VANCOUVER ISLAND ROCK & ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY

The Oldest Rock and Alpine Gardening club in North America
103rd Year, Newsletter, Number 4

Next VIRAGS Meeting Tuesday, May 14 7:30 PM In person and Zoom

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.

Justin Dunning

New Information on Trillium hibbersonii

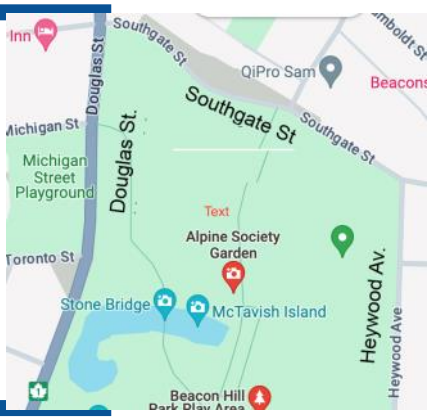
Notes from the Executive

- Thanks to all those who made the Spring Show and Sale a success!
- Membership is 124 members in good standing. A Members Directory, with contact information will be available at our monthly meetings.
- Open Gardens have begun! We are developing a schedule for garden visits for May and June. Open gardens will be announced by email with times and addresses. If you would like to have VIRAGS members visit your garden, let any member of the Executive know.
- There are workshops being planned for: Potting on Seedlings, Preparation of Cuttings, Making a Small Alpine Pot

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

TRILLIUM HIBBERSONII

VANCOUVER ISLAND'S HIDDEN GEM

WITH JUSTIN DUNNING

Justin Dunning grew up in Haliburton, Ontario surrounded by Trilliums every spring. Trillium grandiflorum is so prevalent that the county uses it as its emblem and it carpets the deciduous forest floors so thickly that hills can appear white at a distance. Justin's main focus is on carnivorous plants and orchids but has always had a soft spot for the genus Trillium. After learning about the existence of a dwarf Trillium endemic to "inaccessible cliffs" on the west coast it became an obsession to see these plants and document them. Over the past three years, Justin has visited every documented site of Trillium hibbersonii and is excited to share the history of Vancouver Island's most charismatic endemic plant. Justin has lived on Vancouver Island for 12 years with his wife Tiffany. They spend their weekends hiking and exploring with their rescue pup, Nootka.

7:30 MAY 14 @ 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

@VIRAGS – President's Blog

VIRAGS Spring Show and Sale

The VIRAGS Spring Show is one of those miraculous events that appear to 'just happen'. But of course, it is not so. Hours of preparatory work precede the big day and a lot of thought and care are involved in making it spontaneously assemble and then fold itself back into its storage case. We are very fortunate to have **Jacq Bradbury** as our concert master. She has coordinated VIRAGS Spring Show for countless years; so many that no one will ever equal her record! She is the one who does all the advance planning, organizes judges, ensures there is someone looking after all the key elements of the show. There were others who made substantial contributions: **Donna Humphries** and **Louise Potvin** laid out a very attractive Silent Auction Table, the tearoom and all the food was seamlessly put together by **Holly Tuokko** with help from **Connie Wray, Anne Morris, Karen Morrison, Leda Bower, Carol Hester, Debbie Guedes,** and **Louise Potvin**. **Carmen Varcoe** marshalled plants and anchored the sales table with **Bryce Fradley** and **Calvor Palmateer**. **Paul Spriggs, Chris Dixon, and Ayla Dixon** worked their magic with the crevice garden demonstration and **Pat Gordon** masterfully handled membership questions. **Holly Harper** polished all the silver and set up the awards table. There were numerous members who gave up most of their weekend to help with set up and take down, or sell T-shirts, assist with greeting visitors, or sell seeds. Included are: **Colin Tamboline, Brian Rowe, Glenna Duguid, Carole Hester, Don Lindsay** and **Elizabeth Grant.** The unique combination of plant vendors who moved tons of plants, talked with visitors, and answered countless questions are a major part of our show. However, I think an unsung contribution was that of the members who put together entries of their favourite plants, nurtured them, teased them into full bloom, then primped them for the show. These members provide the central focus of the show, which is critical to its success. The show made money, which in important in that it enables our programs to continue to thrive. But what is more important are the scores of people who glimpsed rock and alpine gardening for the first time or were so inspired by a display that they bought a plant to replicate the effect. I heard many excited voices and saw people astonished at seeing nature replicated in a 10 inch pan. The VIRAGS Constitution notes that the Society is to furthering knowledge of rock garden plants and to encourage the cultivation of rock garden plants. The Spring Show this year nailed both.

