

Newsletter

North American Rock Garden Society
Berkshire Chapter March 2010

Next Meeting

Saturday, March 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

AM: Peter Joppe, Hillside Nursery

***Woodland Plants for New
England Gardens***

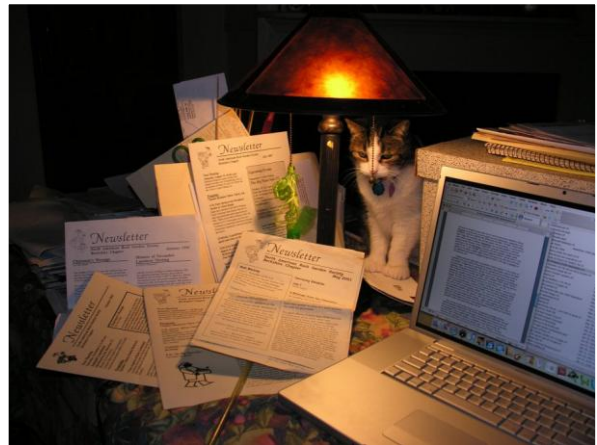


Lunch ---BYO

We welcome dessert contributions. Lunch will be followed by Show and Tell and an auction.

PM: Robin Magowan & Juliet Yli-Mattila

We have become accustomed to the beauty and evocative descriptions of Robin and Juliet, and on this special Saturday, they will present a photographic and oral reprise of their visit to Copenhagen, Tromsø, and Svalbard



In the Company of Old Newsletters

Lori Chips © 2/9/10

All gardeners get restless in winter. They are prone to fabricating many winter projects as a distraction away from the fact that gardening is, at the moment, impossible. I am not, however in that camp. Because I work at a nursery, have my own garden to tend, and have all those fascinating and tempting NARGS events to participate in, my “gardening season” plate is rather full. Sometimes it is not a plate, it is an enormous hotel tray, and it is overflowing. I wonder should I even admit this: sometimes in winter I’m glad when the seed and other orders are done and I can turn some attention to other (non-gardening) things. Things like writing, or painting, or catching up with non-gardening friends. Even (gasp!) considering a resort-like vacation to a destination of surf and sun.

This winter found me stuck at home, though, and contemplative. I have toyed for years with

the idea of a collection of essays so one “winter project” was to assemble all I could find of my horticultural writing for the last 14 years and get it on my computer if possible. As you can imagine that entailed searching through a lot of material both stemming from vocation and avocation, and I can’t say that this was unpleasant. It was overwhelming occasionally, but isn’t that true of anything that requires a person to plow and poke and sift through their past? Some of the juvenilia that I had chosen to put out there occasioned a wince or two, but nothing terribly bad. My Oliver Nursery writing fell into rather neat groupings: catalog stuff and therefore (mostly) unusable and newsletter articles in batches. Like: Alpine Habits (four kinds) sun or shade candidates for the rock garden, a series on troughs, that sort of thing.

The pieces for BNARGS, however, were different. They have far flung subjects and a different scope. They are more personal, show more evolution; they even, at times, tackle bigger human questions. I was somehow braver, more inventive, and I took more chances. I revealed more of myself. I know this did not happen by chance.



Nick Nickou and Anne Spiegel at Stonecrop

As I sorted through sheaves of newsletters I made several stacks: some held articles I wanted to reread (*all* of Geoffrey’s made this cut!) and I pulled mine out to deal with later. Geoffrey’s stack grew admirably larger and larger, and this was *after* he had done his two books! (There was a noticeable and understandable lessening of his work when Norman had had his aneurysm in 1997.)

While one is sorting over the past, even for a good pragmatic purpose, one sometimes can’t help but delve into the treasures at hand. Before long I found myself rereading on the spot “Ah, here is a plant I just got seed of...” or failed with or saw a picture of etc etc. See, I had a justification. I had just bought a brand new filing “cube” complete with hanging files and labels. *All* of the newsletters were to be saved of course, but I needed to winnow a little. Stuff for fun, stuff for my project, stuff to be re-integrated later. If I just read this one now, I can put it into the main stack...” I said to myself.

