



# Newsletter

North American Rock Garden Society  
Berkshire Chapter August 2009

## Next Meeting

**Saturday, September 5 at 10:30 AM**  
Berkshire Botanical Garden Exhibit Hall,  
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.



### Program

Judith Sellers

## Primulas For The Northeast

*(For some insight into Judy and her gardening  
background, see her article on P. 2)*

And after Judy's presentation, and a quick  
lunch, we will be having our annual

### **BIG PLANT SALE**

On P. 6 you will find a partial list of the plants  
that will be available on the 5<sup>th</sup>. Many others  
will show up, so the selection will be VERY  
impressive. Please make a point of bringing at  
least a few of your seedlings and plants, so this  
day can be a financial success too!



*Roscoea purpurea*

## **Editor's Message:**

More than a decade ago, when I first started  
rock gardening, I read an article by Panayoti  
Kelaidis that discussed the all-season  
garden. He described rock garden plants  
that would provide color and bloom from  
March through November. I have tried hard  
over the years to integrate this concept into  
my garden, and to a large degree I've  
succeeded.

During the strange summer of 2009,  
however, I've begun to notice that, even  
though my garden always has something  
blooming, large areas of it are relatively  
drab, consisting primarily of dried seed  
heads, browning foliage and more than a  
few weeds. So now I'm beginning to  
reevaluate my strategy, and I'm considering  
modifying my plant selections to maximize  
the flush of color during the April-June  
period, and then provide some substantial  
bloom during the fall period, right through  
the first hard frost. August now seems to be  
a hopeless month, hot and muggy,  
alternating 90 degree days with torrential

rains and a constant 80% humidity -- all factors that mitigate against the survival of my choicest plants. Many of my favorite *Eriogonums* have suffered huge dieback for the second summer in a row, and one or two will probably not survive. I've lost a few others, but the bigger issue is the just plain miserableness of August. I was out of town for five days in the middle of the month, and when I returned it was to a garden hidden by weeds. The delightfully cool and incredibly pleasant days and weeks of early summer days are now a distant memory, and the muggs are killing me and my plants! It's too hot to plant anything, and it's too humid to weed. A real conundrum.

But for those whose tolerance for humidity is greater than mine, and who actually plan for flowers in August, here are several plants currently blooming.



*Serratula tinctoria*

*Serratula tinctoria*, a lavender paint brush flower in the aster family, blooms reliably every August right up to hard frost. I've

never gotten seed to germinate successfully, but I do divide it each year, so now I have it in shade, full sun and part shade. It flowers equally well everywhere, and is just plain easy!

My various *Oenetheras* all are in bloom, as they have been since late June. *Oenethera macrocarpa* tends to sprawl, but the flowers are huge yellow gems, and, after opening at dusk, they stay open for most of the following day. If you have some room, preferably on a slope or a berm, they are a beautiful and permanent addition.



*Oenethera macrocarpa*

A few years ago I bought 6 Roscoes from Odyssey Bulbs, and planted them in a sheltered area of my shady garden. They continue to bloom beautifully each August, although this year the heat and rain have beaten them down a bit. They are a surprisingly hardy addition, adding color and structure when everything else around them is either dormant or waiting for the cooler fall to show off its color.

PFG

---

## Judith Sellers: Primula Guru

My husband and I have a new house and a 'very young' garden near South New Berlin, NY, overlooking the Unadilla River in USDA zone 4b. I have always enjoyed helping things grow, and became a NY Master Gardener soon after I retired from

teaching.

Primroses entered my previous garden in 1974, from seeds for Burpee's 'Pacific Giants'. They grew happily and were not often eaten by deer, so soon became my favorite plant, and eventually an obsession. Having moved from that very shady and damp garden to a sunny one where I can grow zucchini and sunflowers, I am finding better success with other *Primulas*, such as auriculas and denticulatas than with primroses, and enjoying new challenges.

Memberships in the American Primrose Society, NARGS, the National Auricula and Primula Society (Northern, Midlands and West, UK) and several other plant societies have provided me with opportunities to travel to shows and meet with other Primula enthusiasts, share plants and seeds, and learn from the experts. Serving as an officer and board member for the APS and working on the seed exchange and Quarterly publication have been rewarding activities during those cold months when I have clean fingernails.

