

International Rock Gardener

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Author Grahame Ware is expanding his garden spaces, enjoying growing and trialling plants and making it part of, Phantasma Sculptura, his sculpture garden. He has lived for a long time in rural areas of BC and spent some years as the Editor for the Alpine Garden Club of British Columbia Quarterly Bulletin. He has a small hybridizing programmes with Iris, Lewisia and Hemerocallis. Writing and reviewing the cultural scene

occupies much of his time. He runs, with partner Jan, the Gabriola Ambulance Society, a medical equipment co-op that dates back 50 years. They've been doing that for five years of the eight that they've been on Gabriola island.

Picture of Grahame, taken as he says, some years ago in Oaxaca, Mexico."

Our second author this month is another from Canada.

It has been said that Maria Galletti's zeal for alpine plants is matched only by her encyclopaedic knowledge of the subject. Maria formerly ran Alpines Mont Echo at Maria's garden and nursery in Sutton, Quebec, Canada. Fluent in English, French and Greek and an intermediate Spanish speaker, she mostly travels the world and reports her adventures as a Blogger, writer and lecturer. Maria is a member of numerous National and International Horticultural Organizations and has been a Vice-President and Committee Chair of the North American Rock Garden Society.

Maria, pictured in the Great Basin of Nevada, next to a rare cactus.



Cover image: *Trillium grandiflorum* – Image Maria Galletti.

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--- Plant Story ---

Bergenia 'Pink Dragonfly': Flying Into My Firmament of Favourites

by Grahame Ware ©



Bergenia 'Pink Dragonfly'

Like many gardeners, I have over the years — in my various gardens with their capricious climates — been thrilled by the offerings of the Saxifrage family: namely, *Heuchera*, *Mukdenia*, *Astilbe* and, naturally, *Saxifraga* itself.

Another key member of that family is *Bergenia*. Although I have tried and grown many *Bergenia* cultivars over the years, I've never had one that really blew me away and gained entrance to my firmament of favourites. Never, that is, until B. 'Pink Dragonfly'. Kindly allow me to explain why.

I believe it is because it has those alpine characteristics and sensibilities that I love so much in a plant. Having the soul of an oread, it makes a great container plant or a dazzling denizen of the early spring rock garden. But it is more than just that. Pink Dragonfly has an energy about it that I love, and it must be that it oozes the spirit of the Himalayas. Compact, tough, delicate — all in balance. Before flowering in early Spring, the flowers are held underneath the red-pink and butter yellow leaves like a mother bird protecting her chicks under her wings.

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A compact stemscape the size of a pencil then begins to emerge outward from the stem of the main rosette and then turns skyward unto flowering. Once they emerge all around the scape, The flowers stay and stay and turn from a whiter shade to a pinker/whiter shade.

The pink dragonfly was born!

When curiosity is wed with delight, it motivates one's investigations. Thus, I needed to find out as much as I could. The bottom line is that I discovered that the compact, stylish 'Pink Dragonfly' had a transatlantic and transpacific odyssey. It acted as a proxy to important horticulturists in the history of *Bergenia*. The conclusion I made was that 'Pink Dragonfly' is clearly an offspring of *Bergenia stracheyi forma alba*.

Unravelling The Mysteriously Mingled: A Brief Horticultural History

Fifty years ago, Cambridge taxonomist Peter Yeo was also very curious about the actual origins and species component of many hybrid *Bergenia*. The interfertile *Bergenia* lends itself nicely to cross-pollination he said and concluded, "It is therefore clear that an immense range of clones is possible, and that any attempt to provide (taxonomic) keys is bound to fail." p 96, (*Baileya* v. 18, 1971, "Cultivars of *Bergenia* in the British Isles"). Well, there goes any hope for the crowd that likes to put everything in neat little boxes! As a result of Yeo's hybridizing and horticultural sleuthery, he also concluded that *B. stracheyi* had been hybridized extensively in horticulture with *B. ciliata* and he proposed that the resulting hybrid have a properly named horticultural handle. He proposed *B. x spathulata* Yeo.

But due to the rule of priority, the author of *B. x spathulata* is considered to be Nagels.

In his experience in running garden trials at Cambridge, Yeo says of *B. x spathulata* on p105 that it is "a valuable, dwarf, early flowering cultivar with leaves that endure the winter well." It is also clear that there have been many *x spathulata* hybrids running around for quite a while thus underscoring Yeo's statement above that "any attempt to provide keys is bound to fail." (Endnotes 1)

Tom Smith

In examining, top German cultivars, 'Morganröte' and 'Silberlicht', Yeo says they were raised before WW2 but commercially introduced in 1950-51.

Tellingly, Yeo also states that the basis of George Arends' programme took "place between 1890-1895". (p 99) Thus, without stating it, this meant that he believed N. Ireland based horticulturist, Tom Smith, was the "basis".

(This statement most likely overlooked the significance of the young Prussian, Arends, working at Thomas S. Ware's nursery in London in 1886 where they were working with and selling

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what they referred to as *Bergenia milesii* (*stracheyi alba*), *B. x schmidtii* and *B. purpurascens*.)

Tom Smith was, without question, the first great hybridizer of the genus creating at least 20 named hybrids that found their way into gardens all over Britain, France and Germany.

Tom Smith was a Birmingham born and raised gardener who really hit his stride when he moved to Belfast in 1870 as he found work down the coast as manager at the Warrenpoint Road Nurseries. Later, around 1886, he started his own nursery, Daisy Hill. During the late 19th century, due to the burgeoning tourist trade that was made possible by the development of railways, Warrenpoint became a premier holiday destination and one of its main attractions was Warrenpoint Gardens. Not surprisingly, it was designed and built by Smith for the county municipality and opened in 1906.

The railroads also helped distribute his many *Bergenia* hybrids from his Newry village location where a special side spur was built to accommodate wheelbarrows full of Daisy Hill plants that could be walked right into the railway box cars. As part of the programme of mass shipment of plants, Smith collected sphagnum moss from the local hills so that clean, bare root plants could survive the trip. He was one of the first to do this in the trade. The creation of many of the finest gardens in Ireland and N Ireland was made easier by the trains bringing in “carloads” of plants from Smith’s nursery. Thus, Rowlallane, Mount Stewart, etc. were well stocked with his *Bergenia*. (Endnotes 2)

The actual origin of ‘Pink Dragonfly’

From Rosmarie/Annemarie Eskusche’s web comes this: “This pretty *Bergenia* owes its rather “American” name to the plant breeder Dan Heims (USA), who discovered the plant as a seedling in our nursery and bought it “unnoticed”. It was then named and introduced by Terra Nova.”

