

Newsletter

*North American Rock Garden Society
Berkshire Chapter September 2012*

Next Meeting:

Saturday, September 15, @ 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: Nick Turland – *Plant Hunting In The Mountains of Crete*



Senecio fruticosus – image by Nick Turland

Lunch – BYO

We welcome dessert contributions. Lunch will be followed by **THE BIG PLANT SALE!**

PM: Nick Turland – *Alpine Plants of The Pyrenees*

“I’m a botanist with a special interest in the wild plants of the Greek island of Crete (Kriti), having been there around 30 times since 1984. I’m also interested in the flora (and fauna) of Greece and the Mediterranean region in general.”

We are going to have a full day, so please come a bit earlier than usual. We will need to organize the Plant Sale before the program begins, and that means at least 30 minutes just dedicated to getting the sale plants out on the tables in the proper order. Plus we need help setting up the tables. Bring plants and come early!

PFG

FALL: A TIME FOR PLANTING



While I know many people like planting in the spring, perhaps in part just to see something new in the garden, I’ve personally had better luck planting in the fall. Plants seem to like the cooler, wetter days of this time of year, and they know that they should put their effort into growing roots in the ground, so that by springtime they seem much better established than a new transplant. Despite the typically cold New England winter (last winter having been a nice exception), most things I plant in September or October establish themselves well. The nice thing for me is that they need much less watching, watering and other types of coddling than plants transplanted in the spring.

This is one of many reasons that it makes sense for the BNARGS Big Plant Sale to be held in September each year. I encourage those of you who can attend to pot up seedlings, rooted cuttings, etc. to share with your gardening friends, and also to take home a few new things in support of your garden and our chapter. There is also an interesting plant nursery about 15 minutes from the Berkshire Botanical Garden called Country Caretakers. While it doesn’t

look all that special from the road, I've gotten some interesting plants there over the years, Primula "Tie Dye" being one of my favorites, especially since it tends to rebloom in the fall.

This is also the time of year to plant spring flowering bulbs. There are many wonderful cold-hardy bulbs such as multi-color crocuses, double petaled snow drops and species tulips. In addition, [Brent and Becky's Bulbs](#) is one of my favorite mail order sources for interesting, easily affordable bulbs.

While you are enjoying the colors of fall this year, I encourage you to plant something new for a little color next spring.
Happy Gardening!

Erica Schumaker

WE CAN DO BETTER THAN THIS

For those of you who "took the summer off," you missed two extraordinarily excellent meetings. In July the Locklear presentations were a treat. The first, on phloxes was loaded with gorgeous photos, cultivation advice and rarities. For me, the second, even by itself would have been worth the drive alone. He had fashioned a wonderful talk on one of NARGS brilliant lights; Claude Barr, whose [Jewels of the Plains](#) I have always cherished and should be on everyone's bookshelf. The talk gave us beauty, history, biography and poignancy about the plains, the man, the place and the plants.

That this meeting was so poorly attended was deeply disappointing. When next I walked into the hall in August I was greeted by a hard working long time member who said: "The disintegration of our chapter is happening before our very eyes." The August meeting featured a beautiful talk centered on the plants available from Broken Arrow Nursery. I took copious notes. In the afternoon Tom Stuart took us on an exploration of ferns, broken up with images of alpines "one could grow nearby" which was very helpful on a cultivation level. The entire show was enchantingly laced with beautiful

botanical paintings which I (naturally!) drank up with delight. So I hope you feel as if you missed out on something, because you did.

I joined the Berkshire chapter back in 1996 for a plethora of reasons, not least of which were its erudite, storied and sterling members. It did not hurt that these members attracted other members and good speakers too. An added bonus: these sterling members brought tons of plants to the plant sales. And you know something else? This was a time when everyone came regardless of the speaker because our meeting is an event. We all have common endeavors, and we are friends.

Now I come to the plant sales. In July I was seriously troubled that I was one in only three people who brought plants. That's the kind of thing usual for March. But JULY? We can do better than this! Pretty much all of us have gardens (big ones, too!) and a pretty high percentage of us grow things from seed. Layerings are always possible, and division of many things is easy. I was also a little shocked at how people were shopping the sale. Listen, I have worked in this industry for 20 years and I KNOW what plants cost retail. (And wholesale!) and oh-my-God do you folks not realize what bargains are offered to you on a monthly basis. It is actually almost poor sportsmanship to not take full advantage of it.



Penstemon barretiae – image by Marvin Kellar

Now in fairness I must report that the August sale turned this around a good bit for the better: more donors, more shoppers. Here is merely a partial list of offerings that you missed out on:

Asplenium platyneuron, *Cheilanthes lanosa* (and other great ferns) *Cryptantha*, *Lagopus marrubiastrum*, *Oxytropis* (several kinds) *Paeonia obovata*, *Penstemon barrettiae*, *Physaria chambersii*, *Scutellaria resinosa* ‘Smokey Hills’ and *Townsendias*. (And this list does not include anything I brought or the choice shrubs from Broken Arrow.....)



