

International Rock Gardener

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The reaction to IRG features about the making of garden features to “house” rock garden plants was very favourable. This month Jan Tholhuijsen shares some more of his “make and do” ideas. These are projects that can be adapted to size to suit many different situations. We hope readers will be encouraged to try some of these in their own gardens – or even on an apartment balcony!

Cover photo: *Rosularia libanotica*, photo by Jan Tholhuijsen.



Above and right: Cascade gardens in Brno

HOW TO CREATE A CASCADE GUTTER by Jan Tholhuijsen

The idea to make my own cascade was derived from the saxifrage gutters I had seen in the Botanical Gardens in Brno, Czech Republic.



These vitrified clay half-pipes were 45 x100 cm. They had been used as drainage on an old farmhouse with a thatched roof. These were items I could certainly utilise. The supporting framework was made from impregnated beams of 7-7 cm diameter and some metal tie-rods.

In my previous garden I had had planters made from halved ceramic pipes so this idea to make a cascade was a logical follow-on for me. I found on the internet ready-made half pipe ceramic channels, created for rainwater runoff.



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Working out where to place the framework!



The pieces of half tube overlap each other by 10cm and there is a rise of 3-4cm at each intersection.

The transitions between the tubes are sealed with cement, so that the excess water from one to the other half-tube runs down.

The ends are sealed using a template and cement.



At the bottom of the tubes a layer of 10 cm. gravel / potshards is located and above these some root cloth. The excess water can freely flow down.

My recipe for the planting mix is Japanese split (gravel) 25%, coarse masonry sand 25%, improved garden soil 25%, clay and black soil 25%.

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The rocks were found at a garden centre in the neighbourhood and have a beautiful old look. They had already weathered for a dozen years. The stones have a green patina, I think from iron or copper which is in the stone.

The framework was given a layer of opaque stain for colour and protection.



On YouTube you can see a short film of the planted cascade: [HERE](#)

You can read about Jan's latest project - a "pseudo-moraine" also made with half-pipes: [HERE](#)



Now some further pictures of the cascade in situ.

Waiting for the planting in Spring - some under-planting is possible too, round the lower framework.



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Around 98 saxifrages in the planting with ten accents of "witches' broom" conifers.

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A little *Salix* finds a home in the gutter, with a *Hosta* beneath.

We can see more hostas under the gutter – seen left with a cover against winter wet.

For the roof for the saxifrage gutter, the shadow stripes are from north to south, so that as the sun moves, each time the shaded areas are changed. This is mainly intended for the rainy winters here, but with severe sun, it is also good to use. It only takes about 5 minutes to assemble.

As I mentioned earlier, I had some halved-pipe planters in a previous garden and I decided to make some more now. I used a slightly different method to that employed for the cascade gutters.



Semi-vitrified Clay half-pipes 100x32x15cm



For my other project, the saxifrage gutter, I sealed with the ends with cement – for this I used [Ecosheets](http://www.ecosheets.com), a recycled plastic product.

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The pipes are prepared by sanding everything with sharp coarse sandpaper, then degreasing with water and ammonia.

Pipes are cut to size and the ends fixed with sealant. The ends can be dyed in the colour of the vitrified clay pipe. Drill drainage holes.



Above left: Fill any damaged areas with a glue paste.
Left: The top edge is also smeared with glue to seal it.



Above right: Inside and outside twice dyed with exterior latex, in a terracotta colour.

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Preparing the supports



Frame made – on to the next

Frame painted and in situ – of course larger sizes can also be made, for instance double length units.



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Single length pipe in place with double size filled version. The pipes have a layer of 4-5 cm potshards with anti-root fabric above, then one third each, Japanese split, sharp sand and potting soil with a small part of vermiculite added.



Above left: Red Weser flagstone to match the half pipes on these new gutters was used to landscape them. Above right: The first small vitrified clay pipe ready for planting.



Double length version – planted

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Crevice Planter made from old Satellite Dish – a neat planter made from something that is not too difficult to find.

Right: Satellite dish - powder coating still intact



Below: Degreased and washed



Right: holes drilled for drainage and below: painted on both sides with Hammerite paint to prevent rusting.

