

Newsletter

North American Rock Garden Society
Berkshire Chapter May 2006

Next Meeting

Saturday, May 6 at 10:30 AM

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

Chapter Business: Show & Tell, Ask The
Expert, and any other relevant or irrelevant
activities, as long as they are interesting

AM - Spring Woodland Gems- Part 1

Don Dembowski

"Spring is the best time in the shade garden. From precious anemones, anemonellas and hepaticas, to big ol' arisaemas, trilliums and mayapples, many new and unusual species and cultivars are becoming available." Don has collected unusual shade plants from sources far and wide, and crawled around his garden to photograph them. Propagation tips and plant sources will be presented and there will be plants for sale.

Lunch – BYO. We welcome dessert contributions. Following lunch there will be a plant and seedling sale.

PM – Spring Woodland Gems – part 2

Don lives and gardens in Perham, NY, just north of NYC. He's been the Chair of the Hudson Valley Chapter for several years. He spends an "inordinate amount of time in his gardens," which include shade, rock gardens, a vegetable garden, berry bushes, Japanese maples and several dogwoods. In real life he teaches woodworking to middle school boys at the Buckley School in NYC. For the sale, he will be bringing *Arum elongatum*, asarums, *Paeonia obovata*, *Arisaemia candidissimum*, Solomon's Seal, and double trilliums, among others.

Chairman's Message

By *Peter George*



Spill's Penstemon - Penstemon lyallii

As we move into Spring, albeit hesitantly, the excitement of gardening builds almost exponentially each day. I'm beginning to see more and more

green through the last vestiges of our recent snowfall, and my hopes for a minimum of losses may yet be fulfilled. My greatest concerns are for my penstemons, which almost all seem hopelessly brown and desiccated after the odd warm, cold, warm, cold winter season past.

I've always been interested in 'beginnings.' The first meeting, the first contact with a rock gardener, or simply the first impression one gets of the rock gardening world is often the determinant as to whether or not one stays involved. I have asked several members to write a bit about *their* beginnings in the BNARGS Chapter, and I've written a piece about my rather memorable first meeting.



My First BNARGS Meeting was almost a decade ago. Fred Case was the speaker, and it was the Annual Luncheon meeting, so it was a more ‘social’

event than regular Chapter meetings. Larry Rue, a neighbor and friend had persuaded me to come, but he left me immediately to chat up his friends in the group. I knew absolutely nobody, and I was so insecure that I sat down at the closest table and stayed there sipping water until lunch was ready to be served. I had the weird sense that my table would never fill up, and for a while it didn’t. All the other tables were filling quickly but finally two men sat down and introduced themselves as Norman and Geoffrey. As we spoke, the table did proceed to fill up and eventually I became involved in a surprisingly lively conversation with this bunch of people who knew a lot about alpine plants, but more importantly, were not bothered by the fact that I didn’t. The talk was warm and effortless and I learned a great deal about alpine plants, woodland plants and the Berkshire Chapter of NARGS. It was only later on in the meeting that Larry informed me that we were sitting at a table with giants in the world of rock gardening, and that the two men on my right were just about the most prominent members of that rather elite group. But however prominent they were, they were first and foremost gentlemen, thoughtful, friendly and accessible, and I realized that any organization that had men like that as ‘leaders’ was one in which I would be very comfortable. Now, almost a decade later, that meeting still is fresh in my mind, and it guides me (and hopefully all of us) in how we present ourselves to our guests and our newest members.

