

International Rock Gardener

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As October winds sweep around the world we feel blown from subject to subject this month. ZZ shares some plant snippets with us, abetted by [John Mitchell](#), who is alpinist supervisor at the RBGE, SRGC Edinburgh Group Convenor and Chairman of the [Meconopsis Group](#). John will be one of the speakers at the [AGS conference](#) in November 2014. We are happy to introduce a new face to IRG, Robbie Blackhall-Miles, who is propagator at [Crûg Farm Plants](#) in North Wales and blogs for '[Guardian Gardening](#)' where he encourages people to try growing something new and different. On [his website](#) he writes about the plants growing in his 'backyard botanic garden'; a collection of early evolutionary plants and horticultural oddities. He

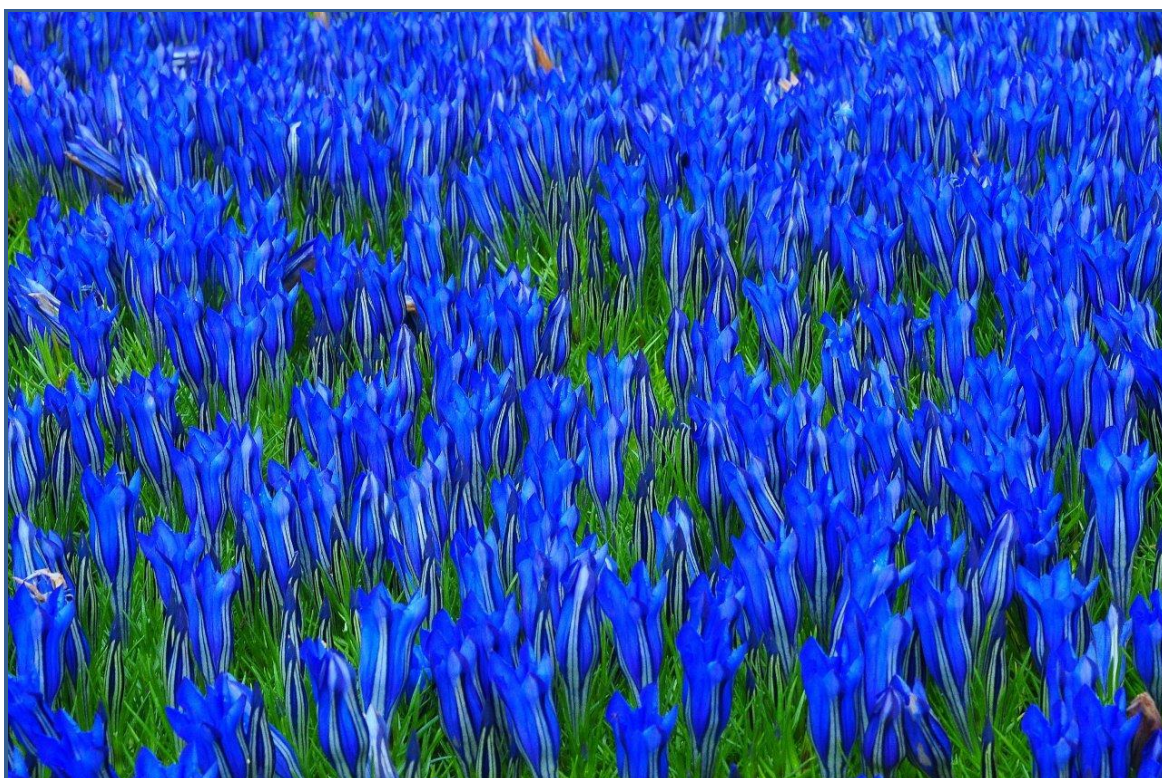
is becoming renowned for succeeding with difficult to grow plant species and is particularly interested in Proteaceae, Ericaceae, Cycads and Ferns. Robbie is a Fellow of [The Linnean Society Of London](#) – the world's premier society for the study of natural history, and is Chairman of the [Australasian Plant Society](#) in Great Britain. This man is a breath of fresh air – you might care to “meet” him via [this video](#) from the recent Great Dixter Plant Fair.

Cover photo: *Ranunculus lyallii* photographed in South Island New Zealand by J.I.Young.

