

Newsletter

*North American Rock Garden Society
Berkshire Chapter August 2012*

Next Meeting:

Saturday, September 7, @ 10:30 AM

Berkshire Botanical Garden Exhibit Hall
BBG is located 2 miles west of Stockbridge,
MA at the junction of Routes 102 & 183

AM: A Michigan Rock Garden In a Gravel Pit – Don LaFond

Don found out that a cottage garden wasn't going to flourish in his newly acquired gravel pit, so he started rock gardening instead. He joined NARGS in 1990, worked on his garden, built a few pieces of furniture in his spare time, put in a small greenhouse, served his chapter (The Great Lakes Chapter) in various official and unofficial positions, and today has a most estimable garden, one worthy of admiration and recognition. His talk will give us some of the history, a lot of the plants and some insight into how hard work, vision and time can create a great garden.



Lunch – BYO

We welcome dessert contributions. Lunch will be followed by our Annual Plant Sale

PM: The Big Plant Sale

Please arrive early with your plants, which we need to organize before the program. And bring some special specimens, too!

AS SUMMER COMES TO A CLOSE



August is rarely thought of as a high point of our gardening year. Woodlanders tend to bloom early, and by August most are either in dormancy or showing signs of their annual preparation for winter. Most alpine plants bloom earlier in the summer, and August is the time when their seeds are maturing (so we can collect them for the Seed Exchange!) And yet more than a few are blooming beautifully now, bringing late season color and contrast to an otherwise bland garden. At this moment I have some very lovely plants in flower, demonstrating their willingness to flourish here in North Central Massachusetts and to survive both snowless winters and extremely hot and dry summers.

The picture above is *Delosperma sutherlandii*, which I obtained last year from Panayoti Kelaidis during a visit to the Denver Botanic Garden. It flourished last summer, came through this past winter quite easily, and has been flowering without stop since late May. The plant is lush, the flowers beautiful and the spread modest and definitely controllable. In short, this is an ideal plant for a hot, sunny spot with good drainage.



The plant pictured above is *Allium cyathophorum* v. *farreri*, one of the most glorious of all the onions I've grown. It's been in my garden for almost a decade, has bulked up a bit each year, and has never become a nuisance by seeding around too much. One or two volunteers each year is the most I've found, and they are as welcome as volunteer gentians! It's blooming now and will stay in flower for weeks, fading out in late September. Hopefully I'll be able to collect seed before the frost cuts off their maturation process. Richard May used to have it in his inventory, and the seed is generally available and quite reliable.

Every summer I find that by August my evening primroses have stopped blooming profusely. I get one or two flowers every few nights from *Oenothera macrocarpa*, but it is now totally committed to producing seed, which clearly is taking its energy away from flowering. But one special member of this interesting genus is just beginning its display. *Oenothera caespitosa*

variety *marginata* is putting on a beautiful nightly show and will continue to do so for at least another two weeks. It's not a reliable perennial, which means that I don't expect it to winter over, but it does surprise me one year out of three. This year's flowers are from last year's one seedling, so I guess this was a lucky year for me. I have seed set aside for next year, and since it doesn't require a cold period I expect to plant it out in situ in late March or early April.

The final plant I'll discuss is *Verbascum atroviolaceum*. The smallest member of the *Verbascum* family, it's soundly perennial and provides color for the entire gardening season. I got my first plant from Bill Adams's *Sunscape Rare Plant Nursery*, and I've never had to make any special effort to keep it. Each year it blooms, declines into dormancy, revives in a few weeks, re-flowers and sets plenty of viable seed. It spreads itself around rather generously, but it isn't a nuisance, and I tend to leave it alone because it's a modest sized plant with a tiny

footprint. I'll be bringing one or more seedlings to the sale in September, so if you want one, you'll have to be there.



