



The Trillium

VOLUME 26, ISSUE 2
FEBRUARY 2016

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

Native Plants for Piedmont Rock Gardens by Margo MacIntyre

When Marian called to ask me to write an article about native plants for rock gardens for the Trillium, a wave of nostalgia hit me. During my college years and later, my Mom enthusiastically reported on the goings-on in the Piedmont Chapter of NARGS. Many times when I was home visiting from my gardening work at the Mt. Cuba Center in Delaware or Hurley Park in Salisbury, I attended Rock Garden Society meetings in Chapel Hill.

Mom created what I call a rough draft of a rock garden on a bank filled with rocks she brought in and placed. The bank is perhaps two feet high and it tapers into the woods. It was created with rocks from Chatham County and was home to many small bulbs, low and creeping shrubbery, ferns and small perennials. The shady ends contained choice spring wildflowers, some of which remain today, still nestled among moss-covered rocks. Since the garden has not been tended in over a decade, it's safe to say that these gems stand the test of time. *Erythronium americanum*, troutlily, *Claytonia virginica*, spring beauty, *Silene virginica*, firepink and *Mitchella repens*, partridgeberry, grace the small hillside. The *Erythronium* and *Claytonia* seeded into the lawn with reckless abandon. All of these residents of our local woodlands are available from local and mail order native plant sources and they are easy to grow.

Over the years, Mom improved the early rock garden and she created many other gardens. Her association with the North Carolina Botanical Garden plant rescue volunteers and her participation in Piedmont Rock Garden Society meetings



Erythronium americanum—Trout

Photo by Alan Cressler, from The
Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center



Claytonia—Spring Beauty

Photo by Alan Cressler, from The
Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Cen-

and conferences stirred what seems to be a natural desire: a new, larger garden in more sun. As Elizabeth Lawrence and countless others said, gardeners eventually come to a place where they must have a rock garden. It just seems that gardeners often mature in this way. Designs were created. More rocks were brought in, soil, scree, and energy were in place. In this garden she planted the choicest rock garden plants and many thrived; and one spring the garden was included on the Piedmont Rock Garden Society tour. The new rock garden was well-drained and had all the necessary components of a rock

garden, but the summers were difficult due to watering requirements, and I suppose that the wet winters took their toll too. As is the case in all gardens, not everything thrived and there were chances to re-plant.

Looking back I wonder how the addition of more native plants would have affected the garden and if the garden would have been more resilient to diminishing input from gardeners. My trip to the Rockies this summer left many images in mind, and while there are few native Southeastern plants that are as diminutive as Rocky Mountain alpines, we can certainly achieve the effect of carpets of color among rocks with certain native plants. Here are a few suggestions of native plants suitable for southern rock gardens.



Trailing phlox, *Phlox nivalis*, is a natural first choice for a spreading, evergreen and colorful groundcover. Pink flowers cover this 6" tall plant in late April and it is well adapted to dry soil and drought. There are white varieties such as 'Snowdrift' available as well. Its cousin moss phlox, *Phlox subulata* is another great choice and there are numerous varieties of white, pink and lavender to select. Another groundcover that is well-adapted is pussytoes, *Antennaria plantaginifolia*. Its gray-green leaves persist and the charming fuzzy silvery white flowers attract butterflies and add interest in the spring. Pussytoes will enjoy lean, well drained soil. Green and gold, *Chrysogonum virginianum*, is also an excellent evergreen choice for part sun or shade. This tough plant has gold flowers sporadically from March-November, with the biggest show being in mid-spring. It's easy to grow, though some green and gold succumbs to fungus. It easily climbs between and over rocks.

Birdfoot violet, *Viola pedata*, is a choice selection for a rock garden that is well-drained and contains lean soil too (a pocket of 'terrible' soil of rocks and clay is best). It works well in small groupings and will self-sow if it's very happy. Its purple flowers attract butterflies as well. Easier to grow is the Blue-eyed grass, *Sisyrinchium angustifolium* which is in the iris family. Its narrow bluish-green leaves look good throughout most of the year and the blue flowers appear in spring. This plant self-seeds readily and can be a challenge if the weeder can't tell them from grass seedlings. Its cousin, Atlantic Blue-eyed grass, *Sisyrinchium atlanticum* has narrower leaves and is also easy to grow. Fire-pink, *Silene virginica*, is a favorite of mine. Its bright red, star-shaped flowers are a welcome change from the pastel pinks and blues of spring. The deep gold of mouse-eared coreopsis, *Coreopsis auriculata*, is also a bit different from the standard spring colors and it blooms later in spring too. Mouse-eared coreopsis likes acid loam soil in part sun. Crested iris, *Iris cristata*, also likes shade or part sun. I have found that it blooms best with slightly more sun. Clones of crested iris exist and range in color from white to a deeper purple.

