

The Trillium

Piedmont Chapter
North American Rock Garden Society
Chapel Hill, Durham, Raleigh, NC

It's all in who you know...

by Scott McMahan

This phrase certainly proved true on a plant hunting expedition I took last fall with good friends Ozzie Johnson and Dan Hinkley. The three of us have traveled together on many occasions and were happy to be collecting together again at this, the beginning of a five-week trip starting in Sichuan, China and ending in Northern Vietnam. In fact, this was only the second day in the woods after several days of traveling around the world to first get to China and then enduring a long car ride to our first destination, La Ba He Nature Preserve.

Our first day of collecting had a very questionable start, but proved to be quite fruitful by the end of the afternoon. After trudging through knee deep mud, constantly dodging man-eating rose bushes and all the while pulling leech after bloody (no pun intended) leech off of our bodies, we made our way into a rather diverse valley. All around us were ancient specimens of *Cercidiphyllum japonicum* (Kadsura Tree), maples of all different species (*Acer campbellii*, *A. davidii*, *A. mono*) and most impressive of all, the fabled *Davidia involucrata* (Dove Tree, Handkerchief Tree).



Photo by Dave Creech with permission.

It was truly one of those times when one is in such awe that the level of excitement is indescribable. We were in the same area where some of the most legendary plant explorers spent years scouring the mountains looking for new treasures. The stands of trees we were looking at could well have been the very trees that explorers like Ernest Wilson or Joseph Rock collected seed from 100 years ago.

(Continued on page 2)

Davidia involucrata at Nanjing Botanical Garden, China



(Continued from page 1)

Ernest Wilson, plant-hunter extraordinaire, once described Davidia as “the most interesting and beautiful of all trees of the north-temperate flora...” While Wilson may have been partial to the Dove Tree, it is estimated that he was responsible for introducing over 1,000 new ornamental plants into western cultivation. Dove Tree is native to western China and found mainly in Hubei and Sichuan provinces. While it starts out as a small tree on the forest floor, over time it becomes a large and beautiful shade tree that can grow to over 60 feet tall. Davidia is related to our native Black Gum (*Nyssa* sp.) and has a flower so amazing that anyone who sees it must have one. Actually, the flower itself is relatively small; it is the two huge white bracts surrounding the

flower that are so eye-catching. The upper bract is usually three inches long and two inches wide, while the lower bract can reach up to seven inches long and four inches wide! Since the bract is actually a modified leaf and more resilient than a flower petal, it can be enjoyed for two to three weeks. While the Dove tree should certainly be used more in our landscapes, the fact that it is not easily propagated and can take eight to ten years to flower makes it a difficult sell for most nurseries and garden centers.

Photo by Dave Creech with permission.



***Davidia* at Nanjing Botanical Garden, China**

With a few terrific finds already under our belts, the next morning we returned again to the rich forests of the La Ba He Nature Preserve. During the holiday, the Preserve is a popular destination for Chinese tourists to hike. Since we were there a day prior to the Chinese National holiday, we did not expect, nor did we see, hardly anyone all day. Shortly into the trek we realized that this was not going to be the collecting day we had hoped. We were still seeing amazing specimens of trees, but most of them we had either seen the day before or a late spring freeze, which plagued us the whole trip, had killed the seed before it had a chance to ripen. Shortly after lunch we decided to call it a day and headed back down the mountain. When, out of nowhere, a military jeep whizzing around the curve and headed straight for us, came to a sliding halt 50 feet away. Our knee-jerk reaction was panic. While we did have permission to collect here, our guide was not with us and none of us spoke enough Chinese to explain to them what we were doing. While Ozzie walked ahead to say “Hello”, Dan and I got our cameras out in hopes that they would understand we were just botanizing rather than causing trouble. As Ozzie walked closer to the Jeep, the people inside seemed to keep pouring out! In all, there were seven Chinese men crammed in the jeep and they were all now standing in a line across the road looking at us with great interest. I thought for sure that they were some sort of police but much to our surprise, it turned out to be the mayor of a neighboring town and his entourage. Fortunately, one of the men could speak a bit of broken English. Through him we found out that rather than arresting us, they were much more interested in our opinion of the area and very hopeful that we were savvy business men from the U.S. who were looking to invest. After

a 10 minute conversation that probably did not make much sense to either party, I think that we convinced the men that we were there simply enjoying the beauty of the plants in the preserve. They smiled politely and asked for a group photo. We all gathered around while the driver stood in front of us with seven or eight cameras around his neck and started taking pictures for everyone. Once the photo shoot was over, we shook hands and said our goodbyes.



