



# Newsletter

**North American Rock Garden Society**  
*Connecticut Chapter July/August 2012*

## **ANNUAL MEETING**

Sunday, 8 July 2012, 10:30 am  
Comstock, Ferre & Co.  
263 Main St.  
Wethersfield, CT 06109

Speaker: **James H. Locklear**

### **The View from Phlox Mountain**

Phlox is a genus of 60 species that includes many of America's most beloved wildflowers, and has yielded plants that are cultivated by gardeners around the world. This illustrated presentation will explore the ecology of phlox species in the wild and the history of their use in the garden. The presentation will be tailored to emphasize species of local or regional interest.

James Locklear has worked in the field of public horticulture for 25 years, serving 5 years as director of the Dyck Arboretum of the Plains in Kansas and 14 years as director of the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum. He has introduced several Great Plains native wildflowers into commercial production and also has conducted research on imperiled plants for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Nature Conservancy.

Bring lunch and anything of interest for show and tell.

Directions: from I 91, take Old Wethersfield Exit.

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There is no meeting in August. Our next meeting will be in September, date to be announced, when we will tour the Sidney Waxman Conifer Collection at the University of Connecticut in Storrs.

## **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

**GOOD NEWS:** Our July 8<sup>th</sup> meeting will be held in Wethersfield at **COMSTOCK, FERRE & CO.**, where I attended the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual "Heirloom Festival" on June 3<sup>rd</sup>. Among the Festival's featured speakers: Dr. Wm. Weaver, internationally known food historian and author who maintains the Roughwood Seed Collection in Devon, PA; a panel of seed company owners and managers including Richard Willard, Charlie Hart, Pierre Bennerup and Jere Gettle, which addressed the 'History of Comstock, Ferre & Co.'; and a GMO panel with Jeff Cordulack, conservation biologist, as moderator. I inquired about the use of their facility for meetings and, to my delight, found that we were very welcome and that the July date was open. And, we could arrange additional meetings there, depending on their schedule as they feature lectures open to the public on Sundays. Store hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Sunday through Friday. The owner, Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds Co., has 3 stores: Mansfield, MO (headquarters), Petaluma, CA, and Comstock, Ferre. The history of Baker Creek and Comstock is found in their seed catalogs, available at the store. Plans are afoot to restore Comstock's 11 historic buildings and the founder's 1767 house. Long time members of NARGS will recall that meetings were once held at Comstock, Ferre.

Our next program continues what has been a very informative and interesting year of speakers and topics. Jim Almond's presentation at Ballek's Garden Center in May was excellent, as was the tour of Dave DeLucia's garden (a must see!!). Maryanne and I enjoyed having Jim as guest; an avid birder, he was treated to a view of Connecticut's shore birds and a woodcock's sound and flight in Vernon. In June, Lori Chips gave another excellent program on trough planting and we enjoyed touring Oliver Nursery.

I hope to see you on July 8<sup>th</sup> for James Locklear's presentation.

~Ginny

## Meeting Report May 20, 2012

By *Maryanne Gryboski*

A perhaps too perfect May Sunday saw a small but enthusiastic group meet at Ballek's Garden Center to hear Jim Almond, from Shrewsbury UK, speak about growing al-pines and bulbs from seed. Having sown thousands of seed over the last twenty-odd years, he explained he would talk about what works for him and from which we might glean some useful information.

He mentioned sources for seed – the many plant society exchanges as well as professional seed sellers – but also reminded us to look to our own garden and ensure pollination of desirables by hand pollinating. A soft paint brush to spread pollen from blossom to blossom or a pair of tweezers to pluck an anther and rub onto the stigma, never forgetting “to hum like a bee” while doing so, might ensure pollination providing temperatures are warm enough. Harvested seed should be kept in glassine envelopes but not plastic bags as any trapped spores could proliferate and kill the seed. Seed will keep for up to 10 years in the fridge – providing your family doesn't object to the loss of space!

As to sowing, he uses a mix of equal parts vermiculite, grit and compost. He fills the pot, sprinkles the seed on, covers with grit and then waters. Very fine seed is sown atop the grit. Most hardy al-pines need cold to germinate so sowing in autumn and leaving outside is ideal. Some seeds, e.g. cyclamen, have chemical inhibitors that delay germination and these should be washed. Others may need chipping. He even showed seed being ‘smoked’, a process which speeds up germination for some difficult seed. Because clay dries out, use clean plastic pots and flats for sowing and be sure to label and keep records. Jim also applies two treatments of a dilute solution of copper sulfate, a fungicide, spraying one over the sown seed and a second when seed germinates in order to prevent damping-off.