This kind of activity can work on one in a strange and alchemical way. Here was a call to arms to help in the seed exchange. (We did.) Here was the call for plants for the sale. Over here was the announcement of Panayoti Kelaidis’ talk. I remember that. As usual, his talk was exuberant, fresh, and erudite. Norman and Geoffrey invited a bunch of chapter members to visit their garden afterwards. They said they had got things pretty well weeded so now was a good time to visit. I had with me an old friend and Joe and it meant we would miss the Kentucky Derby (which we always watched) but this was bigger than the run for any roses. This was Norman, Geoffrey, and only my second chance at seeing their garden. (The first had been at the Annual meeting in the Berkshires in 1995.) You may wonder why it was inevitable that we miss the race. It is because of the distance I travel to attend BNARGS meetings. I need to leave the house before eight A.M. to get there in time. On a perfect day it equals a two and a quarter hours drive. If I hit the apparently somnambulistic traffic from “The Leaf People” in October, or fisherfolk in spring or even rabid fleamarketeters in summer it can be longer. The roundtrip commute is just under 5 hours on that one Saturday. Why do I drive 5 hours on a Saturday? In revisiting all these newsletters I know exactly why.

It is not for the chance to buy a couple of alpines however cool they may be. It is not just to sigh with envy over slides of other plants/gardens/places that I may never have/visit/see. Or even to garner, over time, a

wealth of information on growing. Although this last one is a weighty contender and does factor into the whole. No. It is that I am *going to do these things with other people*. These other people are very important in this equation. NARGS people are of a variety, quality and caliber I have not encountered anywhere else before. I believe this to be at the very heart of the very best that this Society of ours offers.

I get to walk in the door, chat with Anne Speigel, sit next to Jacque Mommens, give John Spain a big hug, tell Elisabeth Zander or Robin Magowan how much I liked their last article. Or tell Peter George how spellbinding the entire last newsletter was. The knowledge and camaraderie are unmatched. Of course I still miss people who are no longer there but I have been lucky in a years-long experience and I *know* my chapter is not unique in this. We had Norman and Geoffrey. The Siskiyou can boast Crocker and Kline. Sifting through articles I feel wistful too, about those who have simply moved on. Tom Clark has moved away, Tamsin Goggin and Dean Evans no longer attend, and I miss all of them.



Norman and Geoffrey

As I sit here on a frosty winter day and turn these pages I consider, for just one minute, how bleakly different it would feel if NARGS *or* my chapter did not exist. I am thankful to every newsletter editor. I feel in my bones how important it is to spread around what we all share.

Rock Gardeners are intrepid. In fact, we gave a talk about the annual meeting in the Cascades that illustrates exactly that. We happened to be on the infamous bus number three, the one that

rolled backwards down the hill and crashed into a tree, Everybody disembarked, leaders took head counts, a new bus was sent for. A few people strode up to houses, asked to use the phone (this was before everyone over the age of three had a cell phone) and called a cab in order to get to the next destination. Joe had been thinking he'd get the afternoon off, a nap and maybe some ginger-ale back at the hotel. Think again.

Another excellent display of intrepidity came during the EWS in Manhattan not long ago. It took place in the hotel where Georgia O'Keefe used to live. If you peered out of certain windows you could see the angles of some of the views she used in her justifiably famous skyscraper series. At that meeting on that day we were "on our own" for luncheon. This old hotel had the classic configuration of a big square with a bank of elevators right at its heart. As we traveled down in a very crowded elevator, I remember some of the dialogue. These meeting participants were from all over the country and a few from outside of it. They were dressed *almost* as though ready to go hiking. One group was discussing the merits of lunching in Little Italy. Another was calculating time and distance (to be sure to make the next lecture) and when the doors parted at the lobby they hiked off to a meal in Chinatown.

Oh, by the way, lest you think numbers and distance lend *any sort* of anonymity, no such luck. We happened to lunch at a soup place nearby with two Scottish speakers. When he heard my name he exclaimed "Oh yes! From Oliver's. You are the only one who sends in seed in paper coin envelopes...."

But back in the realm of our own chapter, I remember the first time I heard Josef Halda speak. It was a snowy March day, his *Gentiana* book had just come out. I recall looking nervously out the windows (this meeting was held in the "little house" across the street from our usual venue). I had driven up myself, not in Joe's SUV, and as the meeting progressed I watched the snow coming down. I opted to quit worrying, enjoy the show, and deal with the weather later. I bought *Dianthus* 'Inschriach

Dazzler' in the sale from Geoffrey. Which brings me to confess another trick I somehow acquired shortly after coming to BNARGS. *Recognizing peoples handwriting on labels.* I'm sure I'm not the only one who has picked this up. A trick like this will lead you to purchase some fabulous things even if you don't yet know the species. Incidentally, the Dianthus and I made it home safely even in all that snow.

An annual meeting will sometimes throw the perfect two people together. (That is how, I felt, anyway.) At a meeting out west I met Phyllis Gustafson. Do you remember *Rogue House Seeds*? That was hers. She also used to propagate for Siskiyou Rare Plants Nursery. I spent a whole two hour bus ride turned sideways in my seat talking shop with her and deeply wishing we did not live 3,000 miles apart. I still wish that. She has spoken twice at BNARGS. The first time Geoffrey packed her a lunch in a quaint little vintage lunchbox! Her slides were spectacular. Ever since I have been dying to hike Whiskey Peak, the Devil's Punchbowl and Eight Dollar Mountain. One story has it that someone once found a gold nugget up there worth eight dollars.