---Mountains in the Gardens---

The Basic Charm of “The Botanics” by Zdeněk Zvolánek

It is a blessing to have a fresh letter from an old friend, it is a pleasure if the letter contains a heartbreakingly beautiful picture and it is always great, if there is some memory of the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh, which is so dear for me. Recently it happened that a letter with the above mentioned content came to me. That old friend is “Mr. Writer”, Robert Rolfe and the picture is a portrait of *Gentiana ternifolia* ‘Cangshan’ forming a mini-tsunami in “The Botanics” or RBGE, just last month; September 2014. Now when I am personally satisfied, it is my duty to make some remarks to the threefold content of the letter.



1/ Robert Rolfe from Nottingham is surely the most ubiquitous of garden reporters. I see him as a five star hummingbird pollinating every valuable plant in British gardens and shows. Sometimes Robert migrates to the Andes or Turkey and sees them and the best samples of their flora from a taxi. He

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speaks, moves and writes **fast** (a little bit too speedy for innocent foreigners), his life is indeed not a sweet slow silent film of a horticultural hero, it is a good action movie. It is clear that my friend is so busy as the Associate Editor of The Alpine Gardener that we cannot have the pleasure to read in the IRG his witty remarks about September flowers in Scotland. But in connection with The Botanics he kindly wrote me: *“As the attached snap of the gentian confirms, I was up at Edinburgh RBG yesterday, meeting John (Mitchell) for lunch, but before and afterwards wandering round the garden, taking photographs of the plantings on a nigh-perfect day. A long day too, for I set off at 5 a.m., arriving back here just before midnight. In London and then at the AGS Show this weekend, so thank heavens that we had rain here overnight, which at least saves me from watering duties. Time to return to the slog - at least I've a good title for the article, which I came up with while on the train somewhere near Berwick-on-Tweed, admiring a spectacular sunset and drinking a decent-sized glass of cherry brandy. Trust all is well with you, Robert.”*



Gentiana ternifolia 'Cangshan' in the woodland at [RBGE](#)



Left: Robert Rolfe with Lynn Bezzant at the SRGC “[early bulb day](#)” in 2010. Photo - [Sandy Leven](#).

2/ *Gentiana ternifolia* Franch. was described in 1884 (Abbé Delavay found it in 1882). After that it was lost in nature in Yunnan for nearly 100 years. The introduction of this prostrate perennial was made by Sino-British Expedition to China in 1981, just when I spent a week in the Botanics under the friendly care of [Alf Evans](#) and [Ron McBeath](#). Generally *G. ternifolia* has linear, narrowly white-marginate leaves, 3-verticillate, vaginate. Stems are decumbent, up to 80mm long. Flowers are solitary and sessile. Calyx is narrowly campanulate 8-17mm long; corolla is blue with violet-purple stripes. The habit of this lover of

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moist Chinese meadows (3200-4100m) is well illustrated in the drawing of Jarmila Haldová. Her picture makes a strong appeal to people to wish to own this species.



From the imported material one plant with larger flowers in deep sky blue colour was selected and named 'Cangshan' (the old collectors' name for the ridge above Dali). This cultivar was planted in 1990 into a woodland border with cool and wet humus rich substrate. The health and vigour of this clone is well seen in the Robert Rolfe's photograph. When we try to get fine picture of the true 'Cangshan' on-line, we are surprised that some silly nurseries present for it a picture of some nice autumn Gentian but with the wrong pale blue colour. So in this way The Botanics plays the correct role of preserving the original colour and shape of the important clone.

3/ A sweet rhythmic and melodic song, [Memories are made of this](#) from 1955, is in my mind when I remember my four visits to this gently formed botanic garden in Edinburgh. I see the short green grasses surrounding a large rock garden, lovely dwarf botanic rhododendrons, mosaics of heathers, tens of *Primula whitei* in Ron's hands and nice pack of troughs around exquisite alpines in the wooden alpine house and solid frames filled with happy plants in pots. Dozens of plump *Petrophytum hendersonii* in vertical stone-walls under a deep raised bed is firmly fixed for ever in my mind. How

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many rock gardeners abroad can see this paradise of horticulture? I think that with my meagre pension I can't do another long pilgrimage to this church of flowers. So I pray for some Scottish angel coming down the hill with camera and a digital typewriter [to inform us regularly](#) about new hardy rock garden plants in new tufa walls, boulders and in the multi-crevice bed there in the Botanic. But, if possible, only showing the plants that will thrive in our humble continental weather!
Z.Z.



