

Newsletter

North American Rock Garden Society
Berkshire Chapter June 2012

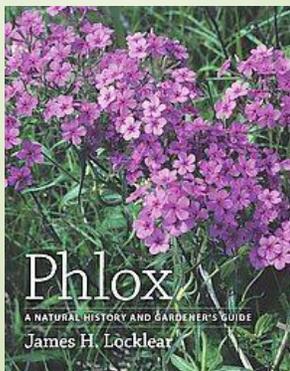
Next Meeting:

Saturday, July 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

AM: The View from Phlox Mountain

Phlox is a genus of 60 species that includes many of America's most beloved wildflowers, and has yielded plants that are cultivated by gardeners around the world. This illustrated presentation will explore the ecology of phlox species in the wild and the history of their use in the garden. The presentation will be tailored to emphasize species of local or regional interest.



Lunch – BYO

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

PM: Rediscovering the Jewels of the Plains

Claude Barr's 1983 classic, *Jewels of the Plains*, opened the eyes of gardeners around the world to the beauty and horticultural attributes of the flora of the Great Plains. This illustrated presentation will take the audience on a journey across the prairies and plains of America to rediscover the garden-worthy plants that won Barr's affection.

AUGUST IN JUNE



Hot! Yes, we all know it's hot. It was a strange winter, more like an extended autumn, but nobody expected THIS. I feel like I've been playing a sort of seasonal Monopoly game and I've just landed on "Go Directly to Dog Days, Do Not Spend Time in Spring." But, that's why so many people make a living in the field of meteorology. Uncertainty is their mantra, and we just have to go along for the ride.

It's been quite a while since I produced a newsletter, and to be honest, I've missed it. But I really did hope for – and still urgently need – a volunteer to replace me as the editor. Between my work, my gardening, my NARGS responsibilities and my new role on the Petersham Board of Selectmen, I just don't have the time to do this job reliably. A newsletter editor has to be able to produce the newsletter, "reliably," every month. So PLEASE contact me if you have the slightest interest in taking on the job – I will be happy to provide all the assistance you need to get started.

This semi-winter was a strange one for my garden. The lack of really cold weather probably helped several of my marginal plants make it to spring, but several died because they just dried

out. I'm not accustomed to thinking about watering plants in January, but with the lack of both snow and rain this past winter, many plants desiccated and a few died. Right now I've got several daphnes that are finally greening up. A few of the evergreen Penstemons had a tremendous amount of dieback as well, but they too are coming back. Everything is at least a few weeks early, and I've got *Zauschneria garrettii* blooming right now, when normally I wouldn't see any of its striking red tubular flowers until August. I could go on, but I don't have to since we all are having the same experience with our gardens. I do wonder what fall will bring. Will we get longer bloom periods in late summer, or will our plants just stop blooming and leave us with a relatively sterile September and October?

My greatest disappointment was with my winter seedpots. All had germinated when I left for the NARGS Annual Meeting in early March, but during the five days I was gone the temperatures here dropped from the 40s to the single digits and every pot froze solid, killing all the seedlings. Not a single survivor! So all I've got now are the warm germinators, and if they survive this incredible heat, I should have quite a few for the September plant sale.

So come to the meeting this Saturday. Jim Locklear was here a few years ago and gave a terrific talk. He's a wonderful photographer, and like Alan Bradshaw, he has more material to share than he could ever cover in even two talks. I hope to see you there.

PFG

WHAT'S NEW FOR 2012

TEXT BY HARVEY WRIGHTMAN AND
IMAGES BY ESTHER WRIGHTMAN

Running a specialist nursery that depends on the offerings of seed collectors and the oddities that may appear in any garden provides both excitement and agitation. We never ever follow the business plan exactly. Some of the "odds and ends" end up on a sales bench, and mostly depend on a spur of the

moment sales talk to the buyers present – like a bazaar. Here are a few of those plants that need the extra attention of the gardener.