A few taller, more unique suggestions should be considered as well. Sandhills St John's Wort, *Hypericum lloydii*, is a diminutive shrubby plant 5-20 inches tall. Its natural habitat is in dry woods and pinelands in the lower piedmont and

inner coastal plain of North Carolina. Yellow-gold flowers grace this plant in June. *Asclepias verticillata*, whorled milkweed, has clusters of greenish-white flowers from June to September and attracts butterflies. Its natural habitat is the dry, open woods in the mountains and piedmont. A couple of grasses round out my suggestions of piedmont plants for rock gardens. Arrowleaf-threawn, *Aristida purpurea*, is a fine-textured grass common in the eastern United States. Its feathery inflorescences create a misty, purple haze effect. Slender woodoats, *Chasmanthium laxum*, is a delicate grass reaching 3 feet when in flower. It grows in woodlands and meadows so it tolerates shade to part sun and blooms June to September.



Iris cristata

Photo by Alan Cressler, from The
Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center



***Silene virginica*—Fire Pink**

Photo by Alan Cressler, from The
Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

It was difficult to narrow the choices, but I hope some of these suggestions are new to you. As gardeners, we are always looking for additions to our gardens, and there is no limit to the choices or the chance to try something unfamiliar. Many of the plants suggested are available at the North Carolina Botanical Garden daily plant sale and most others are available at the annual fall plant sale.

*Margo MacIntyre is curator of the Coker Arboretum, which is part of the North Carolina Botanical Garden.
Her mother was Marguerite MacIntyre of Chapel Hill.*



Plant Portrait: *Shortia galacifolia* by Marlyn Miller

Perhaps the most famous plant in the Southern Blue Ridge Escarpment is Oconee Bells (*Shortia galacifolia*), a rare endemic first collected by the French botanist, Andre Michaux, in South Carolina in 1788 and later named by nineteenth-century botanist, Asa Gray, who described it as “perhaps the most interesting plant in North America.” Timothy Spira, in his book, *Wildflowers and Plant Communities of the Southern Appalachian Mountains and Piedmont*, places oconee bells in the acidic cove forest community. He also describes its isolation in eastern North America and that of relatives in eastern Asia as remnants of a wider distribution abridged by cooler temperatures millions of years ago.

Shortia makes a lovely rock garden plant with its shiny, evergreen leaves and low growth habit, and it spreads by shallow runners. Blooming in March to April, the flowers are bell-shaped, about 1” long, borne singly on leafless stalks. The calyx and corolla are 5-lobed, petals are white to pale pink, the 5 stamens are attached to the tube, and the pistil is 3-lobed. The basal leaves are rounded/spatulate, toothed, evergreen, and up to 3” long. The species name refers to the leaf similarity to *Galax* which is in the same family –Diapensiaceae. You should be aware, however, of the current “status” of *Shortia* if you covet it for your garden: *Shortia galacifolia* var. *brevistyla*, Northern Oconee Bells **Endangered**; *Shortia galacifolia* var. *galacifolia* Southern Oconee Bells, **Special Concern, Vulnerable**. Take note: these official designations are accompanied by laws of acquisition and possession!

The “Escarpment” is the meet-up of North and South Carolina and Georgia and has an annual rainfall of as much as 100 inches. So I should have been a better steward of a 4 ft diameter clump of Shortia on a slightly-raised mound near my creek during a drought in 2007; they had been flourishing, but that summer they dried out and just disappeared. Luckily, I had others in flatter places that did not dry out. I got my start of *Shortia* from my aunt in Transylvania County many years ago and was fortunate that it liked my woods here in Cary, but it has been successfully cultivated as far north as Grand-Métis, Quebec.



Photo from Plant Delights Nursery website

As much as I look forward to seeing those delicate flowers in the early spring, I find the plant's story more compelling than the plant itself.