Left: close-up of *Gentiana* 'Cangshan' - photo John Mitchell.

The [accession record](#) of *Gentiana ternifolia* 'Cangshan' at the RBGE is available online.

(SBEC1053, Collection date 21 May 1981)

An article: "Two new autumn flowering gentians - possibly ascribed to *Gentiana ternifolia*" by I. Christie and I.H.

McNaughton is available [in 'The Rock Garden' June 1989](#)

John Mitchell shares these comments on the SBEC expedition:

In 1981 The Sino British Expedition to China (SBEC) was the first British expedition to set foot in China since the Cultural Revolution. The group leader was Bob Mitchell: other members were Sir Peter Hutchinson, Roy Lancaster VMH,

Peter Cox and Dr David Chamberlain and this was a joint collaboration with botanists from the Kunming Institute in Yunnan.



The SBEC botanists on the trail - from an original RBGE slide.

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More photos of the SBEC expedition members 1981 - photos from RBGE archives.



The main area they were going to explore was the Cangshan in Dali. I think they spent about 3 weeks exploring different valleys along the length of the mountain range. Having such a diverse group of people meant that they had different people targeting certain groups of plants. Peter Cox and David Chamberlain, experts in rhododendrons and Bob Mitchell, Peter Hutchinson and Roy Lancaster looking at trees, shrubs, herbaceous and alpine plants, which made an excellent grouping.



Many of the collections made by SBEC can be found growing in many gardens across the world. In Edinburgh Botanic Garden we still grow many of the collections made back in 1981: several of which are outstanding in the new woodland garden. *Gentiana ternifolia* 'Cangshan' and *G. ternifolia* 'Dali' are two good forms: 'Cangshan' is the dark blue flowered form and is the more vigorous of the two clones making large carpets which are stunning this time of year.

G. ternifolia 'Dali' is a more delicate light blue and is not as vigorous as 'Cangshan'. Both plants do well in the woodland garden and benefit like all Gentians from frequent lifting and splitting, in spring time, down to individual thongs.

Gentiana ternifolia 'Dali' - photo by [Todd Boland](#) Research Horticulturist at [MUN Botanical Garden](#), St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada.

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Two other SBEC collections which warrant a mention are *Paris polyphylla* var. *alba* H.Li & R.J.Mitchell (sometimes seen called *P. yunnanensis*) and *P. polyphylla* var. *thibetica* Franch. which grows to about 70cm and has a more open appearance to it than *Paris polyphylla* var. *alba* which is a smaller, more compact species, growing to 30cm. Once it is established it will form large swathes in your garden. Like all *Paris* in spring the flowers are magnificent and in the autumn time you get the lovely deep red berries spilling out of the seed capsule. Propagation of this species is better from splitting the plant but also seed can be sown. Seed sometimes takes a while to germinate and the whole process can take a long time so be patient and you will reap the rewards.



Above: *Paris polyphylla* var. *alba* Below: *P. polyphylla* var. *thibetica* Photos - John Mitchell



We must be grateful to this expedition for the great collection of material brought back for botanic gardens to grow and most importantly for making it possible for future expeditions to this wonderful country. J.M.



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---Ingenuity in the Garden---

Making the most of what you have got! By Robbie Blackhall-Miles



My name is **Robbie Blackhall-Miles** and I admit I am a plant addict.

What's worse is that the plants which I like to try to grow are always those considered 'difficult in cultivation' or 'suitable only for experienced growers' or, in other words, 'Good luck 'cause you haven't a hope in hell of keeping it alive'.

Even worse than that is that I live in a terraced house with a terraced house sized back garden. There is however one thing in my favour: I have a very strong understanding of ecology and just what makes plants tick. Hence, I am in a good position to really make the most of what I have got.