Glancing down at yet another newsletter I am reminded. We should not forget the Nursery People who have traveled to speak to us. Maria Galletti whose *Alpines Mt. Echo* is still being mourned as a loss by rock gardeners everywhere, but who, I hope, is enjoying more travel and plant hunting adventure which will lead to more pictures which will lead (we all hope!) to more talks for us! And if you have never attended a Harvey Wrightman workshop then you have missed out on an extraordinary opportunity: New techniques, whole new methods with difficult and rare plants. His latest: "Sandwiching slabs of tufa with wet pottery clay and baby plants" was eye opening. I've never seen so many adults as happy as children fingerpainting. We were that absorbed. And with gorgeous results! Honestly, all the "sandwiches" produced looked like they had been done by pros. The first tufa drilling workshop of his that I attended yielded a great success for me. A now venerable *Campanula raineri* has thrived. Just last year as I was walking by it I noticed a

healthy tuffet of leaves growing out the other side of the rock. The campanula had traveled via stolons through the interior of the tufa. It bloomed on both sides last year.

I suppose growing in tufa might be considered a "heroic measure." A lot of what we sometimes can't help ourselves from doing; in regard to alpine plants, seems to fall under this umbrella. Not that these are bad things. But to outsiders they do not always seem to be normal things. I am remembering a meeting we had at what has become the annual pilgrimage to Stonecrop announced in our pages every April. I happened to be jostling up near a woman in front of one laden sales table. I don't remember which vender. She had gathered up a handful of plants and she asked me if I knew about them. Glancing down at her flat I *did* notice that everything she'd chosen was in full flower. "Uh, Oh..." I thought. "Will this flower all summer?" she asked, holding up a gentian. I told her no, but it was a very worthwhile plant. I launched into whatever I knew about the species ending with: "and remember, all gentians are heavy feeders." She was looking skeptically at me. She held up a fully flowered *Lewisia cotyledon*. "Can I grow this in a hanging basket?" I took a probably noticeable deep breath and backed her (and me) a few steps away from the Madding Crowd. I took a few minutes to talk to her. I briefly described what alpine plants were, how most needed perfect drainage. I talked about beginners often having good luck with troughs, and I pointed some out



A Scene in Robin Magowan's Garden

to her. I mentioned several other ways to make these plants happy but *not* out in the perennial garden or in a plastic pot. She looked disturbed. In fact, she looked a little angry with me.

“Do you mean to tell me that everyone here” she gestured sweepingly at all the NARGS customers milling around “with all their baskets and trays *overflowing*” she said that word accusingly “with plants, are all going to go home and grow them the way you are describing?” I took a moment again. I looked at the milling crowd. I’d met way more than half of them. People from chapters in Manhattan, Ct. the Hudson Valley, the Berkshires and Long Island. I told her the absolute truth: “Yes. They are.” We were shopping in the rarified air of knowledgeable alpine plantspeople. Before we parted ways I told her to ask a bit of advice from vendors as she went. I hope that woman is still out there among us. I hope she has joined our ranks. But our ranks, as was brought home to me that day, can seem strange to an outsider.

It has been cold today, and our cat, Queenie is trying to make a space for herself among the newsletters directly under the lamp. Try, as I do, to accommodate every royal whim of hers, she will not be allowed to damage irreplaceable pages like these. Near her polydactyl paw is one seasons calendar of events. But why focus on only one? We have been regaled by travelogues to the Dolomites, the Andes, the Rockies, Iceland and Tibet. We have been surfeited with big helpings on the genus *Penstemon*, on *Trilliums*, on bog gardens, sand beds, and scree. When I begin to consider all of the speakers that came from our membership, the sheer weight of knowledge is humbling.

The point is: we are rich. Despite upheavals in the world at large and despite frailties we may face as age advances on each one of us, we need to admit how rich we are. Now, I know it may sound just too terribly “New Age” to suggest that we should live our gratitude. I went up to Kripalu one weekend. I’ve taken meals out of a “Buddha bowl,” done some yoga, chanted along to Kirtan a little, pondered a lot. But do you know what? To achieve a nice solid dose of peacefulness you may only need to look out

your backdoor. At the rock garden that probably wouldn’t exist (or exist so well) if not for NARGS and BNARGS. The “Practice of Gratitude” is important. I got a big juicy revitalizing helping of it just by sorting through and rereading a batch of old newsletters. We are lucky to have the discretionary time and means to pursue a thing we love, to attend gatherings laden with other like-minded souls.

