



# Newsletter

**North American Rock Garden Society**  
Connecticut Chapter November/December 2015

## Meeting Report: September 20, 2015

By Barbara van Achterberg

Ruth Bennett, an American Iris Society master judge and Connecticut gardener specializing in *Iris*, presented a talk at Ballek's Garden Center in East Haddam on *Dwarf and Low Growing Iris*. She tried to limit her photos to iris no higher than 20 inches. She really tried, but occasionally couldn't resist showing us a slightly taller beauty. She was an excellent, clear speaker and also gave us very helpful handouts.

Ballek's Garden Center is one of my favorite nurseries. I love the way I have to drive by the Goodspeed Opera House to get to it. I love the extensive collection of hardy perennials and the stone house with its living room with comfortable seating arrangements where the lectures take place. I also love the helpful tips from Anita Ballek, the materfamilias. The farm has been in the family since before there was a United States. None of the family lives in the stone house, but they celebrate Thanksgiving there for hordes of family and friends every year. I also enjoyed the end-of-the-season sale across the road at the nursery, and tried to find a perennial on the sale table but instead chose a *Pulsatilla vulgaris* 'Rote Glocke' (red clock) which was not on the sale table. When I admitted this to the cashier, she decided to give me the plant at 2/3 off anyway. It is looking completely settled in my rock garden today. The only thing I do not love about Ballek's Garden Center is that I have to drive at least an hour and a half each way!

But on to the iris.

First, Ruth told us that there are over 350 species of *Iris* as well as interspecies crosses. The best known, of course, are bearded iris. *Iris* 'Low Ho Silver' is an 18 inch silvery-white rebloomer. September is the time for the second bloom. Ruth Bennett's group, the Connecticut Chapter of the American Iris Society, maintains five iris beds in Elizabeth Park, Hartford; one of them is for "miniature falls" (16 inches and

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## Tri-state Meeting, New York Botanical Garden October 11, 2015

By Barbara van Achterberg



Soft and silvery, *Convolvulus boisseri* ssp. *boisseri* in a trough at the entrance of the rock garden at NYBG.

It is always invigorating to attend the Tri-state Meeting in October and to be reunited with friends and acquaintances from the Manhattan Chapter which has members from Brooklyn as well as other boroughs, the Hudson Valley Chapter, and the Long Island Chapter. There was a big sale of alpines, bulbs and woody plants from commercial sources and NARGS members. Both a raffle and an auction took place. Don Dembowski did a terrific job of organizing the whole thing. The sale began at 9:15. The talk was supposed to start at 10, but we had to be herded firmly away from plants and conversation into the Ross Auditorium so it was closer to 10:15 before the introductions took place.

Peter Korn is a Swedish horticulturist and author who is affiliated with the Gothenburg Botanical Garden, and has a private 5 acre garden, Ekilsby, nearby. He grows many different plants from around the globe, some of which he has visited in their native environments, and then tries to recreate what they want in his own garden. Ekilsby is at latitude 60, the same as northern Canada, with over 60 inches of rainfall a year. So days are very short in December and very long in June. Winter

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under). Bearded iris get overgrown - only the new increases of the rhizome send up a flower. So every year the rhizomes should be lifted and the old parts discarded. Sprinkle powdered cleanser over the cut to prevent rot, and plant just below the surface of the ground. Excess nitrogen promotes iris rot so avoid high nitrogen fertilizer. Bring mulch only to the edge of the bearded iris, not over it. Bearded irises need 6 hours of sun to bloom adequately. Iris borer is only a problem east of the Rockies.

Standard dwarf bearded irises include 'Muppet' in overlapping shades of blue, 'Flag Red', and 'Snow Tree' which is very tiny and beautiful. They usually bloom around May 1, followed by intermediates around May 15, and tall bearded iris in late May. When receiving a rhizome in the fall, plant it immediately, or pot it. Don't plant it too late. It is better to buy a bearded iris in flower in the spring.



A small yellow *Iris pumila*.

*Iris pumila* is the background parent for all our miniature bearded irises - 6 to 8 inches, some even lower.

"Flat" irises are bearded irises whose standards lie down flat.

*Iris sanguinea* is usually very tall. *Iris siberica* is well known, but our Siberian irises today are actually crosses of

*siberica* and *sanguinea*. 'My Little Sunshine' is a yellow and white dwarf Siberian iris only 15 inches tall.

