



# Newsletter

North American Rock Garden Society  
Berkshire Chapter      September 2008

## Next Meeting

**Saturday, October 11, at 10:00 AM**

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

## Special Meeting



**Celebrating the Life of Geoffrey  
Charlesworth  
September 29<sup>th</sup> 1920–May 14<sup>th</sup> 2008**

Light Lunch Will Be Served

RSVP by October 2 to Pam Johnson  
413-528-4611

[pamjohnson@hughes.net](mailto:pamjohnson@hughes.net)

PO Box 203, Monterey, MA 01245

If you are unable to attend, we would welcome written remembrances, anecdotes, stories, photos, etc. that could be read at the celebration or included in the memory book



## Editor's Notes:

It's getting toward the end of active garden season, and I'd like to share some thoughts, some observations and some plants while we still have the interest. So pardon the somewhat rambling approach, but I've got a lot on my mind, and my mind is not terribly orderly these days.

The growing season has been an odd one, with a long period of rain and briefer periods of dry weather, and although I've had some losses, overall it's been a remarkably good year for my plants and me. I lost an *Eriogonum*, a very tiny and beautiful form of *E. ovalifolium* that Elisabeth brought into the plant sale 4 years ago. It just couldn't handle the rain. It flowered wonderfully, and I was hoping for seed, but it's death came too quickly, so I'll just have to find seed elsewhere. I was surprised how many of my *Eriogonum*s survived, including *E. douglasii*, *E. thymoides*, several forms of *E. umberlletum*, *E. wrightii*, *E. strictum*, *E. heracleoides* and *E. tumulosum*. The fact

that I'm able to grow so many of these western dryland plants ought to be a cue that you don't have to be a fantastic grower to have some of these beautiful and interesting plants in your gardens. You need sun, really good drainage and a little bit of love. It's not that hard.

My cacti handled the summer rains well too, thanks to John Spain's most excellent advice 9 years ago when I planted them out. Give them full sun, a couple of feet of perfect drainage (builders and gravel) and leave the rest to nature.



I had only modest success with my seed germination this year, so I've bought more plants by mail than usual. My two primary sources are Wrightman's and Sunscapes, and since most of you already know Harvey and Irene, and appreciate the quality of their plants, I thought I would comment on Sunscapes. I've bought a few plants from Bill Adams in the past, and always got

healthy, well-grown specimens. But this year I ordered late, and he sent me 10 plants just last week, since he doesn't ship in the hot weather. I was stunned at the size and health of the plants I got. They are beautiful, with lots of healthy roots that were easy to clean and untangle, assuring me that they will have a really terrific chance at surviving the winter. I highly recommend Sunscapes, especially for western dryland plants that are available nowhere else. And his prices are very low as well. Visit his website @ [www.sunscapes.net](http://www.sunscapes.net).

One of the things I've noticed the past few years is the dramatic decline in the variety of the plants that are offered at our plant sales. When I first joined the Chapter, there were always a good variety of dryland plants, particularly Penstemons, Eriogonums, Drabas, and lots of others which were the most popular and most aggressively sought after items on the sale tables. They were brought by Geoffrey and Norman, Anne Speigel, Lori Chips, Elisabeth Zander, and several others who sated our appetite for the unusual with their contributions. Now we rarely see these plants; in fact, we see fewer and fewer classic rock garden plants while the woodland selection is growing each year. I wonder if the plant selection reflects a change in the tastes of our membership, or if our members are simply not growing many plants from seed, which is how most of these dryland plants find their way to our plant sales. I do believe this is an issue that deserves some discussion; so if you have any thoughts, let's hear from you. My email address is: [petergeorge@verizon.net](mailto:petergeorge@verizon.net) and I welcome your input.

