



Newsletter

North American Rock Garden Society
Connecticut Chapter March/April 2012

UPCOMING EVENTS

A Rock Garden Study Day with Dr. Anton Reznicek
Saturday, April 21, 2012 9am-2pm
New York Botanical Garden

Anton Reznicek will present *Kissing Cousins and Family Skeletons: Rock Garden Plants and Modern Evolution*. Afterward, tour the Rock Garden with curator Jody Payne and complete the day with a trough-making demonstration at 1pm. A continental breakfast is included; lunch is on your own.

Anton (Tony) Reznicek, PhD., is Curator and Assistant Director, U. of Michigan Herbarium. His research centers on the systematics and evolution of sedges. He has served on the executive board of NARGS and as president of the Great Lakes Chapter.

NARGS members should register via phone to 800.322.6924. Let the Registration Staff know that you are a NARGS member so you will get the NYBG member's discount. NYBG or NARGS member: \$48/ non-member: \$51 (includes continental breakfast).

Anyone interested in car-pooling to this event can contact Ginny or Maryanne.

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Jim Almond, Assistant director of Alpine Garden Soc. shows, will speak on an as yet to be decided topic.
Sunday, May 20, 2012
Ballek's Garden Center, Moodus, CT
This will be followed by a **tour of the nearby garden of Dave DeLucia**.

Lori Chips on *Planting Troughs*
Sunday, June 10, 2012
Oliver's Nursery, Fairfield, CT

James H. Locklear, author of *Phlox: A Natural History and Gardener's Guide*, will discuss this genus.
Sunday, July 8, 2012, Location TBA

See 'Events' continued on page 2

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As we admire our winter blooms, we should be pondering just what this bodes for spring. After reading the Sunday **Times** article of February 26th *Much to Savor, and Worry About, Amid Mild Winter's Early Blooms*, (www.nytimes.com/ref/membercenter/nytarchive.html)

I have given much thought to that question. At the New York Botanical Garden, flowering bulbs and other plants are 2-4 weeks ahead of schedule; in my own garden snowdrops and winter aconites have been blooming, recently joined by the lovely Adonis amurensis. As cheering as these blossoms are so early in winter, what price will we pay over the long term?

The Connecticut Flower & Garden Show this past week was missing one important display – that of the **Connecticut Chapter of NARGS !!!** I propose that we consider entering an exhibit next year. The goal: to attract new members and share information about rock gardening.

As a follow up to the grafting workshop at Broken Arrow Nursery, I recommend the book, **Botany of Desire**, by Michael Pollan (his first book). The book gives information about grafting, the ancient technique of cloning trees, and tells how John Chapman (Johnny Appleseed) brought the gift of alcohol to the frontier by planting apple trees which produced fruit that was good only for hard cider. It seems an apple tree grown from a seed will be a wildling bearing little resemblance to its parent; anyone who wants edible apples must plant grafted trees.

~Ginny



Seed Musings

By Maryanne Gryboski

It's an odd thing about seeds. Some will awaken just a few days after you've tucked them in bed with a drink of water. Others need to be roughed up or given the cold shoulder one or more times.

A few years ago I ordered seed of *Deinante caerulea* from the NARGS seed exchange. I grew *D. bifida* in the garden and liked its coarse, two-tongued foliage. But the blue flowers of *caerulea* that stared at me from the catalog pages were a siren's call. So it was ordered and sown, and nothing happened.

The next year I ordered it again. And again nothing happened, nor did the previous year's seed come to life.

Now I thought: this *deinante* must be difficult to germinate. I looked for help on the NARGS forum site and found a contributor who proclaimed it the easiest to germinate, a beginner's seed with no special needs. Hah!

So I ordered it again and, once sown, placed it under lights in a warm basement room just as I had done in the past. I guess three's a charm because every seed germinated. September saw me planting out a dozen good-sized first year plants.

