

# Newsletter

*North American Rock Garden Society  
Berkshire Chapter      April 2006*

## **Next Meeting**

**Saturday, April 1, at 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 The Expert, and any other relevant or irrelevant activities, as long as they are interesting.

### **AM — Digital Photography - Art From the Garden**

#### **Elizabeth Zander**

The digital camera has replaced the family Kodak for many of us, and we all want to learn how to use this new technology more creatively. Elizabeth's presentation will demonstrate many of the manipulations possible within software programs to create horticultural art. From PowerPoint presentations to Christmas emails and prints for the wall, see some of the techniques used to aid the creative process.

**Lunch — BYO.** We welcome dessert contributions. This will be followed by our first plant & seedling sale of the season. Bring as many as you can, and, as always, donors get first pick.

### **PM — Androsace and Douglasia**

#### **Anne Spiegel**

Using slides and a lifetime of insights and experience, Anne will provide us with a survey of these two beautiful (and growable) genera. And since Anne grows many of these plants here in New England, she will share her techniques with us.



## **Chairman's Message – 3/19/2006**

*By Peter F. George*

It's March 19, and there has been far too little of the above so far this year. Two days from the Spring Equinox and the average temperature here in Petersham was 26 degrees F. today, a bit too cold for me to do much except turn up the heat and complain. So here's wishing for a lot more sun and a lot more warmth. Even a warm rain would be welcome. But enough of complaining about the weather.....

We had a very successful meeting on March 11, and Harvey Wrightman gave two extremely interesting presentations. Norma Abel and Erica Schumacher have each written about that meeting, but it was my first meeting as Chair, and I'm still surprised that everything worked. Our next meeting, April 1, ought to be quite interesting, and I look forward to seeing many of you there. It will be at our usual location in Stockbridge, and Elizabeth Zander and Anne Spiegel will do the honors.

One of the surprises about this job is amazing amount of support I've

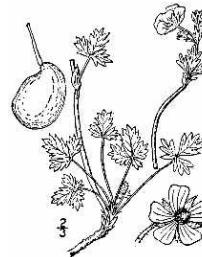
received from so many members. Robin Magowan has overcome a series of bizarre occurrences (not to HIM, thankfully) to put together a very impressive series of programs for us. A large number of members are contributing material for the newsletter. It has been a joy to check my email each day and find articles, poems, book reviews and positive comments that are making the editing job much less stressful than it was in the fall. Basically, everyone I've asked for help has come through, and it bodes well for the forthcoming year.

I've had very little to do in my gardens, except walk around each day and look for signs of life. So far I've had only one official loss, but I'll have to wait a few weeks before I have an accurate census of survivors. It is always a bittersweet time for me when I learn which of my plants have passed on, and which are going to give it another go, but it is part of the process, and one which leads to opportunities for me to try out some things I read about over the winter.

At the next meeting I'm going to be distributing a survey to try to get a better understanding of what we should be offering to you, our membership. We have a somewhat bifurcated population, with lots of very experienced and knowledgeable growers, and a substantial number of early stage rock gardeners whose interests may be somewhat different from the first group. It is actually easier to program for experience, but if that is all we do, we'll never keep our beginners, and it's those beginners who are this chapter's future. So I'm hopeful we can find a way to program in a way that keeps everyone interested and connected to rock gardening. We cannot afford to be introducing new members at our March

and April meetings each year, only to find them missing by October and November.

So please, think about what ***you*** want and need. And feel free to contact me with ideas. My email is: [petergeorge@verizon.net](mailto:petergeorge@verizon.net). Keep in touch.



