

Newsletter

*North American Rock Garden Society
Berkshire Chapter May 2014*

Next Meeting:

Saturday, June 7, @ 10:30 AM

Berkshire Botanical Garden Exhibit Hall
BBG is located 2 miles west of
Stockbridge, MA at the junction of Routes
102 & 183.

Program



Long-time rock gardeners and
Berkshire Chapter members, Anne
Spiegel and Elisabeth Zander will
inspire you with their passion for
alpines and garden construction.



Lunch – BYO

We welcome dessert contributions
Lunch will be followed by our
monthly plant sale.

HAIL AND FAREWELL



This is the last newsletter I'll be editing. I've thought about ending my tenure before, and did so for a relatively short time a while back; but because I enjoyed the work and missed it, I returned to the editor's desk for a year or so. Now, however, it's time to truly retire and let someone else take the job. There are several reasons for this, but the primary reason is simply that I'm no longer looking forward to working on the newsletter each month. It has become a chore, and at my stage of life, I'm doing my best to eliminate chores. I'll continue to write occasional articles for the next editor, but I'm going to focus my botanical efforts on gardening, which is what really gives me pleasure these days. My tenure as NARGS President ends in late August, and after that I'll almost be a free man again. I can hardly wait.

This issue's theme is "My Favorites." During the 8 years that I've served as editor, I've read more than a hundred submissions and published every one of them. The newsletter is not a professional journal, but rather a reflection of the words and images created by our members and other botanical friends. I did a bit of editing for grammar, sometimes even reworded a phrase or two; but in virtually every case, what you saw in

the newsletter was what the author intended, not my rewrite.

The sheer volume of knowledge that I've gained from having read all those submissions is astonishing to me. And the articles that were written primarily (or at least substantially) for entertainment value almost always succeeded, making the newsletter more than just a botanical guide to rock gardening. We can and should take pride in the body of work we have created together. Our chapter has always contained an eclectic, intelligent, generous and exceptionally kind body of people, and your contributions to the newsletter have enhanced our lives, and especially our gardens, in ways we could not have imagined and can appreciate only in retrospect. So I'd like to extend a hearty "Thank You" to all who have contributed to the newsletter during my tenure as editor. I wish I could thank those valued members of our special community who are no longer with us, but hopefully we all thanked them when we could, when we shared that special time on Saturdays in the spring and summer and fall, when they were able to do what they loved so much, and for which we shared at least the passion, if not the skill.

The articles in this issue are my personal favorites. Please don't think unkindly of me if an article you particularly liked (or wrote!) has been left out. Obviously there isn't room for everything, and for entirely personal reasons these are the articles that I recalled enjoying most, and that upon re-reading I enjoyed as much as or more than I did the first time. I hope that you will enjoy them as well, and that you will use this issue as a reminder of the tremendous resource the newsletter has been, and hopefully will continue to be in the future.

Peter



~ MEANDERING THOUGHTS ~

The Berkshire Chapter's Eastern Winter Study Weekend, 2008

~ Written & Illustrated by Abbie Zabar ~

I take a ferry to Hoboken or the subway to Brooklyn for garden inspiration. This minimalist prefers a life without accumulating air miles.

Then again, was traveling ever part of my comfort zone? I remember sleeping beneath life-saving equipment on decks of Greek tourist boats when I was in my teens, or seeing too many Renaissance churches. Or after I got married we'd fly our noisy twin-engine plane; or maybe the Concorde because it was faster than the speed of sound, but what I really wanted was the silent slow motion of a garden back home. I know what he meant when William Faulkner, 20th century Nobel Prize-winning author, said "*I discovered that my own little postage stamp of soil was worth writing about, and I would never live long enough to exhaust it.*"

Yet I reread the program for the 2008 NARGS Eastern Winter Study Weekend over and over. The schedule of speakers was tempting as early spring outside my kitchen window, where buds on a holy trinity of Washington Hawthorns, *Crataegus phaenopyrum*, are beginning to swell and in the distance skeletal trees of Central Park are putting on weight. I tell myself Farmington's not that far away. Besides, I would be with other members in the tribe who, even before finding their room locations, let alone unpacking their gear – will hit the plant sale tables as if this were Las Vegas and everything's coming up double sixes.

For the car ride I've packed peanut butter sandwiches on challah rolls, topped with fresh strawberries. In a few weeks it would be aromatic fraises des bois, *Fragaria vesca*, an ornamental groundcover seeding under the hawthorns. I'm riding with Steve Whitesell (a walking botanical resource who identifies the charms on my bracelet as *Campanula rotundifolia*, not 'bluebells' as the heathens would say), Baldassare Mineo, former owner of Siskiyou Nursery, and when his catalogue arrived the gardener and I considered it hot bedtime reading), and Gelene Scarborough (Curator of the Alpine House, Wild Garden, and Shade Border at Wave Hill). The car speak will be better than warm-up acts at a Madonna concert. But first we're making a Wave Hill detour, where glass frames on the Alpine House are now wide open during the days and every plant is angling for its beauty shot. The staging is so exquisite I'd be happy to quit while I'm ahead. Yet I'm distracted, as well as intrigued, by thorny rose canes laid down on the upper terraces to protect choice plants from four-legged intruders. How clever, I think; just as later that weekend when Harvey Wrightman advises, *stick in a very young plant; minor roots find their own way.*" Or when Rod Zander casually mentions, *"It's important to set aside correct stones for capping off a wall, soon as you begin."* For someone who envisioned a weekend only about plant sales and presenters, 'Aha' moments added up as gifts-with-purchase.

And speaking of speakers, how I wanted to hear Geoffrey Charlesworth, elder statesman of NARGS, co-founder of the Berkshire Chapter, and a close-to-my-heart raconteur. Ever since he put it to Norman, *"I don't want to see any more slides of yaks and out-of-focus conifers,"* I suspected there's a talk that won't be a yawn. Geoffrey Charlesworth was the final speaker after Sunday breakfast in our large and generic Hartford Marriott meeting room, but cozy as a Swiss inglenook soon as he started recounting the early days of NARGS. In pictures and in words, his was a bittersweet reminiscence of garden personalities, filled with Geoffrey's edgy humor and alpine dirt.

A few weeks later I wrote him a thank you. Geoffrey responded right away on the reverse

side of a color copy image of his garden; he couldn't believe I enjoyed his talk so much without knowing the cast of characters. He also added, *"Behind this wall of rhododendrons is a cairn marking Hatsie's (dog) grave with Norman's ashes scattered over it."* I quickly sent off a one-liner, something about wishing his presentation had been twice as long. I never heard back. On May 14th Larry Thomas called to say Geoffrey Charlesworth had died.



I went searching for the copy of Geoffrey's essay 'Some Regrets on Reaching Eighty.' My mind was wrapped around another little trip I took with Larry when we caught a Metro North train at 125th Street; and Jacques Mommens was riding up from Westchester with Midge Riggs in her husband's Jaguar. It was September 14, 2000 and the first time I ever visited the legendary garden of Geoffrey Charlesworth and Norman Singer. We were celebrating Geoffrey's 80th birthday lunch at their kitchen table in Massachusetts.