Townsendia spathulata – image by John Stireman

Remember too, that not everything you buy has to be an *Androsace*, *Dionysia*, *Shortia*, or *Cypripedium*. (How many of THOSE labels are actually only headstones in your garden right now? Think a little outside the box. I have loaded up on stunning succulents, little Irises, even European ginger for blank spots in my shady areas. All these things are expensive at a retail price.

Attendance. My commute to Stockbridge takes 2 hours and 20 minutes door to door ONE WAY with no unforeseen traffic. I will hazard a guess that most of you are closer. And if Tom Clark can make it now & then from Martha’s Vineyard (Which involves a BOAT) Then maybe most of the rest of you can make it more often too. If you think this is a blatant attempt to lay a guilt trip on you, maybe it is. I love my chapter. I love all of you guys. I have tried hard to support BNARGS with my pen, paintbrush, plants, and participation.

This last item, participation, is so important. It is our lifeblood and the measure of our vitality as a group. Without it we sink. At the moment a scant handful of individuals are carrying the banner. We need more of you. Now, I expect I will see a lot of you in September and NO, it’s not because I think I can

single handedly rally the chapter with an article ringing the bell of solidarity. (Or just plain yelling at you.) I will see a lot of you because it will be the national speakers tour speaker AND the BIG plant sale. A terrific meeting. But it would be not only nice, it would be inspiring to see more members in March, August, and October.....

So come to meetings. Bring a few potted things of your own. We all know the economy is bad but I am guessing that most of us don’t have to decide between a sandwich for lunch or an alpine. Bring a little mad money and spend it.

Just imagine if BNARGS suddenly went away. Meditate on that for a minute. Now, in your mind’s eye, remember two or three or four of the founding members who we have lost over the years. (I’m not naming any names...)



Lagopsis marrubiastrum – image by Ilya Smelansky

What would any one of them tell you to do? Oh, heck, I WILL name some names. Norman & Geoffrey RARELY missed a meeting. Their two habitual chairs in the hall are, in fact, hardly ever sat in by anyone else. Have you noticed that? Front row, right side of the aisle facing the speaker. I’m sure I’m not the only one who still strongly feels their presence. And they always had a question or two at the end of every talk. They were our lodestar; they were engaged in the action.

And we should be too.

Lori Chips, August 19, 2012

AS SUMMER COMES TO A CLOSE

I just bought three pine Adirondack chairs. I've wanted them most of my life, and I'd always pictured myself sitting in one at the end of dock on my own private lake, facing west and enjoying the sunset while drinking a good American lager. Well, I've got the chairs, but I never got around to buying the lake, so the dock isn't part of my life, nor is it ever likely to be. But I have a garden, and I am now setting my



Origanum 'Kent Beauty' – image by Michael Liu

chair up so that each afternoon I can face west, watch the sun set, and drink a more than acceptable ice cold Sam Adams while admiring the results of my 16 years of work. Actually I'm pretty impressed with what I've got, some of which I grew from seed, some of which I bought from the vanishing breed of mail-order specialists, and some of which I obtained at one of our numerous meetings and plant sales. It's a good collection, sited pretty well on my property, and seemingly quite happy to be sharing my declining years with me and my new Adirondack chairs.

I am also prone to getting up early on really nice mornings and crawling around several of my beds to see what's growing and, too often this peculiarly hot summer, to what is dead. Now, late in the summer, not much is really growing, but there are some choice things blooming, some for the second time. For example, two self-seeded *Argemone munita*, commonly known as the Prickly Poppy, are doing just fine. The heat and lack of rain brought out this westerner's best

aspects, and right now, I've got plenty of big white poppy flowers, facing in all directions, attracting the attention of every bee in the neighborhood.



Calylophus serrulatus – image by Michael Liu

A plant I've had for almost a decade, *Calylophus serrulatus*, has spread its progeny in an area of about 4 square feet. It's a small plant, with nice yellow flowers, and it's not bad to look at. In some years it winters over, and in some years all I get are seedlings, but I've only had to plant out one, and it's always there, producing for up to four months each year. Bob Nold once called it a



Argemone munita – image by Michael Liu

terrible weed, but here in north central Massachusetts it's just a pretty plant that I can count on to make a nice show every year. Geography does make a difference!