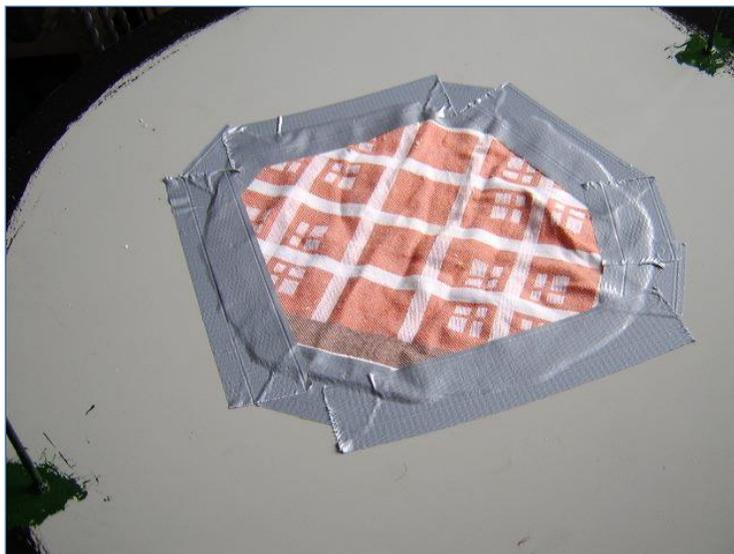


Right: Impregnated small wooden “feet” cut to scale and glued on.



Ed.: You can see Jan’s videos [HERE](#)

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Cover the holes with cloth to prevent excess soil loss and attach and paint a metal support to hold the first slate of the crevice.



Dish with rocks placed – still unplanted - sprinkled with Japanese split. After planting the surface will be sprinkled with crushed slate.

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View from above before planting and below: dish in position



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Planted dish with list of plants used Including one of Jan's favourites – a grafted witches' broom and all top-dressed with crushed slate.

Aquilegia jonesii
Asperula sinntensisii
Calceolaria fothergillii
Erigeron scopulinus
Globularia incanescens
Pinus mugo 'Mini' (sport of Mops)
Primula marginata
Sempervivum montanum subsp. *minimum*
Sempervivum arachnoideum 'Linda'
Sempervivum 'Braune Maus'
Sempervivum arachnoideum subsp. *tomentosum* 'Lagerii'
Sempervivum 'Latex'
Sempervivum 'Edward Balls'
Sempervivum arachnoideum subsp. *tomentosum*
Sempervivum 'Bella'



Armeria in flower

- quite a number of plants in a relatively small container !

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Small crevice garden

In 1990 I made a rock garden for a friend. In 2002, his son took over the house and rebuilt the garden. In 2014 these slates were still piled up behind the house.

My friend asked if I could use them (ha, ha guess what?!)

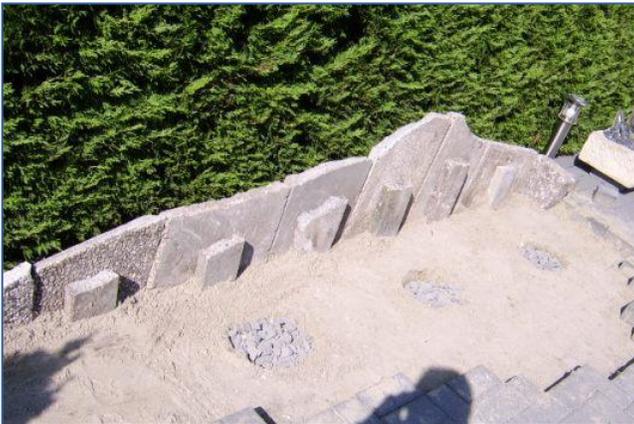
The beginning of a small crevice garden.....

Right: The slate that I recovered

Below: Additional materials



Right: Where am I going to build it?
Surface outlined, 3.70 metres long by 1.35 metres at the widest.



Above: Paving stones removed from base area and three holes in the ground filled with grit 20-30mm, to allow excess water to drain. The back is made from pieces of stone tiles.

Right: Anti-root but water permeable material laid on the ground surface so that no pests can come inside.



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Base mixture is applied, one quarter Japanese split 2-6 mm, 1/4 coarse sand, 1/4 garden soil and the rest clay.

