

January 2018 PVC Bulletin

Potomac Valley Chapter(PVC)
North American Rock Garden Society
(District of Columbia, Maryland & Virginia)

Note new web address: www.rockgardencmetro.org



Galanthus, Nancy Goodwin's garden



Fall crocus, Nancy Goodwin's garden

Spring 2018 Events Calendar

Programs are Saturdays at 10am (coffee at 9:30 am), unless otherwise noted.

January 10-12, Mid-Atlantic Trade Show (MANTS) Baltimore Convention Center

<http://www.mants.com/>

January 27, Bill Johnson, former volunteer coordinator and horticulturist, Hillwood Gardens

Location: United States Botanic Garden, 100 Maryland Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20001

February lecture, details, TBD

March lecture, details TBD

March 24, Lahr Native Plant Symposium and sale, US National Arboretum

April, (early) Tentative Field Trip to Quarry Gardens at Schuyler

<http://quarrygardensatschuyler.org/> Located in and around a former soapstone quarry, The Quarry Gardens are nestled in a 600-acre property about a half-hour south of Charlottesville, VA. The gardens opened in the Spring 2017 to showcase native flora, both existing and introduced, and to preserve and exhibit the relics of the soapstone quarry industry. Designed areas include prairies, butterfly and pollinator gardens, an amended wetland, three vernal pools, barrens, a fern gully, and a waterside talus.

April 28-29 FONA Garden Fair/ Plant Sale, US National Arboretum (This year Saturday 10am to 1pm members only; 1-4pm open to the public; Sunday 10-4pm, open to the public)

May 19, Plant Sale, Green Spring Gardens

May 26, Plant Exchange, home of John Willis , Frederick, MD

Annual Membership Dues: \$15. Please send checks, payable to PVC NARGs, to:
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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE from Kevin McIntosh

After attending the North American Rock Garden Society (NARGS) Annual Meeting in Raleigh/Durham, North Carolina, in mid-November, I have a new appreciation for our parent organization. NARGS has apparently dug themselves out of a financial hole thanks to donations from individuals and chapters such as ours (we donated \$500 to them last year, which was matched by PVC member and current NARGS President Betty Spar. This in turn was matched by a \$1000 donation from the Rocky Mountain Chapter).

So what does NARGS do for us?

The Rock Garden Quarterly, which has been published for 75 years, is a wealth of information for rock gardeners and hardy plant enthusiasts. I've noticed a distinct uptick in the relevance and quality of the articles published this year, including articles on the basics of rock gardening, rain and bog gardens (construction and plants), construction of crevice gardens and, of course, wonderful pieces on plants. Many of these articles focused not only on rock garden plants, but also on other types of hardy plants we can grow in our area.

It is also worth noting that NARGS acknowledges most members grow plants OTHER than those for the rock garden. There was discussion at the Annual Meeting about changing the name of NARGS to the North American Rock Garden and Hardy Plant Society! Furthermore, **NARGS is going to start propagating plants** that chapters can purchase at wholesale prices to sell for fundraising. These "NARGS Select" plants will be chosen by a committee, including Panayoti Kelaidis, Tony Avent, Darrell Probst and others, and sales will kick back money to NARGS. Plants should be ready for distribution as early as next year or 2019. Looks like a win-win for everyone.

I can't emphasize enough the importance of the **seed exchange**, also sponsored by NARGS. It's one of the best seed exchanges in the world. If you are a NARGS member, you can order 25 packets of seed from a list of hundreds of entries for a mere \$15. If you donate seed to the exchange, you have first dibs and get an extra 10 packets of seed. Many of the offerings aren't available in the trade, so the only way to get them is to grow them from seed. I've been growing NARGS seed for the past 10 years with about 75% of the seed successfully germinating. The great thing is I have plenty of plants to share and to experiment with in my own garden. Yes, there is a learning curve to growing plants from seed, but to help with that we may sponsor a seed germination workshop if enough members are interested. Also see this article about seed sowing posted to the website.