This spring I bought a delphinium from Harvey and Irene Wrightman, hoping that for once I'd manage to keep it alive for more than a week. In previous summers the various ones I bought held on for maybe two weeks before entering permanent dormancy, but this year things are quite different. *Delphinium tatsienense* bloomed

a bit in early August, which really surprised me, but now it's putting on the real show; 20 blooms, and all on a plant that's less than 10 inches tall! It's beautiful, floriferous, small and shows no indication of entering even temporary dormancy. I'll let you know if it makes it through the winter here in Petersham, but I'm very optimistic.



Delphinium tatsiense – image by Peter George

Last summer at our August plant sale I picked up a fairly large oregano, *Origanum rotundifolium* 'Kent Beauty.' I planted it out immediately, which was really dumb because it fried to a crisp in about two days. I prayed a bit over it, kept it well watered, and before the end of September, it showed some tiny but healthy new growth. Given the truly bizarre winter we had, with no real winter weather at all, it grew a bit and by spring actually looked pretty good. Now it's been blooming for a month or more, and has just about recovered its size since I first got it last summer. But this year it's quite happy, and perhaps next year I'll get it to drape itself over the adjacent pieces of tufa.

It's truly been a challenging year weather wise, but I'm convinced that this fall will be long, pleasant and provide us and our gardens with a perfect transition into real winter. I'm looking forward to it, and I'll get some really good use of the Adirondack chair as we close in on Thanksgiving. The beer will get darker, but the sky will be just as beautiful, and with some luck, I'll still be looking at blooms in the garden.

PFG

BNARGS PROGRAMS FOR 2012

October 13

Judy Glattstein

November 3

Our Annual Luncheon at the Red Lion Inn –
Speaker to be identified

NOTES FROM THE JULY 7 MEETING

This was a very special meeting. The speaker, James Locklear, has spent many years looking for and studying North American plants in their native habitat. He gave two talks based on some of his work. Each talk was a companion to a book: one his own Phlox, a Natural History and Gardener's Guide, the other one developed out of Claude Barr's Jewels of the Plains.



Phlox griseola – image by Alan Bradshaw

The genus Phlox is truly North American. It comprises about 60 species, all but one (*Phlox sibirica*) native of this continent. Some phloxes were in cultivation as early as 1725 but serious and extensive breeding programs started in the mid-nineteenth century. By the early 1900's there were already hundreds of named forms and cultivars and the work is still going on. Yet quite a few species are not in cultivation. One of the reasons is that many phloxes cannot be divided or transplanted easily (tap root, etc). Propagation is by cuttings or by seeds, and

collecting seeds in the wild is notoriously difficult.

So, it was particularly rewarding to see pictures of rare species, not only in their own landscapes (quite frequently phloxes are signature plants) but also in superb close-ups: *Ph. oklahomensis* (not unlike *Ph. subulata* and strongly scented); *Ph. multiflora* (in Yellowstone, easy); the dwarf and compact *Ph. muscoides*; the difficult *Ph. griseola* (for hot and dry spots, from the Great Basin); the very rare, tiny tiny *Ph. dispersa* or High Sierra phlox in screes and gravelly sands.



Arenaria hookeri – image by Bob Skowron

The second talk was Jewels of the Plains Revisited. Claude Barr's plains extend from Canada to Texas. One may think of immense prairies, covered with various grasses and that not many exciting plants grow amongst the grasses but there are also rocky outcrops and that is where the most exciting plants are to be found. We saw a few general views of the plains that Barr explored and also of his modest house and garden. But then, on with the jewels, and true jewels they are. To name a few: *Astragalus barrii*, collected by Barr and named after him by Rupert Barneby (of NYBG); a *Scutellaria*, very nice even when not in bloom, but unfortunately short lived; *Arenaria hookeri*; *Clematis fremontii*, lavender *Calylophus*; spectacular *Cryptantha*; more and not enough.

One writer and student of the North American flora was Edgar T. Wherry. He did important taxonomic work on the genus phlox and wrote

an authoritative monograph on that genus. Years ago, NARGS established an Award named after him to honor his memory: "to be given to a person who has made an outstanding contribution to the dissemination of botanical and/or horticultural information about native North American plants." James Locklear fits perfectly that description and so in 2012 NARGS gave him the E. T. Wherry Award. At the meeting, Peter George gave him the official diploma and our congratulations, to vigorous applause of all of us.

JM



NOTES FROM THE AUGUST 11 MEETING

Plants and plants only: that was all the meeting was about.



Picea pungens 'Gebelles Golden Spring'

First we heard Adam Wheeler from Broken Arrow Nursery speak about some of his favorite dwarf conifers and shrubs. He has spent years observing and most often growing them at the nursery or in his own garden. His words were the words of a hands-on gardener, and we can trust every word he says. When he mentions a dwarf conifer it is a real dwarf. In his garden: *Abies koreana* 'Ice Breaker' grows 1" a year; his *Abies lasiocarpa* 'Duflon' is 12 years old and 6" across. True, some Japanese maples reach 10' in no time but *Acer palmatum* 'Beni Hime' is very



Cheilanthes fendleri

compact: 3' x 3' in 20 years. For each plant he discussed he had one or two nice photographs of course but he had also brought a few specimens for even better illustration (and sale if we wanted).