Last year's success spurred me to go whole hog this year, and I ordered the maximum 35 packets of seed from NARGS. I especially like taxa that need cold stratification as these can be sown immediately and put out on the porch for winter's duration without taking up house space. Others go into a clear plastic storage tub in the front room or stay in the furnace room, either in a dark corner or under shop lights (I'm up to three 4-foot lengths) depending on their needs. Remaining packets are tucked in the back of the fridge's veggie drawer to be sown outdoors come springtime or whenever I remember they are there.

There's a mix of excitement, delight and wonder when the first bit of green shows, or a seed appears to levitate above the planting medium. It seems like magic and to think, I had a hand in it if only by setting the stage.

'Events' continued from pg 1

September Meeting: TBA

Tri-State Meeting

Nick Turland, Associate Curator in the Division of Science and Conservation at the Missouri Botanic Garden
Sunday, October 14, 2012

CT Hardy Plant Symposium

Saturday, March 3, 2012 www.cthardyplantsociety.org

UCONN Perennial Plant Conference

Thursday, March 15, 2012

A wide range of topics geared toward the professional but open to all. www.2012perennial.uconn.edu

UCONN 2012 Garden Conference

Friday, March 16, 2012

Keynote: Doug Tallamy, *Why We Should Use Native Plants* www.2012garden.uconn.edu/

CMGA 2012 Garden Conference *Exploring Diversity in Garden Design*

March 24, 2012 Manchester Community College

Keynote: Ken Druse, *Companions: The Garden Lover's Guide to Planting Combinations* www.ctmga.org/

Eastern Cactus & Succulent Conference

2 days of nationally known speakers and

CT Cactus & Succulent Society Show

April 14 & 15, 2012 Coco Key Resort Hotel & Convention Ctr., 3580 East Main St., Waterbury, Ct.
www.ctcactusclub.com/

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PROGRAMS: Please talk to one of the officers if you are interested in the Programs Chair position.

For the Love of Snowdrops

Words and photos by Leslie Shields

I think that snowdrops are the most wonderful flower. There seems to be something magical in their arrival when the weather is still so cold and unpleasant. Perhaps it is because my mother kept planning outdoor birthday parties for me on March 20th.

I started with snowdrops the way most people probably do: a few bulbs of the plain snowdrop (*Galanthus nivalis*) in the warmest microclimate that I could find. But they multiply well and soon I was spreading them about. Then I saw a photo of a snowdrop wood in a British gardening magazine; "I want that," was my immediate reaction, and so I began to create my own snowdrop wood under a venerable white birch. It was about that time that I was introduced to the double *Galanthus nivalis* 'Flore Pleno' and discovered that they reproduce as well as, if not better than, the single.

Then Dick Redfield came into my gardening life through the Hardy Plant Society. It seemed that each year in very early spring he would bring in a pot of snowdrops from his garden for a plant auction. Different species! Named cultivars! I had no idea such things existed. I bid on all, getting some but not others. It was as though John Marchacos and I were in a constant battle for high bid.



A small patch of G. 'Sam Arnott' in the author's garden.

Someone suggested *Brent and Becky's* which often had one or two unusual ones like *G. elwesii* and 'Sam Arnott'. There were people who had the inside track on rare snowdrops. I heard the name Hitch Lyman and sought him out. He came and gave a presentation for HPS and I found out how to order from him. These are not inexpensive bulbs; it is one or two a year as the costs are generally \$20 to \$50 – yes, that is per bulb. All this for a

flower that you either have to put in a bed on a hillside, like David Culp's magnificent collection, or get down on the ground when it is often wet and cold in order to see it. And then the differences can be small. It takes a good eye to tell them apart and name them correctly.



A close look at *Galanthus* 'Blewbury Tart'.

Growing snowdrops is generally as easy as most bulbs; just put them in the ground. Like most bulbs they don't want to be wet when they are dormant. Some like a bit of lime, some a bit more acid, but good garden soil works for most. Voles don't appear to be interested in them but I tend to cage them with metal mesh just in case.

Since those early days there have been more articles about this mysterious beauty but the sources on this side of the Atlantic are not yet numerous.

