VANCOUVER ISLAND ROCK & ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY

The Oldest Rock and Alpine Gardening club in North America
103rd Year, Newsletter, Number 8

Next VIRAGS Meeting

Tuesday, November 12 7:30 PM

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

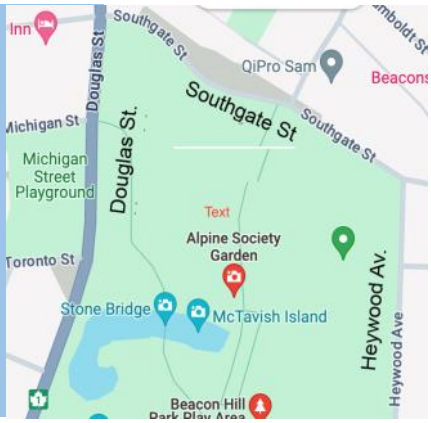
The Member's Photo Show is always a highlight of the year. We get to see what other members have been doing in their gardens or on their travels. We hope you will attend and submit a few photos.

Have you ever considered writing an article for the Newsletter? We are always interested in brief articles that would interest members of VIRAGS. We like to get articles that are between 500 and 800 words that include one or two photographs. The subject matter relates to gardening in general, but a focus on rock and alpine gardening, alpine, woodland, or bog plants, or botanical excursions are particularly welcome. The Newsletter contact address is newsletter@virags.com .

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

Member's Photo Show

Member's photos of plants, gardens, projects, and trips.

Instructions for submitting photos and becoming part of the show will be sent out by email.

Tuesday, November 12, 2024

7:30PM @ LAMBRICK PARK CHURCH

1780 FELTHAM ROAD

ZOOM LINK VIA EMAIL

www.vigrags.com virags_pics vancouver island rock and alpine garden society

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

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Vice President: **Donna Humphries** (donna.humphries@virags.com)
Treasurer: **Louise Potvin** (louise.potvin@virags.com)
Programs: **Paul Spriggs**(paul.spriggs@virags.com)
Secretary: **Don Lindsay** (don.lindsay@virags.com)
Board Members:

Jacq Bradbury
Janice Currie
Erik Fleischer
Elizabeth Grant
Karen Morrison
Colin Tamboline
Donna Wong

@VIRAGS – President's Blog

VIRAGS exists to promote rock and alpine gardening and a key means by which we do this is to provide access to a range of plants suitable for alpine gardens. Most of you are aware that garden centres have very few alpine plants and there are no local specialized alpine nurseries. Seeds are thus a key tool for increasing the abundance and diversity of plants that we have in our gardens.

The VIRAGS executive are proposing some changes to our seed program. The Executive proposes that we develop a list of desirable plants that can be grown from seed. Seeds from this list will be acquired from vendors by VIRAGS or collected from member's gardens. Together these collected seeds and purchased seeds will form the VIRAGS Seed Bank. The seeds in the Seed Bank would be available to the Propagation Group to produce plants that will be made available for purchase at the Spring Show. As well, surplus seeds would also be available for members to purchase at the Spring Show and monthly meetings.

The executive will also organize an instructive workshop in January for new members and those interested in seed propagation. Topics will include accessing seeds and seed lists, providing lists of plants easily grown from seeds, methods for preparation of seeds, preparing soils, planting, and growing seedlings.

Ensuring that members have access to seeds and plants, and are well informed about propagation from seeds, are core aspects of why VIRAGS exists.

Four Brooms for Victoria

- *Paul Spriggs*

The Brooms of the Pea family comprise a large assortment of small trees and shrubs, some of which have been awarded candidacy in the rock garden due to their diminutive size. They offer up large, often yellow pea flowers that smother the plant. Hailing from dry, stony places they tend to be extremely drought tolerant. While there are many small brooms for the crevice garden, the following 4 (all different genera) have proven to be at home in Victoria's hotter and drier rock gardens.

Cytissus hirsutus var. dimissus. As the name implies, this deciduous plant has hairy leaves on wiry creeping stems, and grows about 2.5 cm tall. It will form a large mat over time that can be curtailed with pruning.