The garden mostly houses a collection of plants that have a fossil record that predates the extinction of the dinosaurs. We have dug out a large section of it and

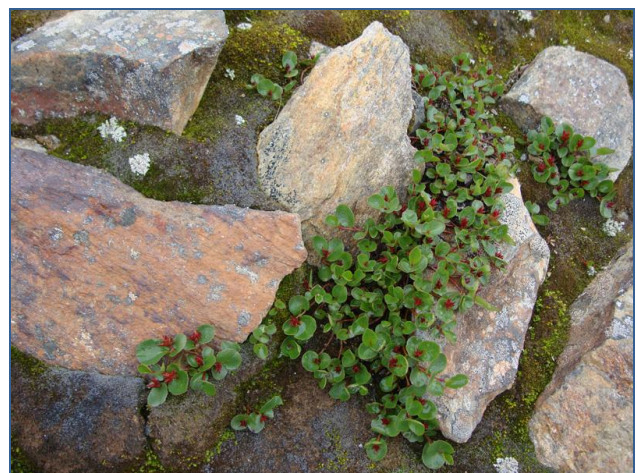
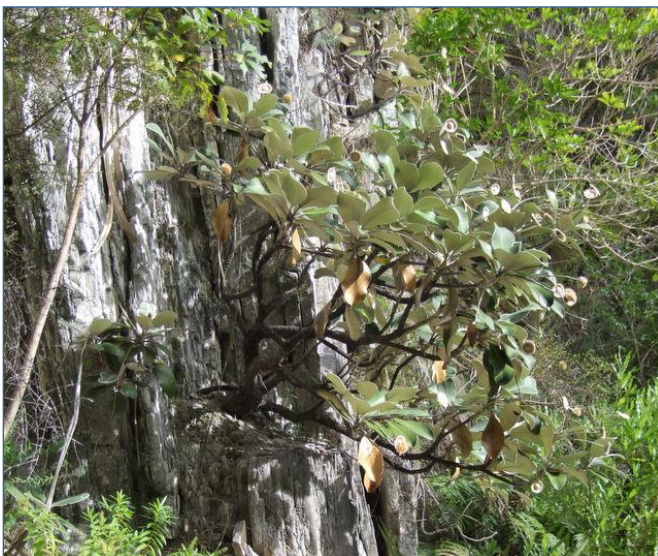
back filled it with gravel and sand so that we can grow Proteaceae and we put tonnes of leaf litter into another section so that we could emulate the floor of a temperate rainforest. It is however the other stuff I grow which I think you may be interested in. The problem is that once the fossil plants had taken over the majority of the garden there wasn't room for much else. I decided that there was only one thing for it and that was to start gardening the otherwise unused spaces like the top of the shed and under the decking.

Left: Under construction, 2011, photo R.B-M.

The shed is a standard 8' x 8' (244cms x 244cms) shed bought ready-made from a local outdoor buildings retailer. What makes it different is that I have put a huge amount of effort into adding extra support in its roof so that I can grow alpinines on the top.

The actual structure on the top of the roof is made of a **wooden grid system** sitting on a foam protection layer and a pond liner that makes things watertight and stops the roots of the plants from growing through into the roof. The pitch of the roof is really too great for a normal green roof and the soil depth is just 5cms. Anyone would think it impossible to grow anything on it. It is however these two factors that have benefited me.

Below: *Pachystegia insignis* pictured in the Sawcut gorge New Zealand by Doug Logan. Below right: *Salix herbacea* in the [Sarek area of northern Sweden](#), photo by Ashley Allshire.



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I only garden one side of the roof as the other is inaccessible. The top area of the roof, near the apex, is the driest and perfect for growing plants that like really harsh free draining conditions like *Pachystegia insignis* and *Salix herbacea*.

