



Newsletter

North American Rock Garden Society
Berkshire Chapter

September 2005

Next Meeting

September 3, 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 – Members Slides of their Gardens

**David Ghers
Juliette Mattila
Brian Magowan
Alexandra Kenner**

Lunch (BYO) We welcome dessert contributions.

PM – The Big Plant Sale

Ok, this is it, time to empty out your seedling frames! If you are digging from the garden, do it a week in advance. Please make sure your potted plants not only are going to live, but also look saleable. Bring a variety instead of all the same kind. **Make sure all plants are labeled. There will be a special sale table for members who do not wish to sell to the public.** Please mark those plants or boxes with a sticker or label.

Non member pricing will be handled by Dean Evans and John Spain. **Donor members get first choice.**

Upcoming

BNARGS October 8th*

John Spain *Hardy Trough and Cactus Gardens*

Phillip Allen *Succulent Wreath Workshop*
(*sign-up sheet at the September meeting*)

*Note – not the first Saturday of the Month

Chairman's Message 8/17/2005

By Elisabeth Zander

Apologies go to our meeting recorder, Norma Abel, for the blip in last month's Meeting Report. The second page of her report did not come through in the transfer to the newsletter. It is printed first in front of the latest Meeting Minutes. Sorry Norma!

At our last meeting Dean Evans and John Spain stepped up to the plate and volunteered to handle non-members at our Big Plant Sale. We will extend an invitation to all members of the Berkshire Botanical Garden email list. We hope to garner new members who are interested in the plants we have on the sales tables. Hopefully they will return to learn more about how to grow their selections. Again I ask that donors be prepared to speak about one or two of their plants. It would also be very helpful to label plants who are overly "good doers".

For those members who do not wish to sell to the public, there will be a special sales area for "members only". It will be cordoned off away from the general sales area. We will have a membership roster on hand. Of course wearing your BNARGS tag will be enough.

Between the blooming gentians, campanulas, and platycodons, we might talk only about shades of purple in the garden this month. It seems to be the color of choice in the rock garden right now. This reminds me of a discussion of a Japanese meal. It's all in the presentation. The gentians manage to flick light about with hairs and fringe and spotted throats. Campanulas are glossy enough to shimmer in the sunlight. The platycodon, though, is mat purple. Light sinks in when it hits the petal.

Moving to the red side of the spectrum, ***Cyclamen europaeum*** is putting on quite a show. A resident of the dry woods of Moravia, it laughs at our dry summer weather. At about 15cm in height, it quietly perfumes the air with gentle wafts of fragrance. A good doer, but not ambitious, it carpets the dry area under hardwood trees. The foliage is strikingly marbled. The color is hard to miss.

Meeting Minutes July 2005 *(continued from last month's newsletter)*

By Norma Abel

Robin introduced our speaker for the morning session, Geoffrey Charlesworth. Geoffrey gave an entertaining and informative talk about 'Gardens of the World'. It is always a treat to hear Geoffrey

speak for his wonderful sense of humor and vast knowledge of gardening and plants.

Our afternoon speaker was unable to make it, so the meeting concluded with lunch and the plant sale.

Meeting Minutes August 2005

By Norma Abel

38 people were present when the meeting was called to order; including one new member and 2 guests.

For show and tell:

- Nick Nickou had brought in the fruit of a skunk cabbage which looked like a brown hand grenade. We declined to open the seed pod (fearing the odor) although all were curious.
- Rod Zander has been in Japan building masonry heaters and brought back a couple of books about rock gardening from Japan. Both featured *edelweiss* on the cover.
- Pam Johnson showed a tree themed raffle quilt that she and a few friends had made for the Berkshire Arts Charter School. Raffle tickets were available during lunch.
- Geoffrey Charlesworth announced that he has seeds from *Paeonia tenuifolia* and *Androsace* 'Millstream' that he would bring next time if anyone was interested. Several members expressed interest.

There was a lengthy discussion about the plant sale being open to the public. Conflicting views were finally resolved when Dean Evans and John Spain volunteered to take care of the paper work involved in the membership issues that had concerned Elisabeth.

