VANCOUVER ISLAND ROCK & ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY

The Oldest Rock and Alpine Gardening club in North America

103rd Year, Newsletter Number 3

Next VIRAGS Meeting Tuesday, April 9, 7:30 PM

In-Person and On-Line

Barbara and Bella Seiden

Flora of the Turkish Silk Road

VIRAGS is a club for plant lovers with special interest in alpine, bog and woodland plants.

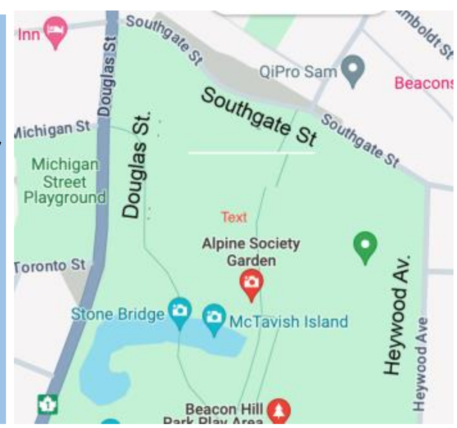
VIRAGS in-person/Teams meetings are at 7:30 on the second Tuesday of the month from March to November at Lambrick Park Church, 1780 Feltham Rd. Victoria, BC. Meetings in December-February are on-line only.

Notes from the Executive

- There have been **86 members** pay their dues for the year. Membership cards will be available at the members table at monthly meetings.
- If you have plants for the **Spring Show plant sale** that you would like to donate for the club to sell, please contact Carmen Varcoe (cmvarcoe@shaw.ca).
- We still need items for the **Silent Auction Table**. If you have something in good to excellent condition that you think might fit, please contact Donna Humphries or Louise Potvin (donna.humphries@virags.com; louise.potvin@virags. com).
- We need a **volunteer** to coordinate the **coffee and tea** that we usually have at the end of each monthly meeting. If you think you would like to help, please let a member of the executive know.

Garden in the Park

Volunteers meet every Friday from 10:00 to Noon at GITP. New volunteers are always welcome Contact Donna Humphries (donna.humphries@virags.com)



VANCOUVER ISLAND ROCK AND ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY PRESENTS

FLORA OF THE TURKISH SILK ROAD

A TALK BY BARBARA COOPER & BELLA SEIDEN

Barbara Cooper and Bella Seiden have been gardening in Toronto for over 25 years. They have a plant collector's garden in an urban setting, consisting of a tufa garden, crevice and rock garden as well as perennial beds. They share an interest in seeing plants in their natural habitat and have traveled several times to South America, South Africa, and Turkey. They are members of the Ontario Rock Garden and Hardy Plant Society.

Turkey is a country of rich physical and ancient cultural diversity straddling Europe and Asia. Bella and Barbara's trip to Turkey in the spring of 2019 was an adventure with many surprises and much beauty. As they travelled along parts of the ancient Silk Road they saw mountains, volcanoes, steppe, beautiful rich valleys, rivers and lakes. Each of these areas is home to incredible flora, much of it endemic. Their presentation will offer some of the highlights of this trip.

7:30 APRIL 9 @ LAMBRICK PARK CHURCH
1780 FELTHAM RD, VICTORIA BC
ZOOM LINK VIA EMAIL

For info visit www.virags.com

Facebook- @vancouver island rock and alpine garden society

Instagram- @virags_pics

VIRAGS, 3930 St. Peter's Road, Victoria, BC V8P 2J8

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Janice Currie
Erik Fleischer
Elizabeth Grant
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@VIRAGS – President's Blog

Changing names

For many gardeners a name is a means of recalling an image, a distinguishing feature, or details of a plant's cultivation. Plant names are essential for any form of meaningful communication, and it is quite natural that we become attached to names. It is a familiar lament of gardeners that the name of a favourite plants has been changed seemingly without reason.

Common names of plants are idiosyncratic and vary from place to place and person to person. Although often descriptive, the variability and multiple names for the same plant is confusing. It is a change in the Latin name of a plant that seems to rankle most. Botanical names are governed by strict rules, an International Code of Nomenclature. The most important aspect of these rules relates to priority. The oldest name has priority when there is any form of duplication.

