



Newsletter

North American Rock Garden Society
Connecticut Chapter October 2011

OCTOBER TRI-STATE MEETING

Sunday, 16 October 2011, 10:00 am
Lyndhurst Museum, Tarrytown, N.Y.

Speaker: Malcolm McGregor

Malcolm McGregor, currently editor of NARGS *Rock Garden Quarterly*, last spoke to the CT chapter in 2009 upon the publication of his book, **Saxifrages: A Definitive Guide to the 2000 Species, Hybrids & Cultivars**. He will be making two presentations at this meeting.

A Rock Gardener's Eye 1: A World Away – subtropical South Vietnam and mediterranean Western Australia.
“Between 2007 and 2009, I made a number of trips to southern Vietnam where my wife Monica was working for two years at a school in Saigon. Some of my visits were just for a week, others quite a lot longer. Side trips during these years took us to Cambodia, Laos, Borneo and Western Australia. All of these allowed me to see these other habitats as a gardener, to see a little of what Vietnamese horticulture was involved with, and to think about my rock garden getting on with its own life back home. This talk will look at the life, food-plants, flowers and gardening of this sub-tropical part of the world centering on a country which is now one of flourishing entrepreneurship within a still Communist framework.

But as well as this, it will go on to reflect on the nature of tropical habitats—a world away from those we model in our rock gardening lives but so ‘other’ that they can make us more aware of just what we are doing.

If time allows, a sidetrip to Western Australia to reflect on the mediterranean flora will provide a cool and less humid finish to this talk.”

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

NARGS speaker John Grimshaw presented two excellent programs: *Snowdrops and Companions for Early Spring* and *Plantsman's Choice*. They were information packed and well illustrated. The setting at Ballek's Garden Center in East Haddam proves to be ideal for our meetings. Nancy Ballek Mckinnon and Anita Ballek are very gracious and enjoy having us.

John informed me about the unusual digitalis that appeared in my garden. He described it as *Digitalis p. monstrosa*, a peloric form which is a mutation that is radically vs. laterally symmetric. It is not unknown to him; in fact, he has recently written on his blog about the sport. Check out his blog* which is updated every two days.

After the program Maryanne, her husband, John and I drove to the home of new member, David DeLucia, to view his garden of cactus, shrubs and trees – a wonderful variety of plants and well worth a visit.

John stayed with Maryanne Saturday night and with me Sunday and Monday. His plane left Bradley at 1:25 p.m. Tuesday for Washington, D.C., then on to Philadelphia and, finally, back to England to arrive on the 26th. John was anxious to visit the Peabody Museum in New Haven, which we did; then we were off to see the gardens and greenhouse of John Spain whom he was keen to meet, having read his book on hardy cactus. They both enjoyed meeting each other and sharing botanical information.

John Grimshaw was a wonderful guest and we had great conversations covering many topics. How nice it is to visit with a world traveler, author and botanist, and how grueling a three-week tour is for our NARGS speakers. Thanks to Chuck Ulmann of national NARGS for arranging the speaking tour.

*<http://johngrimshawsgardendiary.blogspot.com/>

~Ginny

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East Yorkshire, Malcolm's home, is not a natural rock gardening habitat: less than 10 miles from the east coast of England, less than 50 feet above sea level, with mild winters and no snow cover (usually), rainfall rather less than 24 inches a year— very unevenly spread so two months can go by with no rain.

But then that is the problem for all of us— we spend our time growing plants that don't grow in the area where we live— that's what gardeners do.

In this talk Malcolm will reflect on what rock gardening is all about – bringing his love of wild places and plants into the garden – and all that allied to an offbeat look at writers about gardening, from Len Deighton (who first came to notice with the **Ipccress File**, a film which helped make Michael Caine a star), to Karel Capek, a Czech whose book **The Gardener's Year** should be on every rock gardener's bookcase.

The Tri-State meeting always has an extensive raffle and auction (please consider pot a plant or two to donate) and a number of good vendors where you are bound to find a choice plant at the right price. Bring lunch. If you wish to carpool, contact Ginny or Maryanne.

Directions: from Merritt/Hutchinson River Pkwy, take exit for the Tappan Zee Bridge/I287. Immediately cross lanes left and follow I287. Take the last exit before the bridge for RT 9, Broadway. Go left on Broadway. Lyndhurst is ½ mile south on the right. If someone is at the ticket booth, say you are going to the Rock Garden meeting. Drive in past the mansion to the brick carriage house; park on the road leading down toward the river.

Seed Packaging Work Session

The CT chapter will be packaging seed for this year's seed exchange. A work session is planned for the first week of December. This is no-pressure work and is a fun opportunity to share conversation on many topics with other members. Lunch is provided. If you wish to participate, please contact Maryanne.