I am looking forward to meeting members of the Berkshire Chapter, and hope to share my enthusiasm for 'Primulas for the North East' on September 5.'

---

## **Members And Their Gardens**

### ***Bruce Lockhart:***

When my partner and I moved from Brooklyn to Petersham, my gardening horizon expanded from 19x60 feet to 88 acres. First came a vegetable garden, then an orchard of heirloom apples and pears, then a small formal garden, a willow garden, and a woodland garden. It wasn't until the excavation for a greenhouse tossed up a pile of boulders and I had the good fortune to meet Abby Rorer whose jewel of a rock garden inspired me



*Gentiana* ?- Bruce Lockhart

to find a use for the boulders, that I became hooked on rock gardening. A feature of Petersham in the summer is a small wooden table on the sidewalk in front of a house on Main Street. The table often has a selection of alpine plants for sale with a jelly jar for money. I soon learned that the house belonged to Peter George, and that he too had an established rock garden full of treasures most of which were new to me. Peter has generously shared many of his plants and has been a great resource in helping me to establish my own garden.



*Anthemis tinctoria* 'Belarus' – Bruce Lockhart

### ***Anne Hill:***

I have gardened throughout my adult life. Thalassa Cruso and her television show, *Making Things Grow*, were an early inspiration.

This is my 6th house as an adult. I have started and left many gardens, learning each time.

This suburban spot was a blank slate which I have slowly transformed over seven years.

It is in New Hartford, New York, 100 feet x 150 feet, a tiny

paradise with a mixed shrub and tree border, perennial gardens, raised vegetable beds, espaliered trees, water features and a new rock garden.



Design and scale are important to me so this small plot led me to learn about smaller plants, shrubs and trees. Plants, gardening, reading about gardening, just thinking about gardening are the joys of my heart.



Design and scale are important to me so this small plot led me to learn about smaller plants, shrubs and trees. Plants, gardening, reading

=====

## Two New *Androsace*

*Harvey Wrightman*

We were doing the usual summer maintenance on our stock and my daughter Esther commented, "...look at all the *Androsace*. You don't need to bother with *Saxifrages*, the variety here is just as good." And so it is. The Chinese collections have doubled or tripled the number of species. Despite their delicate looks, they have proven surprisingly easy to grow. Their beauty is second to none. Two for your consideration:

*Androsace tangulashanensis* – This tiny species is found in the north of west China, Qinghai and in Szechuan. Josef Halda also collected on the other side of the Mekong river in Upper Burma. Stony screes described as slate or limestone which are rich enough to support short grasses and mat forming plants, in high elevations over 4000m., seeds germinated readily and the small plants grew well and never showed any indication of fussiness. The tiny leaves are a dark, green with a smooth sheen. The individual rosettes are only 6mm. across, and arranged in a tight, overlapping fashion. Impulsively one feels the need to touch the undulating mat, so unlike any other



*Androsace tangulashanensis* – Harvey Wrightman

*Androsace* I have seen. The white flowers with yellow eye must come very early in nature, with the receding snow. In the greenhouse it blooms late February/early March, fully 3 weeks ahead of other *Androsace*. The flowers are large when compared to the cushions they barely sit above, and filled the greenhouse with a breathtaking fragrance – a real bonus as many *Androsace* are not so agreeable in this respect. Through the summer, the cushions have grown well in troughs and in the tufa garden. It enjoys conditions of part shade to full sun, and so far neither heat nor humidity have affected it – an advantage of the green leaved species.

This plant is going to be one of the better introductions. Its easy nature and versatility will allow us to use where small mats are desirable – I can see it in vertical crevices as a “plug” specimen much like *silene acaulis* – but it will have a more refined look.