As to aftercare: prick out when first true leaves form, don't allow seedlings to dry out, keep them shaded and

protect them from pests. Hepaticas grow better communally so should not be separated until after the second year, while many peonies form a root the first year and should be left until after top growth forms. When growing bulbs from seed, don't prick them out but grow on in pots for two years, feeding at half strength, never allowing them to dry out excessively. Something I thought interesting was his suggestion to grow seedlings on individually and not as clumps. In this way, a particularly choice clone would not become entangled with lesser beauties. (Or in my case, a clump of dianthus with a mix of carmine and bright pink bloom that shocks the eye would not have happened.)

Besides seed, propagation of some choice plants might be done by cuttings; gesneriads and ericacea are two such groups. I was especially excited by his suggestion to try ramonda from leaf cuttings; the one plant that I purchased from Paul Waterman a few years back would like company, I think, and I've had no luck from seed. This provides an alternative solution.



*Saxifraga 'Coolock Gem', named after Jim's daughter.  
Photo by Jim Almond.*

Don't think that this presentation was all instruction, for interspersed throughout were eye-catching photos of many beauties: *Hepatica x media* 'Millstream Merlin', large flowers of rich blue-violet, introduced by our own Linc Foster; *Paeonia turcica*, pushing up pink buds; *Primula* 'Broadwell Milkmaid', a mound of lovely white blooms with lightly greened eyes; *Lewisia* 'Ashwood

*Continued on next page.*

### **NARGS CT CHAPTER OFFICERS**

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

Pearl', a cross of *L. cotyledon* and *L. longipetala*, in a pearly white with a soft pink center; and two saxifrages, S.'Coolock Gem', a white, and 'Coolock Kate', a pink with darker eye, which were chosen from Jim's own seedlings and named after his daughters. Many cyclamen (sow this seed fresh), flowers ranging from deep pinks to white, one coloring almost black at the flower's base, and with various leaf mottling, were shown and we were encouraged to try, besides the hardy *hederifolium*, *coum* and even *purpurescens* which Jim saw growing in Anne Spiegel's garden.

Variability from seed can be extreme as was evidenced in the many shots of *Fritillaria acmopetala*, the reddish-brown marking ranging from mottled to solid, or *Trillium grandiflorum* 'striped form', white with a pink stripe down the center of each sepal. And I think that this was an important point in Jim's talk: it's that variability, that chance of growing something different, and wonderful, which can come only from sowing seed.

Photos of Juno irises, of which Jim holds a national collection, rounded out the show. *I. bucharica*, butter yellow falls with white standards; *I. aucheri*, a lovely soft blue; and *I. cycloglossa*, a deeper blue with yellow ridge, are all easy to grow and offer early spring color.



Lewisia cotyledon hybrids grace raised beds in the gravel drive at Dave DeLucia's. Photos by M. Gryboski.

A small auction took place after the program and then it was time to travel to Dave DeLucia's nearby garden. Here the gravel drive, dotted with self-sown johnny-jump-ups of a particularly dark purple, holds low raised beds where lewisia and *delosperma* are currently blooming. Various species of *arisaema*, including two interesting selections of the native *A. triphyllum*, grow around the house and the shaded back hill holds many rhododendrons. R. 'Gigi' caught the attention of many with its huge rose-red blooms in a ball-shaped truss, and I particularly liked R. 'Percy Wiseman'. Dave is creative in his use of materials to achieve certain growing conditions as is evidenced by a series of concrete blocks in which *Primula allionii* grow in porous medium, or by his collection of cyclamen which are individually tucked into small

clay pots that are then sunk into the ground, protecting the corms against both rodents and too much wet.

In all, the day offered many delightful sights and much to consider.

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### Launch of *ROCK GARDEN QUARTERLY* Online

The world of publishing is undergoing the most dramatic changes since Gutenberg invented the printing press over 500 years ago. The Board of Directors of NARGS has recognized that we need to embrace this change, in line with our President's commitments at the last two Annual General Meetings.

The *Rock Garden Quarterly* is now into its 70th year and for all that time it's been changing to reflect the times, and to use new printing technology as it has become available.