Verbascum atrovioleaceum

TEXT AND IMAGES BY PETER GEORGE

FLIES



TEXT BY DEAN EVANS

Flies – what useless creatures! Well, not really. From the time that human beings were driven through the gates of their Garden of Eden protective enclosures in pairs to disperse and populate this new planet, mankind has been plagued by this pest. The greatest minds – men like Newton and Einstein and Cliff Desch – have interrupted their intellectual pursuits to stalk and kill this nuisance. From humankind's beginning hundreds of millions of man-hours have been wasted.

For years I worked at perfecting the catching of them. You think you've lessened their numbers but they just move in from every direction. Your local Tractor Supply chain store carries a fly trap called a "Catch and Toss". It's in the

horse/equine section of the store. It's a clear plastic dome with an inverted funnel for its bottom. They provide a chemical lure in a tube, but I prefer to make my own.

You fill the trap with water, leaving one-half inch of the funnel exposed. Add the lure, turn the trap over and hang. When it is full of flies people throw the disgusting smelly thing in the trash bin. That would make as much sense as throwing away a baby. After all, I spent \$7.00 for this item. Anything I spend \$7.00 for I wouldn't throw away, so I changed the method in order to re-use these traps. You can lay them on their side on the ground in your garden, stick a hose in the funnel end and just flush them out. As I said, I object to using the chemical because I want to use the contents, so I make my own lure. By dropping screened minnow traps in local ponds I catch shiners and small bullheads. These I grind in a blender, using the resulting slurry as the lure. I also will use a dead mouse but I don't grind them because their hide clogs the blender parts – they decompose and smell enough as time goes on.

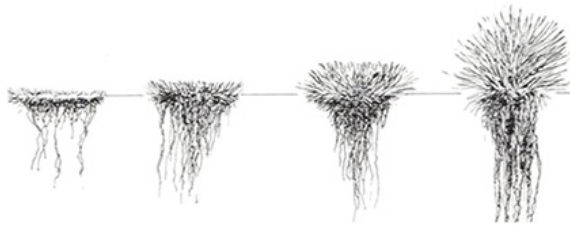
When the traps are filled with flies I sometimes shake the contents into a five gallon pail, and then into a blender. This makes additional lure. I presently have 40 of these traps.

My true interest in this whole process is to grab natural fertility from the thin air. When it rains I will walk around and shake the contents of a full trap over a prize plant. I also will wash the dead flies, parts and fish emulsion off the plant with a sprinkling can on days it doesn't rain. It's the



little things that make one successful. I am

constantly trying to get better at what I do as a gardener. As an example, the long plastic containers that I use for pots for the plants you see me bring to the plant sale are actually candle holders used in the shrine at the Immaculate Conception Church in New Lebanon, NY. I stop in and ask the secretary if I can take them out of the dumpster. She is happy to have me take them because it frees up dumpster space. I bring them home, set them upside down in a bed of shavings in a solar melter. The heat of the sun causes the remaining paraffin to melt and drain into the shavings. These shavings then are used as fire starter for my soil-cooking woodstove. They act as a wick, bringing the temperature up to the ignition point of the paraffin, which burns very hot. These now-cleaned containers are drilled on the bottom with four 1/8" holes for drainage and plants are planted in them. Their long length allows the roots to grow unencumbered so the plant, unlike so many of the plants from other growers, can be planted without ripping and destroying and damaging roots.



Always be mindful of the fact that plants are in balance – roots to top growth. If you destroy any of the roots, you have to cut some of the top. You can damage roots, tops but not the stem. When you buy a plant that is root-bound, take it out of the pot, cut off the root tangle and remove some of the top growth. Repot it and keep it in your nursery area until you see some new growth. Now you can plant it in your garden. This will eliminate much of the commonly accepted plant loss.

Life has shown me that a crafty person will beat any naïve genius. But naïve geniuses can sleep at night! I am a rare combination of the two - a crafty genius who has perfected finding joy in living. I'm like the offspring of a thoroughbred mare accidentally bred by Tony the Pony – small but fast, handsome and a real hit at a party!