Taxonomists classify plants based on their evolutionary relationships. A genus is comprised of descendants of a common ancestral species—and only species descended from that ancestor. As this ancestry is impossible to fully know, botanists use morphological and genetic differences to infer phylogeny. Morphological features have been used for centuries and were the basis for all phylogenies until DNA sequencing became possible. Differences in the sequence of nucleotides in DNA provides a quantifiable means of determining kinship. As DNA sequence data comes available, it is being used to correct phylogenies originally based on morphology alone. Currently, the most common reason for the name of a plant to change is the addition of DNA sequence data that alters our understanding of how plants are related.

Plants of the much-loved genus, *Dodecatheon,* are now in the genus *Primula*. This was one of the first wildflower names I learned; flower of the 12 Greek gods, a poetic name that rolls off the tongue. Mast and Reveal (2007 Brittonia, 59;79-82) provide a convincing summary of DNA sequence data and morphological data that indicates the older name *Primula* has priority and does away with the genus *Dodecatheon*. I understand why this change is necessary, but it is the loss of a familiar name that is difficult. Pity those interested in lilies! Molecular phylogenies have dispersed members of the lily family to several different families and orders. Changing a plant's name is a complex process and is never done without a reason, yet gardeners often believe a capricious taxonomist is involved, or that it is a matter of opinion. Most gardeners do not understand the primacy of phylogeny, and few appreciate how science is a process that constantly revises and amends. However arbitrary it may seem; name changes are a necessary part of our system of plant names. We need to look upon name changes as a sign of having a better understanding of the origins and relationships of the plants we love.

Robert Burke

Plant Profile - *Eriogonum*

- *Paul Spriggs*

The *Eriogonums*, also known as alpine buckwheats of the knotweed family (Polygonaceae), are a large and diverse genus of roughly 250 species, hailing predominately from dry and stony regions of Western North America. Although some can get quite large, (*E. fasculatum* gets almost 10 ft across!), It is the tiny mat and bun forming species that captivate crevice gardeners. The best ones are tightly congested, often with grey leaves and creamy yellow, white, pink or red flowers rising in perfect proportion, resulting in the most charming little package of quaintness. Easy to grow from seed, although any given species can be highly variable so pick out the best ones and ditch the rest. The biggest enemy to successful cultivation of these mini -buckwheats is overwatering, especially during their summer dormant period, so position them in the driest, hottest, and most sun-baked parts of the rock garden. That said, many seem to tolerate our wet winters without any problem provided they get the perfect drainage they require. Although there are so many suitable species here are my favourites. *E. umbellatum* has the widest range of the many species and consequently, has many forms with *E. umbellatum var. porteri*, from Utah, being one of the most sought after. It features bright yellow flowers over a bun-forming plant whose foliage turns red in the winter. *E. ovalifolium var. nivale*, is also one of the very best and occurs close to home, on the Olympic Mountains, and was seen all along the Obstruction Point Rd. during last year's VIRAGS field trip. It features cream-coloured flowers which fade to red-rust over a grey mat of leaves. *E. thymoides* occurs in Washington State on the eastern side of the Cascades and in the Wenatchee mountains. As the name suggests, it resembles a miniature thyme plant. This past summer, I came across a species in the Waterton area of the Rocky Mountains that I can't wait to try: *E. androsaceum*. It almost resembles a bun forming *Androsace* so how could you go wrong? Fortunately, I acquired seeds of this from a Calgary rock gardener, which are germinating as I write this!! Interestingly no *Eriogonums* occur on Vancouver Island, likely because most areas of the Island are simply not dry enough.

E. umbellatum var. porteri, (left) is one of the most sought after members of this popular genus. *E. ovalifolium var. nivale* (right) is another must-have plant with a local connection

Eriogonum thymoides occurs in Eastern Washington and the Wenatchee mountains and *E. androsaceum* is found in the high northern Rocky Mountains in southern Alberta and northwestern Montana . Both should do well in Vancouver Island rock gardens.

Aspidistra and *Clivia* in the Home

- *Joe Harvey*

Homes where there is no garden, are becoming the norm. This leaves frustrated gardeners dreaming of plants. But plants that do well in a garden are completely different from the ones that survive the conditions indoors. The question then becomes, can we select plants that from their natural habitats and enable them to fit into human accommodations? I take two examples of plants that fit the ecological conditions of houses at their time in history. First the *Aspidistra* in Victorian England and up to World War II, followed by *Clivia* in modern condominiums.

