

Newsletter

North American Rock Garden Society
Berkshire Chapter August 2006

Next Meeting

Saturday, August 12, 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 –PM John Bieber & Darrel Trout – Daphnes and More

John Bieber has been a guest of our Chapter on several occasions, and he always brings an interesting new twist to the challenge of growing and appreciating Daphnes. And he ALWAYS brings along an incredible selection of plants for sale, at prices that simply too cheap to mention here.

Darrel Trout is the author of two gardening books: *The Kitchen Garden Planner* and *The Country Garden Planner*. He is the past President of the Long Island Horticultural Society, is a certified nursery professional, is currently a GWA Region 1 Director and works as a freelance garden writer, photographer, and lecturer.

He and John are planning a program, which is described as “humorous, entertaining and educational.” That is a challenging mix and I am looking forward to this program in particular.

Lunch — BYO. We welcome dessert contributions. This will be followed by our plant & seedling sale.



Chairman’s Message – 8/21/06

By Peter F. George

The coneflower pictured above has always signified the beginning of the end of summer to me. These ubiquitous flowers attract a huge variety of pollinating insects, including butterflies, bumblebees, honey bees and the varied populations of solitary wasps and bees, and although these flowers are neither rare nor especially beautiful, they provide me with hours of enjoyment each week as I sit and watch the interaction between insect and flower that begins the magic of plant reproduction.

They also remind me that I’ve completed almost a full year as Chair of our Chapter, and Editor of our Newsletter.

Over the months that I’ve been doing these two jobs, I have tried to avoid making the Newsletter my ‘personal journal,’ while offering a balanced and interesting commentary each issue, relevant to our main interest, rock gardening. However, at this point in the year, having experienced 6 meetings as Chairperson, and having edited 7 newsletters, I’d like to offer some general comments about both jobs, and about the

Chapter, the membership and our future. I feel this is a better venue for this than a regular meeting, when we are all focused on gardening and plants, not on Chapter business and other mundane operational issues.

First of all, I'd like to thank the membership for permitting me to serve as Chair and as Editor of the Newsletter. The experience has been wonderful. The work I've had to do has been satisfying and the opportunity to get to know so many wonderful people on a more intimate basis has been one of the singular pleasures of this past year.

In particular I'd like to thank Dean Evans for his continued service to the Chapter. It is simply not possible for me to have succeeded as Chair without Dean to make sure everything works. He's the first one to the meetings, he sets up the audio system, he runs the slide shows, he is the Keeper of the Keys, and generally is the one person who always seems to have a solution for the insoluble. He's a prolific author, and his contributions to the newsletter are humorous and informative, and they have made my job as Editor a sheer joy. I ask and he responds.

Robin Magowan continues to provide us with the programs that keep us coming to meetings. His work is less noticeable, because it is done quietly and 'behind the scenes' and only on occasion is he given public credit for the tremendous work he puts into this job. He is our resident poet, a man whose words add dimension and color to our imaginations in ways I that constantly

surprise me. His gardens are beautiful, but his poetry and prose and both rarer and more evocative than any plant he can grow or garden he can create.

I could (and probably should) continue applauding those whose efforts support the Chapter but it would fill the entire 10 pages of this newsletter, so I will defer. Suffice to say that each and every member is valued and valuable, and his or her contributions are both noticed and appreciated by everyone who pays even the tiniest bit of attention. So thank you all.



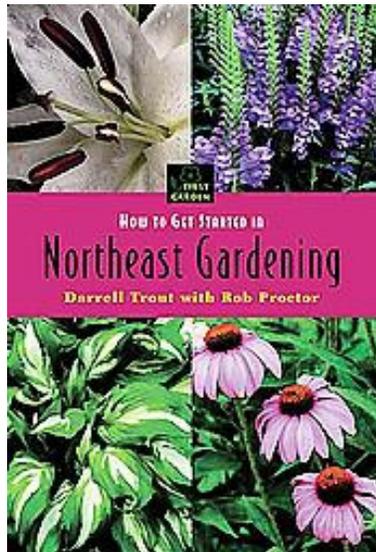
Our Chapter, like most NARGS Chapters, is confronting a serious problem, one that could threaten our long-term viability. Our singular problem is an aging membership, and I don't have any easy answers to that issue nor can I offer any profound insights. My sole observation is that we have such a wealth of talent, genius and simple decency, kindness and generosity in our Chapter, that the future *should* be bright. It would be wonderful if age only brought with it wisdom, but sadly it brings a lot of other issues, and most of them mitigate against gardening, traveling long distances, and sitting through 5 or 6 hours of lectures and slide shows. The obvious solutions to our problem is either to find a way to reverse aging, or recruit and retain a dozen or so new members with an average age under 60. So in all seriousness, let's try to bring in one new member each this next 3 months. We have great programs coming up, and the opportunity is excellent for a bit of modest but important growth in the membership.

