

Newsletter

North American Rock Garden Society
Berkshire Chapter June 2010

Next Meeting

Saturday, July 3 at 10:30 AM

Trough Workshop & Garden Visit:



10:30 am -

John Spain: Trough Workshop

**and/or- Garden Visit: Rock Gardens of
Rod & Elisabeth Zander**

**Program: *Troughs Around the Rock
Garden***

Bring Your Own Lunch - Lemonade, Iced
Tea and Sparkling Water will be provided

**Location: The home of Rod & Elisabeth
Zander in Goshen CT**

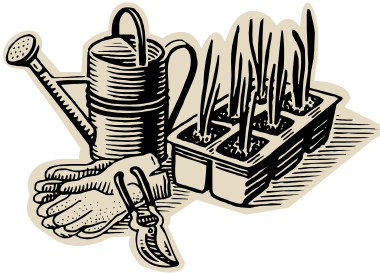
**Information about the programs and
directions to The Zander's home will be
found on Page 10 of the newsletter. If you
have any questions about the workshop,
or you wish to attend but have NOT
notified Elisabeth, please call her @ 860-
491-3329**

Editor's Message:

It's the time of the year when we are visiting friends and their gardens, and I thought it would be a fine time to remind ourselves about the important but often ignored subject of **Garden Etiquette**. It's been printed here before, and in other places, but appears to have originated with the Ontario Rock Garden and Hardy Plant Society. Here it is:

1. Never arrive unannounced.
2. Don't assume pets or children will be welcome. Ask.
3. Gifts are not necessary, but they are a very nice touch. Unless you want to bring coals to Newcastle, bring consumables.
4. If it really is your host's garden that you are visiting, don't refer everything to your own garden – show some interest in what you are looking at.
5. Ask your host to talk about the garden as you walk around; you can't possibly notice all the treasures. Besides, you don't want to be done in 5 minutes.
6. It is permissible to praise what you see.
7. If your host asks for advice, give it. If your host doesn't, he or she probably doesn't want you to say that all the plants are mislabeled, or in the wrong environment, etc.
8. Without asking permission, do not climb over rocks, or wade into the pond or island beds.
9. Do not weed, prune or rearrange anything. Ask permission before destroying any munching pests; your host may respect all forms of life.
10. Taking photographs is complimenting your host. Measuring her buns and announcing an unfavorable comparison with yours is not.

11. Many gardeners are competitive. They will strangle you if you keep telling them how your plants are better, tighter, more floriferous, etc. Or they will descend on you to catch you in your lies, and break all rules of etiquette in your garden.
12. Your host is undoubtedly a generous person, only too anxious to give you something. If you particularly admire a plant, don't be surprised if you are offered a cutting or an offset. Accept with thanks, but feel free to refuse an offer of his only specimen of *Primula angustifolia*.
13. Without first asking permission, do not take cuttings, offsets, seedlings – and certainly not her only specimen of *Androsace helvetica*.
14. If you want to read the label, bend down to it or have someone read it to you. Don't pull it out of the ground – you will smudge the writing and the label will break when you try to put it back and you will slice the plant's roots and you will put it in the wrong spot – no wonder your host will be annoyed and take back her gifts.
15. Perhaps the nicest way of completing your visit is by dropping a thank you note in the mail afterwards.



The NARGS Forum,

An On-line Rock Gardening Community

By Mark McDonough, June 2010

If you've taken a look at the revamped NARGS.ORG web site, then you're familiar with the site's jazzy *extreme makeover*. But, it's more than a mere facelift, the site is power-

packed under the hood with new capabilities and features, such as the database-driven NARGS Rock Gardening Encyclopedia (think: rock gardening Wikipedia), member contributed NARGS Wiki and Image Galleries, and most importantly, the NARGS Forum, an on-line Rock Gardening Community. The NARGS Forum is an interactive, user-friendly, internet destination for rock gardeners and plant lovers of all sorts. Tired of dull text-only plant forums without photos, then the NARGS Forum is the media-rich place to go on the web!

