

## FRIDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

TED VAN VEEN: Dave Adams, our moderator this afternoon, came from Oregon State where we got to know him a number of years ago. We are happy to have Dave Adams back with us this afternoon. Dave, will you take over now?

DAVE ADAMS: Thank you very much, Ted. I'm certainly happy to be back and be a part of your organization as one of your newest members. This afternoon we'll have a group of selected short topics. We have with us first today, Dorothy Dickson, from the Chehalis Rare Plant Nursery, Chehalis, Washington. They grow trees and shrubs and, as she tells me, various very unusual plants. They don't like the usual things up there. They've got all the oddball materials. But today she's going to talk to us primarily about primulas. Mrs Dickson:

### THE PROPAGATION OF PRIMULA

DOROTHY DICKSON

*Chehalis Rare Plant Nursery  
Chehalis, Washington 98532*

The propagation of primula is a big subject, impossible to cover even in an hour presentation, since there are about 700 known species and 350 species have been in cultivation at one time or another

I will talk only about a few of the more common kinds and give you a glimpse of a few of the others. Here, we call all primula, primroses but only the acaulis type, one flower to a stem, is a primrose. The polyanthus, with a cluster of flowers on top of a stem, is the most common commercial primula in the United States.

The easiest to grow are the Juliae hybrids which are crosses of the species, *P. juliae*, a low creeping plant which is not a prolific bloomer, with species of the acaulis or polyanthus type. These crosses produce mainly magenta-colored flowers. It takes two or three generations and the infusion of some of the bright colored primroses and polyanthus to achieve the color range of our modern "Julies". The further away from the species to obtain new colors, the more we lose the desirable plant qualities of hardiness and low growth.

A first generation cross of *P. juliae* was red jack-in-the-green. We introduced it as 'Jay-Jay'.

Primula are generally propagated from seed, or by division for named clones. If you are particular as to color and type, seed from hand-pollination is best, but with no guarantee.

At the Chehalis Rare Plant Nursery, we plant our seed in four-inch square plastic pots, or in deep flats, using a sterile open mix that drains well. We plant from December to April, covering each pot or flat with a cotton cloth to prevent the seed from washing or blowing away and to keep the birds from eating them. We place the pots or flats outside on benches, exposed to full weather, until germination.

After germination, we move them to a shaded area and water with a fog nozzle. Transplanting is attempted when the first pair of true leaves have developed. If we miss this stage, we find it is better to wait until the plant has developed some heavy secondary roots.

Transplanting during the in-between stage results in high losses, sometimes a total loss. We usually transplant the seedlings into flats before moving them to the growing bed or to individual pots.

Other quite common types of primula are *P. auricula*, *P. denticulata*, *P. sieboldii* and candelabras.

Division is a method of propagation that can be used with all primula. It is a way to increase outstanding plants and the only way for named plants.

Different species have different times which are best for dividing. Primroses, polyanthus, "Julies", and *P. auriculas* divide best in the spring, right after flowering, or in early fall at least two weeks before frost. New roots are active at this time. The candelabras, *P. sieboldii* and other species that go dormant in the winter, divide best just as they start to grow in the spring.

*P. denticulata* can be increased by root cuttings. The rare petiolaris primulas can be increased by leaf cuttings. The petiolaris are still rare because their seeds lose viability very quickly. They must be planted while still green before the seed coat hardens. At our nursery, we were fortunate in obtaining, by airmail, a green seed capsule of *Primula calderiana*, one of the petiolaris group. Within 15 minutes after arrival this July, it was planted and under the mist.

*Primula scapigera* is a typical petiolaris primula.

DAVID ADAMS: Thank you very much, Dorothy, for bringing us all up to date on what is in the primula field and what we can expect in the future.