The Newsletter has been extremely enjoyable for me to prepare each month. The contributions have been coming in regularly, and I'm extremely grateful for each and every one. It is important for each of you to understand that this is NOT a professional journal, and nobody either expects or demands literary brilliance. So irrespective of your writing experience, call or email me and I'll suggest a topic or two for you to write about, and perhaps the process will turn out not only to be easier than you imagined, but satisfying as well.

My own gardens are simultaneously waxing and waning, and I'm anxiously awaiting the big Labor Day Weekend program and plant sale. I've got a lot of spaces to fill after a number of losses from this season of erratic and extreme weather, and I know that our contributions will be both eclectic and

encompassing, and that Mark McDonough will have some unusual and eminently growable plants for every kind of rock gardener.

I look forward to seeing a lot of you on August 12 for John Bieber and Darrel Trout's program. It will be fun and quite educational, and we'll have the benefit of some fine and unusual plants from these two superb growers.



Playing in the Rain

By Dutch Uncle Dean

Rain is very disruptive to my gardening schedule, yet I enjoy walking through my garden on a rainy day. This forced interruption of ongoing, planned projects is beneficial. It allows me to evaluate the progress I'm making and to appreciate what has been accomplished thus far. After all, gardening is supposed to be enjoyable. There is no problem being outside these days during a gentle rain thanks to the types of raingear available. Grainger's sells some wonderful lightweight pants and hooded short coats. They are not like the long yellow rubber-coated canvas coats and ponchos of my youth, which were heavy and hot. I can't imagine trying to work in a poncho now. I have heard from people who play golf that they have even better rain suits, but obviously they would be very expensive.

While walking through my garden on these rainy days, I carry a galvanized pail, medium size. It swings freely in my left hand. On my right hand I wear a disposable latex glove. As I stroll along looking at this or that – one plant after another, structural elements, things that I have done – with ideas popping into my head, judgments being made, positive thoughts, critical thoughts, random thoughts, absorbing all the sounds and smells, a part of my brain says: "There's a slug". I bend down, pick it up with the gloved hand and flick it into the pail. This process, in itself, is very important to the well being of the garden. As Dutch Uncle to you, a new rock-gardener, I have already explained that drainage is number one in importance. Number two is control of slugs, because alpine plants have no defenses against them.

Their growth rate is so slow that any significant removal of their foliage would kill them, since they could not photosynthesize and reproduce the necessary leaves for this process. Rain brings the slugs out of hiding during daylight hours. Otherwise you would have to try to pick them at night. During dry periods you can employ slug bait of one form or another. I have been told that a product called



“Sluggo!” (from Walt Nicke Co., www.GardenTalk.com) is very effective. I use the product from Home Depot (Bug-Geta by Ortho) and

feel that it works. In the past I have explained a method of trapping slugs using beer and a Cool Whip container. Up near the top of the bowl a half-inch down from the rim, and evenly distributed around the circumference I make three $\frac{3}{4}$ inch holes. I fill this trap with Samuel Adams beer. The advantage to trapping with beer is that you get the very small slugs that would otherwise go unobserved. The Cool Whip container cover keeps the beer from being diluted by rain. These three different methods, if done on a regular basis, result in effective control of slugs. It’s disheartening to put a bunch of seedlings in your garden and then find one morning nothing but stubble that turns brown and dies. The picking method is truly the most rewarding for me – I keep a count as an incentive. Slugs are very social and where you pick one, you will often find three or more. They are attracted to decomposing organic material, so compost piles are excellent places to look. If you run a weed-eater in a rough area on the edge of your property, this freshly cut greenery will attract slugs from farther afield. Even stomped-down plant material will do the same. These newly arrived slugs will find your plants delectable – they have never known such unique taste. After all, they have been eating hard

cellulose and fibrous stem material. Dog droppings are slug magnets. I’ve never gotten less than six slugs from this source. I presently do not own a dog, but am overjoyed to see that my neighbor got a new German Shepherd puppy! I plan to clean up after him a little myself! When I have made my total walk-about I go to my wood stove, remove some hot ashes with a shovel and drop them into the pail. I then add a quantity of collected rainwater to it. Next I shake the pail, mixing the two and throw the contents back into the stove. At this point, I have now had the pleasure of looking over my garden, carried on a control process that allows me to grow rare Campanulas and made good use of the rainy day.

One other activity that you might benefit from is the creation of slug lairs. These hiding places serve three purposes. Say you have an area that needs weeding but you can’t justify the time to do so – it may be a future garden spot that will have to be spaded up and have the dirt shaken from the sod. You can use plastic soil bags or peat moss bags to lay down over the vegetation after it has been stomped flat. These bags can be held down with bricks or flat rocks to keep them from blowing away. Their impervious nature deprives the grass or weeds of sunlight. Moisture will condense against the plastic and hasten decomposition. Periodically you can lift them and oftentimes you will find slugs, worms and other bugs. I first catch the fast bugs barehanded and feed them to my minnows. The fish worms I put in a can to be dumped in my compost pile – they hasten the production of usable soil. Then I pick up the slugs – I may use my glove or just a leaf – I don’t like their slime on my fingers. Generally I just drop them on a piece of newspaper, wad it up and put it in my stove. I keep these lairs covered with the plastic bags until I want the area for use. If I do

uncover them, it's to allow the area to dry so I can scrape up the worm castings. I accumulate them, should I want to re-pot a house plant- there is no better soil for that purpose. In conclusion, you have now cleared an area, enriched the soil and eliminated more slugs.