First collected by Andre Michaux in its non-flowering stage during his 11 years combing eastern North America for plants for King Louis XVI of France, it was “lost” for nearly a century. Michaux's specimen languished in the herbarium in Paris until Asa Gray, a professor at the University of Michigan Ann Arbor, happened on the dried specimen in 1839 (50 years after collection) during a tour of European herbaria and recognized it as a new species. He named it



Photo from the Alpine Garden Society.net

Shortia for Dr. Charles Wilkins Short, a Kentucky botanist with whom he corresponded. With Michaux's collection site noted only as “high mountains of Carolina,” *Shortia* soon became the Holy Grail for bota-



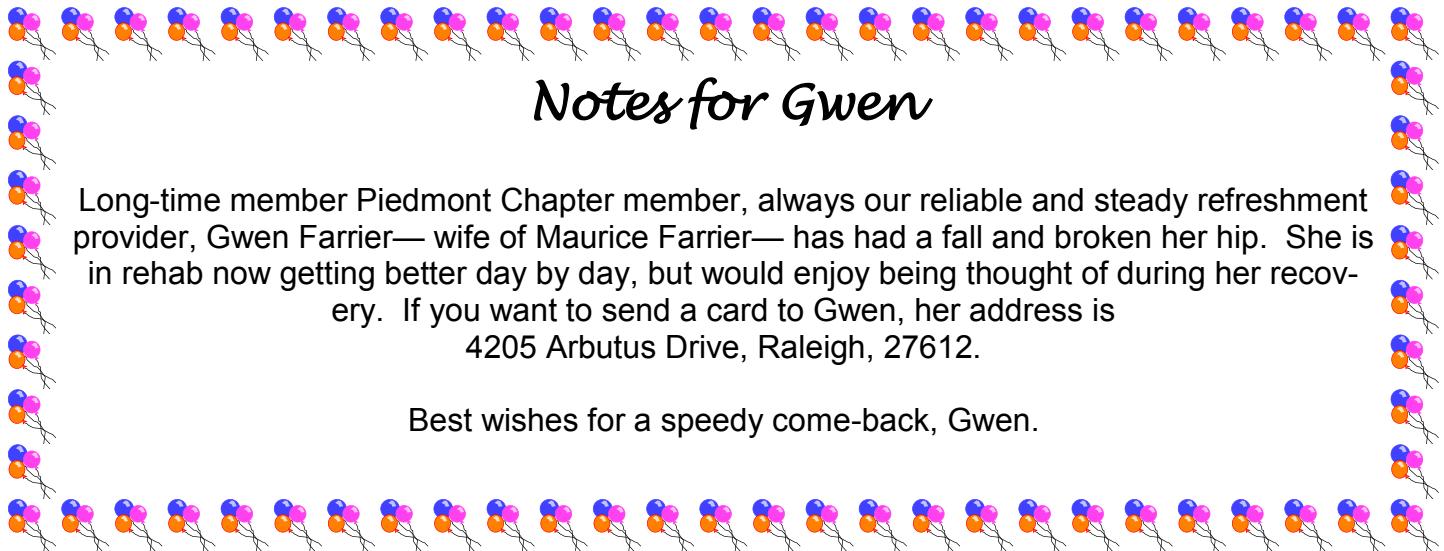
nists, including Gray, who made two trips (1841 & 1843) to North Carolina to Roan Mt., Grandfather Mt. and Mt. Mitchell without success.

Enter Mordecai Hyams (who managed an herb depot in western NC) and his son, George (1861–1932), who found *Shortia galacifolia* along the Catawba River (McDowell County, NC) near Marion in 1877. “We were passing along the road and my attention was called to an elevated hillside that I could not ascend as being at the time rather exhausted, being almost sixty years old” said Modecai Hyams, “so I requested George to ascend and bring whatever was in flower.” Not recognizing the plant, Mr. Hyams sent it to Joseph Congdon in Rhode Island, who sent it to Asa Gray, now at Harvard, who recognized it as the long-sought *Shortia*. On seeing the plant, Gray exclaimed “Eureka! Eureka! Think of that! My long faith rewarded at last.”

Gray, nearly 70, visited Statesville in 1879, toured the Wallace Brothers herb depot, and accompanied the Hyams to their *Shortia* patch. “In the secluded and well protected station, well overshadowed by rhododendrons and magnolias, was seen the little colony of the plant, so long sought,” recorded Gray. Alan Weakley Garden Program—a letter from Kathy Schlosser dated 12 Dec 2015 reads “Just two weeks ago, we closed on the Caraway tract! *Shortia galacifolia* var. *brevistyla* is now under the protection of the NC Plant Conservation Program.”

In June 2011 the Postal Service honored Asa Gray with a first-class Forever stamp in its third American Scientist Series bearing a picture of Gray with *Shortia galacifolia* in his handwriting and a picture of the reclusive plant in the background.

And the rest of the story... Michaux's original *Shortia* collection site was resolved in 1887 by another Harvard professor, Charles Sprague Sargeant, who followed Michaux's notes and found the plant farther south at about 1500 feet in Oconee County, South Carolina. Sargeant sent specimens and a location description to 77-year old Asa Gray, who is said to have wept with joy. Gray died the following year. ↫





2015-2016 Seed Exchange Fulfillment Activity

To date, over 14 members, over a period of 5 weeks, pulled 254 seed packets ordered by NARGS members from 39 states and 22 countries.