Finally I'd like to remind everyone that we need your dues. Pam Johnson sent me the most current membership list, and we have fewer than 60 paid up members as of Sept. 15. Given our historical membership of

about 120 that means that either half of us haven't paid yet for 2008, or the Chapter is losing a lot of members. If you haven't paid by the November meeting, I will be stopping your newsletter, so PLEASE send Pam a check as soon as possible. Pam also asked me to remind everyone that if you want to attend the October 11 meeting honoring Geoffrey Charlesworth's life, we must have an RSVP immediately. Please contact Pam via: email @ [pjohnson@hughes.net](mailto:pjohnson@hughes.net) or by phone day or evening @ 413-528-4611 or by regular mail @ PO Box 203, Monterey, MA 01245.

See you on the 11<sup>th</sup>.

*Peter George*

*Almost forgot. The first picture is *Serratula tinctoria*, blooming now. I got the plant from Tom Stuart 10 years ago, and it blooms in sun and shade starting right about Labor Day each year. Very nice plant.*

### ***Eritrichium howardii* 'blue sky'**



*Text and Photos By Harvey Wrightman*

*Eritrichiums* are among the most desired of blue-flowering plants; and, many times with many species have I, along with many others, have sought to find one that would actually last in the garden. I have seen *e.*

*nanum* growing high in the Big Horns in endless sheets, as if to challenge where earth and sky meet. Seed raising is straightforward and by treating with GA-3, germination occurs readily. The problem in Eastern North America is to deal with the higher humidity levels we have. *Eritrichium howardii* grows at lower elevations in Wyoming, below 2000 meters, and so is exposed to much higher daytime temperatures. Its habitat is also very arid but not totally so. It grows more quickly than *e. nanum* and can eventually form small, tufted mounds 15 - 20 cm across covered with dark blue flowers in early spring. Easier and faster from seed, I have set out seedlings and most would transplant well enough into a coarse, humus-free soil and grow enough to present flowers the next spring. The heat and humidity of summer would weaken most; i.e., dead rosettes, and the survivors rarely would make it through the winter. And so I believed it was probably a short-lived perennial at best; but still worth growing for that wonderful flush of color in early April. One year, at the EWSW in Ann Arbor (2002), I won a piece of tufa that had been core-drilled to make a sort of mini-trough. In April I planted it with 3 seedlings of *e. howardii* and set it in the garden in full light. 2 out of the 3 grew on and survived the summer approach the winter. The most unsettling thing about *E. howardii* is that with hard frost, the leaves turn from gray/green to gray and by late March they can have a definite charcoal look - not very encouraging and morbid enough to bring on all sorts of recriminating thoughts. A careful peek into the center of each the tightly bound bundle of leaves reveals the faintest hint of green. Ahh!! - only sleeping. The rush of light and warmth after the equinox brings a burst of growth so that in a week's time the whole plant revives. To me, it is at its most attractive stage when the new leaves lay equally across the old - the point of



resurrection. And so, in that tufa piece both plants did bloom magnificently, but one grew better than the other and in another



year or so, only this one survived. At this point, I thought, “well, maybe 3 years will be the end - not bad...” It never did die and never seemed to mind the summer muggs or the wet snow of March. Large enough now to take cuttings, I rooted a few and planted them in tufa, and these offsets did equally well. This last season I rooted 32 cuttings and raised another 40 or so seedlings. The 2 flats sit beside each other. Less than half of the seedlings remain. Only 2 of the cuttings died over the summer, and the difference in growth is immediately noticeable. This summer has been wet, at times excessively so, but the *Eritrichium* has not



faltered. Certainly plants from cuttings will grow more readily as general rule and the 'brush' of roots that a cutting develops are much easier to handle as a transplant. The original plant is now 6 years old and some

12 cm across, even with the extensive cutting it has been subjected to. So, with some trepidation, I have named the form *e. howardii* 'Blue Sky' and will offer it in the catalogue for 2009. This cultivar is easy enough to grow in coarse, gravelly soil or directly into tufa. Oh, there are more things to do: cull the seedlings of this plant for other interesting forms; make some new trials with *e. nanum*, maybe the Asian species as they become available - but always looking for the growable.