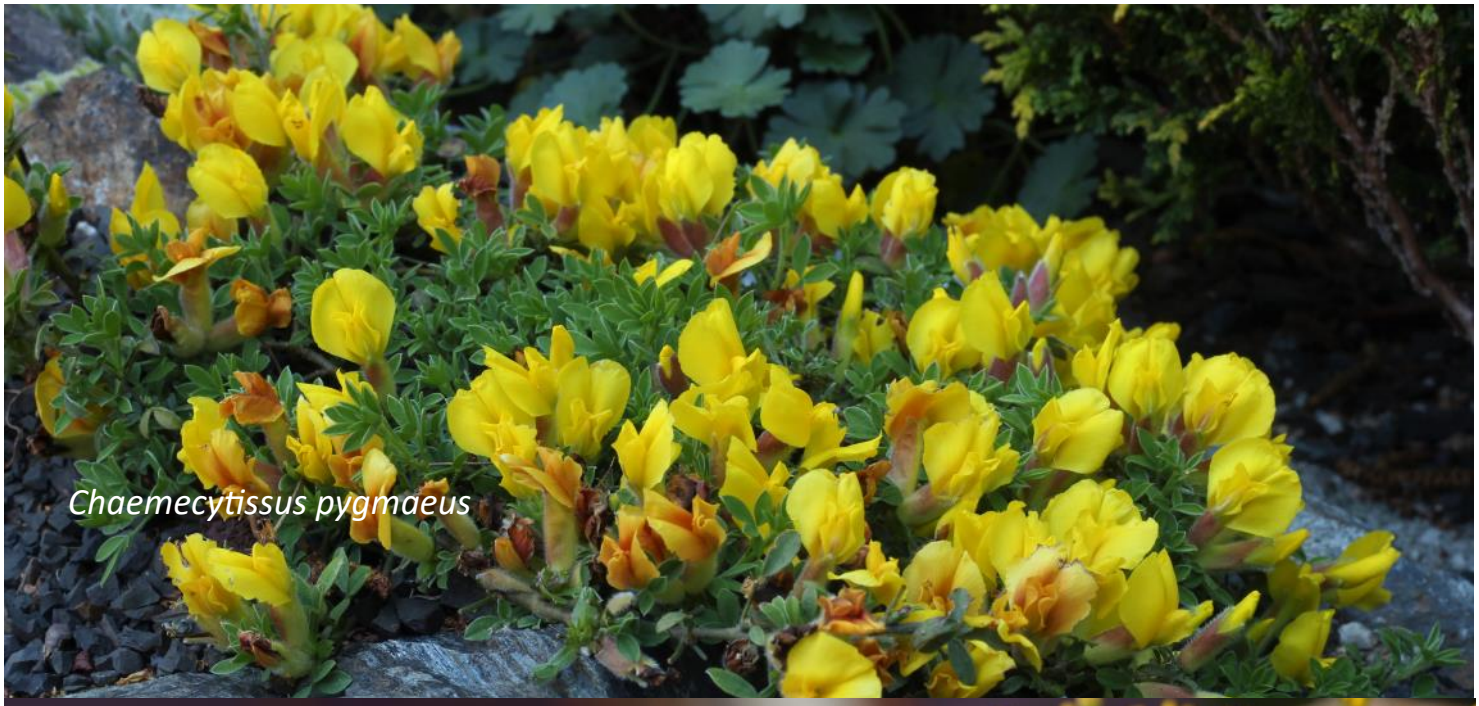
Chaemecytissus pygmaeus is a real charmer and the classiest of the 4 brooms mentioned here. This one has finer leaves than all the others, but as usual its creeping twisted stems absolutely hug the ground! Very slow to increase in size.

Genista lydia var. Lydia is a tiny sub-form of the much larger and easily acquired *Genista lydia*. This tiny broom basically behaves like the above two, with deciduous stems below the brightest golden flowers. 2.5 cm high by 45 cm wide.