Marlyn Miller offered her basement for the activity and set-up by Charlie Kidder and David White made it a well organized affair.

Thanks to all who participated.

Photos by Bobby Ward



Helen Yoest

Steve Schroedl



Photo from UNC News Bureau

Introducing Damon Waitt February Speaker

Damon Waitt joined the N.C. Botanical Garden as director in April 2015, the garden's third director.

Waitt holds a Ph.D. in botany from the University of Texas in Austin, an M.S. in botany from Louisiana State University Baton Rouge, and a B.S. in biology from Tulane University. Waitt serves on the Invasive Species Advisory Committee for the National Invasive Species Council, is founder of the Texas Invasive Plant and Pest Council, and is past chair of the National Association of Exotic Pest Plant Councils.

Prior to moving to North Carolina, Waitt was senior director and botanist at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin, Texas

Piedmont NARGS Speakers Fall 2015/Spring 2016

February 13, 2016 [**note special date**]

Damon Waitt

"Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center and Texas Wildflowers."
Director, NC Botanical Garden
UNC Campus Box 3375
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3375

March 19, 2016

Tim Alderton

"NARGS Trips: Santa Fe and Ann Arbor"
JC Raulston Arboretum
NC State University
Box 7522
Raleigh, NC 27695-7522

April 16, 2016

Helen Yoest

"Gardening for the Future: My Forever Garden"
Freelance writer and garden stylist
3412 Yelverton Circle
Raleigh, NC 27612



Photo from the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

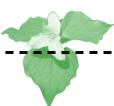
Damon Waitt with students, Jessica Strickland and Commander Ben, receiving awards at the Invasive Hunter Academy, Austin, Texas. Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, Texas.

Photograph Your Garden in 2016

Next January, 2017, we look forward to having a program of members' gardens and favorite (maybe most unusual?) plants. Whether graceful, riotous, whimsical or staid, your garden will be enjoyed, maybe envied by other members.

Please use the next growing season to photograph your garden treasures to share in a 5—8 minute Show and Tell session

Next January.



NARGS Piedmont Chapter Meeting
JC Raulston Arboretum

February 13, 9:30 am
[note special date]

Damon Waitt
“Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower
Center and Texas Wildflowers.”

Director, NC Botanical Garden
Chapel Hill, NC

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Charlie Kidder, Chair chas36kid@gmail.com
919-377-2938

Amelia Lane, Chair Elect
Amelia_Lane@gmail.com
919-787-6228

Bobby Ward, Vice Chair/Program Chair
biblio@nc.rr.com
919-781-3291

Marlyn Miller, Sec. marlynmiller@earthlink.net
919-467-3554

David White, Treas. dmwhite_nc@yahoo.com
919-306-1875

BOARD MEMBERS AT LARGE:

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814-590-2872

Kirt Cox kirtley@ncrrbiz.com
919-489-7892

Joann Currier uniqueplant@nc.rr.com
919-402-0117

Tom Harville tomhar@bellsouth.net
919-851-5369

Elsa Liner elsa_liner@hotmail.com
919-942-1766

TRILLIUM EDITOR

Marian Stephenson marian42836@yahoo.com
919-918-3580.

Bobby Wilder, Distribution Manager
wilder@nc.rr.com.
919-755-0480

Bobby Ward, Quality Review Editor

OTHER SIGNIFICANT POSITIONS:

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

Bring Goodies to Share

If your last name begins with the letters below,
please consider bringing something to share.

For February N—S



“A Higher State”

**NARGS Annual Meeting: Steppe to Alpine
Steamboat Springs, Colorado - June 23-27th 2016**

Steamboat Springs will offer NARGS members a chance to see a beautiful and less famous side of Colorado in what Mike Kintgen describes as a botanical paradise of contrasting habitats. Most of the hikes and trips will focus on elevations ranging from the rich and varied steppe flora up to the interesting montane and subalpine areas (depending on snow cover).

The meeting will convene in Denver on June 22 and picks up the afternoon of the 23rd in Steamboat Springs 170 miles to the northwest.

Please see Mike Kintgen's article "Steamboat Springs and the Northern Colorado Rockies" in the Summer 2015 *Rock Garden Quarterly* for a description of the floristic areas surrounding Steamboat Springs and what attendees may hope to see when they attend the meeting.

More details will be posted as they are available. Registration for the meeting will commence early in 2016

To register for the meeting, go to:
<https://www.nargs.org/steamboat-springs-registration>

REGISTRATION FOR THE MEETING HAS ALREADY BEGUN.