*Can you identify this plant? Be the first to email me with the correct ID and win a choice plant at our next meeting*

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## **The 2006 Winter Study Weekend** By Elizabeth Zander

Winter (Eastern) Study Weekend 2006 might well have been called "Spring Fling". The weather rose to a balmy 50 degrees, and the plant show provided cheer enough to raise our spirits. *Iris*, *Oxalis* and *Cyclamen* sounded siren songs in that department. And with show entries from our own member and master grower Matt Mattus, you know it was just "awesome." The silent auction was also lively due in part to the generosity of Berkshire members (and former). Sally Katkaveck sent some of Dick Redfield's library to the table, the highlight of which was an original edition of Ohwi's Flora of Japan, which retails for \$500. Geoffrey Charlesworth provided bound copies of the first NARGS bulletins. You never know what is going to appear! In the book sales area, the Manhattan Chapter amassed quite a collection to recycle, including some of the

library of Marco Polo Stefano. There were several books I had previously put off purchasing, but the price was right. And of course, Jan Slater was there with the NARGS Bookstore. Yes, I did succumb. Probably there will be one more winter storm best ridden out armchair gardening.

Plant sales area comprised the Manhattan Chapter's table, Maria Galletti's, John Bieber's, John Lonsdale's, and Pierre Bennerup's following round the room. There were choice alpines in all directions. It was an alpine study lesson just to visit the room. Are you salivating yet? Though I order from Maria directly, I could not resist charming blooms of *Primula allionii*, *Saxifraga cymbalaria* and other little alpine house sweeties. Do you know her nursery, Alpines Mount Echo <http://www.alpinemtcho.com/> Take a look and you too will be enchanted. Do notice her unparalleled collection of dwarf shrubs.

John Bieber, of course, had several *Daphne* forms for sale at apostolic prices. By that I mean he is the "John Spain" of the Daphne world, much to our delight. Prices were low enough to get everyone to try something. John Lonsdale propagated many species of *Cyclamen*, with interesting forms of each. And Pierre Bennerup had *Dionysia* to *Helianthemum* to *Hellebores* lined up for our purchases at snap up prices. There was one other nursery displaying, but I never encountered the salesperson. Lectures were assembled on a theme of a Master Class in Rock Gardening. The gold

star went to Rick Lupp, in my mind. He gave an in depth 'how to' look at propagation in his nursery - the eclectic Mount Tahoma <http://www.backyardgardener.com/mttahoma/>. There were many sequential screen shots from grafting cuttings that won't root any other way, to rooting in pots with a plastic cover, to seedling trays and soil mixes. Best tip - use Physan 20 for everything! Available at Charley's Greenhouse, <http://www.charleysgreenhouse.com>, it handles sanitizing cuttings, tools & pots, controls mildew, rust, black spot, and fungus. (I am looking for an alternative to benomyl and will definitely give this a try.) The delightful Blands, Beryl and Peter presented slides in two amusing talks each.

She is the national silver Saxifrage collection holder, and as such keeps multitudes of them growing in her alpine house. He is a Rhodo man, but also does all the construction in their gardens. Best of all he has no qualms about offing a plant that has grown too large for its place. I must confess I am always a bit squeamish about

removing a plant that grows too large, particularly a dwarf shrub. It does beat my past alternative of moving to a new house!

John Lonsdale digitally reprised his garden in Exton PA now that things have grown on a bit. It is truly the Onoclea iris capitol of the East Coast. For all his needs, from seedlings onward, he swears by a 50/50 mix of perlite and Biocomp BC5. Made from composted peanut hulls, it is the hot new



mix (no peat). He buys from Penn State Seed Co., a fairly localized supplier. (Upon further research - our club could order from a VT distributor- a pallet, 40 bags @ \$9.45 per (each is 3 cu')- email me (coptis@forecast1.com) or give me a call at 860 307-7345 if you are interested in a joint order).

The Manhattan Chapter was well represented by Abbie Zabar, who provided a glimpse of gardening on rooftops and courtyards in NYC. It amazes me to see that yes, even there, gardeners are resourceful recyclers. Most fantastic are the lengths to which one goes to get the stuff home. While I back my little car next to a cart and unload my latest treasure, they must employ strong men to get it into the elevator, and lastly, hump it up the last bit of stairs to their rooftop gardens. Wow- keeps them in shape! I was a little sad that Robert Rolfe, author of that informative book 'The Alpine House,' chose to show coffee table pictures rather than dispensing tidbits from his wealth of information about alpine houses. If I see another pot of Dionysia in full bloom or hear again the history of how it came into Britain or how many medals it has, I think I shall pass out. Please, speakers of the future, not more than four slides that look alike! And please remember to breathe in between.