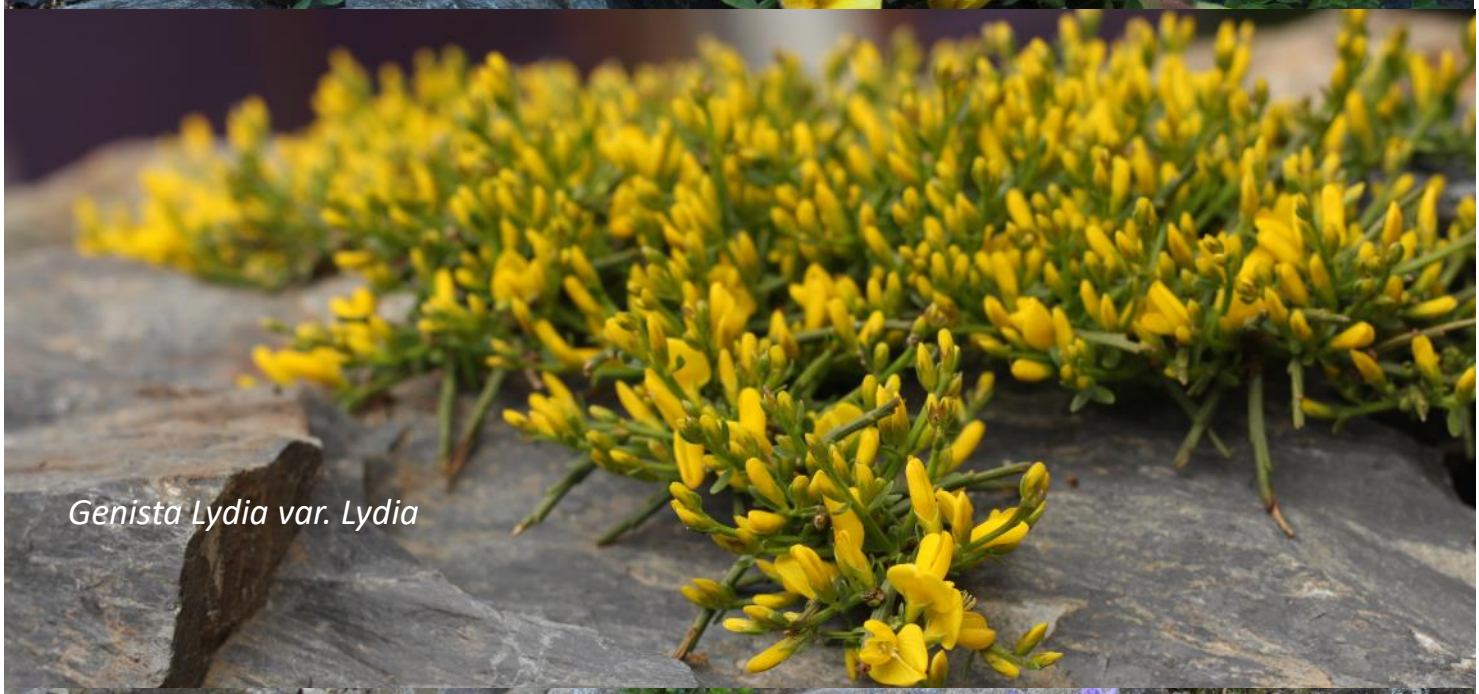
Erinacea anthyllis, also known as the 'Blue Broom', whose claim to fame is it's gorgeous and unusual blue flowers. Unlike the above three mat forming species, this one forms a spikey dome about 45 cm high and as much across so too big for a trough or small rock garden. When we say spikey…we mean it! This is an almost dangerous plant. Collecting seeds can result in bloodshed as one must plunge a hand deeply into the long, protected, and upward-facing thorns…ouch!

Brooms have a bad name in Victoria, which is well deserved in the case of the ecological invaders, but I would like to report that, despite growing these brooms in my garden for over a decade, none have ever self-sown. Furthermore, other than the blue broom, from which I have collected viable seed, they don't seem to produce seed as the pods they produce are almost always empty.

Cytissus hirsutus var. dimissus



Chaemecytissus pygmaeus



Genista Lydia var. Lydia

Erinacea anthyllis

VIRAGS Spring Shows

- *Robert D. Burke*

The Spring Show is a long-standing event for VIRAGS. Many Victoria gardeners have attended the show for as long as they have been involved in gardening, often since childhood. The first VIRAGS Spring Show was held in March of 1939 in the Crystal Garden and there was an effusive review of the event in the May 1939 edition of the "The Garden Beautiful", a BC gardening magazine. The history of the Spring Show reveals many similarities and some differences between the 1st and now the 85th edition.