Origin, habits and requirements, diseases, hardiness, etc he knows them perfectly and he shared his knowledge with us generously. Although most of the plants discussed were maples or conifers there were a dozen others: *Fothergilla gardenii* 'Harold Epstein' which takes full sun and shows brilliant Fall colors; *Hamamelis vernalis* 'Quasimodo', a hardy dwarf which is very fragrant; *Salix hylematica*, very hardy, full sun, with gorgeous red catkins; *Syringa vulgaris* 'Prairie petite', which is quite resistant to powdery mildew. Not the least interesting was an impromptu detailed discussion of various practical aspects of boxwood blight.

Tom Stuart, our second speaker, gave a brilliant and entertaining talk about "Rock Garden Ferns". Although he knows a lot about a lot of different ferns, he limited his views to thirty four ferns suitable for our rock gardens, many of them he brought in his own garden on a hill in lower New York state. For each plant discussed he was showing photos of the plant in the wild or the garden. But instead of close-ups he often was using botanical drawings from various publications, new or old, which was a very effective way to show taxonomically important details. Like the devil, taxonomy is in the details: *Phegopteris connectilis* has hairs (linear) on the fronds, while other ferns have

scales (2 dimensional), that type of things and worse. The speaker never forgot that he was addressing gardeners: he gave a good dose of

scientific knowledge with ample quantity of practical horticultural information. It would be unfair and futile to highlight just a few of the ferns discussed in the talk: they were all fascinating and beautiful. Some *Cheilanthes* are not reliably hardy but some are: the easy *Cheilanthes lanosa* (native to Connecticut) and, surprisingly, the fine *Cheilanthes fendleri*. *Blechnum spicant* seems to be rather short lived on the East Coast yet the gorgeous *Blechnum nipponicum* is good all year round and highly recommended. And there are woodsias: *Woodsia obtusa*, easy to divide; the exotic *Woodsia montevidiensis* (s. Africa), the very handsome *Woodsia polystichoides* (from E. Asia), easy in half shade; And could we forget *Gymnocarpium dryopteris*?



Illustration from *Scandinavian Ferns* by Benjamin Øllgaard and Kirsten Tind, Rhodos, 1993

Of course there was a plant sale on the program. At this meeting it was unexpectedly abundant and brilliant. Ignoring the suffocating heat of this August, many members had taken the trouble of bringing great plants. Even our old

friend Harold Peachey, who happened to be in the area and was visiting us, brought plants. Special mention must be made of the many gorgeous cushion plants brought by Lori Chips and the collection of uncommon seedlings brought by Peter George. Both were providing us with many interesting and useful details about origin, cultivation, characteristics and/or requirements of the plants they were offering. Such exchanges of information, not recited from some books but coming from their own personal experience add much interest to the plant sales and make them special.

But that was not all: Tom Stuart had brought along a large selection of ferns from his own collection to illustrate his talk. He generously gave them all to the chapter to distribute among members present as they wished. Wow! Thanks, Tom.

JM

TO PORTLAND AND VICTORIA: THE BEGINNING

TEXT AND IMAGES BY H. WRIGHTMAN

I received requests from the Portland chapter of NARGS and the independent VIRAGS of Victoria, BC for late June, 2012. This timing works well for us as shipping and spring sales are complete. Daughter Esther can manage the nursery alone.



Turtle Formation

I had in mind for this trip that I wanted to see *Penstemon acaulis* and its close cousin, *P. yampaensis*, in the wild. I would have preferred to start out a week earlier, but couldn't arrange

it. That pretty much eliminated seeing these 2 in flower. No matter, we made preparations for this "field trip", with only 6 days to get to Portland, it meant some extended driving in the range of +1000 km/day. Driving across the belly of the continent from Indiana through Iowa and Nebraska takes 2 full days. By mid-June there were already signs of the severe drought that was taking hold. I have always lived in a rural, farm setting. Droughts have happened before, they are deceiving in that crop yields are usually better than is predicted. Rarely is one catastrophic in the mid-west. Farmers know that flooding in a wet year is far more destructive to crops.