So, now the *Rock Garden Quarterly* will be published in digital form as well as the traditional paper form - and members have access free. There will be an introduction to some of the features in the Summer issue of the *Quarterly*, but you can try the Spring issue right now on desk-top, laptop, iPad, iPhone, etc:

<<http://www.nxtbook.com/allen/roga/70-2>>

In the future, the digital edition will be available around the same date that NARGS members receive their mailed copy.

This is not a replacement for the printed *Quarterly* - this is a BONUS. From now on NARGS members will be able to access the *Quarterly* online and read it on their electronic device, as well as continuing to receive their printed issues as they do currently.

The launch of the *Rock Garden Quarterly* online is a great development for NARGS, and we really hope you'll enjoy it in this new extra format.

Remember the electronic version is a free extra - have your cake and eat it too!

And to give those who aren't NARGS members a view of what we're doing, the same link works for nonmembers, too.

Very best wishes,

Malcolm McGregor  
Editor, *NARGS Rock Garden Quarterly*

## Trough Planting Demonstration by Lori Chips

By Barbara van Achterberg

Oliver Nurseries is on a hillside in Fairfield covered with acres of exquisite alpiners, woody plants, vines, perennials and annuals, mostly quite choice. We found Lori Chips hard at work in the alpine section. It was hard to tear ourselves away from the plants in pots and in garden beds, but eventually we all gathered around Lori, who was standing before a sturdy trough worktable.

Lori first gave us handouts, which were excellent, on 'Hypertufa Trough Recipe', 'Creating a Hypertufa Trough', 'Building a Trough on a Sand Mold', 'Soil Mix for Troughs', 'Winter Care of Troughs', and by request from a member of our Chapter, 'Shade Troughs'. I had to contrast her six handouts to the total lack of them at the last trough demonstration I attended, where we signed a list with our email addresses for copies. I am still waiting for that email to arrive.

Lori next showed us how to build a sand trough, stressing that it should be at least 6 inches deep to grow anything other than sedum and sempervivum. She used a sponge to demonstrate the superior drainage of a deep vs. shallow trough, crediting Gwen Kelaidis for using this example at one of her talks.

Lori pointed out that because rocks are a good addition to a trough people like to collect them, which is fine. But some are endangered and illegal to collect! Beach and rounded rocks are harder to design with than sharp rocks. Use similar rocks in a given trough. Create an outcrop with striation going the same way.



Lori Chips demonstrates placement of rock in a trough.

The drainage holes at the bottom of the trough should be covered with window screening to prevent entry of pests.

This is especially important because in winter, any trough that is not too big to handle should be lowered to ground level.

The soil mix should be moistened and free draining. Put in a little more soil than you think you need. First, position rocks and any shrub(s), play with that, and then nudge in perennials. When removing a plant from its pot, do not brutalize it. Remove the top layer of soil to minimize weed problems, then turn the pot upside down and tap on the edge of a bench, holding the plant between your fingers. It will fall out intact.

80-90% of plants you want to grow in a trough will be sun lovers. About 10% of small plants will grow in the shade. How much shade do you have? If begonias and impatiens will not flower, your shade is deep. Medium shade is better for a trough and light shade is best. Light shade is 5 hours unoccluded sun here in Connecticut. Some suitable shade plants are dwarf hostas, dwarf astilbes, miniature hemlocks, *Lysimachia japonica* 'Minutissima' and *Ophiopogon japonicus* 'Nana.' For light shade, lewisias, androsaces and saxifragas can be tried. Silver saxes do better planted right in rock, either tufa or some other rock that will give them a foot-hold (not granite). In the ground, they almost always die, even with lots of gravel.



A sampling of planted troughs, the center trough showing a silver sax embedded into tufa.

How can you tell if a plant is shade tolerant or shade loving? If it is shade tolerant, it leans toward the sun. If it is shade loving, it doesn't.

When planting a trough for sun, plant silver plants on a crest and place emerald green plants below, where it is cool. In the demonstration trough Lori planted for us, she actually dug a gully between two rock outcroppings and

See *Troughs* on next page.

## GARDEN TIMES IN JUNE

By Angela H. Fichter

I am writing this on yet another cold, wet day in early June, and I am reminded of how lucky we are to have all this rain. Aside from filling up our wells and washing the pollen out of the air, the rain forms the life-blood of the garden. If you have ever lived in Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Eastern Oregon or Eastern Washington, then you will know what gardening in a dry climate is like. With-out irrigation, there is no garden. Here in Connecticut we just wait for the heavens to open to get water to our gar-dens. True, we sometimes have to supplement with hose or watering can, but mostly the clouds deliver the goods.