*Androsace muscoidea* – Not from China, this came from a 2005 collection that Pavelka made in the Garhwal Himal of India at ~ 3700m. Again the seeds grew readily and we soon had over 60 different seedlings and one could see variation in this population. The collection site was described as being ,”...drier places of alpine meadows.” The compact cushions made silver/green domes of matted, hairy leaves. Most forms of *A. muscoidea* have white flowers though the *A. muscoidea ssp. longiscapa* is pink. Although the plants grew beautifully, no flowers were produced until this year – a long wait, but worth it as there



*Androsace muscoidea*- Harvey Wrightman

were all shades of pink with the prettiest being a lavender/pink shade that is not so common with *Androsace*. We made some selections for color and form and will name the best. In the 4 years it has grown here, it has shown itself to be adaptable to our climate and able to withstand the heat. All this waiting bears out what it’s like to grow something new. The best way to avoid impatience and irritation is to grow lot’s of variety and don’t obsess on the ones that fail

to make the grade. There will be more to come.

## Clay Crevice Planting Workshop

Class size is limited to 25 participants and will be held on **Sept. 26<sup>th</sup>** at Robin Magowan’s garden in Salisbury, CT. The class will begin at 11:00 AM

Wrightman Alpines will supply:

- 1) 2 tufa pieces for crevice piece
- 2) Materials for clay fill
- 3) A selection of appropriate plants for the crevice

Registrant should bring:

- 1) a trough or plastic tub to transport finished piece

Basic technique of Clay Cleft Construction will be demonstrated and questions re: this will be addressed, i.e.

- 1) what stone to use
- 2) how narrow the crevice
- 3) composition of mud for the crevice and why
- 4) how the mud is applied
- 5) how the plant(s) are laid out
- 6) how the pieces are put together and how they are set
- 7) “dressing” the surface of the crevice
- 8) Placement and aftercare

Please contact Peter George @ [petergeorge@verizon.net](mailto:petergeorge@verizon.net) OR 978-724-0299 to make your reservation. The class will be filled soon, so if you are interested, PLEASE contact Peter ASAP! Cost is \$50/per participant.

*Harvey and Irene Wrightman*



## Geoffrey's Nasturtiums

Well they are here, flowering now in my window boxes. These were the seeds I wrote of in my article last spring. Odd that an annual can give a bittersweet message. Odd too, that a bright simple annual makes me think of Geoffrey. But maybe not so odd after all. He had expansive and inclusive taste in plants and flowers. And I have to say; these have been the prettiest Nasturtiums I have ever grown.

Thanks old friend.

*Lori Chips*

---

## The **Big Plant Sale** Inventory

I thought it might be helpful to provide a list of some of the plants that will be making an appearance at our **BIG PLANT SALE** on Sept. 5. It's only a partial list, but it does give you an opportunity to find out a bit about them before the sale, making the big decision to buy or leave behind much easier. To check up on these plants go to: <http://www.kadel.cz/flora/kvSearch.html>

So here it is:

*Alyssum daghestanicum*  
*Alyssum moellendorffianum*  
*Alyssum sibirnyi*

*Androsace sempervivoides*  
*Anemone rupicola*  
*Aquilegia barnebyi*  
*Arabis carduchorum*  
*Calylophus serrulatus*  
*Campanula chamissonis*  
*Cremanthodium arnicoides*  
*Draba rigida*  
*Dracocephalum fragile* (orig. from Anne Spiegel)  
*Dracocephalum ruyschianum*  
*Dracocephalum wendelboi*  
*Ephedra minima*  
*Erigeron compositus* var. *pinnatisectus*  
*Erigeron scopulinus* (orig. from Norman Singer)  
*Eriogonum douglasii*  
*Gentiana acaulis* (orig. clone from Linc Foster via Ellie Spingarn)  
*Gentiana scabra*  
*Geranium maculatum*  
*Glaucidium palmatum*  
*Globularia repens* (the smallest one)  
*Hosta venusta*  
*Iberis taurica*  
*Iris cristata* 'Dick Redfield'  
*Lewisia columbiana*  
*Micro Phloxes* (orig. from Dick Redfield)  
*Oenothera macrocarpa fremontii*  
*Onosma taurica*  
*Opuntia fragilis*  
*Papaver miyabeianum*  
*Penstemon barbatus*  
*Penstemon rupicola*  
*Phlox kelseyi* 'Lemhi Purple'  
*Physaria condensata*  
*Physaria eburniflora*  
*Physaria newberryi*  
*Polemonium viscosum*  
*Potentilla hyparctica* 'Nana' (orig. from Geoffrey)  
*Rosa pulverulenta*  
*Saponaria* 'Bressingham'  
*Saxifraga x urbium*  
*Sedum spathulifolium*  
*Sedum ewersii*  
*Sedum kamtschaticum*  
*Sedum middendorffianum*  
*Sedum oreganum*  
*Townsendia spathulata*