--*PF*

The Enduring Legacy of 2 Men

Years ago I was asked to clean out a Robert Hall’s business. This was a chain that sold men’s suits. They sold to working class people and to the man who was forced to buy one for some occasion he didn’t want to attend. They had come up with an idea of selling a suit with two pair of pants, one that matched the coat and one plain. This made the coat both a suit and a sports jacket. In this store there were rows on rows of pipe racks screwed to the floor. I wanted all this inch and a quarter pipe, as I knew I had a use for it and could sell the remainder. These stores were bare-bone, with tiled floors, and were lit with fluorescent strip lighting. There were a few chairs for the waiting wife and six changing booths. As I worked I started to study the mirrors. I am very superstitious and one of my great fears is the consequence of breaking a mirror. Much of my success has resulted from sheer good luck, so I don’t take many chances at hexing myself. These mirrors interested me. For some reason in the small suit section I appeared to be taller, beefed-up, bowl-chested with wide shoulders. It was as if I had benefited from the Charles Atlas course advertised in Popular Mechanics. Conversely, in the large suit section I looked rather gaunt, although taller than normal. With study I realized that the mirrors were ground to give the appearance of a 20% change in your reflection. They had obviously spent the decorating money on the mirrors. When it came time to remove the mirrors I took great care, wrapping each one individually – I even rented moving blankets and backed them up with sheets of plywood. With these large suit mirrors I started my hypno-therapy weight loss and self-esteem building clinic. The small suit mirrors are used in the stop smoking portion of the business. These mirrors have changed my life. I have hung two of the small suit

mirrors in my home. When I get up in the morning and walk down the hall to the bathroom, beside the door I see my reflection. Even though my boxer shorts may be twisted askew, my undershirt sweated and wrinkled, even with the bandana around my neck soaked with Absorbine horse liniment, I look incredible! I stop and strike a pose like a toreador. Some days in the morning light I look as Errol Flynn did in "Captain Blood". Some days I see myself as my hero, Geoffrey Charlesworth, rock garden genius and denizen of the mountain crag.

There are few people I envy. It's hard enough to possess all the skills I have, yet I cannot help but wonder what it would be like to have his keen intellect, his quiet confidence and reserve. Most of all I could benefit from his example in knowing when to keep quiet. Geoffrey Charlesworth is a man with class.

I can't recall what year it was when I became involved in rock gardening and the Berkshire Chapter, but I do have newsletters from 1994. However, I do remember my first meeting vividly. I came early and one of the first people to arrive was a very high-energy woman in a wool plaid skirt and sweater, its sleeves pushed up above her elbows. I sensed immediately that she was very assertive and had obviously taken the same sensitivity training program as Bella Abzug. She strode in carrying a small plastic cat carrier. She was very pleased with this crate and told how she was able to

"It is only when you start a garden, probably after age fifty, that you realize something important happens every day."

*-Geoffrey B. Charlesworth,
1994*

use it to bring plants on the airplane instead of risking their damage in the baggage compartment. I wondered how a seatmate would react to seeing a woman boarding and wanting to put a cat underneath the seat on a long trip. I know I would want to change seats! Or even sit out

on the wing! She removed 6 or 8 plants from the crate and I asked her "Does your cat nip?" Her expression told me she wasn't used to being kidded.

The meeting hall started to fill up and people talked pleasantly, standing around the coffee and pastry table. I was standing near the rear exit door when a small station wagon pulled up and backed up close to the meeting hall door. The move was perfectly executed, as if by plan or practice. Two men opened their doors and got out. They moved to the back of the car and opened the hatch. One handed a flat of 40 plants to the other and took out one for himself. There were other items in the compartment, so I approached and said "Can I carry that for you?" He gave me a quick glance of appraisal and handed me the flat, saying "Take it in to Geoffrey and he'll put these plants on the table." I now had a name to fill the front of my brain. As I entered the room I noted that conversations had slowed and the room was much quieter. People's eyes were trying to scan these 40 plant trays. Their eyes reflected their emotions. The other man entered the room carrying a number of items and he started moving amongst the crowd like a long-term Congressman running in a district

unopposed. Geoffrey accepted their celebrity with a quiet grace – he smiled and listened attentively to what people were saying. On his face was a sheepish smile. The cat carrier lady found her way to the plants in quick order. Even with no understanding of these plants I recognized that they were something special –they were all similarly and professionally potted. They had plastic labels on which were scrawled words and dates and letters. It was just so much hieroglyphics to me. The plants were potted in a mix, predominately builder’s sand.