Of course, that may not be the whole story. She also says that: “The varieties ‘Glockenturm’, ‘Admiral’, ‘Biedermeier’, ‘David’, ‘Red Sister’, ‘Rosa Zeiten’ and also ‘Pink Dragonfly’ come from our nursery. When selecting these varieties at the nursery, we place particular value on large flowers, flower colour, vigour, and an attractive winter aspect, i.e. beautiful and splendidly coloured foliage in autumn and winter.”

In his Terra Nova Nursery catalogues, co-owner Heims parenthetically acknowledges Eskusche’s work on ‘Pink Dragonfly’. Subsequently, Terra Nova has come up with two other good siblings to “Pink Dragonfly that are also container and rock garden partial— Dragonfly ‘Sakura’ and Dragonfly ‘Angel Kiss’. Previously, Terra Nova floated the even more diminutive ‘Flirt’. Never at all complacent, Terra Nova in 2022 introduced a new colour series dubbed/copyrighted as Vintage. These are also container-centric *Bergenia* that owe some of

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their diminutive DNA to 'Pink Dragonfly' but also have a heavy interbred dose of *B. eimeiensis*. This latter species was re-discovered in C. Sichuan in the late 1980's by Mikinori Ogisu which led to the authoring by C.Y. Wu ex J.T. Pan in 1988. Take note that the habitat that this wonderful species lives in has alkaline soils over rocks, in fairly dry conditions, and usually under an overhang. Heims relates (pers.comm) that they have "over fifty (50) breeding stock cultivars of *B. eimeiensis*" at their breeding facility. The result of this new direction/evolution for even smaller and better container-centric and rock garden partial *Bergenia*, can be seen in their Vintage series— namely, Early Brilliance 'Magenta', and 'Vintage Rose', 'Vintage Bouquet' and 'Vintage Blush'. These are the polar opposite of "elephant ears"! (Endnotes 3) Another *B. eimeiensis* hybrid that has spurred interest lately is Robin White's 'Pink Ice'. I'm sure there will be more of these wonderful rock garden hybrids hitting the markets over the next while.

Taxonomy

The name *Bergenia* was coined in 1867 by Moench and published by Engler.

The Englishman Haworth had used the name *Megasea* in *Saxifr. Enum.* 7 (1821) and most English gardeners followed that name for the better part of the next 80 years.

The botanical shorthand looks like this: *Bergenia stracheyi* (J. D. Hooker & Thomson) Engler, Bot. Zeitung (Berlin). 26: 842. 1868.

Synonymy: *Saxifraga stracheyi* J. D. Hooker & Thomson, J. Proc. Linn. Soc., Bot. 2: 61. 1858; *S. milesii* Baker.

Leichtlin says, in regard to the aliases, that it was known as *Saxifraga milesii*, a synonym that became another synonym, *Bergenia milesii* Stein. This was before becoming the duly and taxonomically annotated *B. stracheyi forma alba*. As regards this specific epithet, Regel in *Gartenflora* 35: 307 (1886), says that Mr. Miles of Chelsea [G.W.: that area of London not the Physic Garden — more on Mr. Miles later in Endnotes] has introduced it into cultivation via seed. This clue may well be the source of Tom Smith's breeding material. and begs the question of whether or not Miles got his seed or plants from Leichtlin. Leichtlin and Hooker were close allies in introducing plants of garden merit into horticulture and this plant was one of them. Max Leichtlin is credited as discovering the type plant (lectotype) at 11,000 ft in 1882 in "Afghanistan". This is incorrect. We know, however, that Miles says that his source was "Afghanistan" and also why Leichtlin gave his name as the specific epithet. Englehart authored the species while parenthetically acknowledging J. D. Hooker and Thomson. Some people now are exploring the notion that *B. stracheyi* and *B. 'afghanica'* are synonymous but that idea will be, in my opinion, inconclusive and incorrect. The Himalayan blood of *B. stracheyii forma*

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alba has infused 'Pink Dragonfly' and kin with alpine characteristics— much more compact, excellent winterhardiness, and, delightfully, longer flowering.

Plantsmen Who Hybridized *Bergenia*

The species *stracheyi* is also what fabled hybridizer Eric Smith used to develop his neat *Bergenia* cultivars, 'Bach', 'Beethoven', 'Brahms' and 'Britten'.

(J. Archibald, ['Raiser unknown: Eric Smith, a plantsman'](#) in Hardy Plant Society Journal 2000). [Available from SRGC.net – Archibald Archive] In that article, Archibald comments that they all derived from “the very dwarf and leathery-leafed *B. stracheyi forma alba* as a seed parent. Their dark, thick-textured foliage remains in extremely good condition all winter and they flower profusely. I rate them very highly as garden plants and grow all the cultivars.”

Archibald and Smith were the owners of the Plantsmen Nursery, but the only *Bergenia* listed in The Plantsman Nursery catalogue of 1967-8 were Ballawley seedlings! Incidentally, the Ballawley hybrids were another group of Irish based types that bore little resemblance to *B. stracheyi*.



Bergenia 'Pink Dragonfly'

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Archibald continues, “Eric had selected about four clones, and we grew them alongside each other for several years. After a little arm-twisting, he decided to name two, 'Brahms' and 'Beethoven', after his two favourite composers. **These are all white-flowered hybrids of *B. stracheyi*** [G.W. emphasis], similar in general qualities but some with green calyces and some with pink ones.”

Graham Stuart Thomas is another *Bergenia*-phile with a great knowledge of the historical background of this highly interfertile genus. As a young man, he met the talented plantswoman and *Bergenia*iac, Gertrude Jekyll when she was still puttering around her Munstead Wood gardens. They hit it off. Thomas saw how very effective *Bergenia* were in her home gardens and in her clients' gardens, providing not only an excellent spine along rock-lined paths but also with the added plus of multi-season interest. Inevitably, Thomas caught the *Bergenia* bug too. However, Thomas who introduced his own *B.* 'Sunningdale' in 1964, was seemingly unaware of its true provenance (the fact that, as Archibald states, that they were *B. stracheyi forma alba* hybrids) of Eric Smith's first two great *Bergenia* cultivars, 'Beethoven' and 'Brahms'. The proof? Thomas states in his *Perennial Garden Plants* (1990), that 'Beethoven' and 'Brahms', “are further excellent German-raised hybrids.” This was one of those rare occasions when the great plantsman was wrong. Surprisingly, Thomas' Sunningdale was the British nursery that introduced Arends' 'Abendglut' and 'Silberlicht' as stated by Yeo (1971) in his solid foundational survey of *Bergenia* (in *Baileya* v. 18, 1971, Cultivars of *Bergenia* in the British Isles 1971).

In this important work, Yeo also states that “Arends was raising hybrids of multiple parents immediately after WW2. The interfertile *Bergenia* lends itself nicely to cross-pollination.” p96 Curiously, in the *RHS Dictionary of Gardening* (1999), it lists *B. x spathulata* as a cross between *B. ciliata* and *B. stracheyi* and hedges it's bet by saying that it is of “Garden origin or a wild cross in India.” p341. This entry was done by none other than Yeo. This certainly raises the nothospecies spectre, doesn't it?