## NARGS: A Few Thoughts

A longtime NARGS member wrote the following to me recently: "I have felt for several years that the Quarterly is not speaking to me anymore or to anyone on the eastern seaboard. I no longer even read it cover to cover as I always used to -- even though it is getting more slender all the time." Her comments resonated with me, given my increasing dissatisfaction with the national Journal over the past 2 or 3 years. Once a publication to be read and reread, it now gets shunted off to my back office for weeks before I get around to reading through it. It is slimmer, to be sure (an issue we should be discussing) – but more importantly, the content is simply not interesting. Here is a list of topics that the current editor suggested on the Alpine L listserv a few weeks ago.

### TOPICS:

Sculpture and other art and craft works in the rock garden: What is appropriate?

How to mount a rock garden exhibit at a plant show.

Culinary herbs in the rock garden.

Classical Chinese gardens in China, Vancouver, and Portland.

The natural garden: Magic or myth?

Manzanitas: On beyond kinnikinnik.

Rock garden at Government House, Victoria, BC.

Unusual containers used as troughs (not old boots, please).

Rock garden at the Australian National Botanic Gardens, Canberra.

Can an alpine lawn or meadow be imitated successfully below the tree line (OK, we know they have them in Denver).

Are these topics interesting to you? Manzanitas? Classical gardens in China, Vancouver and Portland? Is it possible that we no longer have a *national* Journal, but

one serving the interests of a few hundred people living and gardening in the Pacific Northwest?

In 1999, NARGS membership increased by about 330 new members worldwide, including about 75 new members in the U.S. This year, one decade later, we will gain fewer than 80 new members *worldwide*. During that same decade, total NARGS membership has declined by over 40%, leaving us today with about 2,900 total members. By comparison, the NARGS chapters have almost 6,000 members – so the decline cannot be due to a loss of interest in rock gardening, but rather to a loss of interest in NARGS.

So what is NARGS doing to increase membership? The national organization failed to organize a 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Meeting, and incorporated the required meeting as a mere adjunct to the 2009 Western Winter Study Weekend. At that meeting, for the first time in NARGS history, the three people nominated by the NARGS Nominating Committee to serve on the Board of Directors were rejected by the voters present, and replaced by three regional candidates. This effort was organized by the host chapter and supported by the NARGS leadership. One of those denied an opportunity to serve on the Board, Harvey Wrightman, was later awarded the Marcel Le Piniec Award, one of NARGS' three most prestigious awards. Good enough for the award, but not good enough for the Board? And to make the story even more bizarre, the Awards Committee, claiming they were "unable to find a box big enough to fit the framed award," sent Harvey and Irene a laser copy in a manila envelope. Irene had to iron it to remove the creases, and it is now pinned to a cork board in their home!

Then there is the bylaw issue. The NARGS bylaws are designed to centralize power in a single hand, that of the President. He or she essentially names all the chairs of all the committees and pretty much runs the organization for their full term. The election process prevents a genuinely representative vote for NARGS officers, because the votes are cast at national meetings, which are generally attended by fewer than 250 people. The bylaws mention both mail and email balloting, but (of course) the bylaws contain no procedures for a vote by either method. Until the bylaws are changed, the utterly undemocratic and unrepresentative voting procedure will continue. I suggest that each of you take a few minutes and read them. It should only take you 4 or 5 minutes, and will be very helpful in understanding the inner workings of this strange oligarchy.

<http://www.planethugh.com/images/stories/4articles/bylaws2000.html>

These comments, by the way, are entirely mine, and do not in any way reflect the views of the Berkshire Chapter, or of any of its members other than me. I do hope that this is just the first of many discussions about NARGS, and I welcome contributions from other Chapter members.