VIRAGS Spring Show and Sale—2024

Photo Credit: Mel MacLeod

Plant Profile - *Globularia*

- *Paul Spriggs*

Native to mountain regions of southern and central Europe, the globe daisies of the Plantaginaceae or plantain family, are really the perfect plant that no crevice gardener should be without. Most form evergreen mats of glossy green leaves above which rise, to varying heights depending on the species, the cutest little blue or white globular pom-poms (hence the name globularia). All are easy to grow in Victoria rock gardens in full sun and well drained calcareous soil. Although there are larger species available, the choicest are the smallest of the genus and so here are the favourites. *Globularia cordifolia* forms flat mats of glossy evergreen foliage that get about 18 inches across with blue or white pompoms rising just 2 inches above. Its leaves have a notch at the apex giving them the look of a heart hence the name cordifolia (heart shaped leaf). *G.repens* (creeping), is an even more diminutive species, which conforms to the rocks over which they grow. Unlike *G. cordifolia*, Flowers are held tight against the foliage. *G. cordifolia* and *G. repens* have highly desirable white varieties. Finally comes *G. incanescens,* one which differs in being a deciduous, rather than evergreen species, and forms a congested clump up to 6 inches across rather than a flat, spreading mat. This plant is native to the Apennine Mountains of Italy. It boasts dark, glaucus and rounded leaves below characteristic steel blue pompoms mere millimeters across. *G. incanescens* will self-sew in the garden when conditions are right. Although easy from seed, the Globularias root as they travel and so are perfect candidates for division.

Top left: Globularia cordifolia, the heart -leafed Globularia.

Top right: Globularia repens, the creeping Globularia.

Bottom: Globularia incanesccens, the incandescent Globularia.

Cultivating Compact Clivias

- *Joe Harvey*

In densely populated parts of the world the lack of gardens, bans on pets, tiny apartments, and the craving for the comfort of a plant to look after has led to the selection of dwarf mutants of *Clivia*. Canada is not a crowded country, but traffic and climate have increased the number of people living in apartments with a resulting interest in plants that can only survive indoors. This article details some of the cultivation differences required to grow dwarf *Clivia*.

The thick roots of *Clivia* require an instantly draining mix, such as is used for tropical orchids or cacti. Use granular materials such as bark, perlite, lava rock and hardly any fines. *Clivia* are adapted to drought and should be bone-dry in winter, especially if kept cool. I do not water mine November to February. Be more generous in the spring, but never allow the pot to stand in water. Let them go dry when you are on vacation, 8 weeks is not a problem. They are shade plants of South African forest floors and cliffs, but in Canada they are content with our midwinter sun. The pale stripes of variegated plants are easily burnt by sun and must be protected. Fertilize only when actively growing; I use water-soluble, low nitrogen formulations at one-quarter strength. Old plants produce side shoots, which can be cut off and potted up separately. To repot, upend the dry pot, shake off the old soil, clip off dead roots and remove side shoots. Pack the roots into a fresh pot and trickle fresh granular soil around them, shaking and poking it around the thick roots, a few voids are OK. Complete root loss is an emergency: unpot and clean off the dead material, allow the stump to dry for a few days and repot in fresh dry granular soil. Keep out of sun, water very little for at least the first six months – a matter of a teaspoonful a week. You are allowed to inspect the stump; they can be considered bulb-like, similar to a leek. Complete recovery takes over a year. For insect problems, like scale, spray with pyrethrin (Raid) monthly for a year. To pollinate, rub a ripe anther between two fingers and transfer the pollen by rubbing an open stigma. Some plants may be self-incompatible and pollen from another plant may be required, this is where a group devoted to the exchange of material is useful.

The name *Clivia* comes from Lady Charlotte Florentia Clive, who became Duchess of Northumberland in 1817 when she married Hugh, the third duke. She resided at his Syon House estate, across the Thames from Kew, London since this was convenient for her court duties. A large conservancy (recently restored) had been built to test the plants then pouring in from the Empire and her head gardener, Mr. Forrest purchased a collection of bulbs gathered in South Africa by a William Burchell. It was expected that they would flower blue, like *Agapanthus*. However, they were red! The custom was to name plants for the person who first flowered it. The first species of the new genus was named *Clivia nobilis*, the noble *Clivia*. However, the species commonly grown is *C. miniata* (from minium, red lead, an old paint pigment). There is no official pronunciation of scientific names, English advice is to use the reformed Oxford Latin which has *Clivia* with short 'i's. Problems with foreign names such as Przwalski, (of the horse and a few plants), has led to pronouncing as the name in pronounced. On this basis *Clivia* would get a long i then a short i.