Even if you're not a member of NARGS, the NARGS Forum is an open internet resource that anyone can use. Just go to: <http://www.nargs.org/smf/> and have a look around. You can peruse various NARGS categorized subjects, read through specific topics and messages, view photos and launch links provided by members, use the SEARCH function to find posts on topics or plants that interest you. The NARGS Forum launched as recently as January 2010, so the body of information is still young and growing, but with increased member participation this resource will continue to expand its collective body of knowledge. Rather than just browse the NARGS Forum, if you would like to respond to messages and actively engage in dialog with other forumists, as a NARGS member in good standing, full NARGS Forum access is a member privilege, all one needs to do is request an account login; information and directions are provided from the NARGS homepage.



Convulvulus compactus – photo by Anne Spiegel
<http://nargs.org/smf/index.php?topic=24.360>

So, you may wonder what the NARGS Forum experience is like. I like to think of it as a rock-gardening based internet café. Lets see, I think I'll check out the latest entry on Eriogonum, and there's a message from Panayoti Kelaidis, his message includes his "avatar" (personal signature image), which can be most anything, but in Panayoti's case it is a picture of himself sitting at a table with his hand held aloft toasting with a glass of wine, a friendly gesture to be sure? It feels as if I'm actually talking to Panayoti in person when viewing his messages. And his message includes a photo of a wonderful Eriogonum in bloom. No need to try to describe a plant to supplement one's message, upload up to 10 photos per message to say it all, after all, we all know how much a picture is worth. Photos appear in "thumbnail mode" (smaller than actual size) which assures quicker loading of the pages and allows seeing more of the entire message at a glance; click on an image and it pops up a separate window displaying the photo at full size.

When a NARGS member launches their web browser to the NARGS Forum, and they log in, the interface presents a list of unread messages since their last visit. There is a link for this default action called "*Show unread posts since last visit*". How simple, easy, and cool is that? There's also a link to "*Show new replies to your posts*", a most useful option to see if anyone has responded to one of your own messages. NARGS Forum users have personal settings that control the forum experience; for example, mark message topics as ones you're interested in to get email notifications whenever new messages arrive; think of it as "subscribing" to topics. This simple "notify" feature is a powerful time-saver, as you will receive email notifications in your regular email inbox for only those topics that truly interest you, as opposed to more rudimentary email-based forums where it is necessary to wade through all incoming messages. Even with these notify options enabled, the NARGS Forum still provides handy ways to simply browse new messages and topics since your last visit.

Starting at the NARGS Forum homepage (click on the Home button), listed are a broad range of

standard topic categories, such as *General Alpines*, *Plant Identification*, *Propagation*, *Bulbs*, *Woodlanders*, and many more. Under each main topic, there is either a list of "message threads", or a further listing of sub-topics to be browsed. Clicking on a topic or "message thread" will expand the page to show the various messages and replies within, you can reply and add to the discussion if desired. If information searched for cannot be found, there is the option to start a new topic; other forumists will see your new message, and you will be notified of any responses to it. One of the more popular categories to create new topics in, is the "*Plant Identification*" topic. Unsure about the true identity of a plant you're growing; everyone has a few of these, then post a good photo and NARGS members will help you confirm the plant identity or make suggestions about what the plant might be; advice and opinions coming from some of the most knowledgeable plants people around.

One of the more overlooked aspects of the NARGS Forum, is that the forum is actually a centralized database of information, making finding stuff easy. As people continually add information, plant descriptions, links, and photos, the collective database of information is growing, and it can be SEARCHED at any time. In the following example, while in the NARGS Forum click on "Home" to be at the forum starting point. Then in the Search window type in: *townsendia* then hit enter to initiate the search. A search "results page" comes up showing all places on the forum where the word match "*townsendia*" is found, the search word(s) highlighted, each is a clickable link to jump to that search result. Following through on this example, I click a link found on "Image of the Day" where apparently *Townsendia aprica* was featured on the continuing "Image of the Day" thread; the message loads. Then click on the thumbnail image to see a large photo of this outstanding *Townsendia* species.