## Meeting Notes

### September 6, 2008 NBARGS

As promised in last month's newsletter, Cliff Desch began Show & Tell with instructions for building an invisible deer fence, based on his successful installation of one that runs 1650' around his property. The University of Massachusetts told him that fencing was the only thing that would keep deer out, and after determining that an electric fence was not feasible for a number of reasons, he chose one made of a sturdy, plastic mesh. It measures 7 ½' tall and attaches to a 1/8" monofilament line strung between trees or posts 20' apart. The bottom 6" of the fence forms an apron that is staked into the ground. Total costs with a few tools and other supplies ran about \$2/ft. From his enthusiasm, it seems well worth the price to protect his collection of Rhododendrons and rock garden plants. He'll let us know how the fence fares against a winter of hungry deer.

Peter George auctioned donations from Geoffrey Charlesworth's estate: Glimpses of a Life by Frieda Hall, An Island Garden by Celia Thaxter, Alpine Plants by John Good, 3 Czech books, and Geoffrey's own books-- A Gardener Obsessed and The Opinionated

Gardener (a copy once owned by Timmy Foster).

Rachel Flower announced that she is taking custom orders over the winter for cold frames made from composite decking. A photo of the design will be in the next newsletter.



Joe Strauch donated three different Epimediums for auction—*E. grandiflorum* var. 'La Rocaille', a pale yellow clumper named after Harold Epstein's place on Long Island; *E. koreanum* 'Harold Epstein', a bright yellow spreader; and *E. x sasakii*, a shorter, evergreen, pale lilac clumper that's listed by Darrell Probst.

The following slate of officers was nominated and approved for 2009:

President: Cliff Desch

Vice President: Robin Magowan

Secretary: Carol Hanby

Treasurer: Pam Johnson

Programs: Elizabeth Zander

Pam Johnson announced the Celebration of the Life of Geoffrey Charlesworth will be held on October 11 at 10 a.m. at the Berkshire Botanical Garden. It will include remembrances, slides, music, and a light lunch. Geoffrey's remarkable talk at the Winter Study Weekend this year was recorded on DVD and will be shown with the slides from his program. RSVP by September 27 to Pam at 413-528-4611, [pjohnson@hughes.net](mailto:pjohnson@hughes.net), or PO Box 203, Monterey, MA 01245. If you are unable to attend, send stories or photos that could be included in the memory book. A number of Geoffrey's relatives will be coming from England for the occasion.

#### Member's Potpourri of Slides

Peter George showed the current favorites in his garden: *Chicorium spinosum*, *Oenothera fremontii* (large blooms open about 6-7 p.m. and stay open the following day); *Dianthus anatolicus*, *Oxytropis splendens*, *Polemonium caeruleum*, and *Zinnia grandiflora* (a long bloomer).



*Chicorium spinosum* – Photo by Rachel Flowers

Robin Magowan gave a condensed tour of his troughs and crevice gardens over time



and different seasons. He credits Harvey and Irene Wrightman for helping him transform his troughs by the asymmetrical placement of tufa and stones, and a vertical orientation to add height.

Elizabeth Zander credited Czech gardeners Stenack Voluec and Zdenek Zvolánek for the way she designed her 10-year old garden of crushed process rock between larger rocks placed about 2” apart. Joyce Carrothers showed her how to pack plants into crevices and use a bamboo skewer as a tool.

Two years ago, Cliff Desch drove to the Blue Ridge Mountains and saw the rare plant, *Shortia galacifolia*. It was named after John Short, a botanist from Kentucky, but is restricted to moist streambeds in southwestern North Carolina and northeast Georgia. Cliff grows it well in his sunken moss garden and brought in seedlings for the September plant sale.

Juliet Yli-Mattila showed slides of a rock garden near Trentino, Italy that she and Robin visited in July 2001. One of the highlights was a very large ornamental Rhubarb, taller than Robin.

Thanks to everyone who contributed photos for our program, and to those who brought in plants for the September sale.

