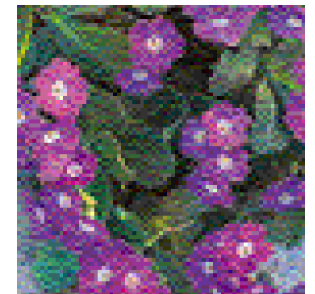




C H A P T E R I I I
A L P I N E P L A N T S
A N D R O C K W O R K



WHO KNOWS WHY A CERTAIN TYPE OF PLANT TURNS OUT TO HAVE such irresistible appeal to an individual? Why should African violets or rhododendrons or bromeliads become so firmly entrenched in the enthusiast's affections to the point where little else matters? In my case alpine plants were the hook that dragged me from a normal existence into a lifelong involvement with, and attachment to, plants. In 1951 my first sight of *Armeria juniperifolia* 'Bevan's Variety', a particularly neat, sessile, and seductive form of the familiar sea-thrift of Britain and Europe, was a revelation. I was consumed with admiration as the diminutive, grassy tuft produced a myriad of enchanting, pale pink tufted flowers that obscured their origin and were equally beautiful when they dried and generously opened pods filled with shiny, black seeds. For me there was no turning back.

It so happened that one of our first major undertakings at Les Quatre Vents was doing something about the stony structures in the garden in which alpines, incidentally, prefer to grow. By the 1970s we realized that the garden needed major rehabilitation (and also that it could be expanded to advantage). In the early 1930s Eddie Mathews had surrounded the then rather modest house with terraces, walls and steps that made a visual and practical link between the building and the garden. After some forty years it was clear that much of the stonework needed major attention. The dry walls to the north and east of the Tapis Vert were ramshackle and on the verge of collapse. Terraces and steps planted during my parents' tenure were full of ineradicable weeds and coarser plants that had seeded in uninvited and overwhelmed anything choice. Keeping the roughest semblance of order required tiresome and regular hours of difficult weeding to the exclusion of any other garden activity. We had just completed a five-year program of creating raised stone beds and walled gardens at Stonecrop, our garden in Cold Spring, New York, and had more or less learned how to achieve satisfactory results.

OPPOSITE

The "campanula moment" in mid-July in the walls and circular steps supporting the reflection pool terrace. Campanula cochlearifolia in its blue and white forms predominates.

ABOVE, RIGHT

Primula marginata 'Kesselring's Variety'.