There was smoked fish, bagels, and beer. The Formica counters - resplendent with more gooey-iced cakes than the local Sandisfield bakery - could have been a Thiebaud painting. While we were downing desserts Norman asked Birthday Boy to read something he composed for the occasion. I can still see Geoffrey, head bent down, shyly whispering words to himself. Before we left the two of them, famous for their endless generosity with the thousands and thousands of plants they propagated (as long as you didn't jump the starting whistle at their Labor Day Weekend Plant Sale, according to Larry) handed us shoeboxes packed with itsy-bitsy alpines, all potted up and perfectly labeled. Party favors on't get better than that for rock gardeners. I thought if I grew those babies right they, too, might be something in eighty years. At the last minute I pulled out Geoffrey's book and, in spite of embarrassing underlinings and marginalia, I wanted him to inscribe it. I also asked for a copy of the essay he just read, filing it between the pages of "A Gardener Obsessed." Geoffrey was, indeed, an opinionated gardener and one of his best read-out-loud quotes goes "*It is only when you start to garden - probably after fifty - that you realize something important happens everyday.*"

I was back in my garden, home from the 2008 Berkshire Chapter's Winter Study Weekend, inspired, but perfectly happy to never leave again. The energy in swelling buds was contagious and my Washington Hawthorns needed meticulous de-thorning before they leafed out, a demanding pursuit but a harbinger of spring that's become *the* ritual I love doing. Yet nothing felt more compelling than pruning out crossover limbs clogging up the center of a young olive tree. After all, as an old Italian gardener told me, "*Prune it so that one day a bird will fly through, wings never touching the branches.*" Hey Geoffrey, even if it's only a starling wouldn't that be 'something important?' Or maybe a miracle, when you're gardening above sidewalks of cement.

Editor's Notes: Abbie Zabar, a member of the Manhattan Chapter of NARGS since 1997, lives and gardens in NYC. Her drawings are in the permanent collection of the Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation in Pittsburgh, one of the foremost

resources of botanical art in the world. She is an artist, writer and designer; but when all else fails she gardens.) Abbie has generously allowed us to reprint this article, which appeared in the newsletter of the Manhattan Chapter of NARGS.

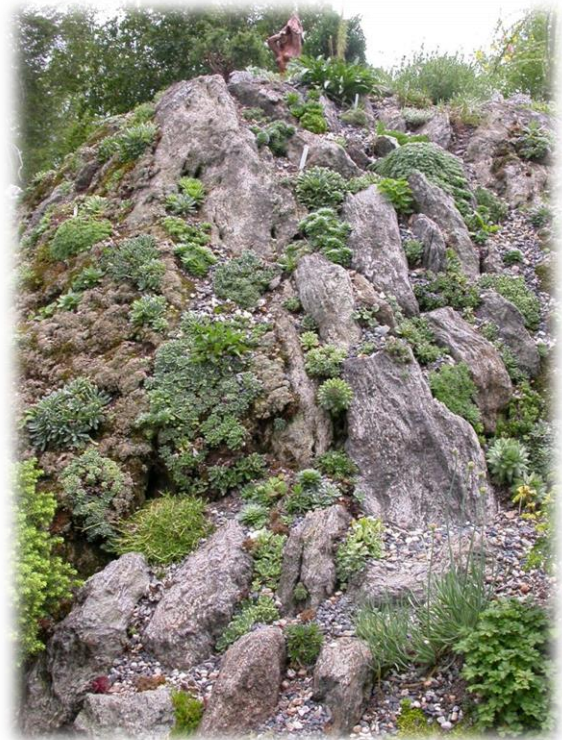
THE PHOENIX



GARDEN

**TEXT BY ROBIN MAGOWAN AND
IMAGES BY JULIET YLI-MATTILA**

We all call ourselves rock gardeners, but not everyone would take the term so literally as to devote himself to little but the rock tops themselves. The focal point of my early garden was a small outcrop of decaying granite, six feet high and some thirty feet wide,



Robin's Crevice Garden circa 2009

that lay a few steps from my writing studio. On its north-facing side I found I could plaster saxifrages, taking the plant in the sand it came with and smearing it where a thin carpet of moss and lichen offered a toehold. The saxifrages would eventually seed themselves across the rock face, often in quite bare places. So I was, with the help of the plants, already a rock top gardener.

But my outcrop by no means provided a unified focal point for a garden of diverse plants. Obstructing it were two trenches that the roots of a pair of ash trees had creviced in the outcrop. During his visit, after the 2008 winter study weekend that our chapter hosted, Zdenek Zvolanek suggested that I make the outcrop the basis for a redesigned crevice garden. All I needed to do was fill in the two crevices by laying the stones vertically and there I was with the basis for a revitalized garden.

A year earlier, at the first Czech international rock garden conference, Josef Halda had offered to build me a garden at the first opportunity. I had in mind something more dramatic than the two small berms filled with meadow plants outside our house's front entrance. But when Josef showed us a beautiful garden he had made with large, gently sloping black rocks in a farmer's back yard, a few miles from where he lives in northeastern Bohemia near the Polish border, we decided that a garden with large rocks might be too overpowering for the house entrance.

While awaiting Josef's arrival, delayed for a year by visa problems, I happened to meet a local mason, Leon Harris, who had access to an unexcavated part of the Conklin quarry in Falls Village, CT. The rocks he showed me were strikingly fissured white dolomite, old enough to be turning into marble. Some were lined with fossils. They were slated to be ground into road gravel for which there was a consistent demand. I could see the ornamental possibilities offered by gray and white rocks so beautiful they could stand

on the lawn as sculpture, and I bought a truckload, setting two big chunks to the east of the outcrop (unaligned, alas, as Halda would point out—but by then so festooned with plants they could not be resited).

I expected to be able to paste saxifrages and androsace on them in much the same fashion as I had done with the outcrop. But an outcrop is an extension of ledge deeply buried in earth, whereas a newly quarried rock, however submerged in soil, lacks the requisite moistness, one that rain, or the gardener, hose in hand, has to supply. But for all the difficulty, or maybe because of it, I found the challenges enthralling. These were rocks that, like a trough, could accommodate the tiniest gems; only here, clinging in a fissure, they looked as if they actually belonged. Taking Zdenek's advice, I procured from a pottery a pail of sticky bottom clay, much like the substance from which

children make sculptures, with which I filled in the gaping fissures. Then, wrapping the geophyte in a dressing of moss, I inserted it in the clay cavity. A year later, *Clintonia megarhiza* and *Petrophytum caespitosum* are two well-established citizens.

In early May, 2009, I picked up Halda as he neared the end of his NARGS-sponsored tour. I had no idea if he still wanted to build me a garden, let alone what he might want to take on in the five working days we

had. But I did point out a small area to the south of the outcrop that had defeated every effort of mine, larded with small boulders and too sun-baked for weeding enjoyment. I must have mentioned that the soil adjoining the outcrop seemed quite deep. That evoked Josef's architectural curiosity and he spent much of the next day with a spade, digging out a long uptilting wing of ledge, and then a second parallel stratum, some three further feet below. The two sweeps of ledge would suggest the striated lines that the rest of the design would incorporate.



Up to this point my various rockeries had been limited by what could be transported in the bucket of a tractor. Using it, my caretaker, Swede Ahrstrom, and I had put together and planted a small limestone addition to the granite outcrop the previous autumn. That, Josef felt, he could accommodate, but to build a garden in scale with the outcrop he needed a machine capable of moving the much bigger boulders



that he wanted for the cornerstones of his design, and workmen capable of lifting and setting them with the help of strong straps. We enlisted the help once again of Leon Harris, his two-man crew, and his heavy truck and backhoe.