Photo by Scott McMahan

**The Mayor of Ya'an & His New Friends—Ozzie Johnson (second from left),
Dan Hinkley (third from right), Scott McMahan (far right)**

Later that afternoon, we reconnected with our guide and told him about meeting our new friend, the Mayor of Ya'an. He looked very skeptically at us and just said “Maybe he was the Mayor...maybe not”.

The next day it was time to leave La Ba He and move on to our next destination. Driving is one of my least favorite things to do in China. The roads in the remote areas we travel are very poor. When driving on the curvy mountain roads, you never know when a landslide or a careless driver who has caused an accident could cause traffic to stop for hours. This time we were scouting out areas that were very close to the terrible earthquake that occurred in Sichuan in May of '08, so we knew that we were bound to run into multiple landslides and road construction. Sure enough, late in the afternoon, we came upon a nasty traffic jam. In typical Chinese driving style, our driver honked and weaved his way through the seemingly impenetrable maze of cars and somehow we arrived at the head of the line. A car wreck had traffic stopped in both directions. Frustrated drivers on both sides of the accident were now out of their cars giving advice to the parties involved while the police tried to keep other cars from driving through the crash scene causing further delays. Like everyone else, our driver approached the officer and tried to talk his way through...no luck. After sitting and stewing about how many hours it was going to take to clear the road, our guide got out of the car and once again approached the officer. They talked for five or six minutes, continually looking at us and pointing when, unexpectedly, the officer nodded, made a few cars back up and let us right through. As we drove through the road block (getting numerous dirty looks), one of us asked, “Did you bribe him or something?” to which Gary smiled and replied, “No, I told him you are special guests of the Mayor and he is expecting you for dinner.”

So, I guess it really is all in who you know... ☺

The Backbone of Southern Gardening... Bulbs Throughout the Year

Sandra Ladendorf

Bulbs, large and small, are the backbone of southern gardening—more important here than in any other part of the country where we have gardened, I believe. While I treasure the large golden flowers of our ‘Connecticut King’ lilies, the truly gigantic purple orbs of *Allium giganteum*, the pendant ivory trumpets of *Lilium formosanum* var. *pricei*, ‘Mount Hood’ daffodils, August’s naked ladies, the architectural form of September’s *Lycoris radiata* and all other large bulbs in our yard, it is the tiny ones that truly capture my heart.

Our gardening year begins with mats of *Cyclamen coum* in bloom during January and February. This cyclamen is not showy. A single plant is best appreciated in a pot held inches from one’s eyes, but a sizable planting of the small pink flowers with their reflexed petals and handsome variegated foliage adds color and charm to the winter garden. To my eye, the most beautiful of all are the various *C. coum* with silver or pewter leaves that glow in the winter light. Nancy Goodwin of Hillsborough, NC, introduced us to these beauties during her Montrose Nursery years. *Cyclamen coum* grows happily in front of established azaleas, daphnes or large trees—anywhere in the garden that provides partial shade and is a place I never water. *Cyclamen* are easy from seed and will bloom in about 15-18 months.

The species crocus are other January delights. They come in a host of colors—yellow, white, purple, striped, lavender and blends. All are worthy of space in your garden. I would urge anyone to add several hundred each year. Why in such numbers? They are relatively small flowers, the bulbs are very inexpensive—and many will be eaten each year by the voles. I find that if I plant 100 on either side of a path, the next year I may have five returning on one side and 105 on the other. The voles are unpredictable and active in my yard. Cats do help keep the population under control. If I were to plant but one early crocus, it would be one of the golden ones, like *C. susianus* or *C. chrysanthus* ‘Gypsy Girl’. That mid-winter yellow gleam is such a wonderful harbinger of the colorful spring ahead.

Snowdrops and snowflakes are other bulbs that provide early beauty. I have only a few—and where I have ten *Gallanthus elwesii*, I would like to have hundreds. In northern gardens, they often poke through the snow; here they hold their pristine small white bells above our brown ground cover of fallen leaves.