One summer we visited my brother and his family in North Carolina when they were having a drought, and government ordered water rationing was in place. Their area, once farmland, is now miles and miles of subdivisions filled with people escaping cold weather. The public water supply comes from reservoirs, and those reservoirs were drying up fast. People were forbidden from watering their lawns or gardens, forbidden from washing their cars. My brother had placed a barrel next to the eave trough so that on the rare occasion it rained he could use the water on his garden. Very early one morning I took a walk around his neighborhood and admired the flowers and bushes that can grow in Southern climes. I noticed a rivulet of water coming down the street in the gutter. Curious, I followed the rivulet to its source: a driveway that was still damp on one side near a suspiciously clean car. I marveled at how early this water cheater had to get up to wash his car so no neighbor would report him. I took this walk before 6AM. Did he wash the car at 4AM in the dark? And who would the neighbors call to report his crime? The water-police? Would they come armed with shears to cut his water hose to shreds? Or would they just cut off his water supply at some central plant and then laugh when he tried to flush the toilet? Maybe the government fines perpetrators. Fifty dollars for one car washed, twenty dollars for a motorcycle, and ten for a bicycle.

Water is such a vital part of our life. Our body's principal chemical component is water, which makes up 60% of our weight. We must drink water, even if it's in the form of tea or coffee, each day to maintain our health. Water is used as a symbol in many religions to cleanse away our sins. We use it to cleanse our bodies and clothes. And we use it to refresh our spirits. Just look at children on a warm, rainy day. They are out in the rain, lifting their faces to the sky, prancing around and exhilarating in the joy of it all. Happy June to you!

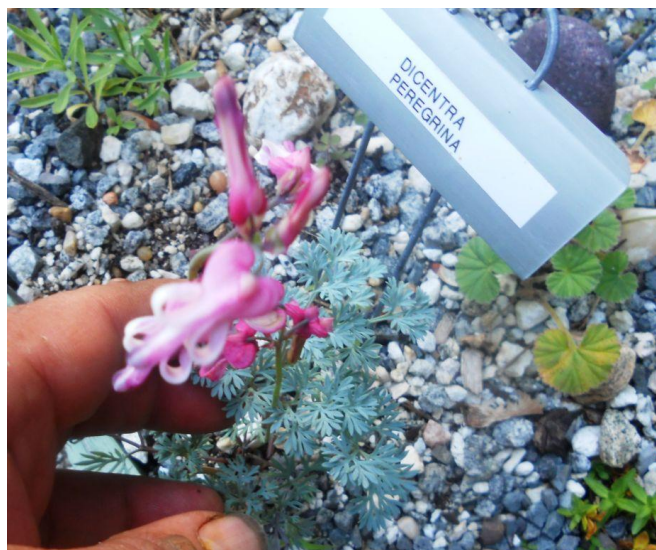
*Troughs con't from previous page.*

planted *Campanula* 'W.H. Payne', with bright green leaves, inside the hollow. Since the whole trough was mounded, the hollow wasn't that deep.

Lori showed us how to freshen a trough by scraping away a bit of soil from the top and adding fresh soil mix with a slow release fertilizer, such as osmocote, and top-dressing with ¼ inch of gravel.

All the sections of Oliver Nurseries are connected with paths, easily navigated by the many green garden carts on the premises. Most of us left with carts of plants; for me, *Dracocephalum ruyschianum*, a charmer loaded with blue penstemon-like flowers, and *Glaucidium pal-matum* var. *leucanthum* from the sale table. Thanks, Dave DeLucia, for pointing that out to me. I already have two *glaucidiums* with lavender flowers, but have failed several times to grow the white one from seed. I also picked up two bags of the special sharp-edged grey gravel that looks so good on the Oliver Nurseries troughs.

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### In My Garden: *Dicentra peregrina*

*Words and photo by Dave DeLucia*

*Dicentra peregrina* is considered the jewel of the genus. Until this year, it has only been a temporary resident of my rock garden. However, a mild winter can bring about wonders. My one plant has several flowers which have lasted 3 weeks! For those in an adventurous mood, it grows in full sun, preferring a lean gravelly soil with NO humus or peat. Evermay Nursery in Maine is a source of this bewitching species.