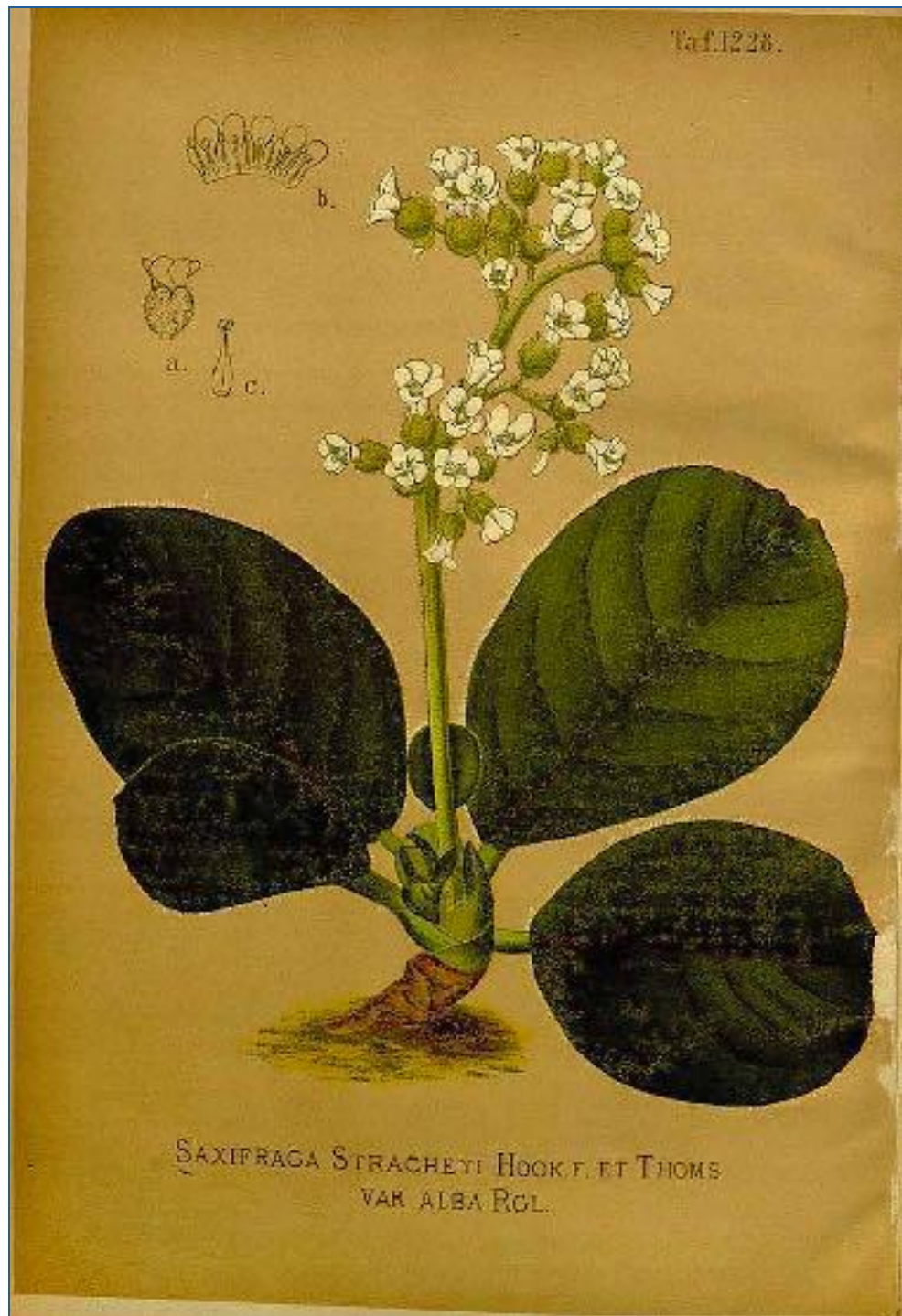
In his capacity as manager/director at Sunningdale Nurseries, few people in their career had as much experience with *Bergenia*, as did Graham Stuart Thomas. He wisely observes in regard to *B. stracheyi* (*Perennial Garden Plants*, 1990) that “This pretty minikin has quite small rounded leaves, and short heads of substantial flowers in white or clear pink. They nestle among the mass of short foliage. The pink form is to the fore at Mount Stewart, N. Ireland.” p 95. He had to be referring to the more compact 'alba' form.



Hand coloured lithograph of *Bergenia stracheyi* from Curtis's Bot. Mag., vol. 98 (ser. 3, vol. 28) 1872 tab 5967. This is the first portrait of *B. stracheyi* in literature.

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This, once again, gets us back to the Emerald Isle. Exactly where Tom Smith sourced his species we do not know but there is a dwarf form of the species that was identified in the wild many decades ago by Dr. Ralph Stewart, former Principal of the Gordon College, Rawalpindi. He recognised a variety or form that was smaller which hailed from Ladakh and Spiti. Tellingly, in the *Flowers of the Himalaya* (Polunin & Stainton 1987) they say, "this form (plate 40, p 460) is the common alpine species of the W Himalaya from Afghanistan to Uttarakhand." (EFlora India Google Group).



First illustration of the *forma alba* in Regel's *Gartenflora* 1886 (Vol 35)

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In the above illustration of *B. stracheyi forma alba* in *Gartenflora* it says, “we (Regel) received this striking form, the illustration of which we provide, from Mr. Max Leichtlin as *S. 'afghanistanica'* [G.W. emphasis] from which it could be concluded that it was imported from Afghanistan.” And shortly later, “Illustration of this form is the most beautiful of these **Indian Saxifraga species** [G.W. emphasis] with its large flat flower clusters.” p434.

Note that when India and Afghanistan in the mid-19th C. were side by side with only the Indus River and the Himalayas separating them, was the provenance really Afghanistan? This is unlikely if one looks at the old maps they drew on. Mistakes in geographical attribution had previously taken place before between Leichtlin, Regel and Frank Miles. (See Endnotes 5.) More clarity on some fundamental misunderstandings is to be found in *The Gardeners Chronicles* magazine of 1882, with the following entry under *Saxifraga milesii* Hort. Leichtlin: “This is one of the Himalaya Saxifrages of the Megasea group which lately has attracted the attention of cultivators both in England and the Continent, and for which no special name (i.e. botanical), so far as I am aware, has been attached. We regarded it as a variety of *stracheyi* but it differs from the species as figured in *Curtis' Botanical Mag* tab 5967 (see above). I received it with a note from Max Leichtlin under the name given to honour Frank Miles (*Saxifraga milesii*) of Chelsea (Endnotes 4), the well-known artist who, apparently, imported the seeds plucked from plants at an elevation of 11,000 ft. from Kidarkanta in the Himalayas.” p102 [GW: This is a village at the foot of a famous mountain of the same name located in Uttaranchal— now re-branded as Uttarakhand in the nation-state of India].