Josef and I spent much of the next morning in the cool heights over the Conklin quarry with the masons, tagging rocks that caught our eye and, with the backhoe, opening the wooded hillside buried underfoot. The plethora of choices was such that we could limit ourselves to rocks we found utterly irresistible: intensely fissured; full of interesting seams and fossils. Many were substantial gardens in their own right, encased in flattering moss, lichen, desirable ferns, hepatica, aquilegia Canadensis, and other woodland specimens. While waiting for our tonnage to be delivered, Josef set me the task of ripping out the whole of the garden below the outcrop.

I am not against change, but I prefer to do it incrementally, a plant at a time. After almost twenty years I could not help but feel a certain attachment for what the plants and I had created between us. To rip out a whole seasonal intricacy of interwoven plants and submerged bulbs was not easy. Looking out at the devastation that evening, the uprooted thyme, penstemon, veronica, eriogonum, gypsophila, phlox, all smoldering on the adjacent lawn and the now pocked incline of naked earth, I couldn't help but lament. It didn't help to tell myself that this is the storied way in which the new has always come into being. Krishna the destroyer is merely another avatar of Krishna the creator; out of

destruction, new life arises. For me, the five or so hours spent pulling it all apart was almost too much. Worn out and every limb aching after the intense work, I had no choice but to leave the plants pulled out in several piles on the lawn, waiting for my wife's gardeners to heel them into temporary homes in the vegetable garden. I didn't like to feel so exhausted and sad, seeing how quickly the

years of tender devotion and care had vanished.

Among all the debris, a small number of plants were left standing: conifers, several daphne, a miniature rose, deep-rooted pulsatilla and acontholimon, and a couple of rock-covering clumps (aubrietia and *Astragalus angustifolius*) which were, like the proverbial banks, too big to fail. Josef saw them as structural points for his new rockery, while Leon Harris saw them as challenges to his ingenuity. Not all of them would survive an unusually rainy summer, let alone the winter. Daphne that had once bestrode their little incline, watching the rain drain away before it could affect their fine network of roots, now found themselves inundated from the earth and rocks above.

Next day, the placing of rocks proceeded at a pace that left us all differently drained. Lift and lower, up and down, no soon was one great rock laid in place than Josef was called upon to select the next from a pile in a field several yards below my studio. Josef would confess that never in his life had he had to think so fast, so strenuously, about garden structure. Each rock, often enough more massive than the two masons waiting with gloved hands to grab hold of it and ease it out of its straps, had to be scrutinized, turned, sited, and, often enough, re-sited, before it met Josef's approval. It was a subtle and exacting process and, even days later, with much of the garden in place, none of us could anticipate exactly how Josef would want a new rock angled, let alone

how deeply buried—the design was that turbulent. As for myself, I was left awed by the pinpoint accuracy with which the masons maneuvered the great stones and their courage as they stood holding for a whole minute or two their knee-buckling load.

In most building schemes the bigger rocks, like the bigger plants, are set in the rear; we build up to them. Josef, instead, prefers to use them frontally, rising up in the forefront like one of those ranges on either side of the Owens Valley in California. Set smack against the lawn, they create the illusion of something utterly original: not a rock garden so much as a distinct mountainscape. Much of Josef's life, from his teen-age days as a rock climber to his current work as a taxonomist, plant finder and seed gatherer, has taken place in the mountains, and it is that geologic reality he incorporates in his garden designs. Difficult, one might think, when the terrain is merely rolling, as much of mine is. But that's where big rocks mixed with smaller ones in a tumult of striated lines can suggest a very different montane composition.

Once larger rocks entered the outcrop equation, then the garden in front of my studio, filled with a rich, moisture-retentive soil that accommodated gentians, several daphne, and even *Dicentra peregrina*, now looked out of kilter. This was a garden I could more easily alter. Just keeping plants in scale, in such rich earth, required considerable attention which I could now direct to the four or five very large rocks with which Josef graced this perimeter.

After Josef's departure, my initial efforts went into making these insertions look as if they have always dwelled there. The process of domesticating them by surrounding them in earth can seem never-ending. There is always another bucket or two more of amended soil I can add, extending in the process the available planting area. Despite being filled in, the overhanging stone roofs still make excellent homes for a range of moisture-sensitive plants.

I treat each rock as a virtual trough, but one in which, unlike my exposed troughs, the plants command a sheltered site. If a plant is rumored to actually feed on the limestone, that's reason

enough to acquire it. I'm told I can enlarge limestone cavities by boring away with a geologic hammer and chisel, but as yet I'm still too besieged by other types of garden work to attempt such surgery.

Barring use of the geologist's hammer, there are numerous sites waiting to be seized in my new rockscape -- the more recondite, probably the better. Delicious surprise, after all, is a rock's prime ingredient, the astonishment that a plant may thrive on the surface of the rock at all. I feel like a miner, or a master of the unlikely, armed with a skewer-like trowel, tapping away until I find a resonant cavity. It is here, too, that weeds, pioneers as they are, can indicate depths not so apparent. If all else fails, there are always the succulents. Josef suggested *orostachys*: each rosette, inserted in a weathered pore, can become a comic monstrosity. Given the slightest indentation, a mat of sedum can turn a glaring rock surface into a painting. Or a layer of sedum can create a planting space for tiny bushes growing on top of it: *lithodora*, *moltkia*, *rhamnus*.

In filling out the rockscape, the plants I look for are ones that can carpet bare rock, especially those that contour themselves to the wavering rock face. For draping an edge, *arenaria* are especially valuable, as they divide readily, and can be suspended in a meager layer of soil atop a cliff face. So are plants such as *talinum* and, in the shade, *saxifrages* and *Androsace lactea*, which can grow on seemingly no soil at all, and which look good the steeper the incline.

In my efforts to populate rock surfaces, I have learned that nursery plants resent being tried here, there, and everywhere to see where they might do best. Their long thread-like roots prefer reasonably deep cavities in which to seat themselves. Such security, I feel, reassures them. They need time, too, to settle, but if they are planted in spring, it is often difficult for them to withstand summery desiccation. Rock surfaces shed moisture extremely well, which allows for good drainage, but may lead plants to burn up. Time for settling is often not so available in autumn, which is otherwise preferable for planting. How on a rock you withstand full sun

is a question that needs to be put to a vast range of dryland species. If I can coax them through the first six weeks on the rocks, there is hope they may withstand the winter.

Six months later, at the Halloween end of October, I took the bull by the horns and expanded the two small berms in front of our house. I followed Josef's example: the same masons, the same limestone quarry, and this time even bigger rocks, but the effect is rather different. Instead of the perimeter stone being set confrontationally, the great blocks have been laid low along the driveway, where they flow, rippling, one into another. There are a few larger and, quite possibly, more ambitious stones than Josef had access to, but they are set back toward the house. This entrance garden has a completely different feeling than the garden below the outcrop, which is wild, tumultuous, and saved from chaos only by the architectural lines that come from the excavated wings of ledge. The garden in front of our house is serene and welcoming. I was surprised to find that the large white stones are not off-putting as far as the look of the house is concerned. Instead they make the vertical stories of the house, rising as they do right off the driveway, look less abrupt, and smaller. The rocks, strange things that they are, domesticate the house.