BNARGS PROGRAMS FOR 2013

September 7

AM: Don LaFond

PM: The Big Plant Sale

October 12

Ian Young – NARGS Speakers Tour

November 2

Our **Annual Luncheon** at the Red Lion Inn and a program by Mike Stewart on Dwarf Rhododendrons

NOTES FROM THE AUGUST 3 MEETING



No time was spent on Chapter or NARGS business but for a few minutes there was a general discussion and exchanges concerning ways to keep our members and also the general public better informed about our activities. The members present did focus on the coming September meeting and the big plant sale and several of them readily volunteered their efforts (producing and distributing a special flier, organizing a phone network). Then, on with the program.

In the morning, Joyce Hemingson reported on what had especially caught her eye while attending the NARGS Annual Meeting in Asheville, NC. On that occasion she had visited the Asheville Botanical Garden, where she saw a double flowered *Cornus florida*, and of course the Blue Ridge which was the theme of the meeting. Among the many interesting plants she saw, she listed a few violas, *Saxifraga michauxii*, *Phacelia bipinnatifida*, *Amianthium muscitoxicum*, *Prosartes lanuginosa*, *Heuchera parviflora* (found in caves, Martha Oliver had told us a few weeks ago, and that is where Joyce

saw it), *Conopholis americana*, *Kalmia buxifolia* (Ha! a newly discovered kalmia? Nah! just our old friend *Leiophyllum buxifolium*, the sandmyrtle), and a nice orchid: *Galearis spectabilis*. Of course Joyce had seen much more. Her presentation was selective and unhurried, rightly so. It was as good as being there and seeing the plants in situ. Seeing through Joyce's eyes, one sees so much and so well.



Heuchera parviflora – image by Joyce Hemingson

What are gardeners talking about during one friendly meeting? Other gardeners and plants of course. That is exactly what Bill Brown did in the afternoon. His presentation consisted in reminiscences of outstanding gardeners or plantsmen that he met at meetings, on field trips, or in their own garden. Who are these gardeners? Linc and Timmy Foster, Rex Murfitt, Roy Davidson, Robert Rolfe, Geoffrey Charlesworth, Captain Erskine, Joel and Ellie Spingarn...These mini-profiles, were interspersed in no apparent order but very skillfully with portraits of plants to which apparently he had personal connection or attachment. (No, he was not boasting, just passing information.) *Tecophilea cyanocrocus*, thought lost in nature, but rediscovered or reintroduced back; *Viola pedata* bicolor; *Androsace chamaejasme* in Alaska; *Phlox* 'Iceberg' which is a *Ph. diffusa*, not *subulata*, hence is difficult. *Alstroemeria*, growable in Connecticut near a South facing wall: *Crocus imperati* which was in bloom just before Christmas; etc. It was informal, charming, at the same time entertaining and informative.



Primula japonica 'Redfield Strain' – Image by Sunny Border Nursery

The plant sale was combined with the Show and Tell, into one segment of the program. Dean Evans had brought a tray of 32 primulas (*Primula japonica* 'Redfield strain') and gave us a short story on how he got a fistful of seeds from Dick Redfield himself during a visit to his garden. These Redfield primulas have been growing, multiplying and generally thriving in a wet spot in Dean's garden ever since. We hadn't seen *Gentiana verna* on the sale tables for a long time: there was one brought by Harold Peachey. There was a draba, a perfect 2" cushion that Lori Chips had donated as if this was the easiest and commonest thing one can grow. And more, too numerous to list but not less desirable.



Editor's Note: I haven't produced a newsletter for quite a while, mostly due to simple burnout. I've always enjoyed it, and after a couple of years of 'resting,' I asked Dave Gehrs if he minded giving it up. He didn't, so here I am again. Thank you, Dave for stepping up and for the willingness to step down!



