



Newsletter

North American Rock Garden Society
Connecticut Chapter August/September 2011

SEPTEMBER MEETING

Sunday, 18 September 2011, 10:00 am
Ballek's Garden Center
90 Maple Ave.
East Haddam, CT 06423

Speaker: John Grimshaw

John Grimshaw is both gardener and botanist. He holds a first class degree in botany and a doctorate in African forest ecology from Oxford University, but he is fascinated by all plants and will attempt to grow anything in the garden. The origins of garden plants are of particular interest and he has traveled widely to see plants growing in habitat.

John worked in the Netherlands where he developed perennials for the seed trade and is currently Gardens Manager at Colesbourne Park, Gloucestershire. He is co-author of the monograph *Snowdrops* (2002) and was principal author of a major book on trees introduced in the past 35 years entitled *New Trees, Recent Introductions to Cultivation* (2009).

He will be presenting on two topics: 'Snowdrops and Other Early Spring Bulbs', to start at about 10:30 and, after a break for business meeting/lunch/plant auction and book sales, 'Plantsman's Choice – Plants I Like and the Reasons Why'.

Bring a lunch and any plants you might wish to contribute to the auction or present for show & tell.

Directions: From Rt. 9, take exit 7; at the end of the (long) ramp, take a left onto Rt. 154N. Go ¼ mile to 1st light and take a right onto Rt. 82. Cross the bridge. At the fork, bear right following Rt. 82. Go 1 mile to 1st stop sign and take a left onto Rt. 151. In ¼ mile take a left onto Maple Ave.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

An unusual looking *Digitalis* (foxglove) appeared in my garden this year. Millie Latawic's daughter, Fairlee, told me that her mother had several of these plants growing in her garden, but they disappeared after a time. I did not plant any foxglove in my gardens. My neighbor has some plants, but not the variety (or sport) shown. I showed the photo to Bill Cullina while we were at the Annual meeting in New Hampshire and he had never seen a plant like it.



I show this picture to make the point that we have in the Rock Garden Society members who have interesting and unusual plants which they have collected and grow in their gardens...and, when they can, they share willingly with others. We all learn about plants and techniques from each other. I suggest that we continue the practice of sharing and learning by having members make brief presentations, at meetings or in the newsletter, on the plants they grow and the techniques they use. When I view gardens and contrast them with gardens of NARGS members, the difference is stark. We grow more unusual plants, often not found in the typical garden center...we are constantly exploring and learning about an astounding variety of plants....the world over.

~ Ginny

Meeting Report: 10 July 2011

by Barbara van Achterberg

Our annual meeting and potluck lunch took place at the delightful garden of Joan Mencil in Shelton. The trip itself was a treat for me, taking just over half an hour instead of the usual 1½ to 2 hours from my home in northern Fairfield County. We welcomed a new member, Dave Deluccia from East Haddam, who proved to be quite knowledgeable about plants. As more people kept arriving, exchanging greetings and catching up on news, Joan put off the garden tour until firmly coaxed by the Secretary, who needed names of plants and information for this report!

In a place of honor stood *Abies koreana* 'Silberlocke', purchased only 3 to 4 years ago, and looking perfect with its symmetry and frosty needle tips. In visits to the Netherlands I have seen many beautiful Korean firs, but never realized they could do so well here in Connecticut. Joan also has an evergreen magnolia, so maybe her garden is in a sheltered microclimate in Shelton. Hostas are one of her specialties, and they were beautiful indeed. I was surprised to see a gorgeous green and gold hosta growing in semi-sun. Maybe I'll try moving some of mine this fall to give them some more light.

Joan and her husband have used broken pieces of asphalt from a former driveway as paving stones going down to a woodland garden on their property. It made an attractive path in dappled shade, but probably would not work in the sun. We followed this path to a moister area where Jack in the pulpits, lady slippers, more hosta, *Crocus vernus* in many colors, hydrangeas, heucherella and 'Vulcan', a good red rhododendron, were thriving in shade or semi-sun. Actually, Joan told us, only one of the heucherellas was thriving; the others had died.