The writer of the above entry in the section headed “New Garden Plants” was none other than J. G. Baker, the long-time archivist and botanist at Kew. Baker then signifies this plant as *Saxifraga milesii*. But the culprit of confusion would appear to be Leichtlin who says he received the seeds from Miles and being a nurseryman by trade (Leichtlin) grew them into plants, collected more seed and shared them. And yet, about four years later, he says to Regel that the plant is *Saxifraga 'afghanistanica'* making no mention to Regel of his dedication to Miles and, it seems, forgetting that they were collected in Kidarkanta. To his credit, Regel wisely places it under the species *stracheyi* and, in turn, takes credit for authoring the subspecies epithet *alba*. Leichtlin, although a great grower of plants especially bulbs, made many mistakes besides this and this was another one.

This then is, most likely, the original wild source of this form/subspecies/ ecotype of *Bergenia stracheyi* that made its way into horticulture in the 19th Century. J.D. Hooker says in Curtis Botanical Magazine, “The specimen figured here has flowered in the Royal Gardens on an open rock work in March during several years. The plant was raised from seed sent home by Captain Strachey FRS from Kumaon in 1851.”

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Note that Kumaon and Kidarkanta are in the same area of N India and not what is currently regarded as Afghanistan. *Saxifraga milesii* is *Bergenia stracheyi forma alba* and Kew was the likely source for Miles. From them it radiated to many of the horticultural literati in Germany and England, two countries that were very close culturally and politically during this period.

B. stracheyi forma alba eventually made its way into the gardening and hybridizing hands of Tom Smith likely through these channels. One could persuasively argue that Smith (Tommy not Eric), in fact, well over 100 years ago did more than anyone to popularize *Bergenia* with over 20 named cultivars being sold into the horticultural trade. He got the whole *Bergenia* train rolling out of the station with considerable help from 'hort tout', William Robinson, who had much to say in his magazine about what he referred to as "the broad-leaved rockfoils" (Volume 3, 1905 *Flora and Sylva* magazine).

He says that *Megasea (Bergenia)* "are among the hardiest, most easily grown and useful of evergreen perennials, and have a very distinct and high value for the garden." p247

Robinson had this entry on *Megasea (Bergenia) milesii*: "a plant of garden origin formerly regarded as a form of *stracheyi* but now supposed to be a cross between that kind and ? *ligulata* var *ciliata*. It is of very dwarf growth and bears pure white flowers of great beauty, particularly in the early stages, the distinct claw to each petal distinguishing them from any those of any other kind." p249

On the next page Robinson lists three varieties of *Megasea (Bergenia) stracheyi*: 1) *alba*, 2) *afghanica* and 3) *athysanodes*. They are noted as being small of stature as is another supposed species, *M. yunnanensis* which he says is "a remarkable plant similar in stature to *M. afghanica*." p250

Robinson, like most at the time, was confused as to the identity and name of what would eventually be agreed upon was *Bergenia stracheyi forma alba*. Obviously, there was several eco-types of the subspecies created by the various altitudes of N India and the western Himalayas. But what they all agreed upon as to the origins of it was that it was of "garden origin." This suggests very strongly that *Bergenia* seed from plants in the garden were being passed around with the assumption that they were pure species and not hybrids. Given the interfertility of the genus, this was a seriously flawed assumption.

Leichtlin says he got the seeds from Miles and duly dubbed it as such for his friend and correspondent in Robinson's gardening magazines. Miles said it came from 11,000 ft in the Himalayas. The question is: did he get the seed from Hooker or one of his plant explorer/military friends when they were trading bulbs and seeds? London, Baden-Baden and St. Petersburg all figure in the geography and cultivation of this subspecies. (See Endnotes 5 for more on this discussion of mistakes and attribution among these individuals.)

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Final Thoughts

Pam Harper, the doyenne of the American perennial scene for over 30 years, says, on p196 in her seminal *Designing With Perennials* (1989), “Unless you have observed them (*Bergenia*) through the season where you live, start small, with just a clump or two, for in many parts of the United States they are happy in neither sun nor shade, while their cabbage-like leaves provide safe harbour for slugs. They seem to be at their best in full sun where 80 F is considered a heat wave.” Harper, who gardened in Virginia, USA is not exactly cock-a-hoop over our “grandfather’s” *Bergenia*, is she?

However, these comments echo my former sentiments and that is how I used to feel about *Bergenia*. But, most importantly, it follows and underlines my surprise and delight with ‘Pink Dragonfly’. It contradicts the *Bergenia* stereotypes that we’ve come to know and certainly is one cultivar that isn’t *miffy* as Reginald Farrer used to say when sardonically referencing plants that just didn’t stand up to what the seasons threw at them and thus departed either on their own volition or, more likely, from the disgust of the gardener. No, it’s a whole new ball game with these hardy, smaller “rockfoils”.

The world is always changing just like our opinions of all things in it. *Bergenia* is no exception. I am excited about the newer and more versatile hybrid group of *B. stracheyi forma alba* types such as ‘Pink Dragonfly’ and the *B. emeiensis* hybrids now just coming out and ready to really test them in our gardens.

Endnotes

1) Subsequently, the authorities of botanical and horticultural nomenclature deemed Yeo’s horticultural authoring as “unplaced”. *B. smithii* Engl. is also considered another such “unplaced” name that, in turn, is synonymous with *B. x newryensis* Yeo.

2) Much more on Tom Smith and his importance not only to *Bergenia* but to all things horticulture in Britain and the West can be found in an article by Alan Grills. Before moving to Newry (near Belfast), the young Smith worked at the famous Veitch and Sons nursery near London. After a lifetime of hard work and amazing accomplishments in ornamental horticulture, he was the first nurseryman in Ireland to receive the highest award from the Royal Horticultural Society, the Victoria Medal in 1906. During his time at Daisy Hill, his operation had no equal in Europe or anywhere else. During his prime, seeds and plants from expeditions all over the world— but primarily Asia—flooded into his Newry, N. Ireland nursery. Smith was, I found out much to my delight, the source of that famous coral bark maple, ‘Sango Kaku’.