Don’t get me wrong! There will always be unattainables. I don’t anticipate an Olympic gold medal in my future any more than I expect *Eritrichium nanum* to blow in as a volunteer seedling. I suppose I will always strive for those *Gentiana urnulas*. (there is a rumor someone germinated it *once*, in the U.K.) I may even sit (metaphorically, anyway) in a full lotus posture intoning prayers to a six armed three breasted deity, concentrating on my third eye in order to help my poor Himalayan plant thrive.



Buda Shakyamuni

But it may be more productive by far on this wintery day to just bask in the warmth I have felt on rereading these pieces. Some written by people I know well, some I have never met. I am proud of what is achieved by us on a yearly basis. The talks, the hikes, the images, the plants, the friendships. This last especially, our friendships, are a blessing worth celebrating.

A resounding “Thank you!” is owed, first to our current, prolific Editor: Peter George, and to every other one in a long creative fascinating chain. Without them, I would not have had such wonderful material to revisit.



Choice, But Easy!

Text by Harvey Wrightman
Photographs by Esther Wrightman

Sedum aff. purdyi - For the most part, *Sedum purdyi* is lumped with *S. spathulifolium*, and if you go on the www.calflora.org site, the photos confirm this opinion. However, this collection by Ron Ratko and taken in the Siskiyou Mtns. Of Northern California, is exceptional and differs *S. spathulifolium* in several ways. Described by Ron as growing on loose, shaley outcrops, it forms, "...domed rosettes of yellow-green densely imbricated, rounded leaves –



spaced like shingles on a roof." – making it easily separated from any random grouping of west coast sedums. It could be a new species or subspecies. Coming from a colder, drier area than other coastal collections, I have found it easy to grow, though it is restrained in both size and growth rate – both useful characteristics for an alpine garden. The tight structure with stems that are not so brittle, make it an attractive choice for a vertical position in a clay crevice – and this siting aspect perfectly displays this attractive anomaly from the Siskiyou.

Polygala chamaebuxus – Our native *Polygala paucifolia* which prefers the dry, acid duff of our woodlands is a silent jewel that when one stumbles upon a colony, one must simply stop and stare. Of more robust constitution the European *P. chamaebuxus* grows in lightly shaded spots in upland areas from Swiss Alps to the Bohemian Massif of the Czech Republic, up to 2500m elevation. This relatively broad altitudinal range affords it an carefree demeanor and indeed, even in an ordinary perennial garden, one can place it at the front where it will form a slowly expanding mat of low woody stems and lustrous, evergreen leaves – hence the moniker "chamaebuxus". In the rock garden, give it some space, perhaps treat it in the way you would any other small shrublet. It will run



and fill a crevice nicely and soften the looks of the stone. All it really needs is a surface layer of organic material into which its sprawling surface stems may root - the underlying soil pH is not so important, though it prefers acid conditions, too. White flowers with a bright yellow keel represents the most common form found in nature; but, selected clones usually feature some lurid color of pink with the same yellow keel – showy, but less elegant than the type. My opinion is biased, but not prejudiced.

Eryngium glaciale – Every rock garden needs a thistle to emphasize, that in nature the scene can be messy if not chaotic. Well, if you can't quite buy that line, step up to the new and improved model. *Eryngium spp.* have wonderful hemispherical flower heads in clear shades of



blue. Of the smaller species, *E. glaciale* (to 20 cm) has deeply segmented leaves, blue/green with the obligatory terminal spines. The bracts beneath the flowers are similarly constructed with an added dash of silver – the flowers so resilient that they last for nearly a month beginning in late June. This plant is a glamorous package that exudes danger, and a coldness to counter summer’s heat.

Androsace muscoidea f. longiscapa – This form was a one-off collection By Mojmir Pavelka at about 3700m in the Himalayan Garhwal, India. Similar to other collections it forms compact, globular mounds of very tightly bound rosettes, gray/green in color with prominent silky hairs. The plants grew very well from the beginning and we had ~ 50 seedlings. Usually *Androsace spp.* bloom on very young plants and by the second year for sure – not so in this case which only added to the tension and irritation, as I knew this was a colorful colony. By the third year the first flowers appeared and the delay was worth it. For what really sets this collection apart is the flower color which ranges through shades of progressively darker pink to a

luscious lavender – not a very common color for Androsace.

Pavelka describes the habitat as, “...drier places of alpine meadows.” And perhaps this drier (warmer?) imparts a hardier spirit and disease



resistance, as we have found it to be very happy in the garden or in troughs. This is a plant that can be used for a crevice instead of a more mundane sedum or sempervivum.