Set on the east side of the house, and protected thus from the afternoon sun, it makes for what I hope will be a rather different growing space



A GARDEN BY ACCRETION

TEXT AND IMAGES BY CLIFF DESCH



I put the blame squarely on Ronald Beckwith for starting it. I was introduced to Ron in 1974 at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, where he was superintendent of the research greenhouses of the botany department. At the time, I was a post-doctoral research fellow working on a grant investigating aging in blowflies as a corollary to aging in general, e.g., sensitivity to taste declines in older adult blowflies as it does in older humans. Ron awakened, aroused and encouraged my interest in all plants, especially in alpinists.

Shortly thereafter I joined the Connecticut Chapter of (N)ARGS and met Ev Whittemore and Ed Leimseider, whose gardens were eye-openers for me. They generously gave me many plants to start my garden. Ev was involved in the seed exchange at the time and was growing

thousands of pots of seedlings under lights in the basement of her home. I soon learned that she grew this many seedling pots every year as her usual modus operandi. Ev goes to extremes most of us would not bother with in order to satisfy her alpine plants' needs – including moving her garden from Massachusetts to the Asheville-Hendersonville area of North Carolina, in order to have a site with less summer heat and less winter cold, so that she could grow a greater range of plants. She goes so far as to place small electric fans in her garden to blow air over heat sensitive alpiners during hot weather! After filling her first garden in North Carolina with plants, she sold that property and bought another nearby (in Penrose, North Carolina) in order to begin filling a second garden.

Ed Leimseider, now deceased, had a mature woodland garden in Westport, Connecticut. I came home from his garden with a car trunk full of plants. I still have the *Shortia galacifolia* Ev gave to me and the purple *Iris tectorum* from Ed.



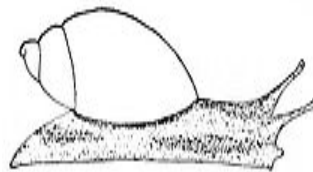
Rhododendron smirnowii

Elliott Jessen is a longtime friend who I met in 1974 through the Connecticut Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society. He has given me many woody plants including conifers, rhododendrons, maples and, of course, magnolias. Over the years, Elliott and I have undertaken botanizing-by-car trips to the Rocky Mountains (three trips, including Colorado, Idaho, Montana and Wyoming), to the southern Appalachians in North and South Carolina, and to the Bruce Peninsula/Manitoulin Island in Canada as well as the west coast of Newfoundland. Elliott and I travel well together.

To me, my garden is more than just collection/accumulation of pretty plants but, also, it is a collection of memories and fond thoughts of friends, fellow gardeners and nurserymen. I have plants from so many individuals growing throughout the garden, and I am reminded of them when I see these plants: *Rhododendron smirnowii* from Linc Foster, *R. yakushimanum* (and many more) from Elinor Clarke, *R. bureavioides* from Fred Serbin, *R. keiskei* from Guy Nearing along with some of his hybrids, assorted hybrids by and from Gus Mehlquist and Toni Angelini, purchased plants from Jim Cross and Don and Hazel Smith, epimediums from Harold Epstein, and many more from other generous gardeners. Sadly, most of the plants I purchased at our chapter's plant sales that were grown by Norman Singer and Geoffrey Charlesworth are "alas, no longer whinnying with us" and only their labels remain as mementos. My favorite conifer in my garden, now 20+ years old and 12 feet tall, is a *Chamaecyparis nootkatensis* grown from a cutting from Nick Nickou's magnificent specimen and rooted for me by Lud Hoffmann. The deer like it too.

This is a complete change of topic, but I just had to add it in:

A couple of years ago, Joe Strauch gave me a 35 mm slide of a terrestrial snail he had photographed in his garden in Lenox, Massachusetts. I did not know what it was. Recently a fellow at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst identified it as a native snail named *Novisuccinea ovalis* (Say, 1817), the oval ambersnail. This snail has a very interesting



twist. It is the intermediate host for the trematode flatworm, *Leucochloridium variae* McIntosh, 1932. Trematodes

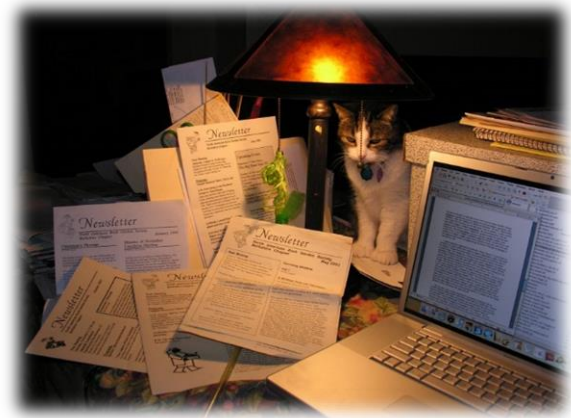
are a class of flatworms (aka flukes) that are all parasites of mollusks and vertebrate animals, and have complex life cycles involving both asexual reproduction in the intermediate host (the mollusk) and sexual reproduction in the definitive host (the vertebrate).

The life cycle of *L. varia* is truly weird. The sexually reproducing adult worms live in the caeca and bursa Fabricius of birds (e.g., the American robin). The caeca are a pair of pouches off the end of the small intestine and contain bacteria that aid digestion. The bursa Fabricius is a dorsal diverticulum near the end of the gut (the cloaca) that produces B lymphocytes, which synthesize circulating antibodies to foreign antigens. This latter structure is named for Hieronymus Fabricius (1533-1619) who discovered and described it (published posthumously in 1621). He had no idea of its function.

The worm eggs pass out in the bird's feces, land on plant leaves, and are consumed by passing *N. ovalis*. Once inside the snail the eggs hatch, releasing larvae (miracidium, pl. miracidia) that digest their way through the gut wall into the snail tissues where they transform into the next larval stage, the mother sporocyst. The mother sporocysts develop brood chambers, which contain germ balls that, in turn, develop into daughter sporocysts. The daughter sporocysts grow and become highly branched and extend into the snail's tentacle (preferring the left tentacle!). The sporocyst-invaded tentacle becomes greatly enlarged and sausage shaped, and the surface becomes transparent. The portion of the daughter sporocyst within the tentacle has green and brown to orange rings, and pulsates continuously in daylight. The behavior of the snail changes, too. Instead of seeking dark hiding places during the day, it remains in the open. The movement and the color of the tentacles are attractive to birds that peck at them and ingest the infective stage, the encysted cercaria (= metacercaria), within the daughter sporocyst. Each daughter sporocyst contains about 300 metacercariae. Once in the bird's gut the cercariae break out of the cyst and take up residence in their usual haunts. Sometimes nestlings become infected when their parents feeding them infected snail tentacles. Yummy.



IN THE COMPANY OF OLD NEWSLETTERS



All gardeners get restless in winter. They are prone to fabricating many winter projects as a distraction away from the fact that gardening is, at the moment, impossible. I am not, however in that camp. Because I work at a nursery, have my own garden to tend, and have all those fascinating and tempting NARGS events to participate in, my “gardening season” plate is rather full. Sometimes it is not a plate, it is an enormous hotel tray, and it is overflowing. I wonder should I even admit this: sometimes in winter I’m glad when the seed and other orders are done and I can turn some attention to other (non-gardening) things. Things like writing, or painting, or catching up with non-gardening friends. Even (gasp!) considering a resort-like vacation to a destination of surf and sun.