Meeting Report: 18 September 2011

By Barbara van Achterberg

Meeting at Ballek's Garden Center in the delightful stone house across the street from the nursery, Chapter members were met by Nancy Ballek McKinnon, who cheerfully welcomed us with a pot of coffee.

John Grimshaw, an eminent gardener, author and botanist from England, was making his first trip to Connecticut. In his two talks, he would frequently question us, "Does this do well for you?" In most cases, if we could get the plant at all, it was hardy in Connecticut.

The first talk, "Snowdrops and Other Early Spring Bulbs" started with a bit of botany about galanthus. It has no petals per se, but an inner segment, containing the stamens, and outer segments which are usually white. Above the inner segment is the ovary, which will swell and make seeds.

Most common is Galanthus nivalis, which will spread in no time to make a show in late winter, February for John, usually early March for us. A somewhat larger snowdrop is Galanthus 'Sam Arnott' with larger and notably fragrant flowers. It is sterile, but spreads by division. A larger snowdrop is also the earliest: G. elwesii, named after Henry John Elwes, a Victorian naturalist. (I have had it as early as January, but more usually February, and not until March in 2011, when the snow finally melted.)

Unfortunately it spreads much more slowly than nivalis. Galanthus plicatus is an even larger snowdrop from the Crimea. Galanthus reginae-olgae is a fall-blooming snowdrop from Greece and Sicily. Twice it has failed to survive the winter in my garden. Thanks to John I can now pronounce it, if not grow it: re-GEEN-eye OLG-eye (both g's are hard).

There are many named forms of snowdrops, thanks to totally obsessed galanthophiles. One bulb sold for £360.

Some have yellow ovaries and tips, some are all yellow, others are greenish. Galanthus 'George Elwes', a hybrid between elwesii and plicatus, has a green fish image on the outsides of each inner segment.

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

Snowdrops are poisonous to mice, who love crocuses. As far as I can tell, mice leave *eranthus* and *corydalis* alone, too.

Eranthus hyemalis, the winter aconite, is a bright golden companion to snowdrops. E. 'Schwefelglanz' is a pale yellow one. My own pale yellow form, 'Moonlight', came from Marcia Meigs in Ithaca, who got it from Bill Hamilton. My single tuber is multiplying, ever so slowly, while the bright golden ones take over the rock garden across the driveway.

John recommends planting snowdrops in a bed of *Cyclamen hederifolium*. The leaves make a nice ground-cover--eventually--for the early spring bulbs before producing their own flowers in September. *Cyclamen coum* blooms in late winter to early spring.

Crocus has many species: *vernus* and *tommasinianus* are robust and will hybridize, rapidly making sizable beds unless mice, voles or chipmunks decimate them. *Crocus sieberi* and the beautiful form 'Tricolor' are very early, fragrant and loved by bees. John showed us how to propagate crocus and other true bulbs by chipping. You start in May, or early in the dormant season, in sterile conditions. Slice the bulb lengthwise in numerous thin slices, leaving a bit of the base on each slice, soak in fungicide, and incubate over the summer in a ziploc bag. Then, pot them up in the hoop house for the winter. He recommends practicing first with a common type.

A great way to plant crocus in turf is to pull up the turf, plant the crocuses and then replace the turf. Mice won't be able to get through as easily to devour them. You mow after the crocus leaves turn brown.

John followed up with several other bulbs, perennials and shrubs for the early spring garden. Virtually all of them do well in Connecticut.

During the lunch break we learned from John that Ginny's weird foxglove, pictured in the Aug/Sept newsletter, has a name: *Digitalis purpurea monstrosa*. We had a demonstration of troughs made by Jeana Richo's son out of styrofoam fish boxes. They are very lightweight but probably not winter hardy outdoors. A small plant auction raised some money for the Chapter. We also had time to visit the nursery.

Then John gave his second talk, "Plantsman's Choice." The plantsman is John, and his garden is on the grounds of Colesbourne Park, Gloucestershire, where he is Gardens Manager. Having his home garden in the middle of a park means it is sometimes visited by the public, and he cannot label his rarities, for fear that they will be stolen.

John's cottage is at 500 feet elevation on a north-facing slope--cold but bright and sunny. He has lived there only about six years, yet the garden looks finished. He has a regular lawn and a lawn meadow, not mowed till August, which gives him "as much pleasure as any other place in the garden." This year he added a new rock garden section with native Cotswold limestone and the crevices that are "de rigueur" among alpine enthusiasts these days.