Robin Magowan introduced our morning speaker, Mike Slater. Mike showed us some buckeye seedlings that he had brought for our plant sale. Mike showed some beautiful slides of flowers and rocks (mostly in the wild) in all possible combinations and gave an entertaining and informative presentation.

Due to the time constraints our afternoon speaker spoke immediately following Mike. Elisabeth introduced Karen Bussolini who gave us a preview of her new book with JoAnn Gardner called '*Elegant Silvers*'.

'*Elegant Silvers*' and other books from the NARGS book store were for sale during lunch. Our plant sale netted \$421. Thanks to all donors who gave such great selections!

A Very Special Presentation in July

By Pam Johnson

Founder member of the Chapter, noted author, and everyone's favorite rock garden plant expert, Geoffrey Charlesworth, was the speaker at the July meeting. News of his presentation drew a large crowd, many of whom were new to our meetings, which was particularly noteworthy as it was a holiday weekend when attendance is often sparse.

His slide lecture was titled "Gardens of the World" and Geoffrey said his talk would be mainly about

looking at gardens hoping to find good ideas we can use in our own gardens.

The centennial edition of "Horticulture Magazine", April 2004, named Geoffrey Charlesworth's, 'The opinionated Gardener', as one of their top 100 gardening books, with this comment:

Take equal measures of dry, acerbic wit, sharp intelligence, consummate plantsmanship, and

philosophical speculation and you get the uniquely satisfying blend contained in 'The Opinionated

Gardener', written by one of America's most respected rock gardeners. Although there's much here about alpine plants, there's also much that is universal:

"Being happy is dirt under your fingernails, wearing old clothes, having a good idea get better the longer you work at it, starting a new bed, giving plants away, and listening to rain."

These traits were reflected in the lecture as evidenced by comments from those fortunate enough to attend.

"He uses his self-deprecating humor so well to make those who are far less expert comfortable with him."

"He has such a wonderful way with words, even though I am not a plant expert, I really enjoyed his talk."

"I never had the chance to go to Europe, but he gave me a wonderful trip abroad – I feel like I have been there. The variety of gardens, as well as



plants, was just extraordinary." "Geoffrey's talk gave us an overview of rock gardeners past and present. It was as though he were doing a history of the Society and who the good gardeners were. It was fascinating to see what people grew back then and what now. Tastes and popularity of plants change."

"Geoffrey personalized the survey: he opened up elements of possibility in even the grandest gardens. He showed how we could take elements from them to incorporate in our own gardens within the bounds of reasonable cost and effort – provided of course we are young enough.... Like 60."

Geoffrey claims this was his last lecture. Maybe. Perhaps his great generosity, as shown by the hundreds – possibly thousands - of plants he has donated to the Chapter and given to friends, will extend to be open to being drawn out of "retirement". In the meantime, he is nurturing the gems he will bring to the September Plant Sale

Eradicating Japanese Knotweed Another Installment from Dutch Uncle Dean

By Dean Evans

I will speak on eradicating Japanese knotweed, as many of you may be suffering with this invasive menace. A previous property owner planted this plant along the side of my driveway to provide a screen, and because it was free. You may have heard it called "false bamboo". Over the years I have cut it, mowed it, dug on it and cursed it season after season. One spring I cut down a large quantity of the brown dead stalks, piled them in the intersection of Firetower and Griffin Roads and lit them afire. The flames went over 15 feet in the air and started to lick the telephone cable that runs alongside of Firetower Road. I envisioned that I would have a federal charge lodged against me so I started moving the flaming debris. I didn't realize that this stalk material was the equivalent of cardboard gasoline. And it occurred to me that if someone were to light this patch afire it would take my house along with it. My house would go quicker

than God could get the word, so I started a campaign to solve this problem.

First, I started digging on it with a vengeance. But every time I used the time required to remove the plant crowns for another task, the plant would re-establish itself, and for that matter, spread. After all, that's all it had to do with its time. My wife made it a practice to clear a certain number of stalks on a routine basis so she could see up the road. She had been hit once by a telephone vehicle while backing out of the driveway. This method obviously was not the solution.