These earliest bulbs are followed soon by *Iris reticulata* and its named cultivars. Like the species crocuses, these irises are small, so again, I like to plant them 100 at a time, quite close to one another. The species itself has relatively narrow reddish purple petals, but some of the selections have broader petals and come in clear, light blue, medium blue, dark blue, purple, etc. The Daffodil Mart in Gloucester, Virginia, offers 15 of these named varieties this year. Sky blue ‘Harmony’ is one of my favorites, but you won’t go wrong with any of them. These irises bloom above the early foliage and then the leaves elongate and grow for several weeks, so plan for some tall (15") rather stringy foliage for a while. In my garden, the *I. reticulatas* have not been bothered by voles or any other pests.

Depending on the scale and form of your garden, you may like to use some of the standard crocuses that bloom after the species and have larger flowers. ‘Jeanne d’Arc’ is a favorite of mine—pure white and glistening.

Scillas are a huge group, with flowers of widely varying sizes. In our woodland, I enjoy the wood hyacinths that are about 15" tall. For the scree, the minute, less-than-two-inches-tall, *Scilla bifolia* adds its clear blue charm. We first saw this bulb on a mountainside in the Pelion Range of Greece, high above the Aegean Sea. It was growing in combination with a cream-colored crocus and quite lovely.

If you are looking for another small, true blue flower, plant some of the chionodoxas, like *C. gigantea*. It is hardly giant, (catalogs say 5-6", but it is more like 3" in our garden), but the color is gentian blue.

Like the scillas, there are muscaris of varying sizes. Pick the ones that are of good scale for your garden, and plant them in drifts. If you select the sterile varieties, the flowers will last much longer in the garden.

While our native *Erythronium americanum* thrives and multiplies here in our woods, I have not done well with the showier varieties like ‘White Beauty’ or ‘Pagoda’. Perhaps it is because I have never planted them in numbers. They are expensive—\$5 a bulb for ‘White Beauty’---and when I planted three, the deer ate the foliage to the ground; if one should survive and bloom, some pest in our woods drills holes in the flowers. I yearn for the beautiful drifts I have seen in England.

(Continued on page 5)

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Permission from Ellen Hornig, Seneca Hill Perennials

(Continued from page 4)

If you want a ground-hugging carpet of daisy-like flowers on ferny foliage, it is hard to beat *Anemone blanda*. I am very fond of 'White Splendour' and add another 100 to one area of our woods each year. Voles and other pests do not seem to bother these anemones. In another part of the woods, I have the variety 'Atrocaerulea' drifting beneath azaleas. It has rich blue flowers. I do not care for the 'Blue Shades' that are on the market. Most of the group I planted turned out to be pale, wishy-washy colors, and I have weeded them out. There are a number of other anemones that are garden treasures. Again, it depends on your taste and the scale of your garden. Experiment!



Photo from Missouri Botanical Garden website

Anemone blanda White Splendour'

Nothing bothers them, neither deer nor vole nor other pest. They just quietly grow and multiply each year. The flowers are gorgeous; they look equally well in formal plantings, naturalized in the woodland or grown for cut flowers in the house. The species and wild forms are wonderful plants for the rock garden. While I want 100 of every bulb in this large genus, if I could have just one, it would have to be the golden glow of *Narcissus bulbocodium* var. *conspicuus*. I have a few planted at the driveway's edge, to greet visitors to the garden, and that mass of bright yellow hoops is welcoming indeed. My only complaint is that this species grows so vigorously that a planting really needs to be divided every two years or so. Another favorite is *N. scaberulus*. Each tiny, perfect trumpet is no larger than my smallest fingernail---a gem for troughs or other small plantings.

On recommendation from daffodil expert Bill Tichnor, I now put some fertilizer under the "bulbocodiums" when planting---first the trench, then some fertilizer covered lightly with compost, place the bulb s and then fill the hole with garden soil. For garden bulbs in general, I feed with 10-10-10 twice a year, once in the late fall and again when the foliage breaks the ground. For a less economical but time-saving method, you can use the slow-release Bulb Booster just once.

There are three genera I would recommend for fall gardening. Plant and enjoy any of the fall-blooming crocuses you can find on the market. I particularly like *C. sativus* with its bright orange stigma. Saffron for our bouillabaisse soups and for the Spanish paella comes from the harvest of thousands of these tiny stigmas; thus we can well understand why saffron is so expensive.