In his garden, John plants lilies underneath other bulbs. Since they need deeper planting and come up later, the double planting works well. His *galanthus* include two rarities: *G. plicatus* 'E.A. Bowles', all white with no green markings; and *G. 'Green Tear'*, a *nivalis* which is extremely green inside. Other spring bloomers are *Crocus tommasinianus* red form, *C. sieberi* 'Bowles White' and 'Firefly', and *Primula vulgaris* subsp. *sibthorpii*, very early. *Paeonia mairei* blooms a little later. It has lovely bronze foliage with big red buds. The flowers don't last long. *Lilium martagon* 'Album' is a spring bloomer, along with *Gentiana acaulis*, *Pulsatilla vulgaris* var. *rubra*--very happy in limey soil-- and *Ophrys apifera*, the bee orchid. Yes, the bees love this. *Monardella macrantha* subsp. *hallii* has bright red flowers and is from the American Southwest.

Several fritillarias grow in the North Meadow, which has never been plowed. Among the numerous summer flowering plants are *Anthemis* 'Tinpenny Sparkler' blooming in June and August, and *Achillea* 'Pomegranate' with nice red flowers. *Iris* 'Scramble' was selected and named by John, after scrambled eggs! *Mahonia* 'Moseri' sounds most attractive. It is dwarf with apricot-blushed new growth, bringing to mind certain epimediums. *Salanova* lettuce is red and green, both pretty and tasty. (It seems to be available only in Europe.) *Eucomis grimshawii* is a bulb for a bog, named after John Grimshaw, after he found it in South Africa.

From *Galanthus elwesii* to *Chrysanthemum* 'Dixter Orange', John Grimshaw's cottage is surrounded by flower and foliage in a naturalistic but controlled setting year round. John is a witty and knowledgeable speaker. It was a great pleasure to have him talk to our Chapter.

Speakers Wanted

The Sow and Reap Garden Club of Granby is looking for speakers for 30-45 min. presentations. Interested persons should contact Barbara Casavant at: (860) 653-4712, or ddcasavant@juno.com.

The Garden in Early Fall

By Maryanne Gryboski

While many plants are winding down and looking a bit tired at summer's end, I've been surprised and delighted by beauties that have just now come into their own.

Making the biggest splash in my own garden are the colchicums, where even a few bulbs can produce a significant bouquet. In one bed, *C. autumnale* has pushed its deep lavender-pink cups up through the dark leaves of *Ligularia* 'Brit Marie Crawford' while elsewhere the large softer-colored *C. speciosum* leans out from under a shrub. *C.* 'Waterlily', of which I would like to have much more, is supported by the silvered-purple leaves of a heuchera and *C.* 'Glory of Heemstede', white at the base of the cup blending to a deep tessalated pink, peeks from behind a golden leaved hosta.



Colchicum speciosum leans out from under a shrub.

Gentiana m. 'Royal Blue', recently planted in my garden and also seen in Dave DeLucia's, is a deep blue-violet, half standing-half sprawling about; look inside, and its trumpets are white, dotted with blue. The violet flowers of a bottle gentian, likely *G. andrewsii*, were also spotted at Dave's. Taller than the gentians, the Japanese anemones make a gay sight. *A.* x 'Honorine Jobert', its flowers a pristine white, lightens a now shady area in my stroll garden while a soft pink cultivar, possibly *A.* x 'Max Vogel', rests on the dark green leaves of *Rhododendron* 'Golf' at Dave's.

Something else I saw at Dave's and which I unashamedly begged a cutting of was *Indigofera amblyantha*. At about 3 1/2 feet tall, it was covered with spires of small softpink pea-like flowers. This is a shrub that may get to 8 feet tall but can die back to ground level in colder climates. It was backed by *Clerodendron trichotoma*, its white star-like summer flowers gone, but still showy with its deep rose-red calyxes surrounding ripening blue berries.



Clerodendron trichotoma calyxes and berries at Dave DeLucia's.

A daylily my sister recently passed along from Illinois, *H.* 'Charleston Autumn Bronze', is two feet tall with golden flowers brushed coppery-bronze; it truly glows as if a light shone from within. Quacking Grass Nursery has a number of very late bloomers that should be available next year; *H.* 'Angles of White' is my favorite.

In a shadier area, *Tricyrtis formosana* pokes through the panicles of *Hydrangea* 'Tardiva', while a single stem of a *tricyrtis* seedling, its many white blossoms lilac spotted, arches into a path. A low-growing yellow-flowered toad lily with thick, gold-edged foliage was seen lightening up a dark spot at Variegated Foliage Nursery.



Tricyrtis formosana pokes through a hydrangea.

Along with aconitum, just now opening its dark blueviolet hoods, the waxy yellow bells of *Kirengeshoma palmata* still going strong, and the many and varied asters, frothy masses in shades of blues and lavenders, there are treats galore in the early autumn garden. And when many of these are done, the foliage will take over. What a delight, what a gift!

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What's happening in your garden? If you'd care to write a column for any particular time of year or on a particular subject, please contact the newsletter editor.