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No bastardised/anglicised name for him! Smith propagated and provided many of the foundation plants for the great Irish gardens that were being created at the end of the 19th and early 20th Centuries. In addition, he was directly involved in their design and planting arrangements. This includes Rowallane (Rev. John Moore), Inacullin (Bryce), Castlewellan, Kilmacurragh, Headford, Annesgrove and, last but not least, Mount Stewart (Dame Edith Vane-Tempest-Stewart, Marchioness of Londonderry). His fame, along with his personal touch, meant that he travelled to all of these properties and with his keen eye and wonderful horticultural landscape mind, suggested where they plant them and how. He was a totally hands-on, horticultural artisan: a plant artist. Horticulturist Alan Grills was the son of Thomas Grills, G.N. Smith's son-in-law, that had taken over Daisy Hill when it went into a WW2 induced bankruptcy. (G.N. Smith was Tom Smith's son). As part of his education, Alan Grills went to work at T. Hilling & Co where Graham Stuart Thomas was the manager and his forceful mentor.

For more on the Daisy Hill Nursey read Alan Grills, 'A famous Irish nursery: Daisy Hill Nurseries, Newry', *Moorea: Journal of the Irish Garden Plant Society* 10 (1993), pp 3-6.

3) Pink Dragonfly and its kin are definitely not in the same league sizewise, as the "Elephant's Ears" of the past. I suspect that this common name came from *B. cordifolia*, the honking Siberian species that made its way into cultivation earlier than most. Still the common name persists as witnessed by a newly christened cultivar named 'Dumbo' that they say is a "hardy *B. ciliata*"). It comes from Rodney Richards' New World Plants.



Will Disney's lawyers be contacting Richards soon?

Dumbo the baby elephant (seen here) whose ears were too big - oh what a great cartoon that was. This is Walt Disney's 1941 version. I'm not sure if *Bergenia* 'Dumbo' will fly as well artistically or commercially as did the cartoon film character. We'll see.

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4) Frank Miles was an artist and a well-connected, Victorian bon vivant who died at the age of 39. Importantly, he was responsible for introducing John Ruskin to William Robinson. For 10 years, Miles contributed illustrations and information on lilies, as well as writing many vignettes on plants and cultivation for Robinson's magazine, *The Garden*. Miles loved *Narcissus* as well. Robinson shared one particular passion with Ruskin: that of alpine plants. Robinson is credited for inventing the 'Alpine garden', or rock garden, whose detailed lay out concepts he developed in *Alpine Flowers*, first published in 1870. With this book, he meant to explain how alpine plants might be grown in English gardens. To describe the natural habitat of such 'tiny mountain gems' (Robinson 1870a, 78), he narrated his own trips to the Alps, in the footsteps of John Ruskin, whose diaries he quoted extensively (Robinson 1870a, 91–93, 305). It seems the Alps afforded Ruskin and Robinson a new source of forms, patterns and colours, that they tapped for inspiration. This was a new artform and all of the aesthetic principles applied.

Miles was also very good friends with Oscar Wilde and supported him financially, etc. Oscar Wilde lived with him as a boarder for many years. (Above modified and adapted from Ingram, David. 'Wild Gardens: The Robinson, Ruskin and Severn Correspondence'. *Ruskin Review and Bulletin* 10 (2014): 30–34.)

5) Mistakes are made in provenance and attribution therein. One example involving the same people with *Bergenia stracheyi forma alba*. From Kew Magazine May 1987, "The Discovery and Introduction of *Allium Giganteum*" by Richard Dadd. "Frank Miles had also sent bulbs of the *Allium* to Max Leichtlin, who cultivated many rare plants at Baden-Baden, and to Eduard Regel, Superintendent of the Imperial Botanic Gardens at St. Petersburg, who had monographed the genus *Allium* in 1875. Regel named and described the plant as a new species, but, inexplicably, he stated that it came from the Himalayas, and this error has since been perpetuated by frequent repetition.

Baker's supposition in Curtis' Botanical Magazine that *A. elatum* was the same plant as *A. giganteum* was also mistaken; it is undoubtedly closely related but is quite distinct. In fact, it is now known that *A. elatum* is the same as Baker's own *A. macleanii* and, since the latter name was published first, *A. elatum* must now join the hundreds of other synonyms that litter this genus. Oddly, Baker says that the drawing in the Botanical Magazine was **made from a plant given to Kew by Leichtlin** [G.W. emphasis]. Whether *A. giganteum* reached Kew solely in this roundabout way, or whether it also came directly from Miles that Saturday morning, we shall probably never know." p94

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Saxifraga afghanica Hort. Syn *Bergenia stracheyi* forma *alba* **Kew Handbook 1902 RBG**, They'd made the taxonomic shift from *Megasea* to *Bergenia* but still attributed this species to a hort. origin. Yet, just a few years earlier they (RBG) were calling it *Saxifraga afghanica* with "authorship ascribed to Aitch. & Hemsl." In *The Garden* (1896, xlix., 260.), they say, "A distinct plant with white flowers belonging to the *Megasea* group. Afghanistan." A simple case of The Confused causing confusion.



Bergenia 'Pink Dragonfly' is available from various nurseries – these photos are used by kind permission of [Kevock Garden](#), a nursery in Scotland, which is famous for its run of Gold Medals at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show.

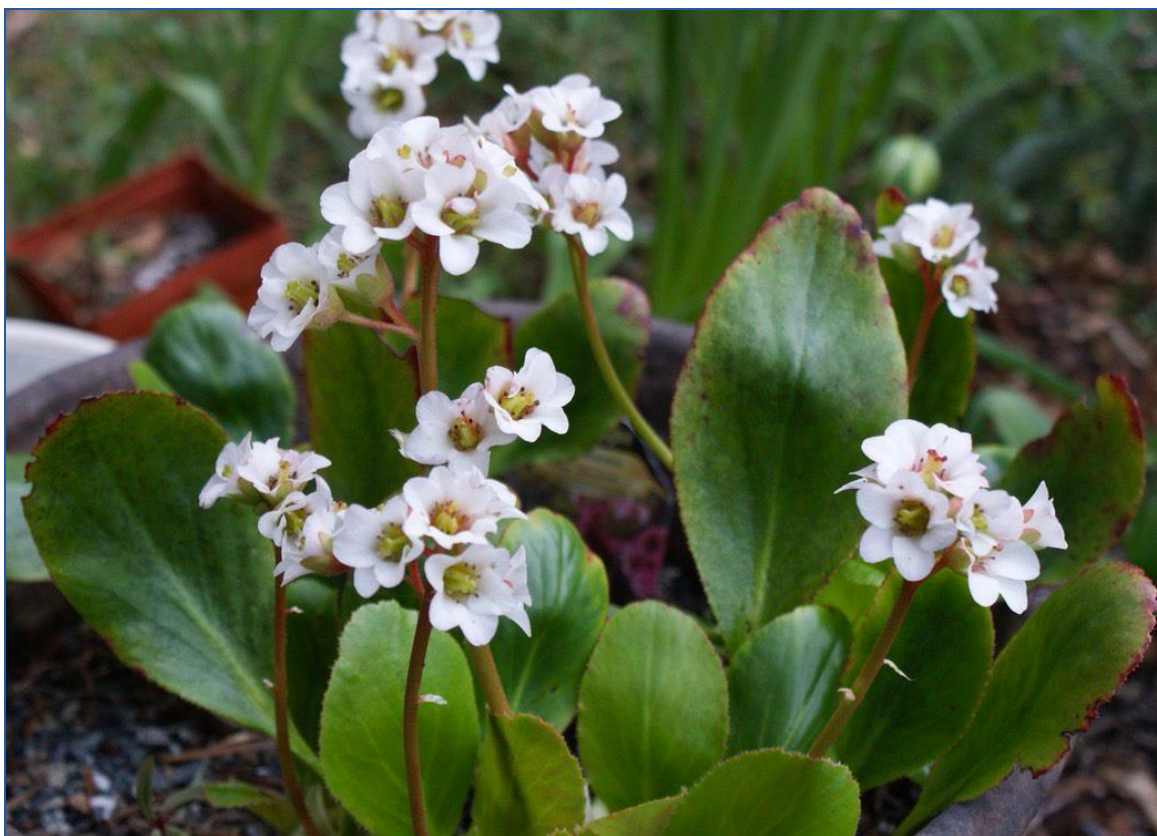
Above: 'Pink Dragonfly' in flower.