As mentioned above, start with *Brent and Becky's Bulbs* (store.brentandbeckysbulbs.com). Hitch Lyman owns *The Temple Nursery*, Box 591, Trumansburg, NY 14886. He sends out a small, elegant listing of the bulbs that he has for sale in any given year. I believe that he asks \$5 for a new subscriber; (he has no website). I have recently found *Carolyn's Shade Gardens* in Pennsylvania (carolynsshadegardens.com). She has incredible pictures on line and snowdrops are the only plants that she will mail. For additional photos or to see what Mr. Lyman's offerings look like, go to John Grimshaw's book or to the website www.snowdropinfo.com/galanthus_gallery.htm.

My new quests: there is a form called *poculiformis* which has 6 tepals and no inner cup; and there are some that bloom in the fall.

I know there are plenty of people who would say that I'm nuts – probably for more reasons than lusting after snowdrops – but I am smitten by these early little bloomers.



February 18, 2012 Grafting Workshop

By Maryanne Gryboski

Sparkling sunshine greeted participants of the grafting workshop at Broken Arrow Nursery and set the mood for a high-energy day. A fire in the wood stove kept the barn just warm enough as we listened to Adam Wheeler, Propagation Manager, define grafting terms, give a brief historical overview and discuss a range of techniques used to achieve various goals, e.g. 'bridge grafting' to repair girdled trees or 'topworking' to change cultivars on the top of a well-established plant.

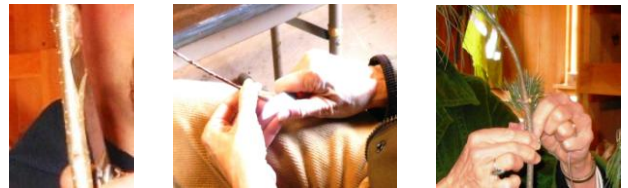
Grafting success, said Adam, is most often met when using clones of the same species for both scion, the top of the graft combo whose short (6") lengths of dormant stems contain buds, and an active growing rootstock, the lower part of the graft combo which is typically a seedling. The further apart the relationship between scion and rootstock, as in species of the same genus, for example, or of two different genera, the less likely a graft will succeed. The graft union, which is the interface between scion and rootstock, must be bridged with callus tissue which develops from the wound, rather like a scab, and later differentiates to cambium. This callus formation occurs at temperatures +/- 75 degrees F. Scion wood, cut when dormant, can be stored for months in the fridge and be grafted when outdoor temperatures rise or be grafted now with the resulting unions treated as houseplants, left in an east or west-facing window. Always select healthy, disease-free material and shoots from the previous season's growth where possible (some very dwarf plants may prove the exception).

'Side veneer' was the technique we would use and Adam described and demonstrated this.

- First, cut a flap about $\frac{3}{4}$ " long into the rootstock between buds. This cut should not be deep but just into the bark to expose the cambium layer.
- Next, cut a 6" length of scion wood with some buds on it. The diameter of the scion can be smaller than

the rootstock but not larger. Cut the bottom end of the scion in a wedge shape with the two sides of the wedge coming to a point.

- Insert this wedge tightly into the flap and make at least one edge of the scion line up with the cambium of the rootstock.
- Starting at the top and working down, wrap a length of rubber band over the cut area, looping at the end to secure the scion in place. Cover this by wrapping with parafilm to prevent the cut from drying out.



Adam then took us out to the nursery grounds where we looked at various pine and ginkgo clones from which we would choose our scions. We took cuttings and headed back indoors, first to practice the technique on miscellaneous branches and then to attempt the real deal. Some participants found it difficult to make clean, even cuts; my challenge was to hold the two pieces together as I wrapped the rubber band to secure them. The scion would tilt sideways as I moved my fingers out of the path of the band and, although I finally managed the wrap, I wondered if the alignment held true.

If the graft is successful, growth of the scion should take place in 2-5 weeks. By mid May, we can begin to slowly remove the upper portion of the rootstock, continuing over a 6 week period so as to reduce shock to the scion.

Spirits were high as participants readied to leave with a grafted pine and ginkgo as trophy, and perhaps a special hellebore, dwarf evergreen or witch hazel purchased from the tempting display outside the barn. And although advised that most of the grafts might not take, we were encouraged to hone our newly won skills with practice.