~ 4 years ago I bought seed from Alan Bradshaw of a *Stachys* sp. (photo above) originating from a Czech collection on Ala Dag at 1700m. It wasn't his collection, but he definitely felt it worth a spot on his list. It has turned out to be one of the most attractive mats that we grow – with soft, felted leaves which hug the ground quite closely. As one might expect from its place of origin, Turkey, it is very heat and drought tolerant. To our surprise, it also tolerates wet conditions, such as we had last summer and again in the winter despite the thick, hairy coat that covers its leaves. With its shallow roots, it is a friendly companion in which to grow other plants (bulbs, small shrubs). The mat provides cool shade for the roots of others and the silvery carpet makes a good background for a floral display.



Viola douglasii – image by Peter George

I've always had a fancy for western violets. They are not so prolific that you need to chase after them and remove them – they won't take over. Although they can be a bit difficult to

accommodate, I find *Viola douglasii* to be the easiest one for me. It comes deeply cut leaves (typical of the group), and flowers of bright yellow with burgundy/brown veining - quickly emerging in April and blooming very soon to take advantage of the vernal wet soil. Sensibly it disappears when the summer heat arrives and the ground turns hard and dry. The roots are thick, white, brittle – somewhat primitive. They like to grow and feed on the heavier soils and drought does not damage them.



Returning to the East, we grow a dwarf form of *Lobelia siphilitica* (photo above), named “Mistassinica” as it was collected by Denyse Simpson near the lake in Quebec. It is just like the typical form only much reduced in size, growing no more than 10 cm tall. The flowers come later in July and August and are a rich blue/purple. A neat little plant which multiplies and divides quickly, one can soon create a stunning effect with a larger planting. It would grow comfortably with the smaller *Mimulus sp.* or *Calceolaria sp.*



BNARGS PROGRAMS FOR 2012

August 11

AM: Adam Wheeler – *Dwarf Conifers & Shrubs*
PM: Tom Stuart – *Ferns*

September 15

AM: Nick Turland
PM: The Big Plant Sale

October 13

Judy Glattstein

November 3

Our Annual Luncheon at the Red Lion Inn and a program by Susan Keiser on Troughs

NOTES FROM THE APRIL 7 MEETING

In the spring of 2011 Anne Spiegel had attended the International Conference in Nottingham, and visited several gardens which were featured in a pre-conference tour. The list was stellar: Wisley of course, traditional but constantly updated and revamped, and Pershore (the home of AGS), and private gardens of such famous people as Chris Grey-Wilson, Peter Erskine, Don Haselgrove, Beth Chatto, Robin Davies (who wrote the book on Daphnes), more. That says a lot: we could expect perfection in design, plant selections, maintenance, everything. Wouldn't a talk on perfection be a little boring? Not when it is given by Anne Spiegel: she cleverly avoided all the obvious, all the coffee table book pictures, but did share with us a few details, a few specific features or aspects of these gardens which specially got her attention: plants of course, such as *Trillium kurabashii* here, *Paeonia anomala* there, superb daphnes, *Oxalis laciniata* in Peter Erskine's, a rare cross between phyllodoce and kalmia; but also interesting design and construction features, especially in newly created crevice gardens where even the walking paths, are built with carefully placed parallel stones.

Last Summer, Elisabeth Zander spent some time in the Rockies. She also visited several gardens in Colorado, especially in the Denver area. She gave us a quick view of these. The fabled Denver Botanical Garden, ever changing, ever beautiful. The private gardens of noted plantmen: Panayoti Kelaidis, Bob Nold, not to be missed by anybody who wants to see what such great ones do when they are on their own, and not constrained by the needs and goals of big public institutions. Most memorable were pictures of a spectacular *Penstemon pinifolius*, *Clematis integrifolia*, and Eriogonums galore, so beautiful when they are happy. Elisabeth and Anne had attended the NARGS annual Meeting last March and took the

opportunity to visit a few private gardens but also the Bellevue Botanical Garden (the extensive rock garden was designed by Michael Moshier a few years ago) and of course Rick Lupp's garden. Elisabeth has posted a few pictures on her blog

<http://www.seed-aholic.com/>.