Finally, there are the conferences and tours NARGS puts together. **The Annual Meeting last month was wonderful. Read all about it in this *Bulletin*:** Jane Collins writes about the Pre-conference field trip to the coastal plain of NC and Judy Zatsick about the AGM. I saw old friends, made new ones and enjoyed the experience immensely. Where else can you get an hour or more of Tony Avent's time and beg cuttings from a wonderfully fragrant dwarf *Osmanthus* in full bloom in November?

NARGS is also sponsoring a trip to Yunnan, China, next June (led by Panayoti Kelaidis), which should be a once-in-a-lifetime adventure. In July the Newfoundland Chapter is hosting a meeting. Escape the DC heat and humidity and watch floating icebergs and whales in a region where alpines meet the sea – not to be missed!

So what are you waiting for? If you are not already a member of NARGS, give them a shot for a year. I think you will find membership at the national level rewarding.

NARGS 2017 Pre-Conference Trip to the Coastal Plain of North Carolina

by Jane Collins; photos by Sarah Strickler

This trip was held from November 15th to the 16th prior to the annual meeting in Raleigh/Durham, North Carolina. Our guide was Larry Mellichamp, an expert on the flora of the southeastern United States, former director of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte



Taxodium ascendens, Jones Lake

Botanical Gardens and author of *Native Plants of the Southeast*, published by the Timber Press in 2014. Approximately thirty participants took a bus to four sites on the coastal plain to view the typical native plants of this extremely diverse area. The first stop was Jones Lake State Park where we learned the differences between Lob lolly pine (*Pinus taeda*) and the Longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*), both found throughout the coastal plain. Highlights were Titi (*Cyrilla racemiflora*) covered with attractive hanging seedpods, plus many confusing broadleaf evergreen shrubs and trees, such as Loblolly bay (*Gordonia lasianthus*), Red bay (*Persea borbonia*), Sweet bay (*Magnolia virginiana*), Shining fetterbush (*Lyonia lucida*) and Dwarf wax myrtle (*Morella pumila*).

In the afternoon we visited Lake Waccamaw State Park where two unusual plants were found:



Long leaf pine forest

Southern sheepkill (*Kalmia carolina*), still with a few pink flowers, and mat-forming Pixie-moss (*Pyxidantha barbulate*) hiding below the fall leaves. Other plants of note were Big gallberry (*Ilex coriacea*), Huckleberry (*Gaylussacia frondosa*), Southern dwarf huckleberry (*Gaylussacia dumosa*) and Devilwood or Wild olive (*Osmanthus americanus*).

The next morning we traveled to the Green Swamp Reserve, a huge wetland area of low and high pocosins and home to many carnivorous plants. The flora of this fabulous spot is among the most diverse in North America. Under a groundcover layer of Inkberry (*Ilex glabra*) and Creeping blueberry (*Vaccinium crassifolium*) were patches of Venus flytrap (*Dionaea muscipula*), their wide mouths open waiting for insects, and an amazing variety of Pitcher plants (*Sarracenia spp.*) of different shapes, colors and sizes.



Sarracenia rubra



Sarracenia flava

A new shrub I had never seen before was Horse sugar (*Symplocos tinctoria*) and a special treat was the stunning blue of the Pine barren gentian (*Gentiana autumnalis*) that opened for us as we left this location of incredibly rich flora.

Our last stop was that afternoon--we explored Carolina Beach State Park next to the Cape Fear River, a transitional zone for salt water and freshwater plants called a Maritime Evergreen



Pine barren gentian
Coastal Forest.



Venus fly trap

Typical of this sandy habitat were three oaks: Sand live oak (*Quercus geminata*), Sand laurel oak (*Quercus hemisphaerica*) and Turkey oak (*Quercus laevis*). Other plants seen included Groundsel bush (*Baccharis halimifolia*), Yaupon holly (*Ilex vomitoria*), many different grasses and a striking shrub called Coral bean (*Erythrina herbacea*) with arrowhead-shaped leaves and brilliant red berries in long leguminous pods.

