

Graham Nicholls and all things Alpine – 4th April

2017

Graham Nicholls, who hails from Bath, described his life-long passion with Alpine plants which he has been growing for about 50 years. After he took early retirement in 1990 he started an alpine nursery specialising in North American alpines and now he exports plants throughout the world.

He described how true alpines originally grew in rocky areas generally found above the timber line (about 15,000ft above sea level) where the soil is poor. Big boulders break down to small stones and then to grit and it is the minerals contained in the grit that these plants get their nourishment as well as from animal droppings. In this environment it was usual to find flowers such as lupins growing to a maximum height of only 6 inches, most other flowers growing no more than a couple of inches.



Graham showed us some beautiful pictures of these fascinating alpines which he found growing naturally high up in the Rocky mountains of Colorado, Montana and Utah when he travelled in the USA. He described how, at this level, the Montana landscape looked like the surface of the moon until the camera's eye got closer and showed the most amazing array of colourful flowering plants.



It is common to find alpine plants in garden centres or you can contact specialist growers who can supply plants which will happily grow in our British gardens either in pots or on top of stone walls. Wherever they are planted it is important to remember these plants need good drainage and it's advisable to add perlite at the bottom of the container. As all alpines are small plants it's a good idea to introduce some height when planting and Graham suggested ways to do this with using pieces of slate or stone set on end or sloping in parallel and planting in the cracks.

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