After the Conference, we toured Wave Hill's greenhouses and alpine house. There were wonderful aged specimens side by side with young plants. Troughs outside were stacked one on top of another, with evergreens on top, so no views there. But no matter, the other houses saturated us with color.

If you have never been to a national meeting, do keep it in mind. This July, NARGS hosts an international meeting above Salt Lake City in the mountains of Utah. Be aware there is a national stipend

for those who have never gone to a national weekend. See you there!

## Nursery/Seed House of the Month



Alan Bradshaw founded ALPLAINS in 1989 partly due to his frustration with the unavailability of plants he had read about in the literature and partly due to his sense of adventure promised by plant hunting in the wild. Already having run a mail-order business offering rare geraniums, begonias and succulent plants in the 1980s, Alan was enticed by the prospect of distributing seeds, which are much easier to handle and ship compared to plants. He spent many years buying, collecting and trading as many different kinds of seeds as possible, sowing thousands of flats to learn the secrets of germination. After having worked as a software engineer for many years, he switched to part-time in 1993 in order to pursue his botanical activities and maintain his ever-growing gardens, all for the purpose of collecting seed not commonly available in the horticultural trade. Having published small black-and-white seed catalogs in the early 1990s, Alan went to color in 1994, featuring photos of rare and unusual flora taken in the wild. Since then, he has traveled extensively throughout the American West and in 2001 he took a trip to the Andes to collect rosulate violet seeds. He has published hundreds of color photos in his annual seed catalogs and has introduced many species to horticulture such as *Shoshonea pulvinata*, *Silene plankii*, *Mimulus rupicola*, *Leptodactylon watsonii*, & *Delphinium purpusii*, among others.

His website is: [www.alplains.com](http://www.alplains.com). Phone 303-621-4590 for a catalogue.

## Minutes from BNARGS Meeting March 11, 2006 by Norma Abel



Our new chairman, Peter George, called the meeting to order promptly at 10:30. There were a total of 45 people present, including 4 visitors, 3 who learned about our meeting from the BBG mailing list!

There will be program changes from the program published in the March Newsletter due to broken legs, family illness and other circumstances outside of anyone's control. See the web site [www.BNARGS.org](http://www.BNARGS.org) and pay attention to this newsletter for the latest updates.

Peter offered to be the point of contact for a consolidated order of plants from the 2006 Janis Ruksans catalogue. This will save the members the expenses and hassle of dealing with getting a check processed appropriately, etc.

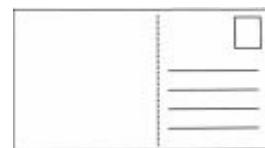
After lunch and before the afternoon program, Elisabeth Zander auctioned off some books from the library of Dick Redfield. Elisabeth will have more books from Dick's library next month.

John Spain told us about the annual show and sale of the Connecticut Cactus and

Succulent Society. He had a few brochures with the details of the meeting on April 8-9. This year's meeting does not conflict with the Saturday meeting of BNARGS (for the first time).

The next BNARGS meeting will be on April 1 at the BBG events center. The speaker will either be Elisabeth Zander or Alan Bradshaw. Watch the newsletter for which presentation will happen in April. The other presentation will happen later in the year, if not in April.