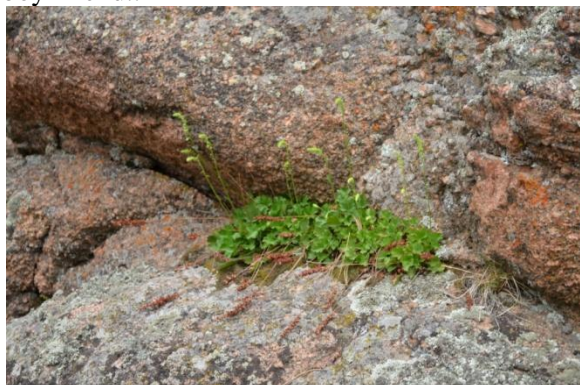


Argemone hispida

The dome of heat was just then taking hold Iowa/Nebraska and making haste to the mountains made sense. Driving into eastern Wyoming on I-80 Irene remarked on the white tissues along the road fence. We stopped. The tissues were flowers of *Argemone hispida* growing in the reddish, sandy soil of SE Wyoming. At ~ 25 cm in height, it is the smallest species and the most northerly reaching of the genus. We have grown this one in our limestone garden for over 10 years. It blooms in July for almost the whole month. Very pretty and delicate, it is cold and heat tolerant and even withstood the excessive rains we had in 2011. Seed is sown in the autumn and left over winter outside. GA-3 doesn't seem to enhance germination, but it germinates well enough on its own. Seedlings should be left in their pots to grow on for a year. There is a one thin straggly root which is best transplanted in early spring. Once growing, it very reliable and thrives in dry sand in full sun and wind. It doesn't take well

to pot culture – therein lies the reason it is rarely listed in catalogues.

Late in the day we stopped at a campground near the base of curious, weather-worn rocks, the Vedauwoo. The outcrops of granite are in very odd, improbable arrangements. Most of the campers were young people and the reason soon became apparent once we saw the main rock face.- rock-climbing was the attraction for them. One young couple was on the large granite face. The young woman, though well-secured, was not experienced and her male partner was giving instructions and non-stop encouragement. Perhaps she was thinking about getting a new boy-friend..



Heuchera sp.

The campground was ~ 7500' elevation so there were interesting plants, and I took photos with new Nikon D-5100 with stock 18-55VR lens. I like the swivel screen as it allows one to set the camera low for plant photos with some sky in the background. Bright conditions are still a trial for focusing; so, when I could not use the manual focus, I said a prayer and took several shots on auto-focus, which is quite good. The extreme ISO speeds make low-light photos possible without flash. Some were up to almost ISO 10,000, and shots were quite acceptable. The shots at the Vedauwoo were all taken after 8 PM. The most interesting one is of a *Penstemon sp.* where all the individual flowers having a bee tucked into the corolla for an overnight stay, transforming it into a weird delphinium morph! Irene spied this one. She has the sharp eyes. Had she been taught to shoot, she would have been a champion. Her skill would prove valuable throughout the trip.



Penstemon sp. With bees!

It was great to be past the prairie. The rock climber/campers all went to bed early and were very quiet.

I haven't had a chance for all the plant id's; so, I would appreciate any opinions offered about naming.

SOME ODDS AND ENDS

I don't know why I rush to get my mail order arrivals into the garden each year. But I do – and far too many of them die rapid, ugly deaths. One day they're lush and healthy, and then....they're dead, dried up and crumbly. Why? Well, I know, and although you probably already know, I'll tell you anyway. I forget to remove the peat that these plants have been growing in, and once that peat dries, it simply will not get wet again, leading directly to plant dessication and death. So please, remove it before you plant those choice alpiners out into the open garden. Soak them, comb them and make sure the roots are clean before they get placed into the scree or sand bed or just plain soil.

As many of you know, there will be a Study Weekend in Pittsburgh the second weekend in October. Check out the NARGS website for information. With any luck we'll have perfect fall weather, and the programs are quite interesting. It's being held the same weekend as the BNARGS October meeting, which means

several of us will not be coming to our own meeting – one of those odd and frustrating coincidences we all hate.

The NARGS Annual General Meeting will be held the first week of May in Asheville, North Carolina. It will be a great event, and those of you who love the woodland should make every effort to be there, since the Blue Ridge is one of the most beautiful and botanically interesting woodlands in the country. Again, check the NARGS website (NARGS.org).

NARGS has an election coming up, and our Awards Committee is looking for nominations, which must be in by Feb. 2. If you are a NARGS member, check out the Fall Quarterly for information, and if you're not a NARGS member, join. Really!

See you on the 15th, and PLEASE bring seedlings and plants for the sale.



“Just one of the many plants I’ll be bringing”

PFG

Links to the Study Weekend and The Annual General Meeting

<http://home.comcast.net/~sy/vialynch/Study%20Weekend%20Information.htm>

<http://www.nargs2013.org/index.php>



EVOLUTION OF A ROCK GARDENER

TEXT AND IMAGE BY JOE STRAUCH

I never intended to become a rock gardener. I came to the Berkshires 23 years ago to be the director of the Berkshire Botanical Garden. I was fresh from a new graduate degree in horticulture and looking forward to working with plants.