This winter found me stuck at home, though, and contemplative. I have toyed for years with the idea of a collection of essays so one “winter project” was to assemble all I could find of my horticultural writing for the last 14 years and get it on my computer if possible. As you can imagine that entailed searching through a lot of material both stemming from vocation and avocation, and I can’t say that this was unpleasant. It was overwhelming occasionally, but isn’t that true of anything that requires a person to plow and poke and sift through their past? Some of the juvenilia that I had chosen to put out there occasioned a wince or two, but

nothing terribly bad. My Oliver Nursery writing fell into rather neat groupings: catalog stuff and therefore (mostly) unusable and newsletter articles in batches. Like: Alpine Habits (four kinds) sun or shade candidates for the rock garden, a series on troughs, that sort of thing.

The pieces for BNARGS, however, were different. They have far flung subjects and a different scope. They are more personal, show more evolution; they even, at times, tackle bigger human questions. I was somehow braver, more inventive, and I took more chances. I revealed more of myself. I know this did not happen by chance.



Nick Nickou and Anne Spiegel at Stonecrop

As I sorted through sheaves of newsletters I made several stacks: some held articles I wanted to reread (*all* of Geoffrey's made this cut!) and I pulled mine out to deal with later. Geoffrey's stack grew admirably larger and larger, and this was *after* he had done his two books! (There was a noticeable and understandable lessening of his work when Norman had had his aneurysm in 1997.)

While one is sorting over the past, even for a good pragmatic purpose, one sometimes can't help but delve into the treasures at hand. Before long I found myself rereading on the spot "Ah, here is a plant I just got seed of..." or failed with or saw a picture of etc etc. See, I had a justification. I had just bought a brand new filing "cube" complete with hanging files and labels. *All* of the newsletters were to be saved of course, but I needed to winnow a little. Stuff for fun, stuff for my project, stuff to be re-integrated later. If I just

read this one now, I can put it into the main stack..." I said to myself.

This kind of activity can work on one in a strange and alchemical way. Here was a call to arms to help in the seed exchange. (We did.) Here was the call for plants for the sale. Over here was the announcement of Panayoti Kelaidis' talk. I remember that. As usual, his talk was exuberant, fresh, and erudite. Norman and Geoffrey invited a bunch of chapter members to visit their garden afterwards. They said they had got things pretty well weeded so now was a good time to visit. I had with me an old friend and Joe and it meant we would miss the Kentucky Derby (which we always watched) but this was bigger than the run for any roses. This was Norman, Geoffrey, and only my second chance at seeing their garden. (The first had been at the Annual meeting in the Berkshires in 1995.) You may wonder why it was inevitable that we miss the race. It is because of the distance I travel to attend BNARGS meetings. I need to leave the house before eight A.M. to get there in time. On a perfect day it equals a two and a quarter hours drive. If I hit the apparently somnambulistic traffic from "The Leaf People" in October, or fisherfolk in spring or even rabid fleamarketers in summer it can be longer. The roundtrip commute is just under 5 hours on that one Saturday. Why do I drive 5 hours on a Saturday? In revisiting all these newsletters I know exactly why.

It is not for the chance to buy a couple of alpines however cool they may be. It is not just to sigh with envy over slides of other plants/gardens/places that I may never have/visit/see. Or even to garner, over time, a wealth of information on growing. Although this last one is a weighty contender and does factor into the whole. No. It is that I am *going to do these things with other people*. These other people are very important in this equation. NARGS people are of a variety, quality and caliber I have not encountered anywhere else before. I believe this to be at the very heart of the very best that this Society of ours offers.

I get to walk in the door, chat with Anne Spiegel, sit next to Jacque Mommens, give John Spain a big hug, tell Elisabeth Zander or Robin McGowan

how much I liked their last article. Or tell Peter George how spellbinding the entire last newsletter was. The knowledge and camaraderie are unmatched. Of course I still miss people who are no longer there but I have been lucky in a years-long experience and I *know* my chapter is not unique in this. We had Norman and Geoffrey. The Siskiyou can boast Crocker and Kline. Sifting through articles I feel wistful too, about those who have simply moved on. Tom Clark has moved away, Tamsin Goggin and Dean Evans no longer attend, and I miss all of them.



Norman and Geoffrey

As I sit here on a frosty winter day and turn these pages I consider, for just one minute, how bleakly different it would feel if NARGS *or* my chapter did not exist. I am thankful to every newsletter editor. I feel in my bones how important it is to spread around what we all share.

Rock Gardeners are intrepid.

In fact, we gave a talk about the annual meeting in the Cascades that illustrates exactly that. We happened to be on the infamous bus number three, the one that rolled backwards down the hill and crashed into a tree. Everybody disembarked, leaders took head counts, a new bus was sent for. A few people strode up to houses, asked to use the phone (this was before everyone over the age of three had a cell phone) and called a cab in order to get to the next destination. Joe had been thinking he'd get the afternoon off, a nap and maybe some ginger-ale back at the hotel. Think again.

Another excellent display of intrepidity came during the EWS in Manhattan not long ago. It

took place in the hotel where Georgia O'Keefe used to live. If you peered out of certain windows you could see the angles of some of the views she used in her justifiably famous skyscraper series. At that meeting on that day we were "on our own" for luncheon. This old hotel had the classic configuration of a big square with a bank of elevators right at its heart. As we traveled down in a very crowded elevator, I remember some of the dialogue. These meeting participants were from all over the country and a few from outside of it. They were dressed *almost* as though ready to go hiking. One group was discussing the merits of lunching in Little Italy. Another was calculating time and distance (to be sure to make the next lecture) and when the doors parted at the lobby they hiked off to a meal in Chinatown.

Oh, by the way, lest you think numbers and distance lend *any sort* of anonymity, no such luck. We happened to lunch at a soup place nearby with two Scottish speakers. When he heard my name he exclaimed "Oh yes! From Oliver's. You are the only one who sends in seed in paper coin envelopes...."

But back in the realm of our own chapter, I remember the first time I heard Josef Halda speak. It was a snowy March day, his *Gentiana* book had just come out. I recall looking nervously out the windows (this meeting was held in the "little house" across the street from our usual venue). I had driven up myself, not in Joe's SUV, and as the meeting progressed I watched the snow coming down. I opted to quit worrying, enjoy the show, and deal with the weather later. I bought *Dianthus* 'Inschriach Dazzler' in the sale from Geoffrey. Which brings me to confess another trick I somehow acquired shortly after coming to BNARGS. *Recognizing peoples handwriting on labels*. I'm sure I'm not the only one who has picked this up. A trick like this will lead you to purchase some fabulous things even if you don't yet know the species. Incidentally, the *Dianthus* and I made it home safely even in all that snow.

An annual meeting will sometimes throw the perfect two people together. (That is how, I felt, anyway.) At a meeting out west I met Phyllis Gustafson. Do you remember *Rogue House Seeds*? That was hers. She also used to propagate

for Siskiyou Rare Plants Nursery. I spent a whole two hour bus ride turned sideways in my seat talking shop with her and deeply wishing we did not live 3,000 miles apart. I still wish that. She has spoken twice at BNARGS. The first time Geoffrey packed her a lunch in a quaint little vintage lunchbox! Her slides were spectacular. Ever since I have been dying to hike Whiskey Peak, the Devil's Punchbowl and Eight Dollar Mountain. One story has it that someone once found a gold nugget up there worth eight dollars.