*Iris versicolor* is a water-loving plant, a native which is infested with iris bud fly - so don't bring it home!

*Iris prismatica* is another native for a sandy bog. It exists well with ferns. In the wild it is threatened by purple

loosestrife.

*Iris cristata* is the well-known eastern woodland iris. It needs some sun to bloom. 'Powder Blue Giant' is very vigorous. 'Montrose White' and 'Edgar Anderson,' which has pale lavender and white falls, are beautiful. 'Dick Redfield', introduced by our late Connecticut Chapter member, is a tetraploid of good dark violet color, but unfortunately not very vigorous, a statement which was seconded by several in the audience.

*Iris gracilipes* is a delicate small lavender or white iris from Japanese hillsides. It almost has to be grown on a hillside to see the blooms.



A blue form of the tiny *Iris lacustris*.

*Iris lacustris* 'Alba' is a very dwarf white iris from the Great Lakes. It loves limestone.

*Iris koreana* was collected by Daryl Probst in Japan. These plants have yellow blooms and like full sun to semi-shade and moist yet well-drained soil.

*Iris minutoaurea* is tiny and adorable. It is from China, Korea and Japan.

*Iris verna* and *Iris verna* 'Alba' are natives of our own Southeast but hardy evergreens in Connecticut. In my garden I have the blue, which blooms only once in three

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## NARGS CT CHAPTER OFFICERS

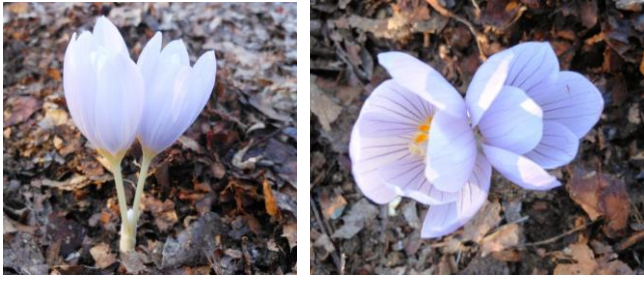
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**PROGRAMS:** Please talk to one of the officers if you are interested in helping on the Programs Committee.



A last minute autumn purchase from Odyssey Bulbs, *Crocus kotschyanus* ssp. *kotschyanus* HKEP.9317 opened its pale lavender blooms on November 4<sup>th</sup>. Darker pinstripes and an egg-yolk yellow basal ring decorate the interior cup.

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or four years but is worth waiting for.

*Iris ruthenica* 'Gamlin Blue' is fragrant, short and often a repeat bloomer.

*Iris tridentata*, blue flag iris, blooms in July and is a beautiful wetland iris.

*Iris setosa* is found all over the world and is called bristle point iris because the standards have upright "bristles."

*Iris reticulata* is the best known bulbous iris. However, most of what is sold as *Iris reticulata* is actually *Iris histrioides*. Whichever one I have has spread into clumps and has even seeded around modestly in good soil in my very well-drained rock garden.

*Iris pseudocorus*, the yellow flag, is banned in Connecticut! But beautiful crosses have been made in other places where it is not so completely at home.

Joe Pye Weed's Garden in Carlisle, Massachusetts is a beautiful mecca for iris. It has one open day either the first or second Sunday in June. It is open to judges on certain other days. Joe Pye Weed's Garden is a private home, not an on-site retail nursery. The owners sell their best introductions by mail order ([www.jpwflowers.com](http://www.jpwflowers.com)) or through other nurseries.

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Ruth Bennett writes:

One of your group asked about a fragrant purple iris. They could have meant the 'Princess Beatrice' iris. Introduced by Barr, 1898, so over 100 yrs. old. And it is known to be one of the best irises of that time period into the 1950's. Known also for its fragrance. Does not say a "frappe kool-aid" smell, but many of those that were pleasant smelling did smell like that. A small purple iris got the name 'Grapesicle' because of the smell! Hope this helps... Some catalogs continue to offer this iris.

## In Memoriam

Nick Nickou passed away on September 1<sup>st</sup>. A long-time member of both the Connecticut and Berkshire Chapters, Nick generously shared his knowledge of plants, always willing to advise and suggest. His Branford garden near the Connecticut shore, filled with rare and expertly grown plants, was a pleasure to visit. Our condolences go to his partner, Carol Hanby.