Right: 'Pink Dragonfly' foliage.

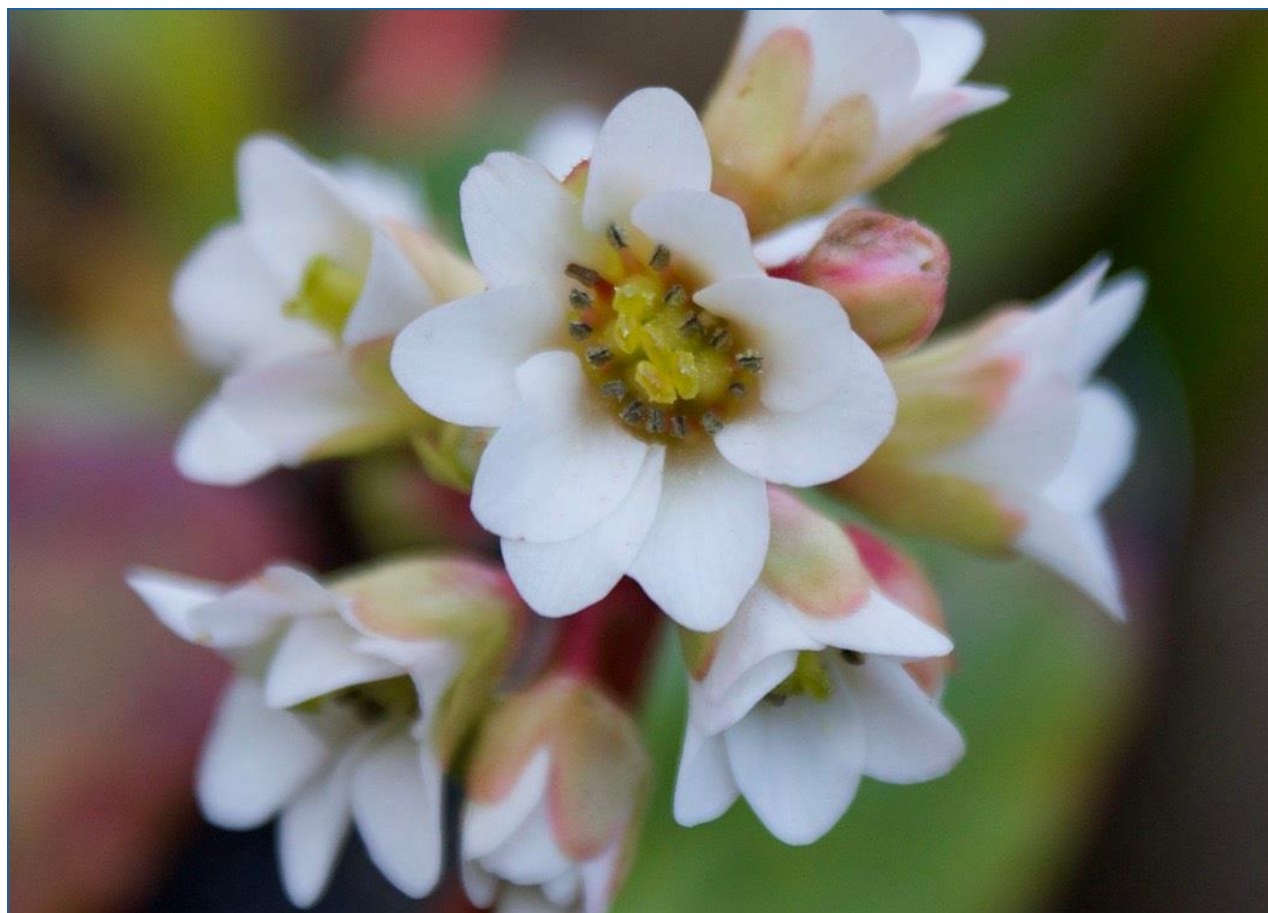


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More photos of *Bergenia* 'Pink Dragonfly', in the garden of Grahame Ware:

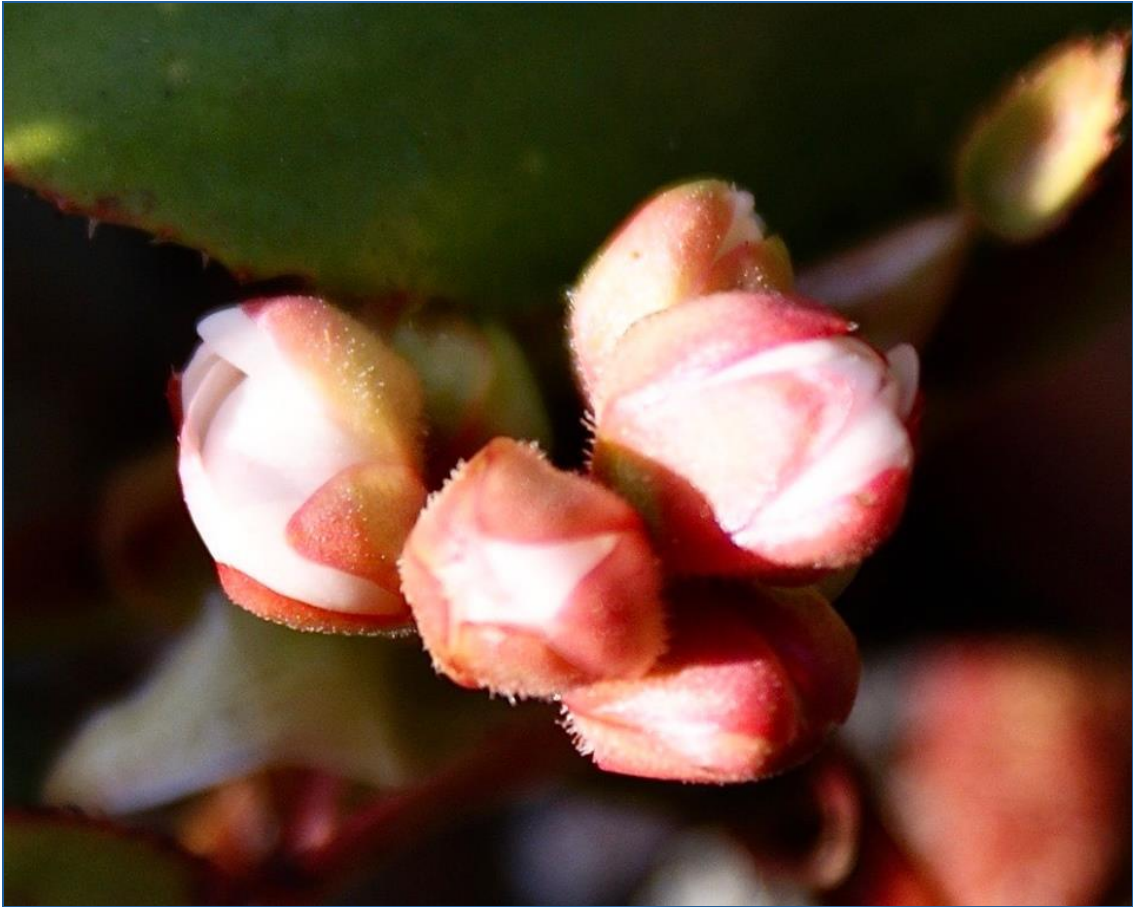


'Pink Dragonfly' in late March living happily in a fibre pot

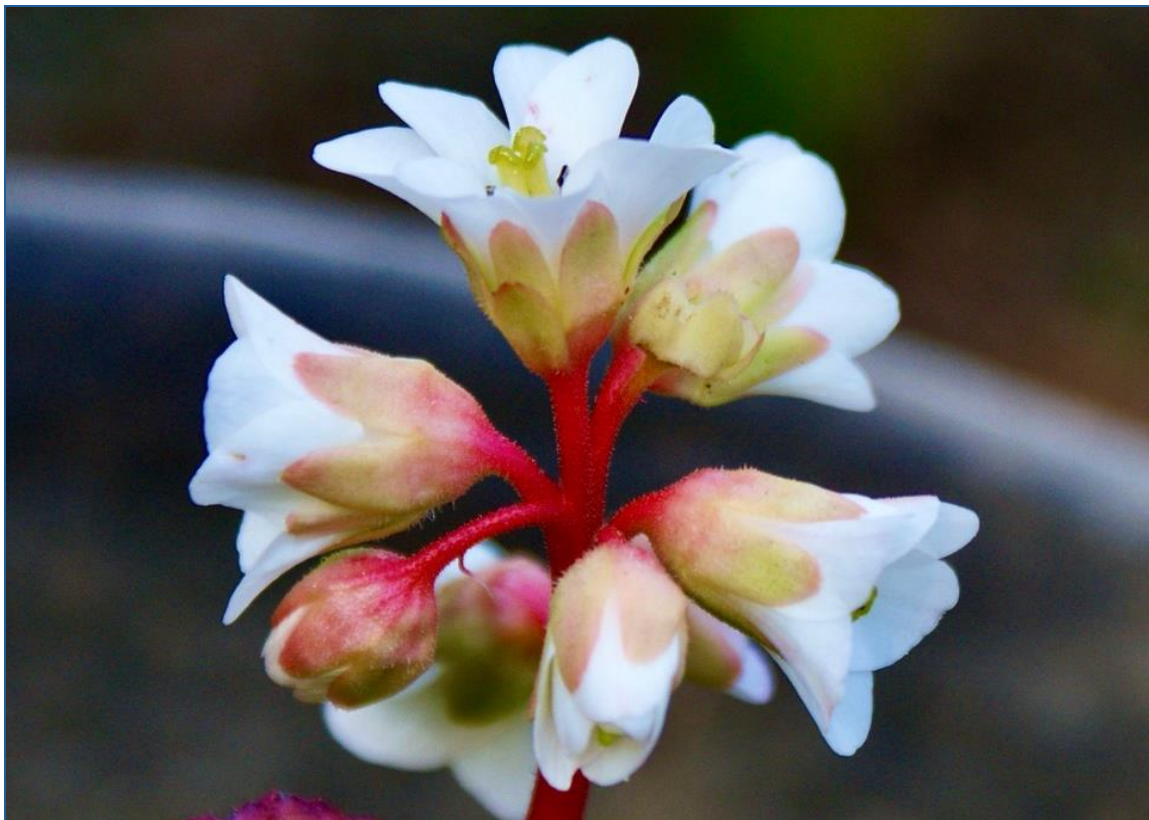


'Pink Dragonfly' flower just opened March 30th. It fades to pink but emerges white.

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'Pink Dragonfly' in bud.



'Pink Dragonfly' flowers emerging.

[This article was first prepared in 2023 by Grahame Ware.]

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--- Spring Ephemerals in Canada ---

Gone in a Flash, Rooted in Wonder – text and most photos, Maria Galletti.



This journey was not to some far-flung corner of the globe - it unfolded right in my own backyard. Though I no longer garden, the search for rare plants has been a lifelong passion, one that's followed me wherever I've happened to be in the world.

This May (2025), I had the privilege of joining 12 fellow members of the Hudson Garden Club in Quebec, Canada, on a walking tour led by local biologist Dr. Frieda Beauregard through the lands protected by the Creek 53 Conservation Trust in Hudson.

An expansive part of Hudson is comprised of wetlands, grasslands and forests and a large escarpment. Being a fierce environmentalist and land donor to conservation myself I was intrigued and excited to explore and view the jewels of early Spring.

Each spring, something quietly magical unfolds in the woods - if you're lucky enough to witness it. I'm talking about the spring ephemerals: delicate wildflowers that bloom brightly and briefly before fading away, making room for the taller, later plants of the season. Their timing is everything. They slip in just as the light returns and the chill lifts, taking advantage of a narrow window before the forest canopy closes overhead. Blink, and you might miss them.