How many times have you posted a comment or text message to a forum, message list, or blog, then realize there are misspellings or grammatical errors, and wish it was possible to go back to fix them. Well, on the NARGS

Forum you can indeed edit your own messages and make corrections after the fact; such power and flexibility. At any time, you can re-enter the message Edit or Modify mode on your own messages, and make spelling or grammar corrections, change information, add supplemental information and photos, or change the photos you've already uploaded, etc. This capability helps ensure that the information uploaded to the forum and being read by others, is as useful and informative as it can be.

There are other small but useful features built into the NARGS Forum interface. Each forumist has a Profile page, which can be edited to include pertinent information about yourself, upload an "avatar image", and to tweak customizable forum settings. It is recommended that forumists include signature block information summarizing general geographical location and USDA temperature zone, a helpful guide when forumists, who are located most anywhere in the world, respond to each other with plant cultural advice. There is also built-in NARGS Forum messaging or email, just another way to connect with NARGS Forum members; I use this all the time.



Eriogonum caespitosum – photo by John Weiser
<http://nargs.org/smf/index.php?topic=258.msg2820#msg2820>

Some NARGS members I've spoken with expressed concern that it will be too difficult to learn to use a new-fangled high-tech forum. I'm convinced the opposite is true, that once familiar with how to navigate the site and use some of the fundamental forum features, it is easy to use and actually saves time by allowing your plant-

related online time to be more focused, less time wading through heaps of posts that are of little interest. But if you do find you're having technical difficulties using the forum, just ask for help, as a couple of us NARGS Forum Moderators are IT (Information Technology) specialists, and we're anxious to help you out. There is also online Help to get you started, and a forum section called "*Announcements from Moderators and Administrators*" with directions on how to do certain forum stuff, like how to attach photos to your messages.



Allium crenulatum 'Olympic Sunset' – photo by Mark McDonough
<http://nargs.org/smf/index.php?topic=24.315>

The most appreciated benefits of NARGS Membership through the years has been the quarterly bulletin, expansive yearly seed exchange, and the extended community associated with NARGS events and NARGS Chapter activities. While all this remains true, now NARGS membership comes with so much more, the centerpiece being the **NARGS Forum**, an on-line rock gardening community. I like to think of it as "*one-stop shopping*" for any and all information on rock gardening in the broadest sense of the term; complete with photos, reliable information, questions and answers, cultivation tips, first hand experiences, resources, opinions, and musings, you name it! So why not get started today, request a login account and password, and meet me and other NARGS members on-line; hope to see you there.

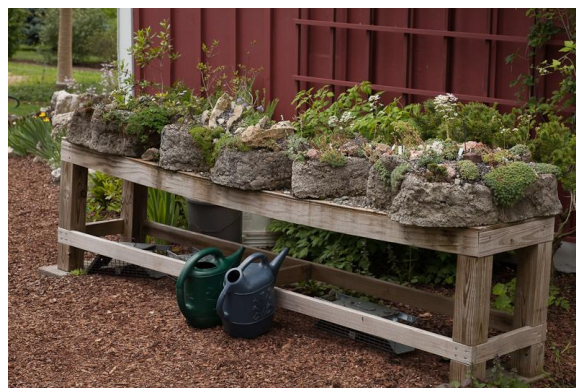
Visiting The Phoenix Garden



It was a perfect day for a garden tour, and some members were already busy looking at plants when I arrived at the home of Juliet Yli-Matilla and Robin Magowan. We had to put our eagerness on hold, however, and gathered in the music room for the business portion of the meeting. Several visitors joined us from New Haven, Litchfield and Salisbury. Next month's trough workshop with John Spain will be held at Elisabeth Zander's in Goshen. Please see the list in this issue of the newsletter for materials to bring. The July meeting will be held rain or shine, and Elisabeth will give a digital presentation in her barn.

Those participating in the "primula study project" reported some seed germination (remember it's best to repot your seedlings on cool days). Donations of 3-4 pots of each primula would be appreciated for our plant sales.