Clivia are so slow growing that general nurseries do not deal in them. This leaves specialist dealers or groups, and I am hoping to inspire local groups to cooperate in producing seeds, exchanging pollen and plants. Contact me if you want seeds and are willing to participate in a grower group.

Photo credit: Sue Lee

(Editors note: Edited for length)

Garden Writing

- *Robert Burke*

In "A Rage for Rock Gardening" Nicola Shulman relates the history of Reginald Farrer, a garden writer, plantsman, and plant collector. Farrer lived at the turn of the last century and was a frustrated novelist with a passion for gardening. He is credited with contributing substantially to the popularity of rock gardening and revolutionizing garden writing style.

Farrer entered gardening at a turning point; Victorian gardening was waning as 20th century gardening was ascending. Victorian gardeners planted vast borders in swaths of colour, contiguous segments were crammed with plants in contrasting colours or rainbows of stripes. The plants themselves were secondary to the effect of vast grandeur. Victorian rock gardens were follies for the wealthy; raised rockworks in imitation of actual mountain ranges' often containing no plants! Farrer advocated that successful cultivation of alpine plants lay in replicating their native conditions. Farrer had seen the plants in the mountains of Europe and his garden was on a limestone scar – a natural rock garden. What was more, there was a system of caves beneath it, where he saw rainwater percolating through the rock and he realized the importance of perfect drainage and irrigation from below. Turn of the century gardening became something for people who did not have a park-like estate or elaborate glass houses. Hardy plants did not need protection and rock gardening required very little space. This new form of gardening put the plants at the centre and part of the appeal seems to be the obligation one has to see to the demanding needs of the plants.

Between 1907 and 1915 Farrer wrote a series of books on Rock Gardening that were very popular, as much for their fresh style as for their content. Victorian garden writers delivered advice in authoritarian tones, remote and dictatorial. Farrer wrote in highly crafted syntax replete with literary allusions, prolonged metaphors, and elaborate similes. As an example of the more formal style, William Robinson, a contemporary gardener, described *Helleborus niger* as having "fine evergreen foliage and handsome large flowers". In contrast, Farrer describes the same plant as "… its face shines with a blazing white innocence unknown amongst the pure of heart". Farrer brought his imagination to plant descriptions: for example, his description of *Primula secundiflora*: "the outside of the bell is of a waxen dulled flesh-colour, filmed with a strange powdery bloom and suffused with lines and nerves and flushings of claret and deep rose, with blue mysteriously suggested over the whole, omnipresent as the faintest of tints, like a whiff of onion in a good salad." The novelist and poet, Vita Sackville-West ranked Farrer with D.H.Lawrence, called him half poet and half botanist, and admired his extravagance and accuracy.

VIRAGS came into being as this revolution in gardening and garden writing played out in the UK. Is VIRAGS a product of this surge in popularity? Coincidence and cause are difficult to distinguish, but I was struck by the plant descriptions found in "North American Rock Plants" by W.H.A. Preece, an early member of VIRAGS. Preece's comparison of *Cypripedium* species reads: "The beauty of *C. reginae* is beyond denial and dispute, but to my mind, it is just a trifle too bold, a shade too opulent and a little too Teutonically blonde and buxom whereas that of *C. montanum* is as of some svelte brunette of the *pur sang*, naturally gracious, essentially well-bred." I doubt we will ever know for sure if VIRAGS was part of this rage or if Preece was directly influenced by the writing style of Farrer. However, Preece clearly adopted a style of garden writing in which the descriptions were flamboyantly colourful, even if the photographs were monochrome.

R.J. Farrer, plant hunter, author and gardener, popularized rock gardening 100 years ago.