Cheilanthes fendleri

As I quickly discovered, being the director of a botanical garden had nothing to do with plants. I was therefore happy to find a group of plant enthusiasts—BNARGS—which, conveniently for me, met at the Garden. I was exposed to an entirely new plant world. Norman Singer and Geoffrey Charlesworth were the dominant forces in the society then, but there were many others, such as Dick Redfield and Red and Shirley Redington, Cliff Desch, Elliot Jessen, Nick Nickou, Elisabeth Zander, Sandy Magyar, and

John Spain, who invited me to their gardens and shared their knowledge and plants.

At home, I was mainly interested in perennials, woody plants, and—increasingly—woodland plants. While enlarging a perennial bed along our front drive, I hit ledge near the surface. It appeared to be a place that wanted to be a rock garden, so I got sand, gravel, and assorted rocks and built a 6-by-10-foot rock garden there. I had no design in mind and planted odds and ends from plant sales and gifts from friends. Only the tough plants survived. This was my pattern for about 15 years.

I'd long been interested in ferns and had amassed a large collection that grows more or less in shade. I started investigating ferns that grow in the sun and found that rock gardeners didn't seem to grow them and that they weren't readily available. As luck would have it, I got a *Cheilanthes fendleri* at a plant sale, and it thrived. That's when I got serious about rock garden ferns. I enlarged the rock garden, built a small hill of calcareous rocks and another of acidic rocks. I've been fortunate in getting several species of *Woodsia* from David Burdick and Tom Stuart and a new *Cheilanthes* from Harold Peachey. Most of these plants were new this year, so it'll take a couple of years before I know if they'll succeed.

Now I'm starting to think about the design of the garden, one that will show the ferns at their best. I guess I'm a rock gardener after all.

Now is the time to Sign Up for the Berkshire Chapter's Annual Luncheon scheduled for Saturday, November 10, 2012

The Red Lion Inn in Stockbridge will host the annual luncheon again this year, immediately following the program at the Berkshire Botanic Garden meeting hall. The cost of the luncheon is \$28 per person, including taxes and gratuities. Entree choices are Braised Chicken with Shiitake Mushrooms or Pan Seared Salmon. A Salad of Berkshire Greens, bread basket, Seasonal Fruit Crisp, and coffee or tea are also included. Other beverages are available

on a cash basis. Please mail a check for \$28 made out to BNARGS along with your menu choice to Vice President Joyce Hemingson, at PO Box 207, Colebrook, CT 06021.

www.obrienhosta.com

**A VISIT TO JOHN
O'BRIEN'S NURSERY**
TEXT BY PETER GEORGE AND IMAGES BY
MICHAEL LIU

Last Sunday I took my family and two new NARGS members on a short jaunt to Granby, Connecticut to visit John O'Brien's nursery. I met John about a decade ago at a Connecticut Chapter meeting, and I remember that my strongest impression was that he was a genuinely nice man, knowledgeable about plants, but most of all, extremely approachable and generous. So although I had heard that he was a hosta specialist and I'm not a huge hosta fan, I thought it would be fun to finally visit his place. Well, it was a revelation! This is what we saw as we turned left into his driveway.



His house is sited right in the middle of the garden/show beds/inventory, and the three elements are seamlessly integrated. It's almost impossible to tell when a show bed morphs into something else, but the plants are beautiful and exceptionally well grown. Obviously hostas are a key element, and I cannot imagine anyone having a larger variety. Here is an image of one of his hosta beds, of which there must have been at least five.



And below is one of the numerous sales areas covering at least ¼ acre!



John's house sits in the midst of various beds containing dwarf and semi-dwarf conifers, hosta, full size trees and numerous woodland understory plants. Many of these conifers and woodland plants are for sale behind the house and down a rather large hill, ending in a pond.



There are lots of Heuchera species and hybrids, epimediums, asarum species and a very nice selection of daphnes.

I spent too much money on several very interesting conifers, but I really had no choice. If you're a gardener this is a special place. I'd



strongly recommend a visit to his website, <http://www.obrienhosta.com>, and a personal visit to the nursery before winter sets in. Here's my favorite purchase of the day, which I'll leave to you to identify.



A FEW PLANTS YOU'LL FIND AT OUR BIG PLANT SALE!!