Robin's article in last month's newsletter began the orientation for our visit to the phoenix garden. He described how his rock garden was



rebuilt during Josef Halda's visit from May 10-15, 2009, and how he then went further on his own, creating a new garden in front of the house. All the while, Juliet took photos, which she turned into a digital presentation for our meeting, which gave us a better appreciation of the process and labor involved. Before we went outside again, Robin added comments and answered questions. Josef visits the U.S. every year or two to install gardens. Work began with



the removal of existing plants, many of which were heeled into the vegetable garden. Then came rock shopping, at the Conklin limestone quarry on Sand Road in nearby Canaan. Once delivered, the rocks were carried into place unscratched by suspending them from straps on a bucket loader. Large rocks were placed in the foreground of the new garden in give the effect of a mountain. A series of parallel ridges to the existing outcrop gave a natural look. Spaces were filled in with pea gravel and soil from McEnroe (between Millerton and Amenia, NY).

It took a lot of filling and adjusting. They worked around existing shrubs, but the Daphnes didn't survive. New plants took off immediately and seemed to love the crevice environment. Some rocks from the quarry even came with moss, hepatica, and aquilegia.

After Robin gave us a guided tour of the rock gardens, pointing out specific favorites, we wandered on our own to see troughs and Juliet's perennial gardens. We enjoyed cool beverages on the lawn with our lunch and looked through seeds left over from the seed exchange to take home, and hopefully bring back as plants for our monthly sales. A small sale was held after lunch. Many thanks to Robin and Juliet for their hospitality and generosity to our group.

Text by Joyce Hemingson – Photographs by Elisabeth Zander

Ideas for Troughs

Or What to Do With Your Newly Acquired Tufa

One of the best “trends” to hit mainstream gardening is container planting - trough gardening for most of us. Adaptable and accessible to most any situation, troughs can be used as accents to an alpine garden or perennial garden; or, they can be the sole feature with a varied number of sub-themes. Each container represents its own particular ecological/horticultural expression. Using the Czech style of narrow clay crevices, it is possible to provide a better growing environment for both the easy alpiners and those that we know less about their specific cultural needs.



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Containers – Almost any sort of container will do for a first effort. Hyper-tufa troughs are readily available and will last ~ 10 years or more. For more permanent troughs, look for ones that have a good customer rating.

Some recommendations:

[HaddonStone](#) – manufactured stone; but, very well sculpted troughs. They are heavy and permanent. Only 2 styles listed on the website.

[Betsy Knapp](#) – sleek, modern looking, these troughs are light and very, very durable. Also, Betsy can make shapes and sizes not normally seen

[Oliver Nurseries](#) – Lori Chips is the Alpine Manager, and she creates beautiful and unusual troughs for purchase, as well as providing fully planted troughs and tufa for very competitive prices.

[Wrightman Alpines](#) – a variety of natural stone troughs in sandstone, limestone and tufa. The tufa troughs are lighter in weight (~40%) than other stone. Tufa has an earthiness that helps to create the mountain atmosphere of the planting.



Plants Ready To Go

Soil - We use [Spanish River Carbonatite](#) (SRC) in most of our container mixes. The carbonatites are particularly good sources of minerals in a form that feeds at a steady rate and does not over-stimulate growth. A reasonable substitute would be “greensand”, which may be easier to source.

For troughs I use:

- a coarse sand as a base material, ~ 65%
- SRC ~20%
- composted pine bark or some other organic material ~15%

This is a physically heavy mix, but it provides long-lasting, stable structure and nutrition for the plants. Mixes that use a lot of organic material tend to negatively change in a short time. One could add pumice ([Pumice Distributor \(Dry Stall\)](#)) or Perlite to lighten the mix.



Clay Mud

Planting- Now comes the part where you must ditch all the poisonous cultural teaching of agrarian-derived societies; i.e., the rock formation that you will create will be elevated and not appear to be stable. I find it easier to deal with pre-school children. They instinctively “get it.” For the chasmophytic plants, what they desire is a place without the competition of those horridly aggressive flatland grasses and forbs – the basis of agricultural crops. When you think about it, the narrow crevices where the special ones grow will have thin veins of soil that have been brought in by wind and water. The soils that will stick are mainly the smaller particles of silt and clay which also provide more nutrition for the plants though the actual volume may not be very much at all.