NARGS STUFF

The photos above and to the right were taken by Joyce Hemingson in the Blue Ridge Mountains during our 2013 Annual General Meeting, which was sponsored and hosted by our two North Carolina chapters. It was an excellent event, well-attended and well-run. The weather in North Carolina was colder and wetter than normal, and the flora were a bit behind as a result, but everyone who participated in the treks enjoyed themselves and gained a deeper and more profound understanding of how to overcome the unexpected appearance of February in May. I hope all of you will consider attending one of the annual meetings at some point. Next year's Annual Meeting will be held in Santa Fe in late August or early September, so hold open that time period. New Mexico is wonderful in the late summer, when much of the flora is in bloom and much of our flora is in seed or dormant.

I know that several of you visit our website and the NARGS Forum, but for those of you who haven't been there for a while, the site (www.nargs.org) is brand new! The project was managed by Ben Burr, our corresponding secretary and an active member of the Manhattan Chapter. He has done an outstanding job, and even though there are still some troublesome issues, we are getting closer to a finished product. Websites are always works in progress and ours is no exception, so please visit it often and start getting involved with the Forum.



I also need, once again, to urge all BNARGS members to join NARGS. For one thing, our bylaws actually require NARGS membership as a condition of BNARGS membership. For another, I'm the President of NARGS, and part of my job is to find ways to increase membership. But the crucially important point is that, if chapter members don't join NARGS, NARGS will be forced to stop delivering its benefits to chapters, many of which are utilized by the non-NARGS component of the local organizations. Should we (BNARGS) charge non-NARGS members to attend the Ian Young talk? I'd be interested to get some feedback. It's done in quite a few places these days.

Finally, it's time to start thinking about awards, and about the next round of elections. 2014 will bring a new President, Vice President, three Board of Directors members, and perhaps one or two additional new elected leaders. Please think about possible nominees and let us know.

PFG

MONOCULTURE IN TROUGHS



I will always harbor a strong abiding affection for the miniature landscape. I love mixed troughs holding combinations of species and rocks; here a mesa, there a gorge, a meadow, some cascaders. A well put-together trough is so much more than the sum of its parts. Its ability to enchant is powerful.

But lately I have been playing with a variety of different shaped containers planted up with only one species, sometimes only one plant. This is known as monoculture: cultivating only one thing in one place. I am not referring to the classic *Sempervivum* or succulent bowl. That is always a stunning and wonderful way to use a trough; a great set-piece for patio or step. But it does involve weaving together varieties of hens and chicks and sedums, usually all on one level, to form what becomes a Persian carpet of color and texture. What I am proposing is even simpler than that.

For instance: I have planted a collection of miniature urns with one single different plant in each: the blue-grey of *Dianthus freynii* the apple green of *Gypsophila bungeana*. the silver of artemisia, the cranberry (in winter) of *Sedum* 'Coral Carpet.' This is ridiculously easy to accomplish, and the look is captivating, modern, and clean. I assemble these urns loosely on a step or two, or in a corner, or the base of a wall.



They look good gathered together in threes and fives. When you think about it, Its a kind of “deconstructed” container gardening. We have all heard about famous Chefs serving “deconstructed” this or that, taking a classic like eggs benedict or cassoulet or paella and serving the parts separately. Think of it the same way. We are giving each alpine the conditions it will thrive in, we are choosing the trough’s shape, size, depth and height with care. Then we are selecting a single texture to go inside each, and we are being impeccable with grooming. (In other words, plant neatly and mulch well so no soil or perlite appears on the surface.)

I have even taken a three-leveled trough and planted each level with the same mini groundcover. I have used several bowls of varying sizes, I have uses cylinders of different heights. The effect is very Zen, very calm. Think

of it this way, instead of assembling your composition inside one larger trough, you are planting things separately and making a pleasing arrangement after the fact. I have used Penstemons, Pinus, Antenarias, Drabas, Erigerons, and silver Saxifrages. Just remember to site them where the plants want to be, and care

for them as you would any other trough.

One pretty terrific bonus is this: with all the concentration on shapes (the troughs) and texture (the foliage) one just about forgets about the flowers. Until they arrive, adding just that much more spice to your deconstructed dish.

