and a vivid red Cornus Canadensis.



Gaultheria 'Pearls'



Aeschynanthus buxifolius

Aeschynanthus buxifolius is an evergreen shrub with startling vermillion flowers, which look like a cross between a Fuchsia and a Penstemon. It grows in China; is a most unlikely looking member of the Gesneriaceae family [Ramondas etc]; has the common name Lipstick Plant; Its Greek roots translate as Shame Flower [*aishyne* shame & *anthos* flower because of its intense red flowers which are 'red with shame'] I love these details. It needs to be kept frost free if grown up here in Scotland. The Levers' Aberconwy Nursery is in the relatively tropical North West part of Wales.

Every two years the discussion weekend changes its venue and is hosted by a different group of the SRGC. This means we need a succession of show secretaries as the weekend progresses. Next year 3 groups will get together to host us in Dumfries. This year's show secretary Willie Campbell [left] showed next year's, Jennifer Watson 'the ropes'. Here they are joined by Show Steward Chip Lima of the Stirling Group.



The foliage plants split it two groups those with red foliage and those with silver.



Red First



Aruncus aethusifolius. This is a great wee plant with much larger cousins in the herbaceous border. It starts into growth in early summer forming a bright green feathery dome later topped by wee Astilbe like flowers. In September it turns a mixture of autumnal shades climaxing in this fabulous fiery red. Then one morning it will all have blown away for another year.



Gaultheria procumbens is an ericaceous shrub which takes on these red tones in autumn, usually accompanied by red berries.

'Harlequin' Foliage



Coprosma 'Evening Glow' looks like this all year round. Multicoloured shiny leaves. Coprosmas are Australian plants and can't take much frost. Judicial pruning keeps them in shape.



Solanum pseudocapsicum variegatum. This either presses all your buttons for foliage and berries or it doesn't. One thing about it is that in both cases it shows no restraint. A bright stunner at any show guaranteed to light up the benches and to provoke discussion!

Silver Foliage *Celmisia longifolia*



These four *Celmisias* - *longifolia*, *semicordata*, *hectori* & *hookeri* - illustrate just how good the genus is for providing foliage effect in the garden as well as on the show bench. During the lectures Dave Toole from New Zealand gave us two talks on New Zealand. His slides showed many of these fabulous plants in flower and in situ. He was pleased to see so many NZ friends in the show. *Helichrysum* species have developed similar forma and colours to *Celmisias*.



Helichrysum 'Korma'



Helichrysum basalticum from Natal



Raoulia australis a wee lamb of a vegetable sheep which can be managed outdoors in a trough in Aberdeen, perhaps it would benefit from a pane to help it cope with winter wet. I find it hard to remember that Raoulias are members of the Asteraceae i.e. they are daisies. Dave in his lectures showed photos of large rock hard cushions in the Southern Alps. It's nice when talks and show come together.



Cotyledon orbiculare has visited several shows over the last couple of years. It provokes the question, 'What is foliage?' Several years ago, at a Morecambe show the judges decided that my Maihuenia poeppigii, a spiny Euphorbia type thing, had stems and spines but no foliage. I am glad our judges today are more liberal in their interpretations of the rules. It's a wonderful thing which you have to resist touching.



Before leaving the foliage plants, how about the colour of this Cornus canadensis from Aberconwy? And last although not shown for foliage but in the 'New,Rare,Difficult' class there was this Nototriche macleanii from 14-15000 ft in the Northern Andes. Notes say it is hardy down to -4C.





The judges in 'action'. Fred Hunt, Brian Mathew & Keith Lever. How appropriate that we had a good entry of Crocus and colchicum. We had a wee problem with the new classification of bulbs. Scilla & Sternbergia are no longer in Liliaceae but are now in Asparagaceae! No-one wanted them to be 'NAS'ed so a new class for Asparagaceae was established with three entries.



Crocus hadriaticus Best Plant in Section II - Ian Steele



Unopened Crocus banaticus