Now to place the the big first stone -

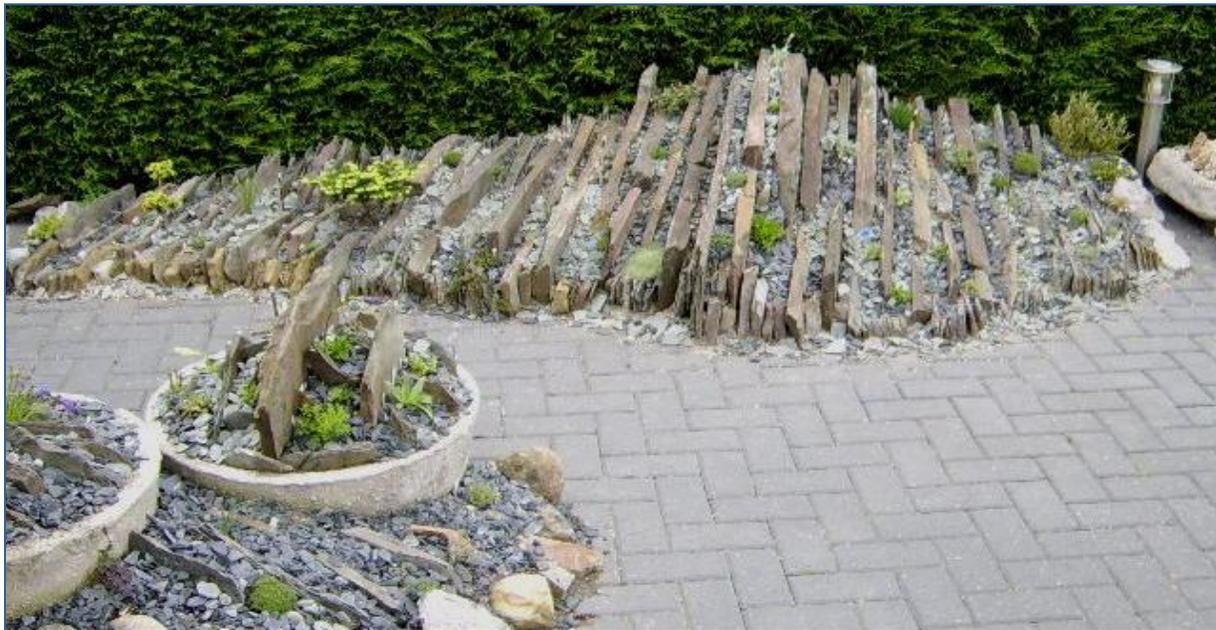


Steady progress is made with the thin sections of rock until the area is filled and shaped attractively. The raised crevice garden blends well into the paved area.



Ed.: There are many descriptions of crevice gardens in the Scottish Rock Garden Club Forum – you can learn about members' experiences with this type of rock bed and planting, for instance, [HERE](#).

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The crevice bed – list of main plants, below.....

| | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Allium</i> | <i>cyathophorum</i> | var. <i>farreri</i> |
| <i>Armeria</i> | <i>maritima</i> | 'Little Penny' |
| <i>Bolax</i> | <i>gummifera</i> | |
| <i>Campanula</i> | <i>dasyantha</i> | |
| <i>Daphne</i> | <i>retusa</i> | |
| <i>Dianthus</i> | <i>simulans</i> | |
| <i>Dianthus</i> | | 'Watson' |
| <i>Draba</i> | <i>suendermanii</i> | |
| <i>Erigeron</i> | <i>flettii</i> | |
| <i>Erysimum</i> | | 'Turkisch Bazaar' |
| <i>Genista</i> | <i>pilosa</i> | 'Procumbens Nana' |
| <i>Gentiana</i> | <i>acaulis</i> | 'Frohleiten' |
| <i>Gentiana</i> | <i>modra</i> | 'Tmaust' |
| <i>Gentiana</i> | <i>septemfida</i> | |
| <i>Gypsophila</i> | <i>aretioides</i> | |
| <i>Helichrysum</i> | <i>milfordiae</i> | |
| <i>Helichrysum</i> | <i>retortoides</i> | |
| <i>Iberis</i> | <i>pruitii</i> | |
| <i>Iris</i> | <i>ruthenica</i> | 'Nana' |
| <i>Iris</i> | <i>reichenbachii</i> | |
| <i>Lonicera</i> | <i>crassifolia</i> | 'Little Honey' |
| <i>Luzula</i> | <i>ulophylla</i> | |
| <i>Phlox</i> | <i>hoodii</i> | |
| <i>Phlox</i> | | 'Bořanovice' |
| <i>Picea</i> | <i>abies</i> | 'Pavlica' |
| <i>Pinus</i> | <i>mugo</i> | 'Kissen' |
| <i>Potentilla</i> | <i>hyparctica</i> | |
| <i>Primula</i> | <i>marginata</i> | 'Beamish' |
| <i>Primula</i> | <i>marginata</i> | 'Caerulea' |
| <i>Salix</i> | <i>reticulata</i> | (Alaska) |
| <i>Salix</i> | | 'Boydii' |
| <i>Sempervivum</i> | <i>calcareum</i> | 'Grigg's Surprise' |
| <i>Sempervivum</i> | | 'Ford's Spring' |
| <i>Sempervivum</i> | | 'Crimson Velvet' |
| <i>Sempervivum</i> | | 'Arendsii' |
| <i>Stachys</i> | <i>discolor</i> | |
| <i>Thymus</i> | <i>praecox</i> | 'Elfin' |
| <i>Tofieldia</i> | <i>coccinea</i> | |



Above: ***Lonicera crassifolia*** 'Little Honey'

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This is a view of the crevice garden from 2015



Now for some plants thriving in my garden.....