Over time I came to realize that these men were the backbone of the organization. Their ethic was to price their plants fairly so no one could not have an opportunity to purchase some of their monthly bounty. I also noted that often one or the other would present a plant to an individual along with a brief description of what the plant was, and how it might be grown. Through their efforts many people have had the good fortune to own wonderful and otherwise hard to obtain plants. Most of this region’s rock gardens are anchored by their plant material. Plant catalogs today will often credit them as being the source of certain plants listed in those catalogs.

It is hard to think of Geoffrey without Norman, but we are blessed to have Geoffrey for a while longer. We owe him so much.

Dean



Program Corrections!!!

June 3 – **Richard May** of Evermay Nursery will be speaking on plant propagation techniques. The afternoon program will feature **David Gehrs** on photographing our plants.

October 7 – **Jane McGary**, Editor of the NARGS journal, will talk about bulbs and present a bulb workshop in the PM.

Don’t Knock Winter

By *Bob Siegel*

Winter is our friend. Not only is it essential to the growth and well being of plants, but it enhances the happiness of the gardeners who tend those plants.



Think back. Remember how happy you were last spring when the snow mantle finally melted, when the earth became soft and sweet, when those little green noses started poking up through the ground.

And remember the happy bedlam at garden centers. Flowers and spirits were all in full and glorious bloom.

Now ask yourself: would springtime be so exhilarating if you hadn’t just survived months of snow and cold and horticultural deprivation? It just wouldn’t be the same if Spring had simply followed in the footsteps of Fall. Gone that intoxicating rush of relief. Gone that sense of joyous rejuvenation. Without the Dark Ages of Winter we would never fully appreciate the Renaissance of Springtime.

It’s like being shipwrecked on a desert island. When you’re really thirsty and

hungry, a sip of water and a crust of bread are more gratifying than a five-course dinner would be in normal times.

There's no better appetizer than real hunger. That's why my heart goes out to those gardeners who are stuck in the winterless South. They garden all year long. No enforced abstinence to whet their appetites. They're condemned to the same old thing, day in and day out, month after month, year after year.

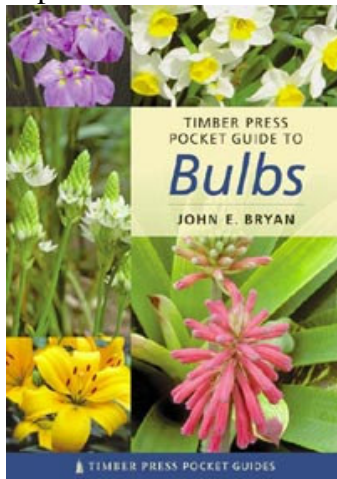
So a word of advice to all you folks who are winter-poor: if you want a change of *pace*, I would suggest that you give serious consideration to a change of *place*.

Go North, where Winters are long and harsh, and where gardening is a treat – a reward – not just another one of those everyday things.

Timber Press Pocket Guide to Bulbs by John E Bryan

Review by Erica Schumacher

This book is a nice size to carry with you, and contains lots of great photos of both flower close-ups and landscape shots. For those relatively new to bulb gardening, it explains the differences between true bulbs,



corms, tubers and rhizomes plus it contains a glossary of terms in the back. The book contains a good mix of both species and hybrid bulbs, including both tender and hardy ones. The climate and zone information, however, needs to be taken with a grain of salt. It is most likely geared to England and the

Pacific Northwest where the author has gardened. For example, *Belamcanda chinensis* is listed as zone 8, yet has made it through zone 5 winters in my yard, and even produced its own seedlings.

The book recommends mowing the lawn prior to the flowering of naturalized crocuses. However, in my yard the crocuses flower way before there is any grass tall enough to cut. Even though the book provides information on where bulbs are native, experienced gardeners can make their own decisions as to which bulbs are likely to grow well for them. The section on pest control contains information on controlling insect problems, but is silent on squirrels and other furry friends, which are my main bulb nemesis. I plant my bulbs with chili peppers to prevent them from being dug up by little furry rodents. Priced at only \$16 in the NARGS bookstore, this book is well worth buying for the photography alone.