This year, while at Home Depot, I saw that Monsanto makes Roundup in a concentrated, super-strong, undiluted form. Unfortunately it sells for \$99.00 a gallon. I could justify any cost at this point because my time is worth money. So I bought two gallons. I also purchased a small plastic plant-watering can with a long narrow spout that holds

possibly two pints and a decent size plastic funnel. While wearing rubber gloves I hold the funnel and fill the watering can from the gallon jug. I close the jug so it won't spill and set the watering can on a piece of board so it is stable and won't tip over, then I remove the rubber gloves. I use plastic bags from the grocery store to remove the rubber gloves, thereby minimizing skin contact. Using a combination of saws I finally found the saw that was the most effective at cutting the plant stalk. The method to employ here is important. Saw halfway through from one side, then go to the other side of the stalk, approximately 1/2-3/4 inches above the lower cut and saw from that direction. When you bend the plant away from the saw and open up the saw cut or curf, the stalk will split down to the lower and opposite cut. It will give the appearance of a step in the stalk - this will eliminate the possibility of the stalk splitting down to the crown. After all as you are sawing you are holding the stalk and there is a rocking motion created which makes it easy to split the stalk. It will split of course because the stalk is hollow. At this point you carry the removed upper portion away from its base or stump. I accumulate this material on blue plastic tarps found at Home Depot or at hardware stores. These tarps are handy in your garden program to pull away debris such as leaves or sod.

The hollow stalk is this plant's weak link. It provides a cavity into which the Roundup can be poured. This reservoir of Roundup will gradually poison the plant's crown. After filling the stalk place a tin can, yogurt container or something that you have available over the top of the stalk's end. This keeps rain from diluting the herbicide. Over time you will notice that small plants will start to wilt and die, as

you only need to treat plants of an inch or greater in diameter. The small plants are suckers connected underground to the large crown masses.

The small dark green long-spouted watering can available at Home Depot is ideal because it allows the Roundup that has a viscosity equal to that of 20 weight oil to be poured out in a stream a little greater than 1/8 inch in diameter. By pushing the spout against the step created when sawing the plant, the spout stays stable as my hands shake a little in my old age. And the controlled stream size can be watched so I don't overflow the cavity. I have had very little spillage.

The stalk material, if allowed to bake in the sun, makes wonderful material to be put on the bottom of a new compost heap because it allows air to get under the pile. And it feels good to get some benefit from this plant. To speak in defense of the plant itself: A person should keep a small quantity of it about, primarily because Japanese beetles are attracted to it before they are attracted to anything else. I make it a daily practice to take my Campbell soup can with about an inch of used crankcase oil in it and pick Japanese beetles. I keep a running count and on average it runs 47/day. That must be the hatch rate around my property. I can defend this plant now, because I have established supremacy by using the method described above. If you have this problem or know someone else who does I feel certain you can benefit from my struggle.

Beyond the Beach

By Anne Spiegel

Albion Basin at Alta, Utah, is one of our favorite hiking places. It, and the Snowbird area will be one of five choices you can make for field trips at next year's Interim International Conference at Snowbird, Utah. The other choices will be Cedar Breaks in southern Utah, the Ruby Mountains in Nevada, the Tetons of Wyoming and the Snowy Range of southern Wyoming. We were lucky enough to visit two of these sites this summer.

Sunset Pass above Albion Basin is a wonderful hike which starts close to treeline and passes through a number of different sites including

huge swaths of *Caltha leptosepala* and *Raunculus escholtzii* flowering as the snow retreats. As you keep going up, *Anemone multifida* (in both red and white) starts to appear. Leaving the last trees for the upper rocky reaches below Catherine Pass, you see the flowers of *Penstemon cyananthus*, *Penstemon whippleanus*, and *Penstemon humilis* reappear. *Polemonium folioissimum* is in bloom with castillejas and lupines. At the Pass, you can look down to Catherine Lake, and the mountains beyond, a really beautiful view. This is a good spot

for lunch, but you can't stay too long. The trail to Sunset Pass, which hugs a steep drop, beckons.

As you go higher on the trail, you come to what we nicknamed the "alpine beach". In this area, a layer of sandstone has been exposed and has been weathered by mountain forces until it has crumbled into a sand which would not be out of place at a beach. As you walk through, the sand is almost over the tips of your boots. You can actually pick up a small rock and crumble it in your hand and add it to the beach. The plants to be found here include some choice buns to be treasured by any rock gardener.