Highlights of the Raleigh/Durham NARGS Annual Meeting, November 2017

by Judy Zatsick, horticulturist at Green Spring Gardens; photos by Sarah Strickler

If you've been toying with the idea of attending a NARGS annual meeting, I encourage you to jump in and sign up. I have thoroughly enjoyed attending them over the last several years. You'll start to see familiar faces after just a few meetings and make new friends while exploring the environs of each location with garden enthusiasts from all over the country. Attendees usually include a sprinkling of guests from other countries as well. Most meetings offer outstanding lectures, amazing images of plants, fabulous field trips, plant and book sales, and opportunities to experience local food, craft brews and more. In short, adult camp for garden geeks.



Display garden at PDN

The NARGS annual meeting in November in Raleigh/ Durham, North Carolina, was no exception. The Piedmont Chapter did a stunning job of organizing a range of speakers and field trips. The engaging schedule kept participants busy from sun up to well into the evening. This meeting even included a fundraiser auction led by Plant Delights founder and auctioneer par excellence, Tony Avent.

NARGS executive secretary, Bobby Ward, gave an overview of fabulous

rock gardens and their gardeners. Garden curator of the Elizabeth Lawrence House and Garden, Andrea Sprott, shared her knowledge and passion for this historic site. Lawrence used her entire property as a testing ground for a wide variety of plants to learn what grows best in the middle south.

Larry Mellichamp, retired Professor of Botany and Horticulture, and director of the Botanical Gardens at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, presented an outstanding lecture on carnivorous plants, one of his great passions. His lecture included stellar images of *Sarracenia*, *Drosera*, and *Dionaea*, and useful details about their culture and natural history. He proudly displayed Dixie Lace, Mardi Gras, Lady Bug and Doodlebug, all *Sarracenia* hybrids he developed.



Crevice garden, PDN

His plants were available for sale and in the silent auction and many of us took advantage and brought a little bit of North Carolina home with us.

One of the most inspiring lectures was by Jeremy Schmidt, Juniper Level Botanic Garden

Research Horticulturist and Grounds Supervisor at Plant Delights. Jeremy is responsible for the amazing crevice garden created from urbanite (cement debris) that he designed and built at the nursery. Armed with a cement saw, he carved the cement rubble into rock like shapes, which he then aligned and organized to create a fabulous, naturalistic crevice garden. Cleverly manipulating the irrigation system, he even fabricated a realistic seep to drip along a rock face in the garden. The newly installed garden is packed with zone pushing plants including the many *Mangave* hybrids Tony has been working on. I can't wait to see how this garden develops.



Crevice garden, PDN

lovely estate with big sweeps of snowdrops and cyclamen enchanting visitors along woodland paths. Nancy kindly led visitors through her gardens, outlining the development and highlights of her lifelong commitment to horticulture.

John Grimshaw, Director of the Yorkshire Arboretum in North Yorkshire England, shared wonderful images of *Galanthus*, *Cyclamen*, *Eranthis*, *Crocus* and other winter gems.

Tim Alderton, Horticulturist at JC Raulston Arboretum, illuminated the life of the garden's namesake. And author Joseph Tychonievich discussed his book on rock gardening, with tips on how to attract younger members to our national and local organizations.

Listening to excellent speakers talk about plants is inspiring, but visiting gardens and nurseries are really the highlights of the meetings. Attendees were fortunate to visit Montrose, Nancy Goodwin's

Other sites explored included the JC Raulston arboretum with its fabulous scree garden, the Sarah P Duke garden, the arboretum at UNC and the ever-changing and cutting-edge gardens at Plant Delights Nursery. Several of the PDN polyhouses were open so guests got to shop for some of Tony's newest selections. It was a wonderful whirlwind weekend.



Fall color at Sarah P Duke gardens

NARGS will hold its 2018 annual meeting in Newfoundland. Sign up, you won't regret it!

Creating a Space for Rock Garden Plants

by Jim Hughes

Building a rock garden has been on my horticultural lust list since moving from Minnesota to Maryland over 20 years ago. I finally got around to it this fall.