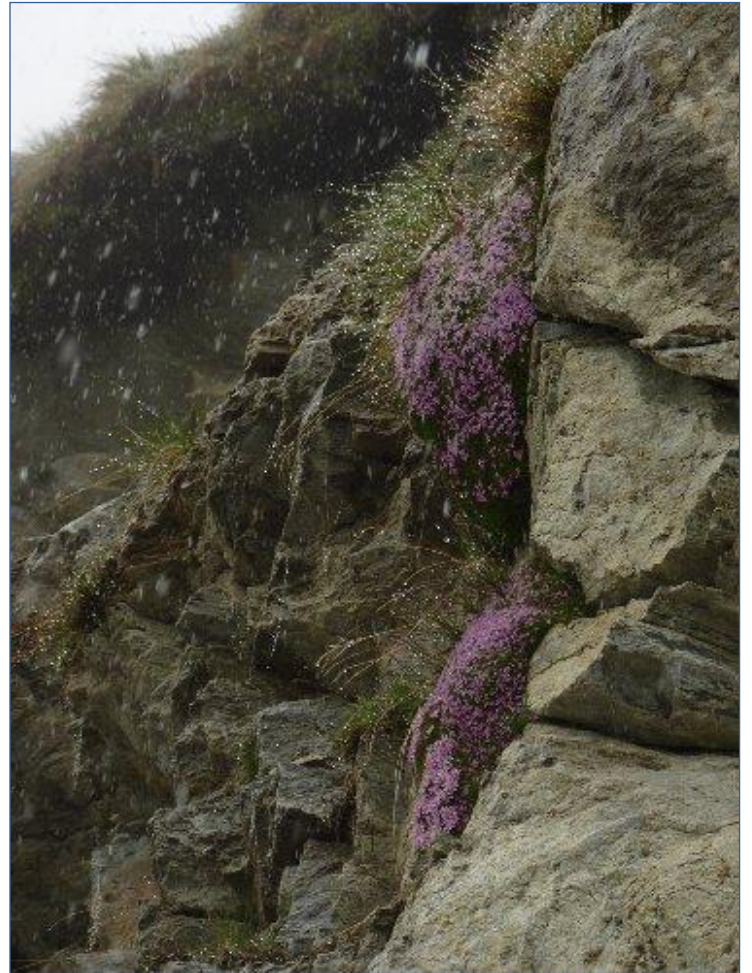
It's also an area where my *Huperzia selago* (Fir clubmoss) does well. Living in Snowdonia we have between 1500 and 3000mm of rain a year and hence the top of the roof very rarely goes without water, the water, however, doesn't hang around for long.



Overview of the shed roof - showing the wooden grid system, photo R.B-M.

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Next down the grid, in the middle of the roof, is where I grow native sub-arctic alpines like ***Saxifraga oppositifolia*** (Purple saxifrage) and ***Silene acaulis*** (Moss campion). It's in this section that I also grow my *Celmisia* collection. Not quite so exposed and with slightly deeper soil this area also holds onto its moisture a bit better. The club mosses grow here too but this time it is *Lycopodium clavatum* (Stag's-horn clubmoss) that's doing well.



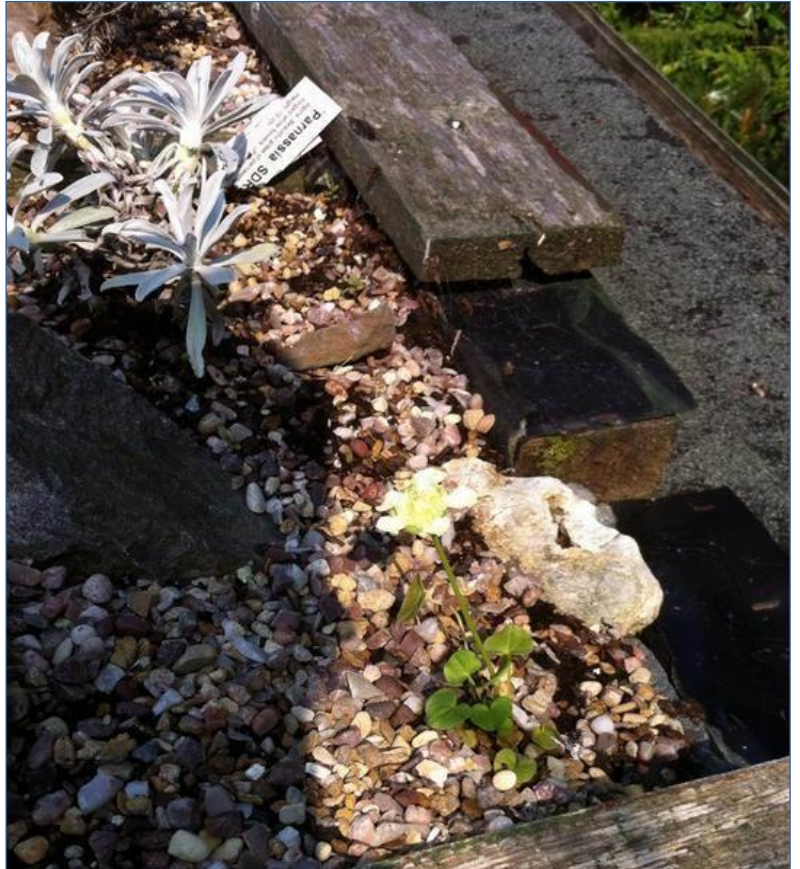
Pictured by Tony Goode in Switzerland in less than perfect weather, *Saxifraga oppositifolia*, above left and *Silene acaulis*, above right.