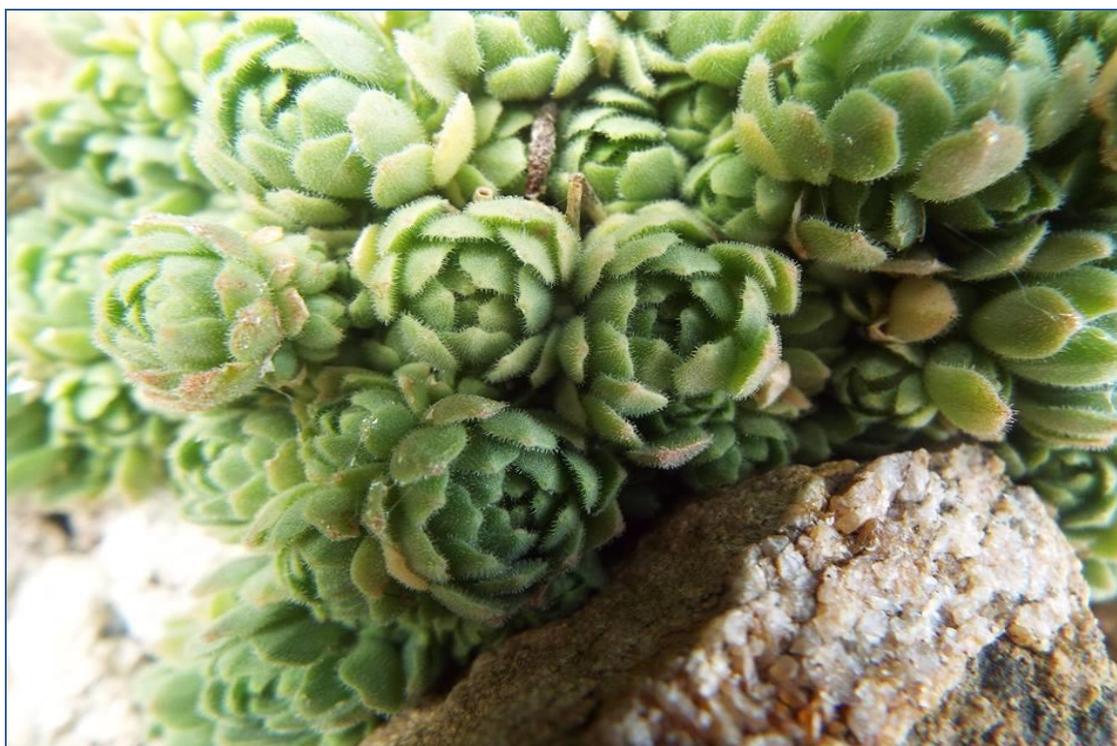
An undervalued plant, *Bellium bellidioides* (above) makes a nice mat with cheerful flowers. It requires a sunny spot and a moderately rich, stony soil. This plant prefers a moist place. There are divided opinions as to its winter hardiness, from -20 C to moderately hardy.

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Left: *Lysimachia japonica* is a simple plant that does well among rock crevices with regular watering. The high cliff on the right is south of the plant, as it protects it a little from the bright sun.

Below: *Rosularia libanotica* comes from Lebanon, Syria and Turkey where they grow in rock crevices, on walls or in dry forests. It forms rosettes of fleshy spatulate leaves in a green to grey-green colour. It blooms with relatively large, bell-shaped white flowers, sometimes with a pink tinge. I give it a cover in the winter.



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Campanula portenschlagiana, a low Campanula originally from the Balkans is a very easy plant, just fun to cover a piece of rock.



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Sedum dasyphyllum* subsp. *dasyphyllum* var. *mesatlanticum: Originating from North Africa, they form a small mound of only 3cm high. Long stems with thick fleshy pink / grey-green leaves lie on the ground and it blooms in summer with pinkish white flower clusters. The soil should be kept dry in winter.



Right: Detail of ***Physoplexis comosa***, I love these special flowers.

Below: ***Edraianthus pumilio*** on a corner of a trough.

All photos by Jan Tholhuijsen.