LORI CHIPS 2010

WEBSITES TO VISIT

<http://www.mannlumber.com/GraniteGarden-id-27.html>

<http://www.obrienhosta.com/>

<http://www.growingwithplants.com/>

<http://www.seed-aholic.com/>

<http://olivenurseries.com/>

<http://www.wrightmanalpines.com/>

<https://www.nargs.org/>

<http://theodoresbbq.com/>

DIVIDE AND SHARE



What is growing in your rock garden that you can divide, pot up, and bring to the Big Plant Sale on September 7? As I was weeding today, I saw lots of possibilities. Once again I challenge you all to bring more plants than Lori Chips! These plant sales help enrich the BNARGS treasury and help new rock gardeners like Ed and me become familiar with more plants. We will also be able to fill in some of the places where 38 plants died over the past year. My spreadsheet is looking quite red with 'Dead' notes, but we are learning and always looking for new plants.

During the business meeting at the September meeting, our creative program chair Elisabeth Zander will be looking for ideas for programs for 2014. Attendance at meetings has been down, and we would like to know what would bring you back.

Judy Brown - Chairperson

FROM THE ARCHIVES *GEUM REPTANS*

Surely everyone who has seen this lovely native of the European Alps at home in its wild habitat must have immediately charmed by it, but perhaps those same people after trying to reproduce the same effect in their rock garden have become somewhat exasperated by the way in which it so often fails to appreciate what one

would regard as the correct treatment for a plant of the bleak stony screes of the highest, boulder strewn mountain sides.



The strange fact is that our scree conditions in the garden do not seem to suit this plant as one would expect, and though it may certainly live on more or less precariously in a somewhat stunted looking state for several years, it seldom produces more than an odd one or two of its beautiful flowers. On the other hand, when planted in the fairly fat soil of an open border, it usually responds by producing fine, healthy foliage and an abundance of flowers; the writer has a plant which under these conditions had fifty flowers open at one time last year.

*Editor's Note: This article first appeared in the April 1963 issue of The Journal of the Scottish Rock Garden Club. I thought it was quite interesting, and I'm going to try *Geum reptans* in the open garden next year, using the author's method.*

A garden is the interface
between the house and the
rest of civilization.

—Geoffrey Charlesworth

GLORIOUS GENTIANAS

TEXT AND IMAGES BY HARVEY AND IRENE WRIGHTMAN

In recent years, a number of Czech seed collectors have been travelling to parts of Western China bringing back and offering what can only be described as remarkable collections both for the variety of material and relative ease of cultivation - not that everything is all figured out, but I have only good things to say about these collections. If available, the sometimes cryptic field notes about the terrain and other vegetation are useful in deciding how to handle the sample from seed germination through transplanting.

Focusing on gentians, I have a few observations: *Gentiana helophila* ssp. *dolichocalyx* – a member of the section *Ornatae*, a large grouping with *Gentiana sino-ornatae* as its type. This subspecies is described by Halda as being bigger in all its parts – the seedlings we have bear that out. Like others in this section, the plants arise from a central clump (monopodial) but they will increase into multiples which can be divided from the parent. The flowering stems are trailing, terminating with a large, pale purple/blue flower with stripes of yellow and violet outside. The corolla is ~ 45 mm long. Probably easy to mistake this species in the wild for a form of the next one, *Gentiana lawrencei*, but the small plants we have are holding close to Halda's drawing and description. So far it looks promising, maintaining a good dark green - responding to the fertilizer given.



Gentiana lawrencei

Gentiana lawrencei - this is a species with a very wide distribution, thus it's likely that there will be good, growable forms to select. A larger growing species, the branches are clothed with long narrow leaves, oppositely arranged on the trailing stems. Like *Gentiana helophila*, single flowers are held upright at the end. The corolla (40mm – 60mm in length) is in shades of turquoise with darker coloring near the opening. Habitat is typically mixed, grassy areas from 3500m – 4700m. In the seedlists when you see *Gentiana farreri*, it will be from the type locality in Gansu, but it is simply considered a form of *Gentiana lawrencei*. Like others in this section, grow it in a rich, humusy soil. It is not lime intolerant like *Gentiana sino-ornata*, indicating it doesn't exclusively grow in bogs. Flowers come in late August in our garden.