Above left: *Saxifraga oppositifolia* and right: *Silene acaulis*, in the Dolomites, photos by Cliff Booker.

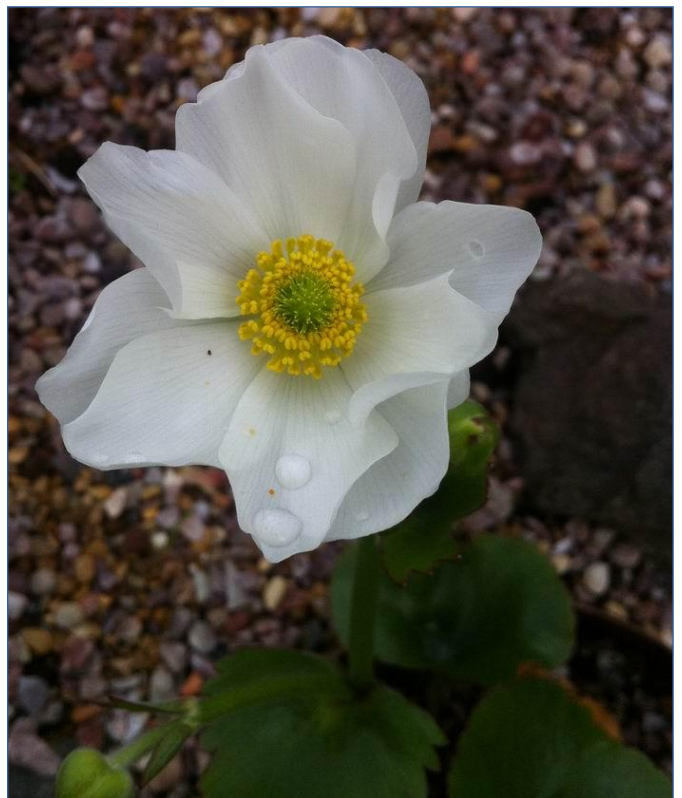
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It's the bottom of the grid that I love the best though. The channel that all the water from the rest of the roof flows along makes for a unique habitat akin to that of a seepage line in rock or a small rivulet. It's in this area that I grow *Parnassia*. Two varieties of *Parnassia palustris*, *Parnassia grandiflora* and a *Parnassia sp.* from China that remains unnamed. It's also the perfect spot to grow a *Ranunculus lyallii* (Mount Cook Lily) emulating its bright, exposed alpine habitat with its feet in cool water.



Parnassia sp. flower shown from above and growing on the corner of the roof, right, with a little silver *Celmisia* behind.

Below left: Lower grid area of the shed roof – with *Ranunculus lyallii* flowering, photos by R.B-M.



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Left: Mt. Cook, the New Zealand mountain which gives *R. lyallii* its common name – photo Doug Logan
Above right: Cliff Booker photographing *R. lyallii* – pictured by the seedsman Steve Newall.



The shed roof is accessed from a raised deck that allows us to view the plants on it easily. Where the water drips off the roof I keep pots of things like *Pentachondra pumila* (left, photo by David Lyttle, New Zealand) and *Pilularia globulifera*.

We also have a plant of *Olearia semidentata* here, another that likes its roots in a bog but its leaves exposed. Under the steps onto the deck we grow *Myosotidium hortensia* (Chatham island forget-me-nots) and *Mitraria coccinea* (Chilean mitre): the steps above them act as shade and allow us to enclose the area in the worst winter weather.



Olearia semidentata – photo from the wild by David Lyttle and *Myosotidium hortensia* in cultivation – photo Ashley Allshire, Ireland.

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Mitraria coccinea - the Chilean gesneriad grown by Robbie under the decking by his shed - pictured here grown in Germany by Gerd Knoche.



Above right: *Achlys triphylla*, with its trifoliate leaves and small white flower spikes, shown in the garden of seed expert Kristl Walek in Canada.