Joyce Hemingson, Recorder



## Hiking in the French Alps

Back in June I had the opportunity to spend 1.5 weeks in France on business. In addition to a very enjoyable week in Paris, I spent 4 days in Grenoble, near the French/Swiss border. One of the highlights of my trip is when a colleague in Grenoble took me hiking in the Alps for the day. To have the complete French experience, we picked up some cheese at the local market and some baguettes at a local bakery. Then we headed to Cret du Poulet, a relatively easy hike in the sub alpine region of the Alps.



My guide, Marie Jean, knew the area well, but not the flora. I knew some of the flora, but not the area. We each learned from each other. Just a little past the chateau we had lunch at, we started to see the royal blue flowers of gentians, I believe *Gentiana acaulis*. The higher we went, the more prevalent they were. I was in rock garden heaven! When we got to the peak of Cret du Poulet, I saw one of the mountain



rhododendrons in full bloom. It was growing on the side of the mountain on a fairly steep slope. I crawled very carefully

to take a picture of it, while Marie Jean watched me nervously. Even though we were hiking in the middle of June, ferns along the trail were first starting to open up. The views from the top were spectacular. Before heading back down we took advantage of the Refuge Cret du Poulet, at an elevation of 1700m. There were a few other flowers of interest, though I don't know their names. I have since purchased *Alpine Plants of Europe*, by Jim Jermyn, a delightful book on growable alpinines from Europe. I bought it for \$15 in Chicago, where it was on the bargain rack.

*Text and Photos by Erica Schumacher*

## **Easy Does It**

### **Easy Plants For the New England Rock Garden**

*By Rachel Flowers*

There aren't a lot of red flowering rock garden plants, and even if this one gets a bit tall at 24", it's a beauty. *Potentilla thurberi* is found naturally in New Mexico and Arizona, yet is quite hardy here in zone 5. It starts to flower in June, and then spends 2 to 3 months showing off the beautiful red shallow cups with darker centers.



It grows in average soil, sun or part shade, and if you keep it deadheaded it won't seed around too much. The seed does germinate well, so you can end up with a few more seedlings than you want if you leave the plant alone.

It's a beautiful and easy plant, fully perennial, and it adds a lot of color later in the summer when so many of our rock gardens are barren of flowers.

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## **Our Annual Luncheon Meeting**

will be held on November 8 at our normal meeting place in Stockbridge. The program will be:

### **Small Irises – Many Choices**

This talk will include many different types of irises for rock gardeners including sun lovers and shade lovers, clumpers and spreaders, hybrids and species, cultivars and seed grown plants.

Jan Sacks and Marty Schafer make their home in Carlisle, Massachusetts and have been flower gardeners for almost thirty years. They grow all types of plants, annuals and perennials; from tiny rock garden plants to the giants we grow for the cut flower industry. They started



Siberian iris breeding in the mid 1980's and began their mail order nursery, Joe Pye Weed's Garden, at that time. The process of hybridizing, evaluating and selecting Siberian iris seedlings is immensely rewarding and is a great learning process. We are now also selecting and breeding small shade-loving iris, primroses and other fine garden plants. In addition, we are collaborating with Darrell Probst to introduce the new Asian irises he has collected to American gardeners. We are active members of the Iris Society of Massachusetts, the North American Rock Garden Society, and the American Primrose Society.

## **Positions of Responsibility**

Chairperson – Cliff Desch  
Vice-Chairperson – Robin Magowan  
Secretary – Carol Hanby  
Treasurer – Pamela Johnson  
Archivist – James Fichter  
Audio Visual Chairperson - Joe Berman  
Greeter – Open  
Independent Director – Peter F. George  
Newsletter Editor – Peter F. George  
Meeting Recorder – Joyce Hemingson  
Plant Sale Chairperson – Bob Siegel  
Program Chairperson – Robin Magowan  
Proofreader – Cliff Desch  
Refreshments Chairperson – Joyce Hemingson  
Speaker Housing – Anne Spiegel

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Monterey, MA 01245

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Please contact editor before reprinting  
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