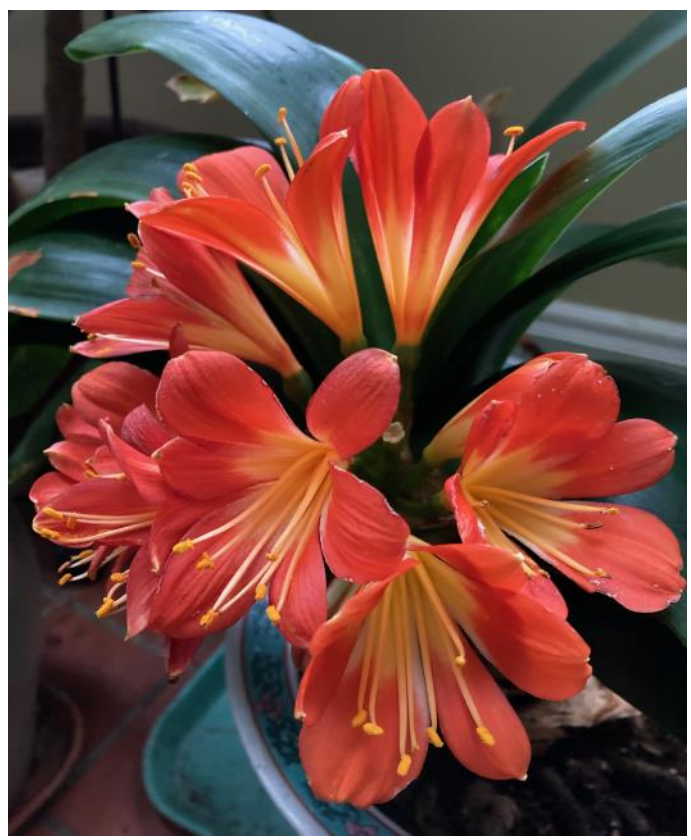
I am peculiarly qualified to write about the early period because I had a long-lived grandmother who refused to change her Victorian era home with the sole exception of having a flush toilet – in the backyard of course! This was in the late 1930's. Other than the only running water was a single cold water tap in the sink in the small back washroom adjacent to the kitchen with its large, polished cast iron oven and coal fire with kettle hob. You wanted a bath? There was a zinc tub you put in front of the fireplace and poured water in from the kettle. Lighting was by gas mantle and there was no electricity, unlike adjacent houses. This is because my grandmother believed Mr. Edison who maintained that AC electricity was dangerous, in contrast to that crazy Canadian, Mr. Weston, who pushed for AC.

My grandmother's house was a large, well-built, middle-class house. While the adults were chatting in the warm kitchen, little me would explore the house. I particularly liked the drawing room with its beautiful heavy, carved wooden furniture for special guests. I would play with the knickknacks in the whatnot and look at the *Aspidistra* in its heavy pot on its wooden stand in the window behind heavy curtains.

The *Aspidistra* was also known as the 'cast iron plant' because you couldn't kill it. They produce green or variegated leaves about 10 inches long, tapering at each end. I noticed the occasional flower on the soil surface, about an inch in diameter with white petals shading pink to dark red and with a foul smell. An adult told me they were pollinated by slugs and snails. *Aspidistras* tolerated the cool, dimly lit houses of the time and were so common that they became a national joke, most famously a song, "The Biggest *Aspidistra* in the World" by Gracie Fields and a satirical novel "Keep the Aspidistra Flying" by budding novelist George Orwell.

Formosa, now Taiwan, is the native home of *Aspidistra elatior* (there may be 170 more species across SE Asia, all very similar). I was surprised to read of it on a subtropical island, but the plant grows on cliffs and damp, shady ravines high in the mountains where conditions are cooler. The conditions in these ravines are very much like a Victorian house. For readers in Victoria, BC, the Prince, and Princess Abkhazi, who sought refuge there, were presumably given an *Aspidistra*, although I have no reference. The evidence is an old specimen growing in the garden below the parking lot in dense shade. The plants withstand a few degrees of frost and although the leaves get badly burnt the rhizome survives to sprout more leaves.