Pyrola is another genus grown by Robbie under his deck – these are shown in habitat with *Equisetum* and ferns in Oregon, photo by Tony Willis, from the SRGC Forum.

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Under the deck, photo R.B-M.

It's under the deck that for me the real magic happens.

This is where I keep my 'Myco beds', deep beds of leaf mould piled on top of large rotting logs; a habitat perfect for (mycorrhizal) fungi to grow and prosper. It's because of these fungi that I am successful growing a whole range of woodland perennials that otherwise prove quite difficult. ***Achlys triphylla***, ***Asarum*** and ***Pyrola*** do well in the cool shade alongside my grandmother's 50 year old aspidistra and a whole range of other bits and bobs. I also grow *Petrocosmea* under the deck in a wall made of old *Cyathea* tree fern logs, the water dripping through the decking but never hanging around long enough to let them rot.

Every inch of spare space has been utilised in the garden each plant grown in its own individual micro climate. Admittedly some things haven't worked for me but in general the idea of either reconstructing the natural conditions the plants require to grow or being able to see the right little spot to squeeze a plant into works. It's all about making the most of what you have got.

R.B-M.

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---Plant Portrait---

Cleaning one small *Daphne* by Zdeněk Zvolánek

For twenty long years I have grown and propagated a dwarf form of *Daphne arbuscula*, which originated in a base of a recycled ash urn which looked like a shallow concrete trough. The urn was in the northern slope of an allotment garden in the Prague district of Žižkov. This allotment is quite famous as the steep rock garden of the popular Czech collector Josef Jurášek. Josef actually collected this smallest form of that paleoendemic species in its homeland of Muran Hills in Slovakia and propagated it for long period (20 years); first - just as *D. arbuscula* without a clonal name, later he and his friends started calling it 'Koryto' ('Trough' in English), but this practical but dull cultivar name was not published or validly described.



Daphne arbuscula 'Star of Zizkov'

This small clone is valuable among the many common forms, which are larger in all parts (with the dry diet of my cultivation in Karlík they are 15cm tall). I felt the need to give a proper name to this pretty small shrub, which has been 'nailed' in my vertical wall for ten years and retains a size of 25cm across. One illustration of the clone is from the wall (in the end of September - after a few bad seasons, full of torturing), second is blooming plant in open soil, which was lost because of urinating of male cat or male dog, hot and wet weather together, high lime in watering or just some kind of noble disease or unknown psychiatric problem.

I hesitate, in the similar way as would dear Master Farrer, to use a mere workaday name for such a star of the rock garden, so I invented the clonal name 'Star of Zizkov', celebrating the well-known nippy collector JJ, the quarter of Prague with highest amount of pubs and the place of Josef's rock garden and his former home.

My young friend (a collector and propagator of *Daphnes*) Jiří Papoušek agreed with my proposed name ***Daphne arbuscula* 'Star of Zizkov'** and distributed this dwarf clone abroad, so at present this clone is in gentle hands of Robin White, Cyril Lafong and other lovers of *Daphnes* under the above mentioned name.



Daphne 'Star of Zizkov' plant, on a vertical wall in September in ZZ's 'Beauty Slope'

Right: A cluster of leaves on 'Star of Zizkov'

Far right: the flowers



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Daphne arbuscula 'Star of Zizkov' in a dry spot in a wall in the Beauty Slope.



For the benefit of horticulture I will use the digital altar of The IRG for a short description of this plant in cultivation, as I used ['The Rock Garden'](#) to describe *Daphne cneorum* var. *pygmaea* 'Czech Song' (left).

Daphne arbuscula 'Star of Zizkov':
The small leaves (12 x 2mm) are glossy green, forming clusters (30mm in diameter) towards the apex of the stem (young stems are reddish, old are gray). Older plants are 7-12cm high and have a rather lax habit. The lilac-pink flowers (15mm in diameter) are produced without hesitation (in warm sunny conditions).

There is a possibility that this clone is very similar to the material which was exported to England by Harry Jans from the nursery of Mrs. Marie Sládková with the incorrect name Sladhova (see description of *Daphne arbuscula* ex **Sladhova** by Robin White).

In the end of my cleaning effort I must stress that the forms of Slovak Daphne are changing their character with help of climate, richness and pH of soil, solar exposure, amount of watering and feeding. With my best wishes for correct labelling!

Z.Z.