The author of the 1939 article, Norman Rant, a founding member of VIRAGS, describes the stairs approaching the upper hall of the Crystal Garden, where the show was held, as "gaily decorated with branches from flowering trees and shrubs" (plums, *Forsythia*, flowering quince, and currants). He explains that this was noted to show how "Victoria stands supreme, horticulturally" from the rest of Canada. He mentions that "all classes were well filled and provided good competition". The number of entries is not provided, but as there were over a dozen entries for the miniature rock gardens, it seems the show was somewhat larger than current Spring Shows. Apparently, "a great many" of the plants exhibited had been dug up from a garden and planted in pans for the show. A practice that is not common at current Spring Shows.

The article provides extensive details of the plants that were on display and many of these are familiar. The show included about 24 entries of "Engleria and Kabshia saxafrages predominantly in the competitive classes". The author notes that Saxifrages are well suited to Alpine Houses but emphasizes they can be grown where none is available. The article praises the use of sand plunges, submerging pots in a bed of sand to better regulate moisture and temperature. An uncommon practice for many contemporary alpine gardeners.

Given the season, there were a large number of spring ephemerals: *Primula albo-cincta*, *Primula viscosa, Douglasia laevigata, Erythronium hartweggii (multiscapoideum), E. tuolumnensis, E. hendersonii, E. californicum, Erythronium dens-canis, E. gigantium*, *and E. oregonum*. The article notes there were 10 species of native ferns, another 10 forms of Dwarf conifers, and 2 dozen forms of juniper. Details of extensive displays of *Gaultheria* (salals), and heathers (*Cassiopes* and *Phyllodoces*) are included.

A clear 'then and now' distinction is that there were 3 commercial Alpine Nurseries in Victoria in 1939, and they all participated in the show. The article notes many unique plants contributed by W.H.A. Preece's Pen-y-bryn Nursery. *Anemone pavoniana, Convolvulus cneorum, Coronilla glaucea, Diapensia obovate, Fritillaria recurva, Pushkinia libanotica, Rhododendron leucaspis,* and *R. pemakoense*. Lake View Aquatic Plant Nursery also had several unique contributions to the show: *Adonis amurensis, Dodecatheon latifolium, Rosmarinas prostratus, Silenei ingramii*, and locally collected *Vaccinium* species. Plants shown exclusively by Rockhome Gardens included: *Synthyris rotundifolia, S.reniformis* (both now *Veronica reginanivalis)*, and *S. stellata* (now *Veronica missurica*). The same firm also showed *Pernettya tasmanica* (now *Gaultheira tasmanica*). A rich mixture of native and exotic alpine plants was on display, not all that different from our Spring Shows.

The Daily Colonist on Friday April 21 1961, has an article by M.V. Chesnut promoting an upcoming VIRAGS Spring Show. The article la-

ments that the Crystal Garden Ballroom has now been taken over permanently by waxworks, so the Alpine exhibition will be at the Christ Church Cathedral Memorial Hall on Vancouver Street. The article states emphatically that it is "the biggest and most extensive flower show of its kind on the whole of the North American continent". There were to have been "more than 500 living plants", including plants that "trap and feed on insects, …dwarf alpine conifers and *Rhododendrons*" and "miniature ferns of the most exquisite loveliness." Hyperbole aside, it seems the 22nd edition of the Spring Show remained an important horticultural event in Victoria.

A more detailed review of the Spring Show was published in the Daily Colonist in June, 1976, (A Glimpse of Quiet Natural Beauty, by Betty Funke). The Spring Show in 1976 was held on April, 9 and 10 at St. Mary's Church in Oak Bay. The article indicates that "in the past, Spring Shows were more social. Today's members place more emphasis on growing and on sharing their knowledge of plants". The author found the trough gardens "arresting" and thought them "excellent for balcony gardeners". Something we emphasize today. Plants noted were *Dodecatheon (Primula) hendersonii, Saxifraga 'Iris Pritchard', S. japonica, Artemesia*, a pale pink wood anemone, and a miniature *Narcissus* with small yellow bells, resembling a hoop petticoat. The author was also impressed with "Androsace *carnea pyrenaica,* the smallest of pale pink petals growing up from a brown moss, creating a striking contrast".