Harvey Wrightman then gave us an interesting talk on Plant Propagation. (*See Erica Schumacher's piece on Harvey's programs, page 9*)



## Postcards from a Nursery Worker

*By Lori Chips*

When I was first asked to write something about working in the "Green Industry" I wasn't at all sure how interesting a topic it would be. However, I got to thinking: horticulture involves people, and people, with all their fads & foibles, are *always* interesting. The first thought that popped into mind was a memory of when I was still a student at NYBG during the "Million Minor Bulb Project." Absolutely everyone was recruited to help plant out. It wasn't until we had to get all those *Crocus*, *Muscari*, *Eranthus* & *Iris reticulata* into the ground that we began to realize how many a million really are. Lift a patch of turf, loosen the soil, sprinkle in bone meal, set in a dozen bulbs, replace the sod, and chop the sod to allow the shoots to come through. Towards the end of the project we were planting 40 or 50 per patch, frantic to get the

work finished before a hard freeze. In spring they erupted like muffin tops with too much leavening. One afternoon during planting, a bunch of us were hard at work. An older couple stopped to observe us for quite some time. Finally, the woman could not contain her question any longer. "Pardon me," she said. I recall the whole group of us frozen in different attitudes, trowels suspended. "I can't help but ask. What are all of you looking for?"

Then there was the busy Saturday years ago in the garden center where I worked. Late May sales were in full swing. One of the crew guys forklifted a pallet of lime and drove it around the back. Unbeknownst to him, there was a hole in one of the bottom bags. It left a white line all around the building in the parking lot. Effectively, it turned a *pull-in-diagonally* set of parking spaces into "Parallel Parking Only." It wasn't until a complete traffic jam & several fender benders later that we recognized the problem.

2006 will be my tenth year at Oliver Nurseries. It's hard to believe. I still remember getting my first tour. And as much as things change, other things remain steadfastly the same. Each year as winter draws to a close the nursery worker must face the same demon: The "busy season" is coming! We rev up and prepare as if for opening night at a play. The stage must be set; we must be ready. Are the two-way radios in working order?

March starts slowly. The phone begins its vernal return from the almost-dead. People want to make appointments. Are the *Kalmias* in yet? They need to special order something or check to see if we will be carrying an old favorite. There are questions: a conifer in the back yard "Doesn't look quite right" after the winter. They want to gather information about a new plant they just read about in the catalogue.

Truckers from Oregon to North Carolina are calling to confirm a delivery date. The players arrive. Familiar part-time or seasonal co-workers trickle in to hang their rain gear in their lockers & catch up on winter gossip. The mulch comes in, so does the fertilizer, some trees are delivered in fat bud or bloom & need protection from still frosty nights.

When do we uncover the plastic hoops? That is always a nerve wracking and critical decision.

Then all at once (it seems) there are heaths and heathers and pansies out for sale and (at long last!) the outdoor water is turned on. No more linking and dragging hoses from the prop-house or carrying a sloshing watering can to a desperate specimen. By some time in April one less layer can be worn, gloves aren't always needed and the soft

acres of micro blanket can finally be put away in the barn. I always feel odd watering pots when snow is on the ground!

People frequently speak wistfully to us about "How nice it must be to work in such a beautiful environment." And to be able to



be outdoors into the bargain! They invariably say this on a sparkling 70-degree May afternoon with sunshine and no humidity. The person who waxed euphoric about a job in a place as bucolic as this, is, of course, a woman with perfect hair. Seeing as it rained all morning, the rest of us are pretty damp and sporting the infamous "hat hair." Even our socks are wet. If you are ever about to bemoan a bad hair day, think twice. There is *nothing* worse than a bad sock day. Meanwhile, the woman with perfect hair needs my help. It is gratifying to notice that she has worn her shrub-shopping stilettos and is clutching her mud-proof Prada handbag. After I've packed her things into her gleaming suburban assault vehicle (SUV or Hummer) I toss her a breezy wave and a smile wondering who on earth is going to unload all that stuff...

Of course, this is just the beginning. The mad press of customers is just around the corner and we are at least 2 months from "Perennial Day". This is the first of two big sales. Before the gates swing open we put on strings of huge faux pearls. The refrain is: 'looking for help? Ask the girls with the pearls!"