Glancing down at yet another newsletter I am reminded. We should not forget the Nursery People who have traveled to speak to us. Maria Galletti whose *Alpines Mt. Echo* is still being mourned as a loss by rock gardeners everywhere, but who, I hope, is enjoying more travel and plant hunting adventure which will lead to more pictures which will lead (we all hope!) to more talks for us! And if you have never attended a Harvey Wrightman workshop then you have missed out on an extraordinary opportunity: New techniques, whole new methods with difficult and rare plants. His latest: "Sandwiching slabs of tufa with wet pottery clay and baby plants" was eye opening. I've never seen so many adults as happy as children finger-painting. We were that absorbed. And with gorgeous results! Honestly, all the "sandwiches" produced looked like they had been done by pros. The first tufa drilling workshop of his that I attended yielded a great success for me. A now venerable *Campanula raineri* has thrived. Just last year as I was walking by it I noticed a healthy tuft of leaves growing out the other side of the rock. The campanula had traveled via stolons through the interior of the tufa. It bloomed on both sides last year.

I suppose growing in tufa might be considered a "heroic measure." A lot of what we sometimes can't help ourselves from doing; in regard to alpine plants, seems to fall under this umbrella. Not that these are bad things. But to outsiders they do not always seem to be normal things. I am remembering a meeting we had at what has become the annual pilgrimage to Stonecrop announced in our pages every April. I happened to be jostling up near a woman in front of one laden sales table. I don't remember which vender. She had gathered up a handful of plants and she

asked me if I knew about them. Glancing down at her flat I *did* notice that everything she'd chosen was in full flower. "Uh, Oh..." I thought. "Will this flower all summer?" she asked, holding up a gentian. I told her no, but it was a very worthwhile plant. I launched into whatever I knew about the species ending with: "and remember, all gentians are heavy feeders." She was looking skeptically at me. She held up a fully flowered *Lewisia cotyledon*. "Can I grow this in a hanging basket?" I took a probably noticeable deep breath and backed her (and me) a few steps away from the Madding Crowd. I took a few minutes to talk to her. I briefly described what alpine plants were, how most needed perfect drainage. I talked about beginners often having good luck with troughs, and I pointed some out to her. I mentioned several other ways to make these plants happy but *not* out in the perennial garden or in a plastic pot. She looked disturbed. In fact, she looked a little angry with me.



Robin Magowan's Garden

"Do you mean to tell me that everyone here" she gestured sweepingly at all the NARGS customers milling around "with all their baskets and trays *overflowing*" she said that word accusingly "with plants, are all going to go home and grow them the way you are describing?" I took a moment again. I looked at the milling crowd. I'd met way more than half of them. People from chapters in Manhattan, Ct. the Hudson Valley, the Berkshires and Long Island. I told her the absolute truth: "Yes. They are." We were shopping in the rarified air of knowledgeable alpine plantspeople. Before we parted ways I told her to ask a bit of advice from vendors as she went. I hope that woman is still out there among us. I hope she has

joined our ranks. But our ranks, as was brought home to me that day, can seem strange to an outsider.

It has been cold today, and our cat, Queenie is trying to make a space for herself among the newsletters directly under the lamp. Try, as I do, to accommodate every royal whim of hers, she will not be allowed to damage irreplaceable pages like these. Near her polydactyl paw is one seasons calendar of events. But why focus on only one? We have been regaled by travelogues to the Dolomites, the Andes, the Rockies, Iceland and Tibet. We have been surfeited with big helpings on the genus *Penstemon*, on *Trilliums*, on bog gardens, sand beds, and scree. When I begin to consider all of the speakers that came from our membership, the sheer weight of knowledge is humbling.

The point is: we are rich. Despite upheavals in the world at large and despite frailties we may face as age advances on each one of us, we need to admit how rich we are. Now, I know it may sound just too terribly “New Age” to suggest that we should live our gratitude. I went up to Kripalu one weekend. I’ve taken meals out of a “Buddha bowl,” done some yoga, chanted along to Kirtan a little, pondered a lot. But do you know what? To achieve a nice solid dose of peacefulness you may only need to look out your backdoor. At the rock garden that probably wouldn’t exist (or exist so well) if not for NARGS and BNARGS. The “Practice of Gratitude” is important. I got a big juicy revitalizing helping of it just by sorting through and rereading a batch of old newsletters. We are lucky to have the discretionary time and means to pursue a thing we love, to attend gatherings laden with other like-minded souls.

Don’t get me wrong! There will always be unattainables. I don’t anticipate an Olympic gold medal in my future any more than I expect *Eritrichium nanum* to blow in as a volunteer seedling. I suppose I will always strive for those *Gentiana urnulas*. (there is a rumor someone germinated it *once*, in the U.K.) I may even sit (metaphorically, anyway) in a full lotus posture intoning prayers to a six armed three breasted deity, concentrating on my third eye in order to help my poor Himalayan plant thrive.



A Lori Chips Trough at Oliver Nursery

But it may be more productive by far on this wintery day to just bask in the warmth I have felt on rereading these pieces. Some written by people I know well, some I have never met. I am proud of what is achieved by us on a yearly basis. The talks, the hikes, the images, the plants, the friendships. This last especially, our friendships, are a blessing worth celebrating.

A resounding “Thank you!” is owed, first to our current, prolific Editor: Peter George, and to every other one in a long creative fascinating chain. Without them, I would not have had such wonderful material to revisit.

Lori Chips © 2/9/10

Editor’s Note:

I’ve selected articles from the entire time I have been editor. In the process of making these selections, I’ve read it all, and I am amazed at the quality that this newsletter has offered. I simply cannot put more than what I’ve selected into this issue, but I implore each of you to go to the chapter website, www.bnargs.org and take some time reading the tremendous resource that is available to you. Again, thank you to everyone who has contributed over the 8 plus years I have been doing this enormously satisfying work.

PFG

SLEET IN THE GARDEN



Music ripens as I wake to crystal pocks
on glass.

Notes balance on invisible spokes.

Only the unseasonal keeps a pattern.
Illicit snowflake recurrences

Paper the arrivals shed
Where April's standing room only

Alpine plant crowd smolders in trays
Awaiting rock definitions.

The art, one of insertion;
I bury orchestral roots.

Is density, destiny? Every earthstring
Stretched taut, the garden's rockscape

Resonates, sky and wind
Struck into flowers.

Robin Magowan

Spring makes its own statement, so
loud and clear that the gardener
seems to be only one of the
instruments, not the composer.

Geoffrey B. Charlesworth

DISCOVERIES MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

JOHN SPAIN

I planted 100 big fat tulip bulbs. They all came up in unison. The blooms were beautiful. Even the neighbors commented. But when a tiny ½ inch corm of cyclamen sent up it's little inch high pink blossom through the snow THAT was something special. The occurrence of the unexpected; a tiny surprise. Now I'm hooked. I'm growing hardy cyclamen.



Surprises and discoveries are the sparks that keep gardeners going. And they take on many forms. Growing rock garden plants from seed was a real disappointment to me. The failure rate was too high. It didn't seem worth the effort. They didn't all come up and what did come up I lost in large numbers. Then I read (or heard) something from Geoffrey Charlesworth, whom I much admire as a seed grower. He expounded on his 60/60/60 theory. In effect he said that we shouldn't get too uptight. Only 60% of the seed that germinates will survive in the seed pot, and only 60% of the seedlings that you prick out of the pot will live.

Now I've discovered something. If that's what one of the best can expect, then success can take on a new meaning. Satisfaction now comes to me, even with my failures.