So, for the basic formation in a trough, you can use any type of stone that has flat surfaces that you then align to form a narrow crevice. It may be vertical or tilted. There may be 1 or 2 parallel lines in the formation for the trough. Don’t make it too complicated or you will be lost in the details. This crevice line presents a significant space for a good number of plants to grow. One side of the crevice is plastered with a sticky clay. The plants, rooted cuttings or seedlings (minus most of their potting mix) are laid out on the clay with their roots suitably spread out. You can see now the advantages:



Trough and Selected Rocks

- 1) a greater choice of plants as larger, potted specimens can be used
- 2) immediate contact with a growing medium (clay), and less damage to the roots.
- 3) “perfect drainage”- I love those words used to describe the right site for a plant, “...rich soil, moist, but well-drained.” – how is that possible after a huge rain and the air turns steamy??? An elevated

position means the crevice will provide a more constant moisture level and allow the area around the crown to dry quickly. The crown is where most disease problems occur.

- 4) The drama of vertical plantings, cascades falling over a cliff are obvious and appealing. This is the best way to improve the beauty of a planting. Although the technique is simple, I am always amazed at the variety of compositions that I see in the workshops we run.
- 5) It is important to keep the crevice to



Smearing Clay on The 'Bread'

less than 1/2" wide. Capillary movement of water is better in a narrow column. Also, some erosion of clay will occur until the plants cover the line. This is less of a problem in a thinner line.

You can always dress-up the line with more. Adding some small gravel bits helps too.



Roots Laid In Clay

- 6) Almost any plant in our catalogue can be used. The decision then lies in what the combinations will be. Ever wonder how confusing that can be. The great thing about this method is it intuitively directs you to place things. To make the verticals work, you need small mat-formers such as *Arenaria tetraquetra*, *Androsace villosa*, *Draba bryoides*, *Silene acaulis*, *Gypsophila aretioides*, *Asperula* spp. and the ultimate plugger sempervivum cvs. of the tiny sort. These plants spread quickly enough to stop erosion. They are small enough that other, showier plants can grow through the mats. Semp's which are so easy to establish are especially good. Once they outgrow their usefulness, they can be removed with little disruption. The mats provide a good foil to set off the choicer plants – these are myriad in number, tight growing androsace spp., kabschia's and tiny campanula like *C. zoysii*.

The method used does take a little nerve and daring, but that's why you're here, right! It helps to actually see it done. I'm sure as more people employ the technique and the results are seen, that it will become a valuable tool. You can even watch [Martha planting one up](#).

Just think, the [Czechs](#) were doing this 25 years ago.



Bringing 2 Pieces Together



Press Them Together With Force



Plants Cascade Down Edges



Add Another Crevice



Watered and Done

Text by Harvey Wrightman – photos by Esther Wrightman

The July 3 Program At The Zanders

John Spain: Trough Workshop

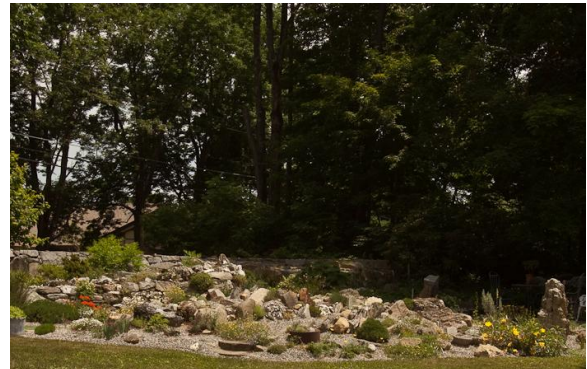
This will be an introduction to making hypertufa troughs. It will be held outdoors at the home of Rod & Elisabeth Zander (in Goshen CT). In case of rain, it will be held in their outbuilding. This lesson will make one trough, not to be over 12", making it relatively easy to move when finished. John has given this workshop many times, and had participants follow on with great success. Please wear old clothing and bring the following materials:

1. Flat board 12" square or larger to move your finished trough

2. Thin rubber or plastic gloves
3. Bucket or Dishpan (something to mix material in)
4. Small object to use as an inner mold, not over 8" in diameter
5. Optional - plastic to cover the trough for transport, cardboard for your car trunk.