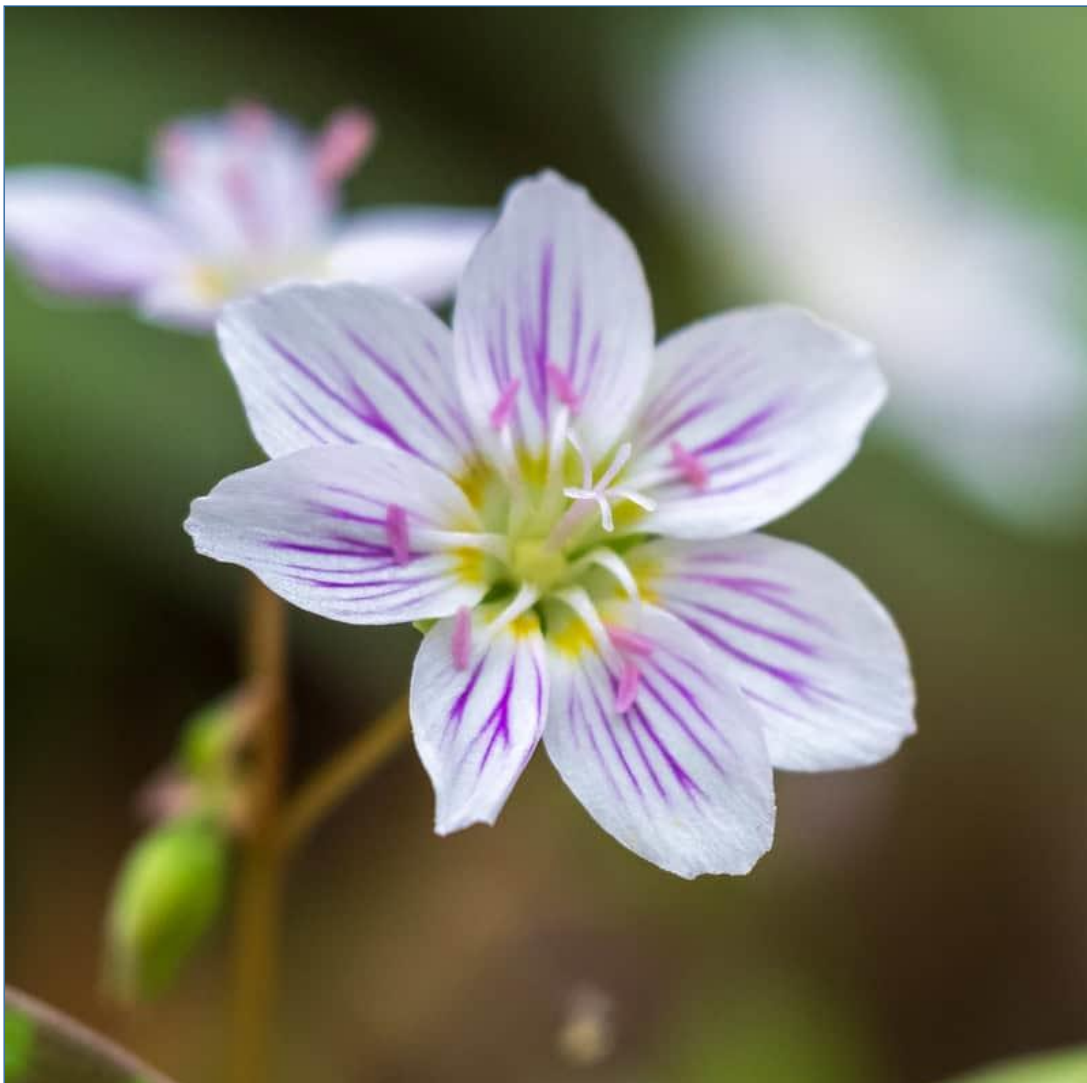
A mix of open fields, shaded woods and escarpment was alive with early blooms and quiet rustle of new life. It reminded me why I fell in love with these plants in the first place - not just for their beauty, but for the sense of timing and mystery they bring to the season.

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The spring ephemerals we encountered on our walk were among the most fleeting, delicate, vibrant, showy, abundant, and delightfully unusual.

Their presence often signals high-quality, undisturbed mixed forests with rich, loamy soils.



One of the earliest to bloom is *Claytonia caroliniana* also known as Spring Beauty, so appropriate and befitting a name, with diminutive, striped pink-and-white flowers that open only in sunlight and often when snow is still melting. Photo Stephane Hogue.

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A close contender is *Hepatica nobilis* var. *acuta*, known by many common names describing its sharp-lobed leaf form. Growing in south-facing ground where soil warms early the Liverleaf Anemone from the Buttercup family is quite fleeting in bloom and forming prominent clumps. As the photo



demonstrates we were too late for the bloom but we could not mistake the species from its unique foliage.



One cannot help but notice the showy display of star-shaped yellow, nodding bells of *Erythronium americanum*, commonly known as Yellow Trout Lilly or Dogtooth Violet, with spotted or mottled leaves!

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Erythronium americanum forms dense colonies in rich, moist woodlands. One peculiarity I have noticed is that not all plants bloom but that does not take away from its flamboyance.



Dicentra cucullaria (Dutchman's Breeches) follows the above line-up coming up in late April early May. I just adore this transient beauty not only for its "bloomer-shaped" fragile blooms but also for its intricately laced grey-green foliage veiling the woodland grounds. Photo Stephane Hogue.

The next group of Spring ephemerals are the charismatic Trilliums. We were fortunate to see all three represented in Creek 53.

Trillium erectum, the Red Trillium, also known as Red Robin, is a solitary marvel perched on erect stems and accentuated by whorls of diamond-shaped leaves. Sometimes it demands attention as we see below.



Trillium erectum

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Trillium grandiflorum, commonly known as the large-flowered trillium. Its showy white flowers, often variable in petal shape, gradually blush pink with age. This *Trillium* plays a key role in early-season pollination. It seems to love open spaces and moist exposed banks.



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Trillium grandiflorum

The third member of the *Trillium* family is *Trillium undulatum*; the most graceful of all three in the woods with a dainty fleeting beauty. Although it has a wide range of habitat it is trickier to spot due to its particular need of soil type. It likes shade, moisture and acidity. I am always enthralled when I spot it! The photo below captures its beauty perfectly, no need to embellish any more.

*Trillium
undulatum*



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Though not technically spring ephemerals, one cannot minimize the importance of ferns in the woods and understory of forests. Ferns provide a natural lush green backdrop palette such as *Matteuccia struthiopteris* or the Fiddlehead fern.



Above: Photo Stephane Hogue.



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Some of the other spring beauties we saw on the walk:



The sculptural *Arisaema triphyllum* or Jack-in-the-Pulpit.

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The elegant *Uvularia sessilifolia* or Sessile Bellwort.



Viola sororia or the Common Blue Violet that brightens the forest floor. Photo Stephane Hogue.

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And last but not least: the luxuriant greenery of *Maianthemum racemosum* or Solomon's Plume.

In conclusion, while these Ghosts of Spring do vanish, many leave behind quiet reminders of their brief visit - colourful seed pods, shifting foliage, and the lingering memory of their colourful appearance. Their short life cycle plays an important role in forest ecosystems, marking seasonal transitions and supporting early pollinators and seed dispersers.

M.G.