Think of the first time a rare little jewel was found to self-sow in your garden, or the surprise to find that a wonderful 'greenhouse' cactus could survive and bloom outdoors in our snowy climate. Remember the plant that you purchased

and planted a half dozen times only to have it die every time. Then you planted it behind that big rock and it lived!! What a discovery. You point out that little plant to every visitor that will stop long enough to admire it.

Failure plays a real part in the joy of gardening. It's when we anticipate failure or have had many failures that the surprise of success is the sweetest. Can you recall being given a tiny piece of some rare and difficult plant? You really didn't expect to keep it alive yet it survived. It even bloomed. Now you want to know about all the other species of this genus. New fuel for the fire. It seems that the more failure we anticipate the more gratifying success can be.

It might also be noted that with every failure we discover something that is not to be repeated. In his article on Gardening Goals, Geoffrey Charlesworth wrote, "They (gardening goals) are constantly changing to accommodate the self-confidence born of success and the wisdom born of failure."



We discover that the 'books' don't have all the answers and that some plants will not grow in certain places. We find out that not all Penstemons grow tall and leggy. We find out that soap hanging from strings does not always keep the deer away. It goes on and on.

Someone once said the God does not count the time we spend in the garden against our fixed allotment of time on this earth. Perhaps this thought was born of the fact that the serious gardener continues through his or her life to thrive through the discoveries of the garden.

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WHAT IS NARGS?

PETER GEORGE

Ever since I joined NARGS in 1996, I have observed that many members (and even more non-members) have an extremely narrow, and therefore fundamentally mistaken, concept of what the organization represents. A lot of people think of NARGS as an "alpine plant" society. Others believe that if something grows more than a foot tall, it's "not a NARGS plant." I have heard that chapters in the South and the Midwest are convinced that their members cannot grow "rock garden" plants, so they increasingly view themselves as garden clubs focused on hardy "perennials." Of course, this leads to fewer and fewer chapter members joining NARGS or, having joined in the past, keeping their memberships active.

So, what's the truth about NARGS and rock gardening?

Our Web site describes NARGS as an organization "for gardening enthusiasts interested in alpine, saxatile, and low-growing perennials. It encourages the study and cultivation of wildflowers that grow well among rocks, whether such plants originate above tree line or at lower elevations." I looked up "saxatile" and found that it means "growing on or living among rocks." We all know what alpine means, and no one can misunderstand "low-growing." Thus, we are an organization of people interested in perennial plants that grow well among rocks and that are relatively short. That sounds pretty inclusive to me, and it certainly doesn't in any way imply that the plants must be alpine, or tiny, or even particularly rare. It certainly does include plants that are native to every region of the world. For example, I grow townsendias native to Kansas, campanulas native to Turkey, epimediums native to China, a Calceolaria native to South America, and alpine plants from the Alps, the Rockies, the Caucasus, and the Adirondacks among others. I have lime lovers, ericaceous plants, and plants that ask only for some sun, some water, and a bit of soil. I also grow all over my property tall plants, such as Echinacea and asters and bushy

plants like *Buddleja*. So what am I? Well, my major interest is growing plants that like to live among rocks, which makes me a rock gardener as far as I'm concerned.

Why are so many people convinced that drabas are real rock garden plants and that epimediums are not? Or that salvias and hellebores are forbidden because they are not included in some mythical list of approved "rock garden plants"? Far too many of us seem to think that, because the British named their organization the Alpine Garden Society, this limitation somehow applies to us. It does not. We are the North American Rock Garden Society, and our approach to what we love and what we grow is inclusive, not exclusive. We understand with absolute clarity that many gardeners cannot grow *Astragalus utahensis*, but that almost all of us can grow *Gentiana acaulis*, or *Penstemon ovatus*, or *Sedum kamtschaticum*. And those, among literally thousands of rock garden plants, can be grown in all climates, at almost all altitudes, and on virtually every continent.

Furthermore, for most of its history, NARGS has published a journal that has focused on plants that far too many of us may have considered inappropriate for rock gardens. Before sitting down to write this, I pulled out two old issues of the NARGS publication at random, just to see what they contained. The spring 1991 issue was dedicated to primulas, and the lead article is entitled "Primulas for the Southeast," by Nancy Goodwin. Nancy is from Hillsborough, North Carolina, a part of the United States not commonly associated with rock gardening. The second issue I selected was the fall 1985 issue, which featured an article called "Native Plants of Vermont." Anyone who is not familiar with the botanical wealth of New England, and who subscribes to the narrow view of what a "rock garden plant" is, will be surprised to learn that the article focused on what we call "woodland" plants, including *Claytonia caroliniana*, *Erythronium americanum*, *Trillium erectum*, *Asarum canadense*, and *Asplenium ruta-muraria*. Are these rock garden plants? Some would say they are not, but I vigorously disagree, and – more to the point – so does the NARGS journal.

So please, let's keep NARGS as inclusive as possible. To be sure, we are not simply a garden club (we are not interested in growing vegetables, annuals, roses, etc.); but neither are we an elite group of the wealthy and powerful who want to keep their organization small and exclusive. We are a large, geographically diverse body of people who simply love gardening with rocks. Let's focus on that, and work a bit harder to find commonality in purpose; by doing so, we will strengthen our organization and enhance its ability to provide valuable services to rock gardeners.

DAPHNES

TEXT BY HARVEY WRIGHTMAN AND
IMAGES BY ESTHER WRIGHTMAN



D. arbuscula "Muran Castle"

One of the delights of late autumn is seeing the *Daphne velenovskyi* putting forth a few late flowers for the withering hours of the aniline light of November. Most of its leaves have fallen, but this fading burst of life, can make one stop and admire...so different from the gaudy spectacle of May when its blooms overpower all the new green growth in a robe of pink.

Whatever is the plant thinking! It freezes solid at night (20 F); but, the flowers never brown or rot. I mentioned this to Josef Halda once, who replied succinctly, "... where it grows, it freezes every night." It seems ridiculous to assign a cold hardiness rating to such a plant. Growing at

3000m in the Pirin Mt. of Bulgaria, it may even survive the magic number of -40 F, though I don't know. It is one of the slowest growing Daphnes, and takes well to any spot that is well drained. I tried growing it on tufa, but the plants did not like the constriction. I do think it would thrive in a clay crevice between rocks. In the garden we have plants in full sun, facing south and also on the opposite slope in considerably less light with little difference in flower production or growth.

Equally hardy, but entirely evergreen is the larger *D. arbuscula* and the derivative clones now offered - we have 4 ourselves. The smallest of these, *D. arbuscula* 'Muran Castle', is a compact mound of the most verdant green one can imagine. Flowers are a pale pink and abundantly cover the plant in May. This clone has the distinct habit of rooting from the branches that touch soil - not all forms do this- and these branches can be separated and used for new plants.



Daphne velenovskyi

Rick Lupp offers a form, *D. arb.* 'Radicans', which is also quite dwarf. However, the needles are shorter and remind one of close relationship with *D. petraea*. By the way, *D. arbuscula* will grow in tufa quite well- not too surprising as it is a true chasmophyte.

A curious form of *D. cneorum* 'Porteous' came by way of Barrie Porteous, which he believes is a dwarf form from the French Pyrenees. Completely prostrate, it looks more like a small willow with the red/brown stems exposed as it gets older. Typical white, very fragrant flowers adorn the branches. This plant is small enough to

use in containers. Like *D. velenovskyi*, it does not grow in tufa well, but needs a coarse soil.