Like *Aspidistra*, the native habitat of *Clivia* is shady forest undergrowth, but in this case in South Africa, where the average temperature is much higher and a better match for modern house temperatures. There are six species of *Clivia*, but Koopowitz, in his excellent book '*Clivia'*, had four species, and the bad luck to have two new species described immediately after he published. The species generally grown is *Clivia miniata* – the name derived from 'minium', red lead, an old artist's pigment. *C. miniata* makes an excellent house plant, but it becomes large with leaves up to 2 feet long. In the 'Old South' of the USA, verandas have half-barrels



Clivia miniata, the Natal lily originated in the woodlands of South Africa. Here the large form flowering in early spring.

filled with huge old specimens. The tiny quarters of Asian cities require tiny plants, and the Chinese took to dwarf mutants, normally discarded as weaklings in Western nurseries.

Nearly 20 years ago I ordered seeds of dwarf forms and my three survivors hint at what is possible in window-ledge gardening. The mature height of dwarf *Clivia* is 10 inches, with about 22, 3-inch-wide leaves arranged in a very tight fan. There are two types of variegation: lengthwise and across the leaf. Lengthwise variegated forms have thick or thin stripes. The width and number of stripes is determined by a random assortment of cells with and without chloroplasts in the leaf primordium. The other variegation type, termed 'akebono', consists of wider patches of paler leaf across the width of the leaf. The stripes are not sharply demarcated and seems to form during spring growth spurts.

Clivia are very slow growing plants, infrequently found in nurseries, where rapidly growing plants are preferred. Amateur groups and societies are the most likely source of plants and seeds. The old adage first applied to *Rhododendron* seed is applicable here. Growing *Clivia* from seed extends your life because you couldn't possibly die before it flowers, which may take nearly 15 years. I have seed ripening and plant divisions available, please contact me (joeharv@shaw.ca).

Dwarf *Clivia miniata* grown from seed by the author. The dwarf form is about 10 inches tall (Left). The faint horizontal variegation of the leaves ("akebono") can be seen in the image on the right. (Photo credit Sue Lee).

Garden in the Park—update:

- *Donna Humphries*

Warmer days have brought more visitors to the Park. We have talked with people from Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Florida, India and of course, many locals who walk the park as part of their daily routine. The tall *Rhododendron* tree is blooming, so it is drawing lots of attention. The *Erythronium, Dodecatheon* (now *Primula* sp.) and *Anemone* are blooming in the small bed in front of the rocky outcrop. The smaller *Rhododendrons* are showing colourful buds.

Like many of our own gardens, the GITP suffered in the January cold snap. We lost plants and others were badly 'burnt' from the combination of cold wind and low temperatures. The search is on to replace some of the small shrubs. With many new dwarf hybrids in the market, we have been considering introducing less rounded shaped plants and there are numerous conifers that add a different texture and shape to complement the established shrubs. Perhaps a more loosely structured small plant, such as *Corylopsis pauciflora* would be an interesting addition. Your ideas would be welcomed!

The work to expose the bedrock on the west side of the garden has been completed. The newly exposed rock leads your eye up through to the rest of the rock garden and with the new crevice garden created earlier this spring, the GITP is getting a whole new look! We did make divisions from the older plants that we removed during the garden renovation, and we will use them in the new planting pockets. We will be busy tidying and planting over the coming weeks and would welcome members to come down and lend a hand.

The Garden in Beacon Hill Park. The bedrock on the left has been exposed to provide a transition to the new crevice garden on the right.

VIRAGS Seeds

virags4seeds@gmail.com

Cameron Kidd directs our seed collections and distribution. Please brings seeds you have collected in a sealed envelope, with the name and location to the next meeting. Cam can help you if you have any questions.

APRIL 2024

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	1	2	3	4	5 GITP 10:00 am	6
7	8	9 VIRAGS Meeting 7:30 pm **On-Line In-Person**	10	11	12 GITP 10:00 am	13
14	15	16	17	18	19 GITP 10:00 am	20 **Spring Show**
21 **Spring Show**	22	23	24	25	26 GITP 10:00 am	27
28	29	30