In the meantime there are shifts of focus every couple of weeks. April is prime selling and buying time for shrubs and alpines. In May this continues but perennials also begin to hit their stride. By now people have been pestering us about annuals, paying less attention to our frost-free cut-off date than they should be. Yearly I try to explain that the farmers and old-timers won't be putting in their tomatoes or basil until Memorial Day. Same goes for annuals and tropicals, but it's like trying to stop high tide with a paper fan. Cheerfully they all claim: "I'm funny, I like a lot of color." As if this might be a special trait of theirs. Of course, we try

to tell them about the beautiful later flowering annuals and perennials, of course they don't buy them, and of course here they come in July or August bitterly disappointed that we don't have any more of that spectacular, dramatic, floriferous plant that is blooming its head off in the display garden over there.

Assisting an inexperienced gardener can be a challenge. I'm always trepidatious once a customer begins fishing around in his pocket. What will it be? A thumbnail sketch? A blurry photo of the front of a house in such bad focus that one can't tell a Rhody from a Juniper? I pray for a plant list. I'll never forget the woman who drew an unreadable plan of her yard in the gravel path with a stick. As always, I tried to determine exposure. To do that it is helpful to know east from west. She *said* she had full sun everywhere. She illustrated with the tip of her stick. The sun rose in front of her house. Then (apparently) "It spins in a complete circle around the entire house & sets in the same place it came up, right here." "NO" I said, "No it doesn't" "Yes it does! Really." she responded "My property's funny." Funny indeed to not obey the Heliocentric Universe.

Another time a co-worker fielded this telephone call: "There are bees all over my *Sedum 'Autumn Joy'* and my husband's allergic. Shall I kill the bees or have him move his chair?" Even after a lecture about how we'd have no fruits and vegetables if bees were extinct, I'm still not convinced she didn't run right out to buy a deadly bug bomb that very afternoon.

It's always refreshing when customers know what they want. However, one person came in determined to buy a "Derbia" from us. She said we had it in the perennial garden. She described a lovely pale silver-



blue flowering plant. Derbia? It wasn't till she said: "You know, the plant they named after the town in the middle of Connecticut." that the light bulb flashed. Bingo! *Amsonia*.

Don't get me wrong. The majority of our customers are knowledgeable and pleasant. Most know which end of a rake to use. But sometimes... Well I once waited on a woman for 2 hours. She wanted a planted retaining wall. I helped her select plants, wrote out instructions, drew little sketches and gave her handouts. Later that season she came back in complaining about the high death toll of her plants. She claimed she'd followed all my instructions carefully and when she was done cramming the little alpines in "only *some* of their roots were sticking out."

My favorite customers, naturally, are rock gardeners, especially NARGS members. They usually know what they want, how to attempt to grow it, and are not afraid of failures. They are unfazed by the suggestion of heroic measures (rock gardeners *invented* these!) and almost always have something to teach me about the art and science of alpines. On the other hand, I can't get away with much either. If they mention a plant I don't know, I'd better just admit it and go hit the books! But beyond erudition there's a bigger reason I look forward to rock gardeners: enthusiasm! Lets face it; we who make our living in horticulture are basically plant geeks. It's always exciting conversation when one geek meets another geek. (Okay, call yourself an alpine aficionado, then. But I'm on to you. You know how many 2-inch pots will fit in your trunk!)

Speaking of trunks, I'm reminded of the man who came in years ago and said: "If I buy as much mulch as I want, will it fit in my car?" I confess to being utterly speechless for a moment. I darted a look at a co-worker, who was darting a look at me. I took a deep breath. "Yes" I said.



