



Newsletter

North American Rock Garden Society
Berkshire Chapter

July 2005

Chairman's Message 6/16/2005

By Elisabeth Zander

What a long dreamy spring we had to savor. I confess to wondering if it would snow, even come June. It didn't. And we rotated from firing the heater to turning on the air conditioner. Forget the fan. Summer blasted its way in the door when June began.

On the boardwalk at White Memorial, a favorite of my walking places for after work, the vision was long and glorious. It began, of course, with *Symplocarpus foetidus*. What a curious plant. The spathe emerges as clasped hands, gloved in shimmery purple satin, then unfolds to reveal a spadix covered with little sunshine flowers. When the leaves unfold, they may hide the nest of a yellow throat, a favorite crooner of that marsh. What kid has not delighted in crushing the leaves and making a face at that skunky smell.

Water was high when the skunk cabbage bloomed. The birds did not care. They celebrated. As did the old snapping turtle, who made his way from one end of the boardwalk to the shallows, to lie in the sun. The first *Trillium erectum*, popped up here and there. What a welcome sight! Interesting that these two early bloomers have such rich maroon color and strong smell. Were there carrion flies about New England before the Europeans built houses for them to winter over?

As the waters receded, *Trillium grandiflorum* made a thick appearance at the wood's edge. A strong patch of *Dentaria laciniata* shot up sweet little white flowers above its lacy foliage near the boardwalk woods. *Houstonia caerulea* clumps were here and there. (What a neat little plant is that. Even in the rock garden where competition is nil, it is well behaved.) Purple jacks of *Arisaema triphyllum* winked as I walked by. Round south at the boardwalk, cardamine

Next Meeting

July 2, 2005, Saturday 10:30 am

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

Chapter Business: Show & Tell & Ask

AM – Gardens of the World
Geoffrey Charlesworth

Don't miss this one! Geoffrey was the winner of the coveted 1994 Quill and Trowel Award for *A Gardener Obsessed*. This presentation looks at how other people (most famous in rock gardening circles and beyond) garden. Not only is he knowledgeable, but always witty and opinionated. For openers, please read his pre-meeting article contained within.

Lunch (BYO) We welcome dessert contributions.

Seedling Sale! –Please bring a few seedlings to share. Remember donors get first pick.

PM – Wildlife Solutions
Ed Machowski

Ed has a side business in Norfolk CT that offers integrated and humane solutions to wildlife problems. He will give us a brief talk on voles and how to get rid of them. After the devastation they wreaked on the north side plantings around my home, it is easy for me to leave humane and just go to rid.

Upcoming

BNARGS August 13th*

Rocks and Plants, Perfect Together
Mike Slater

Meet the Author *Elegant Silvers*
Karen Bussolini

decorated the edge. *Myosotis* sprang up along side. *Violas*, yellow or blue, grinned both in the woods and the marsh, while the swallows cavorted above head. There were so many late afternoon walks with sparkling skies and a cool breeze.

After walking all the way round the boardwalk, I spotted the bells of *Uvularia*, swaying in the wind. And here and there *Polygonatum odoratum* continued the bell dance. *Clintonia borealis* made a brief appearance at the edge of the path. The pinkster azalea was not so brief. Its sweet odor graced the air for, seemingly, weeks. Then came the 90 degrees. Buttercups rose up, flowing onto the boardwalk. Patches of feathery pink *Lychnis* mixed in or gave way. The yellow and purple of the *Violas* migrated to the *iris pseudacorus* and *versicolor*. It was all so tall, the first weed whipping began.

Today in the raised rock garden, *Edraianthus pumilio* and *Serpyllifolius* announce summer. How do so many flowers fit in such little space. A "pave" of bright purple bells sparkle on the little buns. In the sand bed *Gilia aggregata* has sent up a tall spike. Scarlet little trumpets call to our resident family of hummingbirds. Underfoot of it, *Eriogonum ovalifolium* sent out a first spike. *Calyptidium umbellatum* is making a fine show with its little pussytoes stretched out sunning. All is well with summer.

Thinking ahead, as most of you know, our big plant sale is in September. At a recent BNARGS executive meeting, one idea to help promote membership suggested we open the sale to the public. This seems like a really familiar idea to me. In the past, the sale was held at Norman & Geoffrey's. They supplied most of the material - and I am talking thousands of specialty plants. NARGS members from five states drove hours not to miss it.

