



# Newsletter

**North American Rock Garden Society**

Connecticut Chapter November/December 2012

## NARGS Seed Exchange

The Connecticut Chapter will once again be packaging seeds for the NARGS seed exchange. Members are invited to gather at the home of Maryanne Gryboski during the first week of December where they will clean and divide donors' seed into smaller packets that will later be distributed world-wide. This is an opportunity for members to give back to NARGS national; to be exposed to new and unfamiliar plant names, perhaps sparking an interest to grow new species; and to get to know other members. Conversation is lively and lunch is provided. Please contact Maryanne if you might be interested in helping; she will get back to you when definite dates have been set.

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Crocus sativus on October 28, 2012, waiting for hurricane Sandy. Photo by M. Gryboski

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**Consider joining NARGS national;** membership includes subscription to the Rock Garden Quarterly, the annual seedlist, and a growing web presence. Make checks for \$30 payable to North American Rock Garden Society and mail to: NARGS, P.O.Box 18604, Raleigh, NC 27619-8604; or go to the NARGS web site and click on 'Membership Form'.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I have been enjoying the reblooming of *Anemonella thalictroides* 'Shoaf's Double' which was just covered by snow. In fact, my alpines, woodland plants and perennials have performed exceptionally well this year. The best performer was my bog garden when the ladies-tresses (*Spiranthes*), a native orchid, bloomed for the first time!!! CT NARGS held a bog garden lecture & hands-on workshop at Comstock, Ferre & Co. in Wethersfield on Saturday, 26 February 2005. The pre-



sender was Randy Heffner from Aquascapes, Pipersville, PA. My bog garden is in a clay bowl, watered with rain water, and brought into my greenhouse for winter. Accompanying the ladies-tresses are pitcher plants, sundew and Venus' flytrap.

**Membership growth** in NARGS continues to be of importance. We need to interest new and younger people. The latest brochure from NARGS, describing its mission, will be a topic of the next newsletter. I suggest that we consider a presence at the Hartford Flower Show in February. It need not be a grand display as the Delaware Chapter does for the Philadelphia Flower Show, but think what we could present to the public, including a trough. Send your thoughts to me.

This fall I enjoyed visiting the Sid Waxman Conifer Collection at UCONN and the Tri-State meeting in Lyndhurst, NY; and I look forward to seed sorting and the NARGS Annual Meeting in North Carolina to explore the flora of the Blue Ridge.

~Ginny

## Meeting Report: September 23, 2012 A Tour of the Sydney Waxman Conifer Collection

Words, Barbara van Achterberg; photos, Maryanne Gryboski

Dr. Sydney Waxman was a UConn plant scientist who lived in a house on campus with 15 acres behind it which became his own research garden and nursery. His passion was growing choice forms of conifers, especially from genetic quirks popularly known as “witches’ brooms.” His wife, Florence, shared his passion and was a better tree climber than Sydney, often scaling a tree for the desired witches’ broom. Sidney also propagated plants from seed and cuttings. Some of the plants we saw are in the nursery trade here in Connecticut. (Prides Corner and John O'Brien were mentioned as carrying Waxman introductions). They are also available from nurseries well beyond our state borders.

After Sidney's death, Florence lived in the house a short time and then moved on. The upper story of the house is now rented to graduate students, and the first floor, very comfortably refurbished, is available to study groups and organizations such as our own by reservation.

Expecting a garden of dwarf conifers, I was surprised to see trees that towered over our heads, though they were still compact. Our guide, Sarah Bailey, a member of the UConn extension staff and a Master Gardener, explained that most of the plantings were 40 to 50 years old and were now in their full maturity. Sydney's nursery had been neglected in the years after his death, but four years ago members of the Master Gardener program sat down with the UConn Plant Sciences Department and Florence Waxman and developed a grant proposal to restore the nursery and develop it into a destination for visiting families and school classes, with comfortable seating and open spaces for running around and playing games.

The grant was successful and now The Waxman Conifer Collection is completely enclosed in a seriously heavy-duty deer fence. However, vegetable predators are not so

well controlled. I recognized my *bête noir*, oriental bitter-sweet, growing through some of the conifers and mentioned that a landscaper told me that cutting this plant to the ground would not kill it; only a concentrated systemic herbicide such as Roundup used full strength on the cut stem (or trunk) would do it in. Sarah Bailey said that the ideal time to do this was September 15 - October 15, when the sap will be drawn deep into the roots.