Geoffrey

Whenever I go out in the garden, and I'm there much of the day from April to November, it invariably strikes me how much of Geoffrey I'm carrying around. I could never aspire to be his clone, but much of what I do is directly stamped by his personality (teasing, mischievous--he must have made a great university dean), his generously dispensed learning, his great kindness and encouragement over many years.

I doubt whether it would even be possible for me to garden without him. Maybe, but it would be in some unimaginable backwater, deprived of well over a thousand plants, and on a far smaller scale. Geoffrey's energy and his enthusiasm place him in a class all his

own. For the rest of us, the problem is reconciling his vision and ambition with our own capacities. Years ago, I remember Geoffrey looking at my limestone outcrop and saying, as he cast his eyes over the acreage, "You've got space here." Plantsmen without Geoffrey's energy should, perhaps, be leery of a remark coming from a gardener whose ambition was to grow everything, the whole blooming five continent rock garden vocabulary. And who grew something like 1800 seedling pots year after year

As many of us have learned, it is not easy to keep order among plants, pots, beds, boughs and labels. In Geoffrey's garden, however, plants retain not only their names, but also their salient attributes. They are photographed, entered on a computer, and, in a word, known. Whereas mine, their labels smashed, simply disappear into the garden setting. Geoffrey is a plantsman with all the responsibility that implies, whereas I struggle just to remain an aesthete.

There is no such thing as one kind of a gardener, let alone one type of a rock garden. But not everything need be chaos. I find his generosity in explaining the ethics of our discipline, of how to do what we do, very helpful. The six-inch rule, for instance. It can be exceeded, with verbascums, epilobium, salvia, but not without changing the scale of the garden. I remember the first talk by Geoffrey I heard, just after I had joined the society, on composites. Not everyone's favorite genre, but they were Geoffrey's: for their lack of beauty, perhaps; for their economy of capsule, at the advanced end of the evolutionary cycle; and, not least, for their growability from seed--they will germinate!

Geoffrey's two books amount to a rock gardening bible; a fantastic resource for anyone who needs an excuse to spend as much time as possible in the most glorious of surroundings. Still, I can't help but wish

there was more: an article, say, on how he personally surfs the seed lists, what he ignores, what attracts, and why. I'd also like to see a book on the two of them, Geoffrey and Norman, and the garden synergy they created. They are two powerful presences that have somehow melded together in my mind and have made me a gardener.

--Robin Magowan

Coming Attractions



This year, the 2006 NARGS Annual Meeting will be combined with the exciting International Interim Rock Garden

Plant Conference, which occurs only once every ten years. It has been twenty years since NARGS has hosted that event, and in celebration, NARGS has planned an outstanding program of speakers and field trips.

The Conference will begin on Friday, July 21st and run through Wednesday, July 26th. From Friday evening till Sunday morning there will be sales, meals, and lectures at Snowbird, Utah, in the Wasatch Mountains to the east of Salt Lake City. On Sunday, Monday and Tuesday registrants will be away on the three-day field trips.

- Wasatch Mountains, based at Snowbird, with less strenuous walks
- Ruby Mountains, eastern Nevada
- Cedar Breaks/Markagunt Plateau, southwestern Utah
- Teton Range, western Wyoming, and Bear River Range, northern Utah

On Wednesday, all field trips will return to Snowbird for Plant Sales and the closing banquet, which will feature pictures of the

people, plants and places from the five field excursions.

Registration is capped at 300, so I would suggest that you get your registrations in as soon as possible. For further information, and a printable registration form, visit www.nargs.org/IIRGPC.html.

--Joyce Fingerut



Their primary business is the production and sale of hardy native and exotic seeds. They produce yearly retail and wholesale catalogues containing a wide selection of unusual herbaceous and woody plants. They supply seed to individual gardeners, commercial growers, botanic gardens as well as other seed houses. Seed is grown on site and also collected in the wild. While their business is strictly mail-order, their special "Connoisseur" seed packs are available at select gardening shops throughout Canada.

Their business is located on 8 acres, south of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada where winter lows can reach -35°C (-31°F). Since their modest beginnings as a "dining-room operation" in 1991, they have grown to have a worldwide presence, currently conducting business in 22 countries.