This time, we hiked to the beach and found *Phlox pulvinata* almost spent except for one steep slope where some old buns were asking to be photographed. The sharp light yellow flowers of *Linum kingii* and the soft blue of *Linum perenne* dotted the slope. Higher up, *Zigadenus elegans* was flowering and there were some specimens of *Frasera speciosa*. These are always unexpected to me in alpine areas because they form very tall rosetted stems but here there are occasional stunted *Pinus flexilis* (limber pine) which still afford some wind protection. The frasera is so huge it looks out of place, definitely over the "one foot" rule which is my usual guide, but the large individual flowers which encircle the stem are quite lovely when you really look at them. We spent a lot of time exploring the area which has the most *Astragalus kentrophyta* I've ever seen. It was in perfect bloom on either side of the path, occasionally making mats over 2' in diameter. The flowers are tiny, in varying shades of purple with tints of blue, and a large mat seems to be covered with a soft purple haze. This can be grown in the garden with a little effort. Unlike its alpine haunts where tiny plants will grow up through the mat, it needs some protection from competition with other plants in the garden. Wouldn't it be wonderful if an exact duplication of what you see in an alpine scene would give the same results in the garden. You would plant grasses with your gentians, and eriogonum buns would crowd with western phloxes and eritrichium in a rocky patch. Unfortunately, it just doesn't work that way.

The beach flows down to a saddle which is Sunset Pass with a view towards Sunset Peak, another half hour or so of hiking. Instead we turned

to the trail on the right and followed it for a while until we came to some lingering snow. Just above the snow there was an interesting rocky bank which on close inspection was literally knit together with a very low carpet of plants. It turned out to be an alpine plant lover's dream garden. *Astragalus kentrophyta* was the background fabric, incredibly congested. Poking through the mats were scattered plants of *Townsendia montana*, with yellow centered, rich purple flowers. This one is so easy from seed, often blooming the first year, and it reappears the next year and often self-sows. Highlights of white and yellow were made by *Phlox pulvinata* and *Linum kingii*. There was a small white erigeron we never identified and a *Linum perenne* one third the normal height with enormous flowers at least twice the usual size. Apparently there is some talk of this possibly being another species. Finally, there were areas of what at first appeared to be an oxytropis where the keel of the flower turned up and was very elongated. Looking at a flower through a 10X lens just produced confusion because the keel, although very narrow, was not a sharp tip but more rounded like an astragalus. The banner and side petals were pale but with narrow stripes of purple. It was a lovely plant but the confusion remained until we got back to Salt Lake and were able to check in the books. It turned out to be *Astragalus miser* (which we had seen before but always a creamy color and at a lower elevation.). This one reaches 3050 meters (we found the plants at 10,400'). Further reading placed it as *Astragalus miser v. tenuifolius*, with the common name of Garrett's weedy milk vetch. This name is not exactly a good advertisement for what was really a beautiful plant. Of course, one has to keep in mind that it is growing in a windswept alpine environment. *Linum kingii* becomes much more robust when grown at sea level and thus loses some of its appeal. Perhaps Garrett's weedy milkvetch might live up to its name when brought down from its harsh alpine location.

I think this is one of the most challenging aspects of learning to know alpine plants. You are always trying to find a plant that when grown in the ordinary garden will still retain the look and appeal of the heights where it is found. Maybe from a gardener's viewpoint that is really the definition of the perfect

Awards Committee

Lorrie Chips, Chair
Caroline Church
Carol Hanby

Monthly Coffee/Tea Setup Co-ordinator:

*September: Joyce Hemingson
October: John Spain and Becky Lynn*

Berkshire Botanical Garden's Harvest Festival
Saturday and Sunday, October 1st & 2nd 10:00-5:00, Stockbridge MA at the junction of Routes 102 & 183

Remember to bring plants for the Big Plant Sale. Donors have first choice. Volunteers will have next chance at a selection, right after donors.

Wanted: Newsletter Editor- Help continue presenting this great feature full of meaningful information on rock gardening in our area. You need not attend meetings frequently.

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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