- Androsace sarmentosa* 'Sherriffii'
- Agastache rupestris*
- Aquilegia akitensis* 'Rosea'
- Arabis androsacea*
- Asarina procumbens*
- Alchemilla alpina*
- Alyssum* 'Tom Thumb'
- Clematis scottii*
- Cotoneaster* 'Little Gem'
- Chrysogonum virginianum* 'Norman Singer's form'

Delosperma "White Nugget', *Alpina* and 'Fire spinner'
Dianthus freynii, 'petite' *simulans* & *squarrosus*
Draba rigida
Erigeron leiomerus and *E. scopulinus*
Euonymus kewensis
Hymenoxys torreyana
Iris gracilipes alba (Buko form)
Iris setosa 'Nana'
Iris suaveolens 'rubromarginata'
Gentiana acaulis
Gypsophila franzii 'Nana Compacta,' *G. bungeana* & *G. cerastioides*
Hebe topiaria
Helianthemum hybrids
Lagopsis marrubiastrum
Lonicera crassifolia
Ophiopogon japonica 'nana'
Phlox 'Betty,' 'Herbert,' *sileneflora*, *kelseyi*
 'Lemhi purple' & 'Schneewitchen'
Penstemon rupicola & *P. pinifolius*
Potentilla tridentata
Polygala chamaebuxus
Salix repens (St. Kilda form)
Scutellaria resinosa 'Smoky Hills'
Sempervivums
Townsendia hookeri
Townsendia spathulata
Valeriana arizonica
Veronica liwanensis

In Memoriam: Eleanor (Ellie) Spingarn
 January 6, 1928 – June 25, 2012

By Barbara van Achterberg

Ellie Brinkerhoff Spingarn was a gifted rock gardener who could make difficult plants look easy. With her artist's eye she created an exceptional garden in Georgetown, CT. She was generous with friends and visitors. She was also a builder of amazing stone walls and troughs. Since Ellie was a slender woman, 5'3" tall, her beautifully laid walls, some 6 feet tall, are a testimony to her determination and strength. She is survived by her husband Joel, a noted grower of dwarf conifers. Ellie Brinkerhoff was a member of ARGs (later NARGs) for many years, and was a member of the North Atlantic Region. In 1968 Ellie wrote a



Ellie at Oliver's

letter to members from Connecticut that the "time has come to form a local unit of the American Rock Garden Society in Connecticut." Sixty people attended a meeting on April 6; Linc Foster was the speaker. With the help of Linc and Timmy Foster as well as Lee Raden, she organized the first Winter Study Weekend in January 1969 and successive Winter Study Weekends, also in Connecticut.

She was Regional Vice President of ARGs from 1976-1978. She received an Award of Merit in 1973, a Connecticut Chapter Service Award in 1986 and the Marvin E. Black Award 'For a member who has helped other people to reach their potential in the plant world' in 1994.

Ellie Brinkerhoff was hired by John Oliver to create an alpine garden at his nursery in Fairfield. Many people first met her there where they were introduced to both rock gardening and the Rock Garden Society by her.

It was the talk of ARGs when Ellie and Joel Spingarn became engaged. They married in 1980. We all wondered whether they would set

up gardening on Long Island or in Connecticut. But there was never really any question. After a year or so, Joel moved his more portable dwarf conifers to Ellie's place, where he established a conifer bank that enhanced the landscape, especially in the winter.

A friendly but quiet hard-working gardener, Ellie commented that she had to work 3 hours a day to keep her large garden in shape. If she took a day off, she worked 6 hours the next day. Her efforts showed. Even today, when Joel and Ellie have not been able to garden for 10 years, the beautiful bones of their garden remain.

She was one of the women gardeners profiled in Starr Ockenga's Earth on Her Hands: The American Woman In Her Garden, published in 1988. She is photographed sitting on an old International Harvester tractor in the chapter titled "The Lure of Stone." Ellie is quoted as saying "Any rock garden needs mulch, and stone is ideal. It has been my mulch of choice for many years."



Bobby Ward, NARGS archivist, could find only two listings of Journal articles that Ellie wrote. One was about growing alpines from seeds and

the other was about hypertufa troughs. But in personal communication, Ellie excelled. We who knew her will always remember her enthusiasm, generosity and helpfulness.

Editor's Note: I didn't know Ellie Spingarn, but I certainly have heard a great deal about her and her stonework. A few weeks ago I met Ben and Frances Burr at the Spingarn home in Connecticut, and Joel gave NARGS a gift of Ellie's Journal collections, including ARGs, NARGS, The Scottish Rock Garden Society Journal and the Journal of The AGS. We had a chance to see some of her stonework and got an unusual and insightful peek into her non-gardening interests, including an amazing shell collection. Thank you, Joel, and thank you, Ellie! It is my wish as President of NARGS to create an 'Ellie Spingarn Award,' which would be presented to rock gardeners who use rock in the most aesthetically pleasing way. It's time for rock to get its due!

This wonderful article first appeared in the NARGS Connecticut Chapter newsletter, and appears here with their permission.