A highlight of the 1976 Spring Show was the display of children's miniature gardens. A creative young person had depicted a desert scene with a miniature skeleton on sand. Another, had a path of small carved wooden stepping-stones , and a replica oriental garden with pagoda, bridge and bonsai trees. Entries were from Norfolk House School, St. George's and St. Margaret's Schools, where teachers encouraged participation.

Diverse alpine and woodland plants, local and exotic, are a constant aspect of VIRAGS Spring Shows. Some of the methods for growing alpines have changed somewhat, but the plants remain the central focus. It is clear that in the past there was greater participation of young people. It is unlikely that local schools will take up the cause, but we should really be doing more to get our young family members involved. The 1976 article mentions that "a shadow looms over the Island's Rock Gardens"; alpine nurseries are having to give up due to lack of labour. It warns "with nurseries giving up, no specialists will be available, and the supply of plants will fade out. The concern for availability of plants seems to have been with us for some time. As garden centers are unlikely to change, it is VIRAGS members who must make up for the loss of specialist nurseries. It is up to us to continue acquiring seeds, trying new plants, propagating them, and making them available. This is how we can ensure that the Spring Show remains a leading horticultural event on Vancouver Island for years to come.

The cover of the issue of The Garden Beautiful, published in Vancouver, containing an article on the first VIRAGS Spring Show. The article reveals many similarities and a few difference that emphasize what has changed in the 85 year history of the VIRAGS Spring Show

A poster for a VIRAGS Spring Show that took place in either 1985 or 1991. Notices for Spring Shows were frequently posted in the Daily Colonist, the paper of the day, and reviews or feature articles often followed.

Miscellaneous News and Announcements

Mixing it up BEYOND BEAUTY | 2025

Registration is NOW Open

Saturday February 1, 2025 | 9 to 4:30 | Mary Winspear Centre, Sidney BC

Five incredible speakers will share how adding biodiversity creates healthy and beautiful gardens!

The Homegrown National Park | Dr. Doug Tallamy (message pre-recorded)

Mix It Up: Designing with Native & Non-Native Plants| Heidi Hitchcock

Mind What You Sow | Maria Valana

Citizen Science in the Garden | Dr. Brian Starzomski

Trees in the Urban Environment | Dr. Tom Smiley

Conference Fees:

Early Bird fee until November 30, 2024	$75
Early bird bonus—an opportunity to submit a question to Dr. Tallamy	
Regular fee from December 1, 2024	$85
Recordings Only fee (for 30 days after the conference)	$40

Amenities:

Bring your own lunch & mug. Coffee, tea and snacks will be provided.

Vendors and a Silent Auction will add excitement to the day.

Visit mixingitup.org for Speaker & Session details, and the KARELO link

Garden in the Park—update:

- *Donna Humphries*

In late October, we had a planting spree in the Garden. **Paul Spriggs** generously donated a flat of alpine plants, **Janice** also donated some small treasures and with the help of **Jeff Wright**, they planted over 50 plants in the new crevice garden! The area will be transformed this spring with green mats and maybe even some flowering plants.

Mike Rogers, Louise and I continue to work on the rock garden area. Unfortunately, one of the three DeGroot Spires that we planted several years ago will have to be removed as it is dying. We hope to replace it with another tree to continue the vertical focus. We are planting *Semperviven* in between the stones of the steps up into the garden to replace the small pea-gravel that was placed there years ago; the small gravel is like ball-bearings on the stone steps and even we fear slipping when we go up and down that way!

Winter work will include renovating the old crevice garden that lies above the new crevice garden; rocks will be pried up, growing medium supplemented and plants replaced. By spring, that whole area should present quite a show!

Over 50 plants have been added to the new crevice garden. **Paul Spriggs** and **Janice Currie** selecting sites for the new additions.

Paul preparing the plants for bare root planting, showing the deep root structure of the seedlings.

Paul Spriggs, Janice Currie and **Jeff Wright** planting the new crevice garden.