So the question is, how do we assemble a great array of plant material that will draw in new gardeners interested in rock gardening - be it alpine or woodland or bog? At the June meeting, Tom Clark showed a wonderful plant of *Cypripedium kentuckiense*, leftover from the fundraiser sale at Mt Holyoke. The wholesale price is very reasonable. We might sell it to our members for half retail price. We might sell it to potential members at say, 2/3 retail. Is there enough interest to sell to our own membership if we are not able to get enough public to come? Fall is the best time to plant a number of choice woodlanders. Please contact me asap and give me your thoughts. Of course I do not know if we would still be able to get that *Cypripedium*, but surely there is something else as fetching that we might use as a publicity draw. In the meantime, please do think of the sale when potting up your seedlings. Save a few for your friends, and new friends to be.

Meeting Minutes June 2005

By Norma Abel

Twenty-one people were present at the meeting. Elisabeth announced that there were brochures available from NARGS for members to take to other groups who might have an interest in rock gardens. Elisabeth also announced that, in an effort to attract more new members, our September plant sale would be open to the public. Elisabeth asked that each member pot up a few extra plants for the September sale.

The September meeting will be on Saturday September 3. The morning program will be provided by members of the chapter showing

about 10 slide of their gardens and giving a brief description of it. Any members interested in participating should contact Robin Magowan.

Tom Clark had brought in a *Cypripedium kentuckiense* (yellow lady slipper) in bloom.

The talk was given by past president and participating member Cliff Desch on Bog Gardens. The talk, lunch and plant sale were followed by a workshop where each of the members who had signed up for the workshop was given peat, sand and 6 bog plants. The talk and workshop were very educational as well as interesting and fun.

Gardens of the World

By Geoffrey Charlsworth

Instead of a long introduction I thought it would be allowable to write down some of the things I might have said aloud.

Why do we look at gardens? For gardeners it is surely the pleasure of seeing plants growing, but we have almost as much interest in garden layout as well as in horticulture itself. This talk is neither about plants themselves nor about how to grow them. It is mainly about looking at

gardens hoping to find good ideas we can use in our own gardens. The slides are of gardens now either abandoned or so changed by time as to be no longer in existence. Still gardening fads change very slowly so even though the time is mostly at least ten years ago and the gardeners have mostly moved or died we can still get something out of observing bits of them.



You could steal plenty of grandiose ideas from Sissinghurst:
look for a property with an ancient tower to facilitate panning

An Alpine House symbolizes the fact that gardening with alpine plants separates into two distinct activities. One requires a large expenditure in money, activity through the winter, and intensive pest control, but provides a close-up intimacy with plants and a showcase for difficult, borderline hardy, and rare plants. The other more earthy way of

gardening makes all these optional or impossible, it is sometimes frustrating, but instead of eye and nose contact with plants substitutes the pleasures of landscaping, design and a different kind of martyrdom. When we visit a public garden the glass monster we see is not one we can hope to imitate but is a welcome refuge on a rainy day

and an inspiration to people who have their own miniature versions. It can also act as an insidious evangelist to susceptible gardeners, especially in late winter. In this talk we shall avoid going inside too many greenhouses and regard the alpine house as a siren to be shunned.

But the physical setting for the alpine house, i.e. the cunning needed to distract attention from its alien presence, gives us a lot of good ideas. Container gardens bridge the aesthetic space between greenhouse and garden (Wisley). So does a pavement with or without containers (Kew).

In most public gardens we can also find ideas for propagation (Brno), path making (Denver), landscaping (Denver, Smith College, Savill Gardens, Strybing Arboretum, Marie Selby Arboretum), raised beds (Wurzburg), water (Savill) even if these models have to be severely scaled down once we get back home.

The next group of gardens is from England. Looking at Jack Elliot's garden in Kent the greenhouses seem more manageable than Wisley, the raised bed with removable covers is also possible (would it be useful in New England?)



But the Oast House and all the ancient buildings will have to stay in Kent. Roy Elliot, Jack's brother built an enclosed tufa wall which is worth considering. In his alpine house was an enormous *Kelseya uniflora*. This brought gasps of admiration from all who saw it and illustrates a pro and a con of alpine houses. Pro: you can grow a bigger, rarer, more splendid plant (if you have the skill). Con: You can't move it to show anybody else. Of course

this is true of a plant grown in dirt too but it emphasizes that the amount of beauty you can transport to a plant show is limited.

The Bevingtons and Nortons in Surrey have good ideas for front entrance, container display, a tiered bed in the driveway and another protected house open to the elements after the worst of winter is over.