Ellie's Stairs – image by Joel Spingarn

ERIOGONUMS AND STEENS MOUNTAIN

TEXT AND IMAGES BY BILL ADAMS

The annual meeting of the Eriogonum Society was held on the 20th through the 22nd of July at the Malheur Field Station near Steens Mountain in SE Oregon. For those of us in the West, it had been a very dry and hot summer to say the least, so it was anticipated that we would likely not see Nature in its most abundant state.



Castilleja pilosa v. steenensis

We only had two days to drive from Denver to Steens Mountain so there was little time to stop and look for plants during the trip. As it turned out, our timing was perfect since almost nothing was in flower and, as hours of landscape passed by, we were never presented with the frustration of not being able to stop.



Eriogonum cusicii

The Malheur Field Station is located on a wildlife refuge comprised of a large shallow lake

surrounded by a desolate dusty landscape of sage brush filled with a healthy population of jack rabbits. The lake provides an ideal habitat for water fowl and other wildlife and is a prime destination for bird watchers. Unfortunately, the water also provides a home for a large number of mosquitoes and we quickly determined that recreation outside would be problematic.



Eriogonum ovalifolium var. nivale

For our first field trip of the day, we anxiously departed the field station for what was billed as “a short hike in loose, rocky soil”. At the site, we met a nice young lady accompanied by a llama packing water for the trip. She led us through a dry, dusty, sage filled landscape on a hike that seemed much longer than advertised but every bit as rocky. We did see some Eriogonums, primarily *E. strictum* and *E. sphaerocephalum*, but there was little flowering due to the drought. The hike was disappointing but we then traveled to a second site hoping for better results.

Again we experienced a healthy portion of dust and sage but at one stop we were able to see an impressive population of the rare *E. cusicii* growing in a desolate landscape of a peculiar soil type with a strange texture that felt like walking on thin layer of wet snow.

On our second day we headed to the Alvord Basin, the desert area on the west side of the geological uplift known as Steens Mountain. Again, lots of dust and sage and no Eriogonums. It seems going to the desert during a drought is a bad idea. However, on the bright side, we stopped in the tiny town of Fields to have their

famous milkshakes and, while thoroughly enjoying our treat, one of the cars developed flat tire. Fortunately, the garage staff was on hand to execute an efficient repair.



Lupinus lepidus v. lobbyi

Finally, on our last day we headed to Steens Mountain and we were treated to spectacular scenery and a magnificent display of wildflowers. Near the top of the mountain at over 9,000' we saw mat after mat of *Lupinus lepidus v. lobbyi* and *Eriogonum ovalifolium v. nivale* both at the peak of flower. There were huge, compact mounds of *Phacelia hastate v. alpine* plastered to rocky outcrops, and mats of *Eriogonum umbellatum v. dichrocephalum* together with dainty clumps of *Castilleja pilosa v. steenensis* in the alpine tundra. These are but a few of the great plants to be seen on Steens Mountain, and anyone interested in rock garden plants should visit this unique place. And possibly even more important, don't forget to get a milkshake in Fields.

Editor's Note: Bill Adams is NARGS Treasurer, an active member of the Rocky Mountain Chapter, and a very active member of The Eriogonum Society. Here is some information about this interesting 'sister' organization.

Welcome to the Eriogonum Society

The Eriogonum Society has the following objectives;

- enjoying and promoting the use of these plants in the garden.
- enjoying and evaluating eriogonums in the wild.

- assembling, developing and sharing information on the propagation, cultivation, identification and distribution of the eriogonum species.
- providing a seed exchange to distribute eriogonum species seed for use in gardens.
- protecting rare and endangered species of eriogonums.
- advancing the overall understanding of eriogonum from a scientific perspective.



Eriogonum umbellatum var. Porteri

Taken in the garden, where it blooms for weeks. Grown in limey screed in full sun. Photo by Cliff Booker (in Anne Spiegel's garden)

To meet these objectives have a website devoted to the society, an on-line newsletter published four to six times per year, annual trips including educational opportunities to view and learn more about eriogonums, access to an annual seed exchange, and in the future shall have an annual bulletin with articles of interest and nice photographs.

The website includes sections of member collected and published information on propagation, cultivation, identification and distribution of the various species of eriogonum including good photos of as many species as we can photograph. In addition the website will provide information on society trips, members news, seed exchange, and other items of interest.

The dues for membership are \$10/annually, renewed each January.

If you have questions, please visit our website @ <http://www.eriogonum.org/>

Positions of Responsibility

Chairperson – Erica Schumacher
Vice-Chairperson – Joyce Hemingson
Secretary – Carol Hanby
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Refreshments Chairperson – Joyce Hemingson
Speaker Housing – Anne Spiegel

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