The hybrid *D. arbuscula* x *D. collina* named *D. x*



'Lawrence Crocker' is possibly the easiest of all Daphnes available now. An intermediate form

D. cneorum „Porteous“

with gray/green leaves and the dark pink/purple flowers of *D. collina* and is wonderfully fragrant. A bit larger than *D. arbuscula* it grows eventually 20cm tall and 30cm wide. It is easily controlled by cutting it back severely. This is, in fact, the best method for encouraging healthy growth and second bloom) and can be done to all Daphnes.



D. x „Lawrence Crocker“

Of the smaller hybrids now available, I like *D. x thauma* (*D. petraea* x *D. striata*) as it has a moderate growth rate and the white flowers are set off by the dark green leaves. *Daphne x whiteorum* 'Beauworth', a cross of *D. jasminea* and *D. petraea* has large red/pink buds, opening to rose pink flowers. An easy growing plant with dark green leaves, it forms an attractive multi-

branched shrublet. Another compact mat is *D. x 'Schlyteri'*, with parents *D. x 'Leila Haines'* and *D. arbuscula* – it retains the darker flowers of *D. x 'Leila Haines'*. It can be used as a low



spreading mat. A regimental clip will encourage new growth and more flowers.

D. velenovskyi „Balkan Rose“ – *Lamium armenum* & *Androsace*

I have always been interested in how Daphnes will grow on/with tufa and have found it is best not to make assumptions- the response is quite individual. However, there is great promise in growing the smaller Daphnes in narrow crevices, sandwiched with a clay/sand mix. In early April Halda planted some troughs for us in this fashion and though it froze solid every night for over a week, even the *D. calcicola* was unfazed – and everything was straight out of the green house. Since Halda and others have used this method for well over 20 years, it is time we in North America adopted it too. The best aspect of this method is it provides a less stressful environment for root growth, and almost as a bonus, the design and display possibilities take a quantum leap. There will more on this next spring.



SHOCK AND AWE

TEXT BY DEAN EVANS



First of all I would like to thank our President, Judy Brown, for her article (July 2013 issue of the BNARGS newsletter) describing my garden. She only mentioned but a small amount of what she actually saw. One thing that surprised me was her failure to comment on the three Jersey bull calves in my back yard, but I assume many of you have found how useful they can be, and have your own! I bring bull calves home from the farm each Spring as summer pets. They're therapeutic and watching them graze relaxes the mind. A cow extends its tongue, using it to sweep grass towards its mouth, and then rips the grass off with its teeth while moving its neck side to side or upwards. A cow only has teeth on the bottom – its top jaw has hard rough gums. Horses also use their lips and will pull the grass out by the roots and eventually destroy a field if not moved to another grazing field. Cows also clean up brush by eating the leaves – this stresses the saplings and they will start to die. My calves get very friendly throughout the season because I feed them well and give them treats. For example, while watching TV I cut up apples in chunks. This year there has been a massive quantity of apples, enough so that limbs that were not propped to give them support oftentimes broke. Unfortunately people don't have the time or the knowledge required, and many good trees have been destroyed this year. I asked a gentleman if I could have some apples from a tree in his yard and he agreed. I backed my pickup truck under

one large limb, stood in the box and shook a huge quantity off. Even so there were still more apples left on the limb than there would be on it in an average year. My calves are not only very pretty but perform a valuable service. When I pull weeds, they go into a pail along with a small quantity of grain. The calves eat them up and process them so they decompose much faster in the compost pile than they would if they were thrown in directly from the garden. The compost pile worms have even learned to listen for my footsteps. When Judy and her husband left my place I recognized their expression as what I call “shock and awe”.

All gardens have a theme or reflect the gardener’s personality. I have been able to blend those two great American classics: Tobacco Road and Lonesome Dove.



In the past I have written at length about slugs and have stated that few Alpine plants have developed defenses against slugs. It is heartbreaking to plant a pot of seedlings that you have grown with such pride, waiting for the day you will see these plants bloom as they appear in beautiful color pictures in the Quarterly, only to find that the slugs have eaten them. Sometimes the culprit has stayed on after full sunrise to complete the job. This has driven me to develop strategies to control their numbers. One thing I do is put some organic material down – weeds, leaves and the like – in a small pile. I cover this with a flattened cardboard cereal box to retain moisture, and I also spread a plastic potting soil

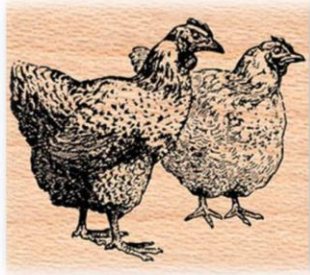
bag over the whole thing which is weighed down. When I check these there are always worms and occasionally some large slugs. The largest worms go into the compost pile because I can pick them quickly. The large slugs are put into a different un-flattened cereal box. When I am done checking piles, the box containing the slugs is thrown into my outside soil-cooking woodstove. Oftentimes I move the pile over and allow the area to dry. This leaves a quantity of worm castings which can then be swept up using a whisk broom with a small dustpan and placed in a 5 gallon plastic bucket for future use potting house plants.



It is remarkable how little cereal comes in a box these days. They say the contents settle but they won’t shake the box while filling to give the purchaser real value. So you end up buying a box with a picture of a smiling sports hero or other expensive advertising artwork that costs more than the contents. I at least get some value out of the box.

I checked in the barn and I only have 18 6 and 5 gallon polytainer seed pots cooked and stored so far, a testament to how the rain and this worn out hip have hindered my activities. Of course I spend a lot of time with my dog Tommy, sitting around, taking rides out to the Amish farm and produce auctions on Tuesdays and Fridays and kicking a half-inflated soccer ball for him to chase, bark at and fetch. But I am all in at the end of the day. I’ve been medicating myself using hen cone injections. When I am at the auction I buy the old scaly leg hens. I make soup and my favorite meal, chicken and dumplings. It’s a staple in my diet. The cones I razor off and cook down to a syrupy slimy gelatin which I inject into

my right hip as a lubricant, mixing in a small amount of Butazolidin. I use an old pair of logging boots that were in the attic out at the farm – they had quite a history as they were used by my uncle in the 1932 Winter Olympics at Lake Placid when he was recruited as a ski jumper by the logging crew of Blount Lumber. I screwed a hook into each sole so I can hang upside down from a pipe placed in a doorframe. While in this position and using a large syringe that I obtained while apprenticing at Vernon Downs years ago inject my relief medicine. Of course it would be much more painful if I didn't clean the injection site with hard cider as well drink a quart-size canning jar first! In a day or two I am back strutting around in the barnyard, but I am going to have this hip replaced on Nov. 12 of this year.



Final Thoughts

There is nothing in this issue about our last meeting, which was, in fact, a day for visiting a couple of gardens here in Petersham. The day was reasonably nice, a bit cool and cloudy, but acceptable for spring in New England. Since only 5 members of our chapter came to visit, I thought that I'd close out this special issue with a few photographs of what my garden is featuring right now.



Hymenoxis herbacea



Primula rusbyi



Daphne cneorum 'Porteous'

PFG

Positions of Responsibility

Chairperson – Judy Brown
Vice-Chairperson – Dean Evans
Secretary – Carol Hanby
Treasurer – Elisabeth Zander
Archivist – James Fichter
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