Also plant any of the colchicums you can locate. They have relatively large, crocus-like flowers, most in a lavender hue, although there are dark purples, rose and white forms available. The double 'Waterlily' is expensive but very beautiful. Note that the colchicum foliage does not appear with the flowers, but later in the spring. It tends to be a bit large, so plan on mixing these bulbs with hostas or some other attractive perennial that will come along to hide this bulb foliage while it matures.

For a lovely sweep of gold in September, plant some sternbergias. Pure, tulip-like rich yellow flowers are held above the ground on 5 - 6" stems. Like so many other bulbs, five are wonderful but 500 are spectacular—witness Bill Hunt's long-established "Valley of Sternbergias" in Chapel Hill near the Botanical Garden.

Our garden year for bulbs ends as it begins, with a cyclamen. The showiest and easiest of these bulbs to grow is *C. hederifolium* which puts up its first flower in June and the last in December. The large bouquets are in September and October. A mature bulb is a masterpiece of floral production and perfection. After a number of years on our land, I am finding these bulbs all over the woods. The ants carry the unharvested seeds around, so I consider them my gardening allies. The bulbs are very easy to move if I find them in the middle of a path or in some other undesirable place.

While it's hard to resist spring bulb catalogs or the fall bulb displays in our garden centers, I would urge you to remember that for every bulb you purchase, a hole must be dug, so don't get carried away. Have fun each year. Plant some old favorites and experiment with some bulbs you have never grown. Bulbs are the most rewarding element of North Carolina gardening. ☺

[Sandra Ladendorf is former Piedmont Chapter President and national President of the NARGS. Now a resident of California, she lived and gardened at 123 High Hickory Rd., Chapel Hill, NC 27516 in 1994 when she wrote this article for *The Trillium*.]



Courtesy of NARGS
Photo by John Lonsdale

Sternbergia sicula

Plant Profile: *Cercidiphyllum japonicum* (Katsura Tree)

Joann Currier

One of my first encounters seeing a katsura tree, *Cercidiphyllum japonicum*, was at the Morris Arboretum in Philadelphia, PA in the mid 90s. WOW! It was amazing to see this huge specimen with its multiple trunks and limbs spreading out in octopus-like fashion! This is one of the most stately large trees I have ever encountered, and is a “must see” if you visit this beautiful arboretum. This specimen can be viewed by looking at www.morrisarboretum.com. Other magnificent specimens can be viewed at www.raretrees.org/cerp11.html.

Cercidiphyllum japonicum is a large deciduous tree native to Japan and China. In cultivation it often develops unusual multiple trunks and reaches a height of 20-60 ft. with a spread of equal size, although the width can be less in some specimens. It is a fairly fast grower, pyramidal when young and develops a large, rounded spreading outline as it matures. Leaves of the katsura tree are fan-shaped like redbud leaves (*Cercis*), thus the botanical name *Cercidiphyllum*. The foliage emerges a red-wine color in spring and turns a blue green color in summer. Fall color is a nice clear yellow with peachy tones. A unique characteristic of the foliage in autumn when the leaves are falling is a fragrance reminiscent of cotton candy. Bark is smooth and tan on young specimens, becoming furrowed and peeling with maturity.

The katsura tree is adaptable to zones 4-8 and best sited in sunny areas with rich moist, slightly acid soil. Although tolerant of wind, this tree needs supplemental watering in dry periods, especially in the first years of establishment. This tree has no serious pest or disease problems. Sun scald has been reported, especially in winter in colder climates.

Although *Cercidiphyllum japonicum* is usually reserved for larger landscape areas, this truly four-season tree can be enjoyed in smaller spaces by planting one of the weeping or dwarf forms. Although not common, many of the following cultivars can be found at specialty nurseries or by mail order.

‘Amazing Grace’ A weeping form found as a seedling by Theodore Klein. It is 15-25 ft tall with a spread wider than ‘Pendula’.

‘Heronwood Globe’ is a rounded dwarf form from Dan Hinkley (Heronwood Nursery) that is reported to reach 15-20 ft with maturity.



Cercidiphyllum japonicum

‘Krukenberg Dwarf’ is semi-dwarf cultivar with smaller leaves and shorter internodes.

‘Morioka Weeping’ This Japanese clone with an upright yet pendulous habit has been traced back to the Ryugenzi Temple near Morioka in the 1600s.

‘Pendula’ Branches cascade to the ground on this weeping form that is wider than tall, growing 15-25 ft. tall.