Martin Rix, writer, has made a garden in a greenhouse. Elizabeth Strangman sells very special forms of familiar plants. Here are hepaticas, but she had pulmonarias and other woodlanders growing to be propagated only for the discriminating gardeners who make the pilgrimage to her nursery.

Now a few small gardens: Margaret Parker has incorporated bits of a demolished church into the garden, Mabel Briggs, Jean Postil and Margaret Jordan had all tiny gardens but very colorful and with some rare plants among the rest. Jean had a greenhouse, a raised bed, a bog, a pond and a pavement in the tiniest of spaces.

From Ireland my examples are on the grand side. The Lamb garden in central Ireland is in the grounds of a Jane Austin type house with stable-yard converted to raised beds. Helen Dillon has a sumptuous city garden. The Shackleton nursery is a coach house with the imposing yard of the house used as growing and selling space.

Then follow four gardens from Germany and seven from the Czech Republic. The Czech gardens feature tufa used to build mounds and mountains and by now the Czech style is very familiar. Olga Duchakova's garden though is a terraced rock garden without tufa.

US gardens vary regionally even more than European gardens. I have separated them into West and East but that doesn't begin to describe the gardens in any rational way. Ultimately we have to admit that the gardens of NARGS members are individual expressions of the gardener but dependent on climate and position. Everybody's garden has something to teach us.

West

City gardens (Ted Kipping, Barbara Stevens); a complex country garden north of SF which eventually became a nursery (Marshall Olbrich) Gardens visible from the sidewalk (Ron Lutzko, the Folkmans); Lawrence Crocker's expanse of cyclamen (a beautiful garden doesn't have to be 'colorful'). In EICerrito Harland Hand created

a garden on a very steep open hillside using hundreds of huge hand made 'rocks'. Victor Girard and Stan Farwig made a garden of pots on tables (mostly South African bulbs). Baldassarre Mineo's garden grew as a display garden for the Siskiyou nursery (reverse history of the Olbrich garden). Bob Heaps on a rocky property in the Rockies made good use of local rock. Alan Taylor in Boulder had an early streetside version of John Spain's combination of succulents and perennials.

East

In CT Timmy Foster demonstrates that weeding a garden once a year is possible. Note the simple bridge across Millstream. Dick Redfield's final addition to his garden transformed a ruined foundation into raised beds. Cliff Desch carved a garden out of woodland. Ruth and Herb Sheppard made wall gardens and raised beds. They also did a lot with solid bedrock close to the surface, as did Eloise Lesan in Cos Cob and Bonnet Sornberger in Scotland. Fred Watson in NH used the moist earth next to a pond for a garden. He also made a small pool near the house. Ted Childs had Linc Foster design a 'Japanese' garden and converted a quarry into a rock garden. Howard Pfeifer designed the Harvey garden using rocks salvaged from roadside worksites. Ellie Spingarn's work with rock was legendary. Ev Whittemore filled a swimming pool and built a mountain of basalt. Ron Beckwith also imported loads of basalt for his garden. Ev and Bruce commuted to NC from Westfield to make a garden before the house was even started.

In Pennsylvania Anita Kistler combined perennials with alpines; Morris Berd made an arboretum just as Frances Dart had in BC and Roxy and Armand Gevjan in Newtown Square. Claire Muller allowed Josef Halda to airlift huge boulders over the top of her house.

Finally two beautiful gardens which may still be intact and unchanged. Anne Spiegel's before the hurricane and Frank Cabot's before he moved to Canada.

Wanted: Please write up a favorite plant, or tool and email it to me- coptis@forecast1.com

Monthly Coffee/Tea Setup Co-ordinator:

*July: Joyce Hemingson
August: Rose Mary Siegel
September: Joyce Hemingson
October: Bill & Martha Brown*

Please remember to bring seedlings for our monthly sale. Be prepared to talk about the plants you bring. If you do not wish to speak about your plants, please make some notes to be read aloud. The past few meetings' discussions opened the door to many new plants. The seedling sale was as informative as a lecture.

We are reissuing the Phone List. The files were mixed. Please throw out the last one. And please look over this one. Forward any changes (especially email) to our treasurer.

Elisabeth Zander
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Published by the Berkshire Chapter NARGS

Chair: Elisabeth Zander
Vice-Chair: Pam Johnson
Treasurer: Barbara Glastris
Secretary: Norma Abel
Independent Director: Tom Clark

Dues Payable January 1st: \$10 single, \$12.50 family
Membership open to all members of NARGS
Payable to the Treasurer, 72 Nassahegan Drive Burlington CT 06013

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