PFG

## **WATER TANK CITY**

*Written & Illustrated by Abbie Zabar*

London has their terra cotta chimney pots; Brooklyn, its telephone pole clotheslines; and the French bake “Almond Tiles,” a delicious homage to the curved clay roof tiles of Provence. Yet, if every out-of-town guest standing in my penthouse garden asks ‘What’s with the barrels on top of all the buildings?’ maybe New York’s wooden

water tanks take the cake when it comes to signature skylines.



Our city-provided water travels down from several upstate reservoirs via a system of early 20<sup>th</sup> century ducts that were built in stages; and though the mains deliver with some oomph, NYC has naturally low water pressure. Which means that if you live in a structure taller than six stories, following point of entry into a building all your water must be electronically pumped to the top, and then somehow stored up there in gigantic pails of water. Gravity will take care of getting it down. Reminds me of Louis’ issues when he was doing Versailles. After seeing the gardens, fountains, and water works of Italy, the Sun King had a yen for the same. Problem is Italy is hilly; Versailles is flat as a crepe. And to make a big splash with endless water effects – as Las Vegas calls it – would be pushing things. But that’s just what you need to do when gushing water doesn’t happen easily, or naturally. Hence, our rinky-dink-looking cedar and plywood structures have reigned as icons of the NYC horizon for over a century. Sure you can make a tank out of metal, but nothing insulates like wood, or keeps the taste as pure. In fact, NYC’s drinking water gets impressively high marks.



We have about 10,000 wooden water tanks punctuating our skyline, more than any other American city. An average domestic water tank, about twelve feet high and approximately the same dimension in diameter, will hold 10,000 gallons of water. The bottom half is reserved for fire-fighting purposes; water for drinking and bathing is siphoned off the top. A conical plywood roof is protection from debris, soot, and pigeons.

It's a simple principle: these storage vessels are made of grooved cedar staves fitting snugly together because the water inside the tank keeps the vertical planks engorged; additionally, tightening the lugs on the galvanized steel hoops that are girdling the swollen vertical planks holds it all in place. When these tanks used to be made of California redwood they were good for over 35 years. No wonder only two remaining NYC wooden water tank builders are left in New York City.

I live surrounded by some of the most innovative (and, often, most soulless) steel and glass architecture, sporting toney architect names like Philip Johnson, Frank Gehry, and Richard Meier. Still, isn't it iconic that the wooden-slatted rooftop water tanks – reminding me of the banded whiskey barrels where I grew roses in my first penthouse garden – have never been improved upon?

{**ABBIE ZABAR** is a Member of the Manhattan Chapter of NARGS. She is editor, designer, and artist for their newsletter, *THE URBAN ROCK GARDENER*. Her drawings are part of the permanent collection of the Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation. She has written and illustrated five books, 2.5 of them on gardening.}



## *NARGS 2010*

### *Romancing the Rockies The Marriage of Plant and Stone*

Exploration and field study of the "edaphic factor": how does limestone or granite substrate influence the flora and biodiversity?

**July 11-14, 2010  
Denver & Salida, Colorado**

The conference venue is the SteamPlant in Salida, a restored historic structure of great charm. Because there is no giant conference hotel in Salida, conferees must book their own accommodation in any of dozens of hotels, motels and B&B's in Salida. If you are thinking of coming, please book a room on your own soon! Visit <http://nowthisiscolorado.com> for lodging listing and reservation information.

**There is a limit of 220 registrants total.**

## **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 – Elaine Chittenden  
Plant Sale Chairperson – Bob Siegel  
Program Chairperson – Elisabeth Zander  
Proofreader – Martin Aisenberg  
Refreshments Chairperson – Joyce Hemingson  
Speaker Housing – Anne Spiegel

**Published 10 times per year (Feb. through Nov.) by the Berkshire Chapter NARGS**

Membership is open to all members of NARGS

Dues \$10.00 single, \$12.50 Family

Payable to the Treasurer

Pamela Johnson

PO Box 203, 140 Main Road

Monterey, MA 01245

Deadline for Next Newsletter is September 24,  
2009

Please contact editor before reprinting  
articles

Peter F. George, Editor  
Berkshire Chapter NARGS  
PO Box 833  
Petersham, MA 01366