Gentiana stipitata

Gentiana stipitata – this species in the section *Monopodiae*, a relative of the large flowered *Gentiana szechenyi*. We grow 2 forms. *Gentiana stipitata* ssp. *tizuensis* which has

trailing stems covered thickly with short, ovate leaves reaching to 8 cm. A single, rather large flower of icy blue is held at the end. The overall appearance is lax. The flowers show off well. In nature it prefers dryish, grassy slopes, in Sichuan at over 4000m elevation. Other forms grow to the west into Tibet and the Himalaya. The second form, *Gentiana stipitata* ssp. *elegans*, is newly described and delightfully easy to grow. It is very similar to the cold scree species, *Gentiana urnula*, but they are in quite different sections. The flowering stems are much shorter, the flowers are smaller, pale blue/violet or darker, but are wonderful little urns held entirely upright. Both Halda and Jurasek, who co-operate and do sometimes travel together, have offered this species. Our seedlings were easy to raise. While not a large plant, it does not seem fussy and is less sensitive to hot weather – the bane of many high altitude collections. This one should be on everyone’s list.



Gentiana paradoxa

Gentiana paradoxa – A species so different, it has its own section. Narrow, lineate leaves on stems that erect or semi-erect stems up to 50 cm tall at most – a very graceful looking plant it is entirely unlike others in the genus. Flowers are like the bright turquoise of the Asiatic gentians, but even with the narrow leaves, somehow it would look out of place in China. The habitat in the Caucasus is from light woodland of lower elevations (500m) right up to the tundra zone (2400m.) Of course, such adaptability bodes well for gardens. Indeed, our oldest clump is now over 20 years old with hundreds of blooms in September. Wild collected seed is rarely seen, though Jim Archibald did offer it in the late 1980’s. The Czechs usually have good seed, but sometimes you can tell it has crossed with

Gentian septemfida, as the plants will have broader, coarser leaves. We get seed from Barrie Porteous, though it blooms very late for him in his Muskoka garden. I suspect there may even be flowers there in November when freeze-up and snow can arrive. His garden form is true as the seedlings are perfect copies.

These gentians are all manageable in the rock garden, properly sited. The only caveat I have for them is the less disturbance the better. Cuttings are possible after flowering, especially in autumn. If dividing, then early spring is best, when the weather is still cool, but the plants want to grow. When they are dormant, leave them alone. Without a desire to grow, disease is a possibility.



Gentiana helophila ssp. *dolichocalyx*

The best seed sources outside North America are the Czechs. They all use e-mail or websites to post their catalogue listings. Most know English. All are prompt and fair. When late November comes, look for their new on-line catalogues – all except Jurasek. For him, simply send an e-mail request, and he will e-mail a list. The ones with websites also have photo galleries which are very interesting.

Josef Jurasek jurasekalpines@atlas.cz
 Mojmir Pavelka <http://pavelkaalpines.cz/>
 Vojtech Holubec <http://holubec.wbs.cz/>
 Vladislav Piatek <http://www.alpine-seeds.com/>

**Please Don’t Forget to
 Bring a Few Plants
 With You On Sept. 7!**

Positions of Responsibility

Chairperson - Judy Brown
Vice-Chairperson – Dean Evans
Secretary – Carol Hanby
Treasurer – Pamela Johnson/Tom Flanigan
Archivist – James Fichter
Audio Visual Chairperson - Joe Berman
Greeter – Ed Brown
Independent Director – Erica Schumacher
Newsletter Editor – Peter George
Meeting Recorder – Jacque Mommens
Plant Sale Chairperson – Open
Program Chairperson – Elisabeth Zander
Proofreader – Martin Aisenberg
Refreshments Chairperson – Joyce Hemingson
Speaker Housing – Anne Spiegel

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Pamela Johnson

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Deadline for The Next Newsletter is September 20, 2013

Please contact the Editor before reprinting articles

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