Primula marginata – Often I hear, “Oh, primula I don’t have the right conditions.” Well, it’s a large genus with over 500 species, and a goodly number are very tough. *Primula marginata* is one those that can be dug up, thrown on a compost heap, and like a dandelion take up growing again. From the Maritime Alps and adjacent ranges where the granitic peaks rise from the sea to near 3000m. In this sun-drenched territory grows *P. marginata* in fissures of both limestone or granite – it simply doesn’t care about soil pH, heat or drought. It can survive anything thrown

at it with the exception of overwatering. The basic form has leathery leaves with a distinctly jagged edge looking like edge of a circular saw. This margin is accented by a dusting of farina – like the hardened



gilding imparted onto some tools. The central, woody stock is very robust, yet slender enough to fit in narrow crevices where the leaves may splay over the rocks, and the heat will ripen and toughen the plant more – it does not want a soft, comfortable life. Typical flowers are lavender shades, and the many selected forms range widely from white through dark pink. This is a Primula which everyone appreciates and anyone can grow.

Linum cariense – The a,b,c’s of the tiny, high elevation flaxes are: *L. aretioides*, *L. boissieri*,



and *L. cariense*. All are captivating, extolled and sought after by many including Farrer. Their cultivation has been limited mainly due to the dearth of seed available. All are from Turkey; *L. cariense* is the most widespread in nature and thus provides the most malleable personality for cultivation. It is a plant which transplants and adapts readily, graciously providing instant thrill as the yellow flowers form on very young plants. As usual, the Czech’s have given us the abundant seed collections to grow and offer the plants. Sultan Dag, Turkey is the locus classicus though it is found elsewhere at elevations between 100m and 2500m. Note that one of the synonymous names is *L. lignosum*, very aptly describing the corky, sprawling stems that trail out along the ground. The new shoots with blue/green leaves perfectly set off the bright yellow of the little chalice. Cultural needs are Spartan, a dry, exposed site with rocky, coarse soil low in organic matter – with a dash of rock powder (carbonatite or greensand) to slowly feed it. Elevated clay/crevice planting will give a

different look and suit its needs. Tolerant of heat and humidity, it will benefit from a windy site.

Penstemon uintahensis – A localized



endemic of the Uintah Mountains. of northern Utah, *P. uintahensis* is the smallest members of the section *Glabri* (smooth, without hairs) and it is really one of the gems of this genus. Growing at 3300 m. in slightly moist, cool alpine turf, the elongated, folded leaves curve out laterally from the central woody tuft. Above the dark green leaves, “...the ¾” sky-blue flowers are in compact verticillasters, resembling a broad capitate head barely surpassing the basal tuft.” – Ron Ratko’s description. Indeed they are so bright and attractive, that as soon as they bloom you cannot ignore them. Although a high altitude plant, its moisture tolerance may explain its acceptance of alpine garden conditions – our original plants are from over 12 years ago and still perform well. Rarely seen on seed lists, even less often in plant catalogues, it is perfect for a treasured spot in an elevated scree and a first-rate for a trough specimen.

Saxifraga x ‘Jana’ – This is a plant that has brought us great joy and controversy. It is one of Miroslav Kraus’ last hybrids, dating from the late 1990’s. It is not on the list of officially

recognized cultivars of the Saxifrage Society. It is so unique and beautiful in its qualities that it prevails over their judgment. Indicative of a Kraus cultivar, is the frosted mint green that shows *S. marginata* in its genetic composition. Kraus did this deliberately as he wanted cultivars to be beautiful, hardy and growable. Because it has vermillion/red flowers - not so common in this genus and usually comes from the less hardy, Himalayan species, Kraus named it after his grand daughter, Jana. Truly, it was his favorite. Last year I showed the plants to Josef Halda and inquired what he thought of its parentage, as it was through him in 2000 that we bought the remainder of Kraus' stock collection from his wife. I pointed out to him that this cultivar, though it is red-flowered, survives in our tufa garden in full sun. Very few other Kabshcia are capable of this, and certainly not any other red flowering cultivars, as they are a very fussy group. Josef said, "In 1996 when I returned with the first collections of the Caucasian species (*Saxifraga*), Kraus was very excited, but also very sad. He was over 80 years old and had been diagnosed with cancer. I gave him large specimens of the species that I collected including the dark flowering ones, *S. dinnikii* and *S. columnaris*. Both had flower buds. I am sure he made crosses right away." The red flowers of *S. x 'Jana'* are very like those of *S. columnaris* both in size and shape, but on longer stems. *S. columnaris*, though it grows in 'underhang' places like *Dionysia*, tolerates drier, hotter conditions than *S. dinnikii*. Quite possibly, it is the first of the new Caucasian hybrids from the Czech's. No one really knows. Though it lacks the "certification papers", it's not the first orphan to be a show winner.