The meeting would have been very good and interesting if nothing else had been on the agenda, but we also had the traditional Show and Tell, this time featuring some nice forms of *Tulipa clusiana* (Lady Jane?) brought to us by Joyce Hemingson. Although the tulips are hardy in Connecticut she grows these tulips in pots to protect them from voles. The other plant shown was *Corydalis solida*. When *Corydalis solida* is mentioned in catalogs it is almost invariably qualified as "George Baker", although it appears that in reality there are many variations in color, and little wonder since the plant self sows easily. Lori Chips had brought quite a few marvelous plants, expertly grown (Ah, these two glorious *Gentiana acaulis*) and these plants went to the plant sale. Sadly, what is not for sale is her secret: how does she do that, again and again? I left for the end of these notes a series of interesting announcements (the Annual Conference on Cacti among others: thanks John Spain keeping us informed about rare horticultural events happening in our backyard, so to speak). Peter George had just returned from the NARGS Annual meeting in Everett, WA and said that important changes are in the making: The NARGS Quarterly on line, important and long overdue update and modernization of the NARGS's election process, normalization and revitalization of the relationships between NARGS Chapters and some affiliated societies. All these things are still in the making and will be announced officially later. Of more immediate concern to this Chapter: the various Treasurer's duties will be assumed by two people. Collecting dues and other money will be done by Tom Flanigan. Our Annual meeting will still include lunch at the Red Lion, but the date will be 11/10 instead of the earlier Saturday. Erica Schumacher, our Chairperson, has been beset by incapacitating health difficulties and if surgical intervention is necessary she will have to limit her activities

during the coming months (our best wishes for successful treatment and recovery). And, no, so far nobody has stepped forward and volunteered to edit our newsletter.

IN SEARCH OF PENSTEMONS TEXT AND IMAGES BY BILL ADAMS

If you are interested in learning about Penstemons, one of the best ways is to join the American Penstemon Society and attend the annual Penstemon Society Meeting. This year the meeting was held in Laramie, Wyoming. It has been hot and dry in Wyoming this year but, even in a dry year, there are always a surprising number of interesting plants to be seen when you go out on field trips. Obviously Penstemons were the target plant at this meeting but, with the drought, the Penstemons were not



Penstemon laricifolius v. exilifolius

at their best. However, when the season is not the best for what you are looking for, you look harder and often see things that you otherwise would have missed.

Our first field trip was into the Snowy Range west of Laramie where we first stopped above the town of Centennial where we saw *P. secundiflorus*, *P. virens*, and *P. whippleanus* in flower along with numerous cushion phloxes and mass displays of *Erithronium grandiflorum* at the peak of flowering. Our next stop was Libby Flats at almost 12,000 feet where we were treated to a magnificent display of alpine tundra plants including *Tetranneuris grandiflora*, *Eritrichum nanum* and *Silene acaulis*.

Continuing on to the Saratoga area, we ascended Sheep Rock Rim, located on land now owned by Annie Proulx, the author of “The Shipping News” and “Broke Back Mountain”. We were in search of the rare *P. gibbensii* and, while fighting 60 mile per hour winds, we managed to find one small specimen with two small flowers still clinging to the stem. Our search through the rocky landscape also revealed a number of exciting regional endemics including *P. laricifolius* v. *exilifolius*, *Eriogonum acaule*, *Sphaeromeria capitata*, *Cryptantha caespitosa* and *Astragalus aretioides*. It is hard to believe how these plants can flourish in such a harsh landscape without the kind hand of an ever vigilant rock gardener.

The following day our field trip took us east of Laramie into the Laramie Range. A short visit to a rest stop on the Lincoln highway produced probably the best Penstemon find of the trip – an exuberant flowering of *P. laricifolius* v. *exilifolius*. Then on to Vedauwoo State Park where a three mile hike produced little in the way of Penstemons but we were rewarded with some beautiful mats of *Eriogonum umbellatum* v. *majus* in full flower. After lunch and a good rest, we headed off to Tie Siding to see a good flowering population of *P. virgatus* and one



Astragalus ceramicus

small specimen of *P. eriantherus*. Although the Penstemons were in short supply, the prairie was filled with numerous other cushion plants. Three species of Eriogonum were in full flower seemingly unaffected by the drought, and species of *Arenaria*, *Phlox*, *Peronychia* and

Townsendia were growing happily among the grasses.