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Midge Riggs, of Hastings-On-Hudson, NY, passed away on October 19<sup>th</sup>. Besides the Hudson Valley Chapter, Midge maintained membership in Connecticut and Berkshire Chapters as well. Many of our members will recall the rock ledge on which she created her gardens.

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Our sympathy goes to Nancy Kulas on the loss of her husband, Robert, on August 30<sup>th</sup>.

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Our condolences go to Ginny Gingras on the death of her husband, Paul, on October 15<sup>th</sup>.



*Gentiana clausa* in the Woodstock garden of Emily Ferguson.

I live and garden in the northeast corner of Connecticut, a rather cold zone 5. We discovered *Gentiana clausa*, the bottle gentian, when we moved to this property in 1998. It grows on the eastern edge of our pond where it has been a perennial here and blooms reliably every autumn. I was inspired by the article on autumn flowering Asian gentians in the fall *Rock Garden Quarterly*. Given the fact that *Gentiana clausa* has been so successful, might I have a chance with any of the gentians mentioned in the article? I have written the author of that article, Todd Boland, and I look forward to his suggestions.

~Emily Ferguson

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temperatures sound similar to ours with plenty of snow, but summers are cooler.



Peter Korn in NYBG's rock garden.

Korn spoke first about his rock garden and then, after a brief break, about his woodland garden. He prefers rock garden plants because "most woodland plants are too easy." His pictures showed some of the enormous labor involved in making his garden with only part time help. After years of experimentation he

now grows everything in coarse sand. He puts 10 inches of sand on top of the lawn, removes seedlings from their soil and plants them bare rooted right into the sand. To prevent weeds and moss, he washes every single rock before he uses it! A few of his rock garden plants are:

- *Monarda bradburiana* - a low-growing beebalm that can take dry conditions
- *Erodium* 'Natasha' - in early spring, a ferny silver clump with lavender and purple flowers
- *Iris sari* - a lovely white iris with yellow markings
- *Lupinus lepidus ssp. aridus* - a beauty at 8 inches high, blue and white
- *Pulsatilla grandis* - beautiful pale blue plump flowers

Many of Peter Korn's ericaceous plants are grown in peat blocks. He builds peat walls 8 feet high on the north side of ditches, which are also constructed of peat blocks, to let excess water run through downhill. He lets moss grow in the ditches. Some plants in Peter Korn's woodland garden are:

- *Rhododendron keiskei* 'Yaku Fairy' - pale yellow
- *Rhododendron radicans* - a low plant with big pink flowers
- *Gunnera manicata* - tall and architectural, he covers it in winter but only for two months
- *Trillium cuneatum* - has wonderful mottled leaves
- *Iris winogradowii* - one of the few iris for shade, a rich yellow
- *Nomocharis meleagrina* - a wonderful speckled red and white lily, not very hardy or easy.

After the raffle, I skipped the auction with its higher priced treasures so that I could go upstairs to the library for the Frida Kahlo exhibit of her life in paintings. I asked the admission price, but to my surprise it was free. Only the display in the Enid Haupt Conservatory would have required a ticket.

My traveling companion and I also had time to visit the Botanical Garden's gift shop and to tour the rock garden which, like the entrance to the NYBG itself, was free that day to registered NARGS members. The weather was beautiful. My only mistake was not bringing a sandwich. The 45 minute lunch break would have given us time for a table and a hot or cold beverage at the Pine Tree Café; but the second rate taco I waited in line to buy at a kiosk made us both late for the raffle! We each won nice prizes anyway.



Many distinctive and unusual leaf forms of *Cyclamen hederifolium* can be found in the rock garden.

**Seed packaging** for the NARGS Seed Exchange will take place in early December at the home of Maryanne Gryboski. If you would like to volunteer, please contact Maryanne so she can let you know when a definite date is set.

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The **Fall Chrysanthemum Show** at the Lyman Conservatory of the Botanic Garden of Smith College will take place November 7-22. [www.smith.edu/garden](http://www.smith.edu/garden)

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If you are in the Cleveland, Ohio area, Bonnie Maguire suggests a visit to **Gardenview Horticultural Park**, a 16 acre site in Strongsville, Ohio that includes numerous gardens and a 10 acre arboretum.

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