## ***REVISED Program Schedule for 2006***

1. April 1, 2006 – **Elizabeth Zander and Anne Spiegel**.
2. May 6 - **Don Dembowski** will talk about woodland plants.
3. June 10 – **Richard May** of Evermay Nursery will be speaking on plant propagation techniques. The afternoon program will feature **David Gehrs** on photographing our plants.
4. July 1 – **Larry Thomas** will present a program on troughs
5. August 12 - **Darrell Probst and John Bieber** will be speaking on *Daphnes* and other things yet to be determined.
6. September 2 - Big Plant Sale and **Mark McDonough**, whose talk will feature new information about *Allium*, but will also address dwarf bulbs, and choice ornamental woody shrubs and trees.
7. October 7 - **Kristl Walek**, proprietor of Gardens North, a Canadian seed house is tentatively scheduled.
8. November 18 - Our Annual Luncheon will feature **C. Colston Burrell**, a world renowned garden designer, photographer, naturalist, and award winning author. The lunch is scheduled to be a 'Potluck' meal at the Berkshire **facility but if there is enough interest, a program can still be scheduled for a restaurant or an inn.**



## **Editors Notes:**

1. For those of you who worry about your Latin, check out the following website to HEAR the correct pronunciation of many botanical names.  
[www.finegardening.com/hearlatin](http://www.finegardening.com/hearlatin)
2. We need 3 volunteers to fill 3 open positions. We need a Greeter, a Meeting Recorder and a Refreshments Chairman. Please ask me about these positions at the next meeting.
3. The February/March issue of Organic Gardening Magazine has an article about Robin Magowan called "Heart of Stone." It is definitely worth finding a copy.
4. The illustration on page 3 is from:  
[www.HistoryImages.com](http://www.HistoryImages.com)

## **March 11 Minutes – Part 2**

By Erica Schumacher

Despite a change of location and speaker, our first meeting of the year was a success. Approximately 45 people showed up to hear Harvey Wrightman, owner of Wrightman Alpines Nursery in Kerwood, Ontario, teach us different ways to propagate alpines. A smaller group stayed to attend his tufa-planting workshop in the afternoon. Some of Harvey's secrets to successful propagation include watering with only low mineral content water such as rain water, using beneficial fungus to inhibit stem and root rot (he likes Root Shield), and planting small cuttings directly in tufa once roots are established. Harvey could not stress often enough the benefits of collecting rainwater to use, whether your water needs are for cuttings, seed germination, or established plants. Distilled water is a more costly option of providing salt and chemical free water. For cuttings, he likes to place them in silica sand such as blasting sand that you can buy at an auto parts store. He

recommends a very porous potting mix, containing a soil less mix such as bio-com made from peanut hulls, mixed with perlite. Everyone that attended the meeting received a nice handout containing many of his recommendations, including some of his favorite websites. There were also many beautiful plants for sale from Wrightman Alpines, includes several types of Saxifrages grown directly in small pieces of tufa that are partially submerged under soil. I went home with two *Saxifrages* and a *Primula* that I have since planted together in a trough I purchased at this year's Eastern Winter Study Weekend.

## **Blossomtime**

By *Robin Magowan*



When confusion so fuels the ground  
Sunlight is never song enough.

Wind hovers over the bed. What erases  
The dawn could light a stone.

I sprawl from one disreputable clump  
To the next. Is order the soulmate

To whom, braced on rock, I kneel?  
Buried under rubble, picking through loam,

Hands converse as weeds  
Lift between plucking fingers.

Is that me, picked up, crumbled, let go,  
Squatting in blue soup,

Eager to keep the high-peaked waves  
Crevicing in startling affinities.

## **Positions of Responsibility**

Chairperson – Peter F. George  
Vice-Chairperson – Dean Evans  
Secretary – Norma Abel  
Treasurer – Jeffrey Hurtig  
Archivist – James Fichter  
Audio Visual Chairperson – Dean Evans  
Greeter – Open  
Independent Director – Elizabeth Zander  
Newsletter Editor – Peter F. George  
Meeting Recorder - Open  
Plant Sale Chairperson – Bob Siegel  
Program Chairperson – Robin Magowan  
Refreshments Chairperson - Open  
Speaker Housing – Anne Spiegel

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NARGS

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Please contact editor before reprinting  
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