Sarah Bailey gives an overview of the Waxman Collection.

Since the UConn maintenance staff can mow the grass between the trees only occasionally, areas with conifers that branch out low are difficult to weed. On the Internet is a beautiful photo of *Larix decidua* 'Varied Directions,' a Waxman introduction of a European larch form. The same larch has now only recently been cleared of weeds and is looking a little bedraggled. Volunteers are assisting the Master Gardeners in maintenance, and more are welcome. Wild flowers will be planted and eventually there will be some new dwarf conifers added to the collection. The goal is to make this a showcase arboretum.

*See Waxman page 4.*

### NARGS CT CHAPTER OFFICERS

**CHAIR:** Ginny Gingras / 21 Timber Ln., Vernon, CT 06066 / 860.875.9865 / [ginygingras@netzero.com](mailto:ginygingras@netzero.com)

**VICE-CHAIR:** Dave DeLucia / 26 Overlook Dr., East Haddam, CT 06423 / [mrdcac@aol.com](mailto:mrdcac@aol.com)

**SECRETARY:** Barbara van Achterberg / 359 Silver Hill Rd., Easton, CT 06612 / 203.261.2156 / [bvanachterberg@yahoo.com](mailto:bvanachterberg@yahoo.com)

**TREASURER:** Sally Katkaveck / 82 Ashford Rd., Ashford, CT 06278 / 860.974.2563 / [sallybillkat@charter.net](mailto:sallybillkat@charter.net)

**NEWSLETTER EDITOR:** Maryanne Gryboski / 88 Eager Rd., Franklin, CT 06254 / 860.822.6589 / [strollgarden@aol.com](mailto:strollgarden@aol.com)

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



## Tri-State Meeting Report: October 14, 2012

Words, Maryanne Gryboski; photos, Nick Turland

The Tri-State meeting, held at the Lyndhurst Estate in Tarrytown, NY, drew a sizable crowd from four chapters. Nick Turland, Assoc. Curator in the Division of Science and Conservation at the Missouri Botanical Garden, gave two presentations, both focusing on his plant explorations in the 1990's. Nick became interested in botanizing as a youth when he and his dad first traveled to Crete to hike the mountains. His morning talk was aptly titled *Plant Hunting in the Mountains of Crete*.

Satellite images offered an overview of the Mediterranean basin, allowing the viewer to place Crete in relation to its neighbors, to get a sense of its scale – about the same as Long Island or Cape Cod – and of the three main mountain massifs. Ten percent of the flora is endemic to Crete, while the remaining can also be found in Turkey and the Balkan Peninsula. Snow covers the mountains November through April, in some cases as late as July; there is snow melt in spring and then it is dry throughout the summer. The mountains offer stiff limestone cliffs and high elevation karstic limestone (sinks or deep holes a hiker does not want to fall into!)

Slides of plants, some hardy and appropriate for crevice gardens, followed. *Onobrychis sphaciotica*, a rare chasmophyte (crevice grower), grows on the sides of exposed cliffs where any snow has been blown off. Its deep pink flowers with darker veining and closely alternate leaves hint at its leguminous relatives. *Alyssum fragillimum* is endemic to the island; with yellow flowers and apically crowded silver leaves, it trails the ground.



*Alyssum fragillimum*, endemic to Crete, trails the ground.



*Silene variegata*, rather odd and very desirable.

*Silene variegata* grows in scree and has succulent bluish-gray-tinged-purple foliage; the pink flowers, five petals so deeply notched there appear to be ten, sits above a pink-veined-mauve inflated sac. Very desirable! One of the rarest species, *Myosotis solange*, has typically blue forget-me-not flowers, but consists of a single patch on the mountain's side. *Daphne oleoides* has white flowers with a heady scent but is poisonous.

Many bulbs grow along the snow melt: *Crocus sieberi*, white with orange in the cup's base and styles and violet feathering on the exterior petals; *Scilla nana* subsp. *albescens*, a pale blue; the endemic *Tulipa cretica*, a soft pink with strong yellow at the base and relatively narrow curving leaves that lay flat to the ground.