In addition to seed, they offer a unique line of gardening and seed products and remain the only Canadian source for GA-3 (a germination stimulator).

During the summer, they operate a plant nursery and open their display gardens to the public on a limited basis. You can find their summer schedule in "The Gardens" link at their website, www.gardensnorth.com

April 1, 2006 Meeting Notes

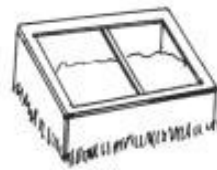
Prepared by Tom Clark

Chairman Peter George called the meeting to order with about 35 people in attendance. Amongst the crowd was a guest, Joan Kutcher, Director of the Mountain Top Arboretum in Tannersville, NY. (www.mtarbor.org) As if in response to our collective hopes for an end to the rather dry stretch of weather we've had, more than a few members vocalized their enthusiasm when the rain began to fall.

Peter handed out a survey in order to get a better understanding of the membership, and how the Chapter can better meet the needs of the members in terms of programs, level of interest, activity, etc. He encouraged all to complete the survey and return it to him by mail or in person at the May meeting. Also, the November luncheon meeting will be held on the 18th and the program is set, but Peter would like feedback regarding where members would prefer it to be held and whether it should be catered, at a restaurant or a pot-luck affair. Your input will be greatly appreciated.

Show & Tell

Lori Chips brought a fine specimen of *Daphne jezoensis* that she originally received from John Bieber of NY. This is one of the few yellow flowered species, and, like so many Daphne, produces a wonderful fragrance. This particular plant was overwintered in a cold frame as it is generally



not hardy in the northeast save a in a few favored locations. Nick Nickou, who happens to have just such a location, does grow it outside and in a partially shaded site. He added that the plant is Winter-blooming

and “wintergreen”, but is Summer dormant and loses its leaves as Summer comes on. With the onset of cooler weather, flower buds and leaves redevelop. He also mentioned that shading the south side of the plant over winter would prevent yellowing of the foliage.

Elliott Jessen showed a hand tool that he has found handy for cutting plants back, slicing through roots and so on.

It has a curved blade with a finely serrated edge that allows the blade to catch and slice through even fine wispy material such as grasses. He found this in the Garrett Wade woodworking tool catalog.

(www.garrettwade.com)

Nick Nickou showed a flowering branch of a double-flowered, pink flowering apricot, *Prunus mume*. These very attractive small trees are encountered far too infrequently given their merits. There are selections with flowers in various shades of pink, as well as white; single and double flowered forms occur; they are fragrant; and are one of the first of the ornamental trees to bloom coinciding with earliest magnolias.

Several items were auctioned off for the benefit of the Chapter and thanks are offered to all the generous donors. After his talk in March, Harvey Wrightman donated to the Chapter a planted trough and a planted chunk of tufa. Dean Evans donated a collection of tufa pieces that would be ideal for a trough. (Anne Spiegel was the lucky bidder and I think she’ll be throwing them at her deer, or at me for poking fun!!) Several books from the library of Dick Redfield also

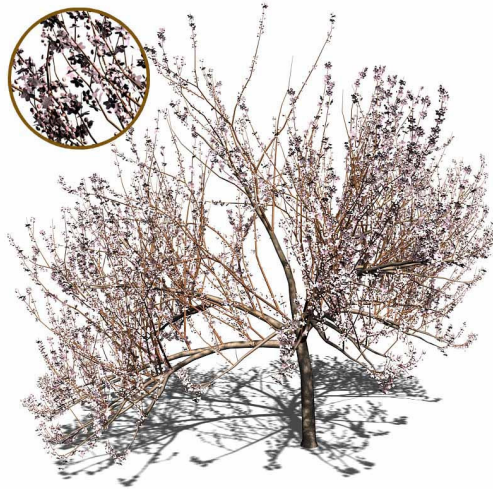
found their way to the Chapter. Geoffrey Charlesworth donated several years worth of journals from various societies. Again, thank you to all donors and bidders.