The house I moved into in 1996 was constructed on a relatively flat area of pure clay, and the other half of the property was a wooded hillside with less than an inch of topsoil. In the first few years most of my focus was on amending the clay soil around the house and controlling erosion on the hill as I removed the English ivy covering most of it. I slowly started defining garden beds in both areas but struggled picturing how a rock garden would integrate into the overall design. I also knew I could not grow many of the traditional alpine rock garden plants that thrived in the cool environment I left behind in the land of 10,000 lakes. So, I put off making a decision about my rock garden. There were so many plants I wanted to grow now that I had graduated from lowly Zone 4 to the heady heights of Zone 7.

Over time, however, I realized a number of plants I wanted to try required the super drainage and lean soil rock gardens offer. This fall I was determined to identify a “rock garden” area and take the necessary steps to amend the soil and place larger stones that would define the space.

Many years ago I purchased a dozen attractive tufa rocks from a local Maryland nursery. I thought these porous, irregular shaped stones were good candidates for such a space, but I only had about a dozen. My rock garden would have to be fairly limited in size. It would not be a huge expanse of scree or crevices with large rocks. Blending it into the overall garden design on my ½ acre lot was also important to me. So, I looked for a small, self-contained, area. I settled on a 20-foot long by 4-foot wide space that runs parallel with a brick retaining wall and separates the flat area of the property from the hillside. Luckily a path also runs parallel to this brick wall and new rock garden space, so miniature plants can be easily viewed and appreciated up close. The brick retaining wall would also allow me to raise the soil level by mounding it against the wall.



Photo 1, left, shows the area after all plants were removed and 3” of topsoil carted away. The space is ready for a lean rock garden mix with super drainage!

When I researched how best to amend the soil and build a raised rock garden bed, I settled on the following recipe: the first layer would be 6



to 8 inches of broken pieces of cement block, brick, and rock rubble; 3 inches of sand would be added



Photos 2, left, and 3, right, show the first layer of rubble

to keep the rubble separate from the next layer; a 3 inch soil mix (1 part garden soil, 1 part pea gravel, 1 part leaf mold) would be layered on top of the sand; all would be topped off with a mix of 1-2 inches of tan pea gravel and gray pond gravel after plants are installed.

photo 4 shows the 3 inches of sand.



After creating the layers of soil, I started to place and group the tufa rock.

Photo 5 (below right) was taken after topsoil, gravel, leaf mold mix was added.

Sometimes I arranged them all at the same angle; sometimes I

focused on grouping them in small vignettes where stones seemed to “speak to” one another. Since none of the stones have “tops” or “bottoms” many were flipped and turned for different effects. I tried to space them in irregular intervals. I am sure I will continue to rearrange them many times, especially once I start adding plants. See sample of stones in photos 6 – 7 below



By the time I got the Tufa stones added, it was getting too late in the year to add plants. That will occur next spring. In the meantime, the



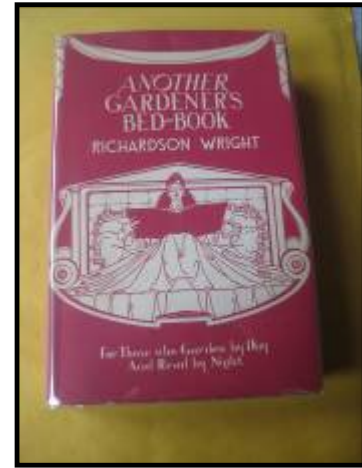
soil can settle, and I can also start compiling my plant wish list. If all goes well, I should be able to give an update next summer.

Winter Reading on Rock Gardens

by Jim McKenney

Richardson Wright's 1933 *Another Gardener's Bed-Book* mentions rock gardens several times. For instance: “June 24, Ultimate Alpines. My innate vulgarity boiled up to the surface when I read, the other day, a suggestion that those who wished to grow high alpines properly should

equip their gardens with air-conditioned greenhouses that would provide all year the exact type of icy blasts to which these minutiae of the higher peaks are accustomed. For a scientific establishment that may be all right, but for the home gardener it is cutting his sport a little too fine. I hold that we should avoid the precious in gardening. It should be robust and for the general run of mankind, not too scientific. I hate seeing my favorite sport dolled up in a Lord Fauntleroy collar."