The afternoon talk, *Plant Hunting in South-Western Turkey*, had a generally more familiar cast of characters. Satellite images of the area again gave us our bearings, and we began our "ascent" in the midst of a yellow carpet of *Eranthis hyemalis*, an easy bulb that sets seed freely and provides the gardener an inexpensive early spring wake-up. The lovely violet *Crocus biflorus* subsp. *isauricus*, white stars of *Ornithogalum* species, and *Galanthus elwesii* were shown.

The herbaceous *Paeonia mascula*, a rich dark rose-red, grows in the rather open cedar forest of Baba Dag; *Juniperus foetidissima*, *Acer undulatum* and *Cercis siliquastrum* subsp. *hebecarpa* – the Judas tree – can also be found.

See *Tri-State* page 4.



*Waxman continued from page 2.*



*Pinus strobus* 'Soft Touch' stands 8 to 9 feet tall.

Also seen were *Pinus strobus* 'Soft Touch,' an 8 to 9 foot globe that demands to be stroked, and *Pinus strobus* 'Sea Urchin,' equally soft and under 30 inches high at 40-50 years of age. *Tsuga canadensis* 'Florence' is wide and low and was named for Syd's wife. A Japanese umbrella pine, *Sciadopitys verticillata*, with very green leaves retains the green color all winter and is much hardier than other forms of the tree. Because of time limitations, we didn't make it to the rear of the property where Sarah told us there is a good view.

Back in the Waxman house, Sarah Bailey told us that fund-raising and cataloging were two continuing goals of the project. Syd took copious notes but didn't catalog; he was too busy teaching classes and working on his collection.

Leslie Alexander, the UConn State Master Gardener Coordinator, is the person to contact if you wish to arrange a walk-through. Her address, phone number and email are online.

A small plant sale was held to benefit the Chapter. We were delighted to welcome three new members—Patricia Justus, John Farrow and Sarah Bailey (our tour guide).

*Tri-State continued from page 3.*

*Fritillaria pinardii*, its small downward hanging bells of chestnut and yellow stripes, and the soft blue *Scilla forbesii* bloom during snow melt.

Higher up, *Lamium microphyllum* is a congestion of tiny leaves and covered with pink flowers; what a prize for the crevice garden! *Primula vulgaris* subsp. *vulgaris* is a deeper yellow than its European cousin. *Geranium cinereum* subsp. *subcaulescens* is beautiful, its softly felted leaves and pink flowers reminding me that I've wanted to find a place for it in my own garden. And the deep blue flowers of *Veronica caespitosa* would also do well here, as Nick had seen them in Anne Spiegel's Wappinger Falls, NY garden.

All of Nick's photographs can be found on Flickr: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/nturland/sets/> (these are downloads from that site) so check them out if you missed the program as there are many more to see.

The luncheon break allowed us to search out treasures at the vendors' tables - I brought home a *Rhododendron* 'Hillside Creeper' from Paul Waterman and a silver-leaved *Cyclamen hederifolium* - and to study the offerings on the raffle table, setting our top picks if our ticket would be drawn. I didn't get the rare *arisaema* that I had my eye on, but did win the dwarf *Iris odaesanensis* 'Chollipo', a Darrell Probst introduction.



*Crocus biflorus* subsp. *isauricus* shows deep purple feathering on the petal exterior.

The NARGS October Book of the Month review is by Ray Deutsch, NARGS member in Redwood City, Calif. The book is **Planting the Dry Shade Garden** by Graham Rice.

We all have a dry shade problem somewhere in our garden. And besides hellebores and ajuga, what else come to mind quickly: *Danae racemosa*, *Pentaglottis sempervirens*, to name two. This book lets you in on a few more selections and they are beautifully photographed, with vivid descriptions. It may not be Ken Druse's book or George Shenk's, but it is useful and funny. The idea of stir-frying *hemerocallis* is great. Here is a link to the book review by Ray on the NARGS Web site: <http://nargs.org/nargswiki/tikiindex.php?page=Book+of+the+Month>

Bobby J Ward