Chairman's Message

My conscious interest in plants began with a few windowsill cacti and other succulents in 1969 while I was a graduate student at UMass, Amherst. Then came the rhododendrons in 1973 during a year of teaching at the University of Rhode Island, Kingston. Here I met Lorenzo Kinney who maintained an enormous collection of azaleas and he piqued my interest in these

plants. In 1975 I was introduced to Ronald Beckwith, greenhouse superintendent for the Dept. of Botany at UMass. Ron got me started with alpines and taught me much about growing them. To this day I maintain a strong botanical and horticultural interest in these plant categories.



Rhododendron nakaharae

In the initial plantings of my 30 year old, now senescent rock garden in Conway, I included dwarf conifers and dwarf species rhododendrons amongst the herbaceous alpines. Most of the woody plants looked good and in scale being under one foot tall. I felt I had satisfied some inner need to meld the planting of rhododendrons and alpine plants. The adjective "dwarf" in this context, however, is a relative term. Most of the slow growing conifers have grown quite large and I have removed (cut down) more than half of them. One, a bird's nest spruce, was successfully transplanted out of the rock garden when it was 3 ft. in diameter. It is now 8 ft. across.

Most of the rhododendrons have relieved me of having to decide which ones to cull before outgrowing their space; they died first. The true alpine rhododendrons with tiny, scaly leaves (e.g., *Rhododendron fastigiatum*, *R. impeditum*, *R. lapponicum*, *R. nivale*, etc.) were planted in the sunniest locations and slowly perished over 10 years. I think it was too hot and too dry for them to thrive.

Not all rhododendrons have failed to do well in the rock garden. A cutting grown plant of

Rhododendron aureum purchased from Jim Caperci in 1979 is now a prostrate mat 4 ft. across. This slow growing, evergreen species, native to the colder regions of eastern Asia, is reported to be hardy to - 15° F. My plant doesn't know this. It sets flower buds every late summer that fail to open every spring. Occasionally a few flower buds open in September so I know the color is pale yellow (ivory). Another species that does well in full sun and is reliably hardy is the dwarf, deciduous form of *R. dauricum*. I have 3 plants grown from seed collected by Warren Berg 25+ years ago in South Korea from a low growing, alpine population. There is no difference in flower color (magenta) among the 3 plants but they range in size from 1 ft high and 3 ft. wide to 5 ft. tall and 5 ft. wide. More



R. calostrotum ssp keleticum

recently (past 8 years) I have grown *R. calostrotum ssp keleticum*, a Chinese species listed by the Rhododendron Species Foundation as hardy to -10° F. This species maintains an "alpine" growth form; low, slow spreading, compact mounding growth. The leaves are glossy, deep green and the large single, upward facing, dark rose-purple flowers occur scattered over the plant. I like this one.

Where there is some afternoon shade, 3 Japanese rhododendrons (azaleas) perform well: *Rhododendron kiusuanum*, *R. nakaharae* and *R. tsusiohyllum*. *Rhododendron kiusianum* is available in a variety of shades of pink to purple and in white. All are free flowering and the buds are relished by white-tailed deer. About 10 years ago, I moved a large plant of the white-flowered form out of the rock garden and I noticed it had parented a self sown seedling in a well situated spot. I have not moved it and maintain it at 6 in.

tall by pinching back most of the new growth. Its blooms are white. *Rhododendron nakaharae* is a late blooming (June) azalea that forms an evergreen (or semi-deciduous) ground cover. I grow it as such in the rock garden under 2 of the "dwarf" pines. The flowers range from pink to salmon. The last of the triumvirate, *R. tsusiohyllum*, is slow growing with numerous, small white, tubular-campanulate flowers opening in late July. The original plant, still in the rock garden, is 2 ft. tall and 4 ft. wide. A non-azalea, non-scaly leaved rhododendron suitable for the rock garden with some shade is *R. keiskei*. On Yakushima, Japan, I saw this species at low elevation in full bloom (pale yellow) in early May and 12+ ft. tall. However, at high elevation on Mt. Miyanoura (the island's highest peak at 6350 ft.), there grows a mounding form with the same flower color, but remaining under 1 ft. in height. The low growth form is genetically fixed and thus, these plants can be grown from seeds. It takes about 25 years, from seed, to reach 2 ft. across. The above 4 species are reliably flower bud hardy.

P.S. As of 9 Feb. 2010 no deer have entered my garden since Feb. 2009. Now that I have made this point, surely, they will come. I have seen their tracks and dropping outside the fence. I don't know what the voles are up to.