Celandine poppy, a weed, was definitely happy there, and Joan let some grow to enjoy their long blooming yellow flowers, while removing those in the way of other plants.

The lunch was as delicious as it is every year. Rock gardeners are good cooks! Coolers and ice were kept out on this hot summer day.

The officers all agreed to continue another year. Emily Ferguson will co-chair the program committee.

Even in the middle of summer, the auction saw sales of double bloodroot, *iris tectorum*, *Geranium renardii*, *Daphne mezereum*, *Hydrastis canadensis* and more. My \$1 *Stewartia pseudocamellia* will stay in its pot till at least 2012.

There will be a meeting at the Ballek's Garden Center in East Haddam on September 18. John Grimshaw will do two talks starting at 10 am. We may visit Dave Deluccia's nearby garden afterward if we like.

Tri-State Meeting

The Tri-State meeting will be held on Sunday, October 16, 10 AM, at Lyndhurst in Tarrytown, NY. This year's speaker is Malcolm McGregor, current editor of *Rock Garden Quarterly*, who will present two lectures. Plant sales, a raffle, and auction are scheduled. Lecture details will appear in the October newsletter.

One or two vehicles from CT chapter always travel to the Tri-State meeting. If you'd like to go and want to car pool, contact Maryanne (info in box below) and she will coordinate rides.

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.*

A Trip to a Prairie

by *Barbara van Achterberg*

On August 13, my daughter and I woke up in a hotel in DuPage County, Illinois, not far from Chicago. We were both going to a niece's wedding at 4:30 that afternoon and needed something to do for the morning. In the hotel's booklet of attractions we read about Morton Arboretum. Visiting an arboretum in August did not seem too exciting until I read about the Schulenberg Prairie, a 100 acre restored prairie, planted completely in species native to the original surrounding tallgrass prairie. For years I have wanted to see a prairie and this was a chance. We paid our entrance fee and drove to the Prairie Visitor Station at the westernmost part of the arboretum.

The 1.5 mile loop began in the shade of burr oaks, but quickly changed to grasses and flowers that averaged waist-high. The path was hard to see, narrow and composed of masonry blocks that allowed drainage. The plants brushed our clothes and skin, yet never scratched us. (Do weeders make regular tours of the loop removing thorny plants from the edges of the path?) Every now and then we saw signs naming the predominant plants. Prairie Dock (*Silphium terebinthinaceum*) is 2 feet tall, rough like sandpaper and resembles elephant ears. Compass plant (*Silphium laciniatum*) at first resembled a fern with its deeply dissected leaves on 4 to 5 foot stems.

It was named by early settlers who believed that the leaves pointed either north or south. (Many, but not all, of them did.) We were either too early or late to see its tall stalks of yellow flowers.

Familiar to us were butterfly weed, purple and yellow coneflower and black-eyed Susan. In bloom all along our walk was flowering spurge (*Euphorbia corollata*), a low plant with masses of pretty white flowers. Rattlesnake master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*) was going to seed. Grasses included both the diminutive prairie dropseed and the big bluestem. Somehow the lower plants didn't get crowded out by the taller ones. I recognized the leaves of numerous robust gentians, probably prairie gentian which, unlike most of its genus, tolerates drought.

Northeastern Illinois is not suffering from drought this summer; the sunny morning on the prairie gave way to an afternoon and evening deluge. The beautifully staged garden wedding we were on our way to moved indoors. The wedding tent handlers had to remain all evening to keep the rain out. It was still great fun.

Morton Arboretum was the home of the Joy Morton, the founder of Morton Salt, and was left by the family as a center for plant lovers and learners. It has many educational components and a friendly and helpful staff who answered questions after our walk.



Two additional scenes from our May visit to the garden of Anne Spiegel.