H. Stuart Ortloff and Henry B. Raymore *Garden Planning and Building* the revised 1945 edition, gives good advice on the place of the rock garden in modern gardens. In the introductory chapter, on the selection of a site for building a home they write: "No home should be built on less than a half-acre...." Remember, that was written over a half century ago (and likely based on experience gained a century ago: hardly our world).

First edition available on Ebay for \$75!

In the chapter on rock gardens: "Anyone who has followed this discussion thus far must feel that the authors consider it almost out of the question for the suburban small home owner to have a good rock garden...but the dry wall can be built and enjoyed almost anywhere...and such a dry wall offers an ideal place for growing a great many desirable and interesting plants." Too bad so few modern gardeners follow this advice.

Wright, Ortloff and Raymore were all active in the early-mid twentieth century. Both books provide fascinating glimpses of a world long gone and they make great winter reading.

Editor's note: A quick Google search reveals that *The Gardener's Bed-Book* by Richardson Wright was reissued in 2003 and is available on Amazon. It's not the same book Jim writes about, but a close relative. Richardson Wright was the editor of *House and Garden* magazine for nearly 35 years, beginning in 1914. The last editor of the magazine, Dominique Browning, wrote the introduction to the reissue of TGBB. She learned about his books (he also wrote about non-gardening topics) when she started her job at the magazine and immediately became a fan.

There are also used copies of *Garden Planning and Building* available on Amazon.

Lessons Learned from A Five-Year-Old Garden

by Alice Nicolson

In 2012 Dan and I moved from our 1850s house on $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre in mid-Arlington to an end cottage in a 125-acre continuing care retirement community across the river near Bowie. I now garden on 3 sides of our unit, and also here and there in the community. I was able to bring a lot of plants from the old garden to start the new one. But I now have to deal with deer and moles/voles.

Things I've learned:

It's a lot of fun to start a new garden from scratch! Everything grows like gangbusters. And here at Collington, in addition to my own garden, I've been able to plant a lot of things to improve the many neglected public beds - in a narrow bed on the north side of one cottage *Tinantia*

pringlei has provided two months of gorgeous morning blue – and elsewhere, *Allium* 'Millennium' mixes with *Tinantia*, *Corydalis hondoensis*, peonies, *Arum italicum* and a few shrubs to provide year-round interest.

NEVER put *Campanula takesimana* into a nice moist bed with other plants - Ditto *Iris japonica* - Ditto *Aster ageratoides* 'Ezo Murasaki' They will crowd out everything else.

Ptelea trifolia belongs in the woods, not in your near bed, despite its sweet-scented flowers.

Eleutherococcus sieboldii variegatus should probably be planted in drier soil to keep it from eating the bed.

***Kerria japonica* 'Golden Guinea'** seems to be suffering badly from a new fungus and no longer is the wonderful plant it was.

Adding lots of turkey grit and mole-bloc will NOT actually prevent moles/voles from tunneling in your rock garden. And foxes don't seem interested in eating them.

Be prepared to weed out excess *Scutellaria laeteviolacea* – a nice rock garden plant but it seeds vigorously.

Using several different deer repellent sprays in sequence helps control deer browsing.

Deer like *Oenothera missouriensis*, which blooms all summer if sprayed.

They also like camellia foliage and buds – alas!--and, witch hazels, contrary to authorities - and of course hydrangeas, *Amelanchier*, *Prunus* and any number of other lovely shrubs and trees.

Those that don't get browsed, the bucks rub raw.

Bittersweet is rampant in our woods and seeded about by the birds. Although they do eat bittersweet leaves, deer don't browse the branches, doggone it.

Squirrels everywhere love bird-feeders. So do deer!

The NARGS Seed Exchange is now open.

For details, go to NARGS website and click on SEEDEX at the top of the page.

For an excellent seed starting tutorial, see *Seed Sowing Basics* by Carlo A. Balistrieri posted to our website. It was originally published in the *Rock Garden Quarterly* in 2007. And FYI, Carlo is now Executive Director of the Moore Farms Botanical Garden in South Carolina .

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