

SAXIFLORA

PLATE 7

Primula vulgaris
(*Primulaceae*)

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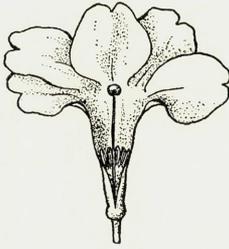
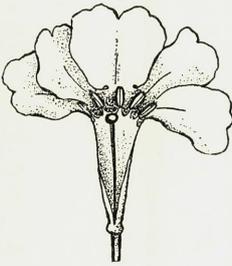
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Primula vulgaris

Left,—“thrum-eyed” flower. Right,—“pin-eyed” flower.

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Primula vulgaris

Primrose

In most American gardens, the genus *Primula* can never assume the importance it enjoys in Britain, for over large areas of our country the summers are too hot and dry to suit these lovers of cool, moist conditions. Among the easiest of the primulas to grow are those belonging to the *Vernales* section, a group which includes the cowslip, oxlip, and common primrose of Europe. It is the last-named which is the primrose of song and story and which is figured here. *Primula vulgaris* is the botanical name of this plant and it is distinguished, together with *P. Juliae*, from their near relatives in that they are the only two members of the group which have sessile umbels and thus appear to produce their flowers singly rather than several together on top of distinct scapes. From *P. Juliae* our plant differs markedly in that its leaves are not heart-shaped or kidney-shaped and do not have cordate bases, but rather are oblong or oblong-obovate and at the base taper very gradually to a short petiole. In its native state, *Primula vulgaris* is widely distributed throughout the greater part of Europe. It favors moist grassy banks, streamsides or light woodlands and blooms over a long period in early spring. In its typical form the flowers of the common primrose are pale yellow, but variants are sometimes found with flowers ranging from nearly white to purple, reddish-pink or occasionally green.

Under cultivation, many distinct varieties have been produced and some of these have been named. They differ considerably in color and in size and shape of flower and some have double flowers. Of the color forms the blue primroses are perhaps the most noteworthy. These were originated by the late G. F. Wilson of Wisley, Surrey, England and with some slight variation reproduce themselves reasonably true from seed.

Many natural hybrids between *P. vulgaris* and related species have been recorded and it is usually considered that the garden polyanthus has resulted from a cross between the common primrose and *Primula officinalis*, the cowslip.

The cultivation of the single primroses presents no particular difficulties. They may be propagated by seed or by dividing the old plants either immediately after flowering or in September. If the former method is used, the seed is sown in a light, humusy soil in a cool greenhouse in February, and the young seedlings are kept growing along until they are large enough to be, and the weather permits, of their being planted out in rows in a sheltered and lightly shaded nursery-bed where they complete their first season's

growth. In the fall or following spring, they are transplanted to their flowering quarters. An alternative method of seeding is to sow thinly in a carefully prepared bed in a cold frame in April and to keep the resulting plants growing along where sown until September when they are transferred to their permanent quarters. The soil into which primrose plants are set should be rich and moist and fat with humus. They enjoy a liberal dressing of well-decayed manure. It must be remembered that while moisture is appreciated, a waterlogged condition of the soil is to be avoided. A partially shaded situation sheltered from the bleak winds of spring suits primroses best and in the colder parts of the country a light winter covering is beneficial. The double-flowered primroses have a less robust constitution than the singles and need more attention and care to ensure their permanence in the garden. The general environmental conditions described above suit them well and they benefit from feeding with dilute liquid manure at intervals through the growing season. Every second year they should be lifted and divided. This forms the readiest means of increase but root-cuttings may be used to effect the same purpose. For use in rock garden exhibits at early spring flower shows, primroses are well adapted. Strong plants potted in the fall and carried along in a cold frame force readily in a cool greenhouse.

Primula vulgaris is a tufted herbaceous perennial having many membranaceous, more or less wrinkled, obovate-oblong or oblong obtuse leaves which are sessile or shortly petiolate. The leaves are pilose or glabrescent and are crenulated at the margins. The petioles are winged. The flowers are formed in sessile umbels on softly pubescent pedicels which are to four or five inches long and approximate the leaves. The five-ribbed, softly pubescent calyx is ovate-tubular with narrow-lanceolate, acuminate lobes. The corolla has a cylindrical tube and a flat spreading limb measuring one to one and a half inches across. The lobes of the corolla are heart-shaped and the throat of the flower is somewhat narrowed and has a circle of scale-like folds. As in all species of *Primula*, two types of flowers occur in the common primrose. In one the style is long and the stamens are inserted part way down the tube and well below the stigma, and in the other the style is short and the stamens are inserted in the throat of the flower and well above the stigma. Gardeners refer to the former type of flower as "pin-eyed" and the latter as "thrum-eyed." The seed capsule is ovate and is included in the persistent calyx.

T. H. EVERETT

Primula veris var. *acaulis* Linnaeus, Sp. Pl. 143. 1753.
Primula vulgaris Hudson, Fl. Angl., ed. 1. 70. 1762.
Primula acaulis Hill, Veg. Syst. 8: 25. 1765.