

ROCK GARDENING IN CONTAINERS

**The 2018 David Boyd Event
held in Benbecula**





THE WORKSHOP

Lectures and demonstrations were given
by experienced members of the SRGC

16 local gardeners attended
Over 40 SRGC members lent a hand



THE PROGRAMME

- 
- ◆ Introduction to growing in containers
- ◆ Growing media
 - ◆ Landscaping
 - ◆ Plants for containers



Outside Nunton Studios the wind was bracing. Inside, in the calm , everyone listened and worked diligently to turn plastic and clay containers into works of horticultural art. Much of what old rock gardeners know has been learned over decades and it is easy to forget that newcomers to our hobby have yet to discover things which we take for granted. Gardeners like Ian Young are always questioning ‘received wisdom’ and developing new and better ways to grow plants. Ian came up with the idea of turning polystyrene fish boxes into alpine troughs. His ideas have spread round the world.

Troughs made from polystyrene have many advantages over traditional stone troughs.

- They reuse waste polystyrene boxes for a start.
- They are light to move.
- They provide thermal insulation.
- They retain moisture.
- They can be painted and styled to match local stone







Matt's efficient and knowledgeable approach to the structure of the weekend included giving each attendee an information pack. Members studied the contents their pack which included an list of 630 Plants which grow on the 'vice-county' of the Outer Hebrides; a Guide to Common Plants of the Uist Machairs; "Machair Life – Crofting on the Machair" and an RSPB guide to Balranald nature reserve. As you see folk started reading right away.





Matt Topsfield welcomed local people and SRGC members to the practical on growing rock garden plants in containers. As you can see everyone was paying attention, including the old hands. The local gardeners were surprised at first to see so many unfamiliar faces but very soon everyone got on well.



Ian C talked about Growing Media



Ian Y talked about Fish-box troughs



Hey! That's our box!





Matt brought his own troughs to show what can be grown in the outer Hebrides.

Nunton Steadings Heritage Centre is, as its name implies, a community facility created from an old group of farm buildings. One of these would once have been a house for the farming family. The other buildings were a byre, stable and stores for grain hay, equipment etc. We were able to see a lot of old farm equipment as used on the Uists at the Uist Museum. The building is U shaped with its 'back' to the prevailing Atlantic winds. A high wall provides shelter on the Eastern side. The central courtyard is relatively sheltered. Many of us would love such an area in our own gardens. Although the climate of the Hebrides is modified by the Gulf Stream, the strong winds, poor or peaty soil can make gardening difficult. Historically, if one was eking a living out of the land, perhaps you had no energy left for gardening, unless cultivating vegetables. Container Gardening is one solution. The containers can be placed in sheltered spots and moved if necessary. The soil in the container is determined by the gardener. Little space is needed for even a large collection of troughs. A wide variety of plants and bulbs will adapt to life on the edge of Scotland. Low growing plants with small, strong, weather resistant leaves are needed. The answer - Rock Garden Plants and Alpines. Shelter is the key to establishing plants. Many members brought plants for the demonstration. The locals chose those which they wanted for their troughs.





Ian C demonstrated different soil mixes and the importance of drainage



Ian Y demonstrated how to build up the stone work in his trough



Matt provided all the materials needed for the practical

- Several different types of container. Clay pans, plastic boxes, large pots.
- Several tubs of already mixed (by Matt) compost for the containers.
- A huge trawler fish box of stones of various shapes and sizes.
- Horticultural Sand to build up between the rocks of various sizes as the container landscape is built.

Ian Y stressed the importance of using at least one big stone to build around. Successive stones are placed to form crevices for planting. Smaller stones are used in the gaps. He fills the spaces with rough sand (not sea sand). Each wee container should be a unique work of art. He pointed out that it was important to arrange and rearrange the stones until, you were happy with the final appearance. The plant roots grow down between the rocks.











One of the finished troughs

All the rosettes were
removed from the
Sempervivums



The local gardeners and Matt with their planted troughs



Members and local gardeners



The 2018 David Boyd Event

The Buffet Supper





**Matt Topsfield was our
Organiser
Chef
Guide
Lecturer**











Thank you Matt on behalf of everyone who enjoyed a memorable weekend