Cercidiphyllum japonicum

Reprinted with permission from Heronwood Nursery

Reprinted with permission from Morris Arboretum,
University of Pennsylvania

New Member Introduction ~ Bob Pries



'Tidal Wave' Vigorous weeping form selected by Bill Barnes at Lorax Farms.

References:

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5. www.raretrees.org/cerp11.html

Joann Currier is the owner of Unique Plant Nursery, Chapel Hill, NC



Katsura in Winter

Reprinted with permission from Morris Arboretum, University of Pennsylvania

This summer I was transplanted from St. Louis, MO to Roxboro NC. I thought I might share my Midwestern views of rock gardening and note the similarities with a Southern rock garden.

Let me define rock gardening. Like the caterpillar in Alice in Wonderland, I think the term often means whatever I want it to mean. At Missouri Botanical Gardens, about 20 years ago, I co-founded the Gateway chapter of NARGS. My first task seemed to be explaining that rock gardening was not a rock collection, but was about plants. I tried to explain to people the enthusiasm I had for dainty alpines. I noted that once you have been to a Colorado alpine meadow in full bloom on the Fourth of July, you are hooked. I attribute this partly to the euphoria that one experiences at 10,000 ft. A Rocky Mountain High is a real experience. The summer is short at high elevations and everything comes into bloom at the same time creating a glorious display. These miniature flowers are, dare I say, cute. But often I would hear protests that you can't grow alpines in Missouri. Sometimes these complaints came from people who already had alpines growing in their gardens, but did not recognize them as such. Alpines are a part of rock gardening but one could have a rock garden without an alpine.

I was attracted to rock gardening long before I experienced an alpine meadow. Rock Gardening seemed to be the umbrella under which one would find the best plants-people and the most interesting plants. As a young child my parents bought me a subscription to the *New Illustrated Encyclopedia of Gardening*. Each month a new volume would come. As I discovered a new world of plants, the editor, T.H. Everett, would often note, that they were suitable for the rock garden. The picture of the New York Botanical Garden's rock garden clinched my interest. That was how I hoped my garden would look someday. My idea of a rock garden was a diverse collection of plants grown in a natural setting.

Of course if we choose this definition we are then confronted with what is natural? There are many different natural environments from prairie to woodland, from desert to bog. I can imagine many rock gardens without a rock and any of these habitats as an overlying theme.

My studies in college were as a plant ecologist. Initially I learned about the climax vegetation for different parts of the world. I built this image of what was natural and what was nature's ultimate expression for particular geographic area. The concept of climax seemed to include the dogma that it would be the most beautiful natural environment that that geography was capable of producing. As I studied nature I soon learned that these idealized notions do not always hold true. Mother Nature cares little about what we think is beautiful. I also began to appreciate that man is a part of nature and even before western civilization came to North America the Indians had profound affects on the 'natural' environment.

At this point I seem to be entering a world of mysticism. I now believe rock gardening is a philosophy. It tries to bring what we perceive as 'natural' to a bit of our garden. Perhaps it can be defined better by what it is not. I don't believe plants lined out rows, is rock gardening. Yet in nature, one can find trees in a cypress swamp in rows (the young seedling begin life on the floating straight log of a dead forest giant). I guess I just have to settle for, "I know a rock garden when I see one". So much for definitions! I believe one can create a rock garden anywhere. The Missouri Ozarks were just as challenging as the North Carolina Piedmont. Each has heat, humidity, red clay soils, squirrels and deer. Yet each is different. Learning how to work with nature, here, is a new challenge. The expertise in the Piedmont Chapter is extensive and I hope to learn a great deal about my new environment. ☺



Piedmont Chapter Meeting

Totten Center, Chapel Hill, NC

February 21, 2009 9:30 a.m.

Scott McMahan

Clermont, Ga.

“Plant Hunting in the Himalaya & Vietnam”

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OTHER SIGNIFICANT POSITIONS:

Sept. Plant Sale Manager: Kirtley Cox
Refreshments: Gwen and Maurice Farrier

The Trillium, Newsletter of the Piedmont Chapter
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Upcoming Meetings

March 21, 2009

Pam Beck
Wake Forest, NC
“Small Space Garden Design”

April 18, 2009

Lisa Bartlett
Atlanta, Ga.

Refreshments at the Meetings

You are encouraged to bring goodies to share to the meetings.
Beverages are available. Last name begins with:

February P-T

March U-Z

April Anyone

But feel free to bring goodies anytime!



Cyclamen hederifolium

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