Cliff Desch

Know and Grow

Potentilla davurica mandshurica

Text and photograph by Anne Spiegel

My first visit to Millstream, the wonderful garden of Timmy and Linc Foster, was a kaleidoscope of plant images and bits of wisdom. I had taken a three- part seminar given by Linc Foster at Carey Arboretum in Millbrook, New York. The third part was a visit to Millstream. It was so inspiring and just impossible to take everything in and remember it all. Tech person that I am, I had no camera with me, but they very graciously invited me back and that time I took notes. One of the plants that caught my eye was *Potentilla davurica*

mandschurica. This naturally dwarf *Potentilla* with large, sharp white flowers seemed to have infinite rock garden potential. I came away from that visit with a small rooted division carefully wrapped in some wet newspaper.

This *Potentilla* was described in Linc Foster's book, Rock Gardening, surely one of the best known rock gardening books to American rock gardeners. In his book he described this as *Potentilla fruticosa* var. *mandschurica*. The Bernard E. Harkness Seedlist Handbook (mine is copyrighted 1986) called it *Potentilla davurica mandschurica*. I've seen this name elsewhere so have gone along with this second version.



One of the wonderful things about this dwarf shrub is its very large white flowers and its habit of blooming until hard frost. It may take a year or two to establish (it certainly did for me originally), but once established it becomes a very permanent part of the rock garden. It is truly dwarf and will simply continue its growth outward rather than upward. It can be made to mound or drape with some selective pinching and pruning (see photo). It can also easily be kept under one foot high. I grow it in a fast draining mix with an almost neutral PH. It also grows well in scree and seems impervious to drought. My plants are many years old and have never been watered. It can take any amount of sun and wind and the deer have never touched it (hope they don't subscribe to the Berkshire Newsletter) nor do rabbits seem to bother it. It seems to have neither pests nor enemies and appears to be very easy to propagate. The only difficulty used to be in finding a plant. My original plant from Linc Foster has given me a

number of new plants. Lori Chips has taken cuttings from my plants so there's a very good chance of finding it at Oliver's Nursery. It doesn't look great in a pot but put it in the ground and you'll reap rewards for many years.

Upcoming Primula Events!

Text by Judy Sellers – photo by Joe Phillip

As this is the Year of Primula for the Chapter, it seems only fitting that we indulge in a variety of activities involving the plants of the genus and the people who delight in them.

The Berkshire Botanical Garden has asked the New England Primula Society to plan and plant a new Primula Garden this spring. We try to avoid the phrase, 'Primrose Path', as the entry in Wikipedia reminds us that 'To be "led down the primrose path" is an idiom suggesting that one is being deceived or led astray, often by a hypocrite,' as was Shakespeare's Ophelia. 'The primrose path also refers to someone living a life of luxury apparently linking primroses to libertine indulgence.'

Soon after 11 AM on Sunday April 11th, Primula enthusiasts will be at the BBG, to plan the layout and make lists of obtainable plants which will be suitable for the space under an old tree by the farmhouse. Everyone will be welcome to come and help. Another date will soon be set for the 'plant and pray' stage of garden development.

The first weekend in May will provide additional indulgence, as The American Primrose Society's 2010 National Show will be hosted by the New England Chapter at Tower Hill Botanical Garden, Boylston, MA. A variety of activities is planned, including a trip to Garden in the Woods on Friday, followed by a buffet and social gathering. Saturday and Sunday will offer plants on the show benches, sales of plants, seeds and books, presentations, a tour of Tower Hill's gardens, an awards ceremony, a special auction of 'Primulabilia', and a banquet.

If you have seen John Richards' comprehensive and beautiful book 'Primula', you will understand what a treat we have in store this year. A retired Professor of Botany at the University of Newcastle, UK, Dr. Richards



organizes the volunteers at the Botanic Garden there. He is past President of the Alpine Garden Society, a Lyttel Trophy holder, an AGS exhibitor and judge, and an RHS Committee member. He writes a weekly garden diary for the AGS website. at

www.alpinegardensociety.net/diaries/Northumberland/

John has grown Primulas, especially Asiatics, in his Northumberland garden for 40 years, and worked with the genus scientifically. He has twice traveled to China to study and photograph the genus in the wild. Dr. Richards will give an illustrated lecture on Saturday afternoon in the auditorium. On Sunday, he will be joined by some Primula masters from the North East to participate in an experts' panel discussion. If we ask nicely, he might even sign our copies of his book.