Our morning program was by member Elisabeth Zander. Using Adobe Photoshop, she showed how digital images can be transformed from basic photos to more artistic creations using one of many applications. An image can be made to look

as if it is a watercolor, stained glass, or textured in many different ways, among myriad other enhancement possibilities. She also demonstrated how basic digital images can be manipulated and enhanced to make them better by brightening or darkening, sharpening the focus, enhancing or diminishing color, cropping, assembling

several images on a screen/page, and so on. In short, Elisabeth made it clear that the possibilities are endless and are really only limited by one’s creativity.

Using a slide lecture developed by Rick Lupp of Mount Tahoma Nursery, Anne Spiegel presented a very informative talk concerning the two closely related genera *Androsace* and *Douglasia*. Throughout the talk, Anne personalized it by contributing asides based on her personal experiences growing many of the highlighted species or her personal observations of several *Androsace* in the mountains of Europe. Referring to *Androsace mucronifolia*, Anne mentioned that she had it growing quite happily in a trough for several years, but when she read that it was a rare plant her specimen promptly died!



My Greeting

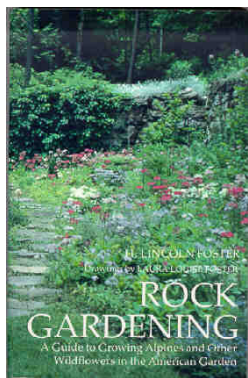
By *John Spain*

It's hard to forget my first meeting with the Berkshire Chapter of NARGS (or was it ARGs then?). It was perhaps 18 years ago. A young lady who worked for White Flower Farm (I'm ashamed that no name comes back to me) invited me to come to the Berkshire Botanical Garden meeting. I had only had my own rock garden for just over a year and, believe me, I didn't know an alpine plant from a cactus – MY hobby.

The club was meeting in the house across the street from the beautiful facility where we are now meeting. The room was crowded and as is common for newcomers, I sat in the very back row just under the windows. No one spoke, and probably for the first time ever, I kept my mouth shut. I didn't know any other member.

After about 10 minutes a nice, white haired gentleman sat down beside me and asked, "What is your interest in rock gardening?"

I confessed that the only plants that I knew anything about were winter hardy cacti. His very considerate answer was to mention that he had said something about winter hardy cacti in one of the chapters in his book.



BOOK! – He has written a **BOOK?**

About that time one of the members came by and said "Hi Linc." Then another, then another. A light was beginning to come on. This must be the legendary H. Lincoln Foster. Even I knew THAT name. And here he was sitting by me and talking with me, a true know nothing if there ever was one.

This first meeting set a tone for the character of our Berkshire Chapter that I can still relate to today. Since that first meeting there have been many members that I have come to know that are also legends in their time. And they have all been open and friendly, just like Linc. They have set a standard for our Society that I hope will last forever.

Odds and Ends



- ❖ The surveys are in, and I received quite a few. What I learned is that we are an eclectic group, and that a lot of us define ourselves as 'gardeners' with a *lot* of 'woodland' in the way we perceive ourselves. We'll try to reflect that in our future programs, but we won't ignore or diminish the 'alpine' part either.
- ❖ I am intending to send an order in to Ruksans in early May, so PLEASE let me know if you wish to participate.
- ❖ We still need a Greeter and a Refreshment Chair, so please let me know if you'd be willing to take on these rather easy jobs.
- ❖ I am still looking for some feedback from you on the issue of the Annual Luncheon. IF we are going to have it in an Inn or restaurant, we need to know by June 1, so please let me know your preference. If I hear nothing, it will be at the Berkshire facility, and will be a potluck.

(petergeorge@verizon.net)

Positions of Responsibility

Chairperson – Peter George
Vice-Chairperson – Dean Evans
Secretary – Norma Abel
Treasurer – Jeffrey Hurtig
Archivist – James Fichter
Audio Visual Chairperson – Dean Evans
Greeter – Open
Independent Director – Elisabeth Zander
Newsletter Editor – Peter George
Plant Sale Chairperson – Bob Siegel
Program Chairperson – Robin Magowan
Proofreader – Rita Evans
Speaker Housing – Anne Spiegel

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Please contact editor before reprinting
articles

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