Photo: Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh

Miscellaneous News and Announcements

- **Eswyn's Alpine & Rock Garden - 15th Anniversary Celebration Plant Sale.** Saturday 11 May, 2024, 9 am-1 pm, 2925 Northwest Bay Road, Nanoose Place, Nanoose, BC. Alpine Gardeners of Central Vancouver Island Plant sale.
- **Victoria Rhododendron Society - Show and Sale of Specialty Rhododendrons**. Saturday 11 May, 2024, 9 am - 4 pm, Horticultural Centre of the Pacific, 505 Quayle St, Victoria BC. Free admission to the show, sale and grounds.
- **Victoria Cactus and Succulent Society, 2024 Spring Show and Sale**. Friday, 17 May, 2024, 1 - 8 pm, Saturday, 18 May, 10 - 4 pm, Church of the Advent, 510 Mt View Road, Colwood, BC. Free Admission, workshops available during the show and sale.
- **Plantaholics Sale** 25 May, 2024, 10 am - 2 pm, Brentwood Bay Nursery, 1395 Benvenuto Ave, Brentwood Bay. Sale of interesting and unusual plants produced by local propagators.

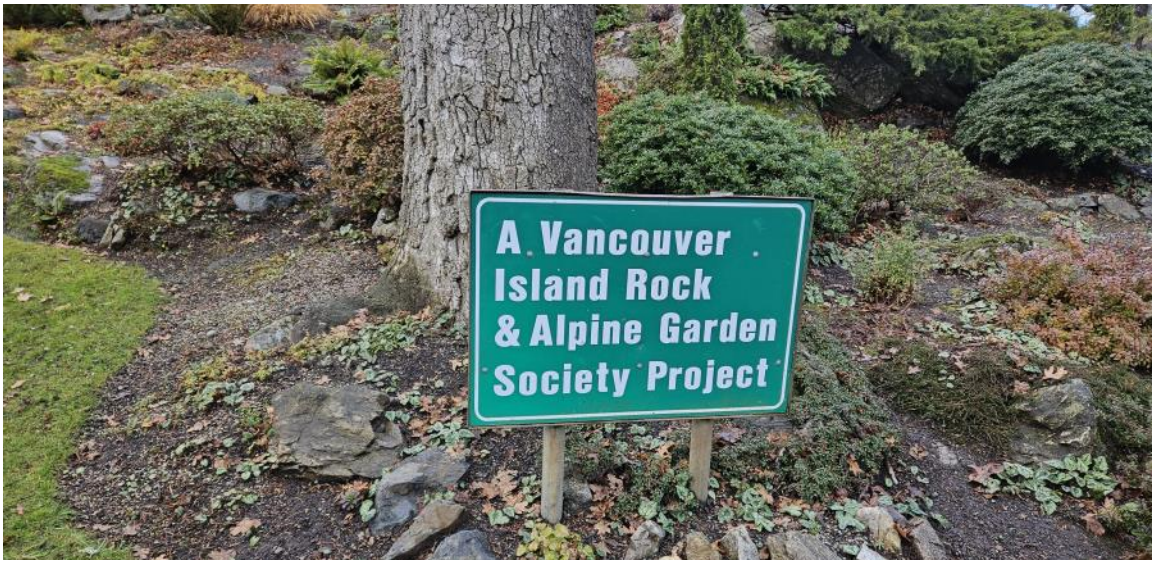
Garden in the Park—update:

- *Donna Humphries*

It has been a busy month with the Spring Show, clean-up of our own gardens, and out-town visitors so the GITP has not received the usual attention over the past month. With only three volunteers, we haven't finished cleaning from winter but we have started planting: primarily divisions from the plants we removed when we started renovations. Planting will be the focus in the coming week. The new crevice garden is quite barren so we need to pay attention to getting more plants in there!

We have had several visitors to the garden suggest we change the big green sign that identifies the area. (See picture) Some have said it is unattractive, others say a garden is not a project but an on-going creative process and the sign does not tell the origin of the area. I am going to approach the City of Victoria Parks and Recreation people to see if they would be willing to take this on. Perhaps one of the ground level plaques found elsewhere in the Park noting the garden was installed as a Centennial project in 1967 by VIRAGS?

We would certainly welcome more volunteers on an ad hoc or periodic basis! Your ideas are always welcome.



MAY 2024

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
			1	2	3 GITP 10 am	4
5 Cinco de Mayo	6	7	8	9	10 GITP 10 am	11
12 Mother's Day	13 Victoria Day	14 VIRAGS Meeting 7:00 pm **In person and On-line**	15	16	17 GITP 10 am	18
19	20	21	22	23	24 GITP 10 am	25
26	27 Memorial Day	28	29	30	31 GITP 10 am