Plant benching will start at noon on Friday at Tower Hill, and continue until 4 PM, to resume from 8 to 9:30 on Saturday morning. Benching must be completed before judging begins, and the Garden requires that all plants remain on the benches until 4 PM Sunday. Everyone is encouraged to bring Primula plants to exhibit, as a good Show requires lots of plants for the public to see and the enthusiasts to compare. To learn more about the show, or to receive registration information, contact Joseph Philip, Show Chairperson at <Joseph525@charter.net>, 508-736-9013, or

Judith Sellers, NEPS Chapter Secretary at <jsellers@frontiernet.net>, 607-859-2955.

On May 15th, the Berkshire Botanical Garden will again feature Primula, with a class emphasizing how to grow the best species and cultivars for our own North East gardens. More detailed information will soon be available on the website under 'Classes' or in the newsletter. So -- Let's participate in some of these primrose pastimes and see how 'libertine indulgence' feels after a long and dreary winter.

2010 BNARGS Programs

March 6

AM: **Peter Joppe**, from Hillside Nursery
Woodland plants for New England Gardens

PM: **Robin Magowan and Juliet Yli-Mattila**:
Nordic Plants- Copenhagen, Tromsø, and Svalbard

April 3

AM and PM: **John Lonsdale** Edgewood Gardens *Cyclamen (AM) & Other Primulaceae (PM)*

John will have hardy and non-hardy cyclamen for sale

May 1

AM & PM **Cliff Booker**, (NARGS Tour Speaker from the UK), *Cream of Alpines*

June 5

Garden visit to gardens of **Robin Magowan & Juliet Yli-Mattila**, with a talk on the new construction aided by Josef Halda and Zdenek Zvolanek

July 3

Peter George, former Chair and current newsletter editor, *Evolution of My Garden*

August 14

Bill Brown, *Spring bulbs of Turkey*

September 4

AM: **Barrie Porteous**, *Unusual and Underused Perennials*

PM – The Big Plant Sale

October 9

AM: Andy Brand of Broken Arrow Nursery,
Shrubs for the Rock Garden

November 6

Annual Lunch

Sydney Eddison, author of Gardening for a Lifetime: *How to Garden Wiser As You Grow Older*

Editor's Comments:

It has become apparent to our Chapter officers that publishing this newsletter in full color is no longer financially possible. The cost of printing nine or ten issues exceeds \$5,000 per year, and we bring in less than 30% of that total each year from dues and plant sales. In short, we have to change the way we print the newsletter in order to survive. This issue will be printed in black and white, with fewer photographs than usual, in order to keep it affordable. There are electronic versions of all of our recent newsletters at our website, <http://bnargs.org/Newsletters.htm>, which are in full color, contain all of the photographs, and can be printed out on your color printer if you want a paper copy. In addition, there may be web-only 'extra' material in the electronic version, so be sure to check it out each month!

There are two Winter Study Weekends this year, which is likely to be the last time that we have two. NARGS has decided to cut back on these events, so in the future we'll have one each year, with the location rotating between East and West. The links for the two Weekends are:
<http://nargs.org/images/stories/wsw/west10home.html>

http://nargs.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=144:2010-eastern-study-weekend&catid=35:nargs-level-study-weekends&Itemid=122

The NARGS Annual Meeting will be held in Denver and Salida, CO in June. Here is the appropriate link:

<http://rmcnargs.org/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabid=59>

There is a lot change going on with NARGS this year. We have a new Editor of the Journal, Malcolm McGregor, who is likely to make the Journal again a publication worth the membership fee of \$35. Malcolm is the author of a wonderful book on Saxes, and has a broad and deep understanding of what it takes to make a journal relevant and interesting. I'm excited about the selection, and I believe that it bodes well for the Society! In addition, our own Anne Spiegel has been nominated for the Board of Directors, and I think it's fair to say that she will get the votes at the Annual Meeting. Other NARGS positions are filled by people we know well, so that too gives me confidence in the future. NARGS has suffered from a variety of ills in the past few years, but I think we've turned the corner. Of course, it is essential that membership begin to grow again, so take some time to consider joining if you not currently a member.

We have the usual issue of unpaid dues, so if you haven't yet paid for 2010, please get your check to Pam Johnson ASAP. Elizabeth Zander has arranged a terrific program for the coming year, and many of our speakers require honoraria, so every dollar counts.

Finally, I'd like to thank Harvey and Esther Wrightman for their exceptional contributions to our newsletter and our Chapter. They have provided us with outstanding articles and photographs of the plants we can grow, and they promise to continue for the foreseeable future. I'm hopeful that more of you will decide to contribute as well. This is NOT a professional journal, but a medium through which members communicate with each other about what excites us, disappoints us, or just plain interests us. Your article doesn't have to be long or erudite, just as long as it is something that interests YOU and somehow relates to rock gardening.

See you in March!

PFG



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

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