

PRIMULA AUREATA

Judi Barton

April is eagerly anticipated by me, with a volunteering stint to help 'man the stand' at the Harrogate Flower Show now firmly on my gardening calendar. It gives me the opportunity to speak to lots of interesting gardening enthusiasts, and free entry to the show in return for a few hours of my time.

As I entered the marquee this year, I stumbled across Hartside Nursery - also known as 'Plants with Altitude' - who are Cumbrian growers with a special love of primulas. Hartside were celebrating their 40th year of attendance at the Harrogate Flower Show. Neil Huntley, who runs the nursery alongside his wife, Sue, told me he and his father had first attended the Harrogate Show, with little experience of exhibiting, back in 1976. Pricing in those days was very much a fine art (as it still is today). On that first stand they were displaying and selling an arresting little primula with an intriguing story behind it.

The primula in question is *Primula aureata*; it has zig-zag edged petals and leaves, and the foliage is coated in a heavy sprinkling of farina, giving it a variegated appearance from a distance. It can be grown outside, but growing it under cover better preserves the veneer of farina.

According to John Richards, in his book *Primula*, in 1939 a chance seedling of *P. aureata* appeared in a pan of *Swertia purpurascens* at Edinburgh Botanic Gardens, from seed sent from Darjeeling but almost certainly origin-ating from the sacred valleys of Gosainkund and Langtang in Nepal*.

Proving to be a vigorous and beautiful plant, it was propagated thereafter by specialists here in the UK. Rounding the story nicely, native populations of *P. aureata* have since been found in the wild.

Primula aureata was very rare in 1976 but, nevertheless, Neil Huntley's father had to be firmly persuaded to put a £10 price tag on it; in those days even £1 was steep. Such was the primula's charm, they sold all their stock on the first morning. To honour that memory, Neil displayed the same primula on his 2016 exhibit, for sale at the princely sum of - you guessed it - £10.



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* *Author's Note:* In my original article, the story of the plant's introduction to the UK was sketchy. Research by Marion Jay, Editor of *Cornucopia*, revealed its true journey which, in my opinion, adds to the allure of this lovely primula. JB

~ First published in the West Yorkshire Group Newsletter ~
Spring 2016