Eritrichium nanum

On our final day we headed out to the Ferris Dunes with the Wyoming Native Plant Society to see *P. haydenii*, the blowout penstemon, Wyoming’s only federally listed endangered plant species. The tour started out at 7:45 AM and we arrived at the dunes at 1:30 PM, just in time for lunch. Fortunately, we were just a couple of hundred yards from the dunes since, when we arrived at the designated spot, the



Phlox hoodii

the few plants were just “vegetative” – that is Native Plant speak for no flowers. Disappointing after such a long drive but, as usual, other plants filled the void. At our feet in the sand was a large population of *Astragalus ceramicus* with its decorative seed pods at their peak. Once out of the dunes, we encountered a rocky

outcrop filled with fantastic buns of *Astragalus aretioides*, *Phlox hoodii*, *Eriogonum flavum*, and *Astragalus spathulatus*. What a great way to end another great adventure into the field to see in the wild many of the plants we strive to grow in our gardens.



Astragalus aretioides

Bill is the proprietor of Sunscapes Rare Plant Nursery in Pueblo, CO and the current NARGS Treasurer.



NARGS STUFF

I'll be brief, both because this newsletter is about 4 months overdue, and it's almost 10 PM on July 2, late for this issue. Actually, really late. But I digress.

I've been President of NARGS for over a year, and it has been a most interesting year. I'm an ambitious guy, and I've set the bar high for the changes and initiatives we need to make. So far we've been pretty successful in getting things done, making changes I believe are crucial to keep our organization vibrant and growing.

First, we now have an online Quarterly Journal. Simply go to www.nargs.org and click on the Journal link on the Home page and you'll be taken to the online version. This is the last issue free to anyone, so please take a look at it if you're not a NARGS member and see what you're missing by not joining. The access points for the electronic version are smartphones,

Kindles, laptops, etc., and you can rest assured that you'll continue to get the paper copy as well. We're not subtracting anything, just adding features and benefits.

Second, the next election will be the first NARGS election open to all members. We're going to use email and regular mail to guarantee that there will no longer be a "poll tax" for NARGS members to vote, namely, the cost of attending the national meeting. David White and Bill Adams have gotten us to the cusp of the actual vote, which has new protocols described in detail in the Summer Quarterly. So democracy is finally part of NARGS culture!

Third, we've adapted the nomination process to fit the new email election process. This too is described in detail in the Quarterly, and again, for the first time, any member of NARGS will be given the opportunity to run for any office. The nomination process is the most open and inviting we've ever had, and is a perfect pairing for the new election system.

Fourth, the Internet Committee is about to release its report on the state of the website. They've worked incredibly hard for months to find out what we have to do to make our site what we all want it to be, and we're expecting their report to be issued within a few days. I'll keep you apprised when the Administrative Committee gets its first look.

Finally, check the NARGS website for information about our next two meetings. Our first Fall Study Weekend will be in Pittsburgh in early October, and then in May 2013 the Annual Meeting will be held in Asheville, NC. There are two proposed meeting following those, one in Sante Fe at the end of the summer of 2013 and the very distinct possibility of holding the 2014 Annual Meeting in Idaho, which would make two consecutive firsts for NARGS. So please make an effort to support NARGS and send us your \$30 membership fee now. Without an increased level of membership by our Chapter members, NARGS will simply not be able to continue to offer all of its benefits to us.

PFG

Positions of Responsibility

Chairperson – Erica Schumacher
Vice-Chairperson – Joyce Hemingson
Secretary – Carol Hanby
Treasurer – Pamela Johnson
Archivist – James Fichter
Audio Visual Chairperson - Joe Berman
Greeter – Ed Brown
Independent Director – Clifford Desch
Newsletter Editor – Peter George
Meeting Recorder – Jacque Mommens
Plant Sale Chairperson – Open
Program Chairperson – Elisabeth Zander
Proofreader – Martin Aisenberg
Refreshments Chairperson – Joyce Hemingson
Speaker Housing – Anne Spiegel

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Please contact the Editor before reprinting
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