Garden Visit: Rock Gardens of Rod & Elisabeth Zander

The bones of the latest rock garden addition are now set in stone. About 110 tons of rock were moved around the property to amass at the south side of the house in a Czech style garden. Hundreds of tiny seedlings are thriving in the crushed-stone fill (no soil) crevice setting. So far, so good. Please join us for a look at this handcrafted garden. See also the Saxifraga crevice garden, again built without soil, designed by Zdenek Zvolanek, where tiny jewels of the Alps are reveling in the extended root run. Additionally there are a large raised limestone bed, a 30' area of raised sand beds, and small woodland, all with more mature plantings of choice material. See <http://www.seedaholic.com/> for a history of construction details.



Sand Beds and Raised Limestone Bed – photo by Elisabeth Zander

Program: *Troughs Around the Rock Garden*

In addition to options of the Trough Workshop and Garden Visit, there will be a continuously looping program displayed inside. Troughs from around the world will be presented to foster ideas on planting and construction.

2010 BNARGS Programs

July 3

Trough Workshop: **John Spain**
Garden Visit: **Elisabeth & Rod Zander**
Please sign up via email or call for the trough workshop: canbya@gmail.com or phone 860.307.7345

August 14

AM: **Bill Brown**, *SpringBulbs of Turkey*
PM: Peter George, *Evolution of My Garden*

September 4

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

PM – **The Big Plant Sale**

October 9

AM: Andy Brand, [Broken Arrow Nursery](#), *New Dwarf Conifers & Japanese Maples*
PM: Eric Breed (from Dutch Rock Garden Society), *Going Wild for Bulbs*

November 6 - Annual Lunch

Sydney Eddison, author of [Gardening for a Lifetime: How to Garden Wiser As You Grow Older](#)

What's Blooming Right Now

It's late June and the most flamboyant period of my garden is now part of the past. When I visit the plants that thrilled me with exuberant blooms in May, I find seedpods and some weeds, and the odd seedling that managed to find enough sun and water to survive this most exuberant spring bloom. Now the 2nd flush of blooms is with me, and I'd like to share a few of them with you. They are not really special or rare, but they are beautiful and reliably perennial, and when the conditions are right, as they have been so far this year, they are truly worth the time and trouble of growing them well.

The first picture is *Daphne cneorum* 'Porteous',



become one of my favorite plants of all time. I grow it in full sun and its spread from about 1

a totally prostrate form with tiny leaves that forms itself to the underlying rocks and soil. It's blooming for the 2nd time, and it has

inch in diameter to almost 1 ½ feet in 3 years. I bought it from Harvey Wrightman, and I recommend it to anyone who loves Daphnes. And it has a wonderful scent as well!

The red flowered tall Penstemon in the foreground is *P. barbatus*, which is truly perennial here and which is simply gorgeous right now. The red tubular flowers are attractive to hummingbirds in particular, and make a beautiful and striking backdrop to the otherwise predominantly yellow flowers in this section of the garden. These plants are self seeded from a small plant I picked up 2 years ago at one of our plant sales.



The next picture is *Allium cernuum*, a beautiful and somewhat prolific onion that has been flowering like this for about 2 weeks. It is a bit tall for the rock garden, and it seeds around quite



a bit, but in area with some sun and some room, it makes a terrific show for about a month or so right about now.

This last picture is *Aquilegia barnebyi*, a subtle and delicate columbine that is just about finishing its bloom right now. It reaches about 12 inches in height, and the flowers are, as they appear, yellow and pink, and they last about 2 weeks or more. I grew it from Alplains seed, and it flowered the 2nd year.



PFG

The link for [directions to the Zander garden](#) is:
<http://www.mapquest.com/maps?city=Goshen&state=CT&address=127+North+St&zipcode=06756-1202&country=US&latitude=41.839084&longitude=-73.23212&geocode=ADDRESS>

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 – **Still 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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Please contact editor before reprinting
articles

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