About Dutch Uncle Dean and His Garden

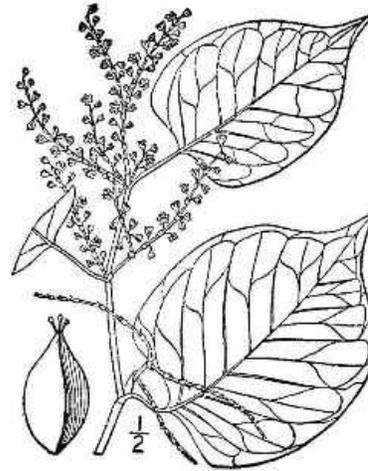
By Tom Clark

Whenever the opportunity presents itself I always feel privileged to visit someone's private garden, especially when provided with a personal tour. One such occasion arose after our May meeting when our very own Dean Evans invited me to see his garden in Stephentown, NY. I, of course, had expressed interest a number of times in seeing his garden, and I finally had my chance so I promptly took him up on his offer.

The adventure began as soon as we were underway. We had scarcely made it out of West Stockbridge when Dean wheeled around and reversed direction. I thought he had forgotten his way home, but he yelled out the window as he sped back the way we had come, I'm going back for that wood, give me a hand! I followed suit and turned back and helped Dean load on a few planks and various scraps of lumber. This was a fitting introduction because the man is rather frugal, but more importantly he is an innovator. Combine those two things with the fact that Dean has a keen eye and sharp intellect for how things work and you get a person that can solve problems in very creative and original ways.

I'm sure that most of us have read the articles in our Newsletter submitted by Dutch Uncle Dean in which he describes

some of the solutions he has developed for various problems or the various growing techniques he employs. To the uninitiated some of what he describes may seem pretty



far-fetched and much of the rest simply beyond belief, but its all true. I saw with my own eyes the woodstove on which Dean cooks and sterilizes his soil to be used for sowing seedlings

and potting on; the results of his very effective method for eradicating Japanese Knotweed; the patio made up of huge slabs and chunks of rock that he moved into place not with machine but by employing more basic techniques such as using rollers and a come-along. The latter was an effort to recreate something reminiscent of natural stone paving we saw in western Newfoundland in which massive chunks of stone were separated by fissures and soil-filled gaps in which a range of choice rock garden plants grew.

How many of us sow our seeds in two or three inch pots? A few of us may go as large as a four-inch pot. Dean sows seed into large nursery cans and four-gallon pails. Don't worry about drainage; he has a template for boring out drain holes in the bottoms of the pails. For a media he blends his cooked compost with grower grit and Turface that produces a lean, free-draining, friable blend. Due to the volume of soil, daily attention isn't necessary, nor is the

need to transplant at an early stage so critical. Pots tipping over are not a problem either, and if it ever becomes an issue I think that will be the least of Dean's problems. I thought his use of pre-numbered pigeon leg bands as a means of keeping track of what's what is ingenious. A uniquely numbered band is held in place in each pot with a common nail. The number is recorded along with all the pertinent information about the contents of each pot such as name, source, sow date, etc.

These numbers follow the plants he raises into the garden as well. Adjacent to his soil preparation area and his expanse of seed pots is a natural dome of rock with interesting crevices and cracks. Dean has augmented the natural planting pockets by boring holes into the mass of rock, just as he did in the rock garden at Berkshire Botanical Garden. Across the road are masses of daylilies that remain from an earlier, although now somewhat diminished passion. Tucked along the foundation of his home is a gem of a tufa garden studded with choice and difficult alpine. How satisfying it must be to build a garden from tufa harvested by hand on your own property and then to adorn it with one's own plants. *Phlox* "Betty", one of Dick Redfield's selections named for his sister grew in this garden alongside the yellow-flowered *Vitaliana primuliflora*. A couple of different varieties of *Eriogonum ovalifolium* were perfectly content; *var. depressum* has been content since 1998, and *var. nivale* was loaded with buds. Although not in flower I

couldn't help but marvel at the tidy plants of *Castilleja sessiliflora*, a species from an exasperatingly difficult genus to satisfy in cultivation. Other treasures were tucked in here and there; *Draba dedeana*, a compact Convolvulus, a nice Androsace. I found it difficult to write, walk, observe and gawk all at the same time! We pushed on to the woodland.

Dean's land falls across a gentle slope and mowed meadow until it reaches the woods. Throughout the patch of woods Dean has made paths, and in the lower, wetter spots he has constructed boardwalks. The overall effect isn't so much that of being a garden but is more akin to managed woodland in which the cultivated plants mix and mingle with the dominant natural vegetation. Rare Epimedium grow alongside Cinnamon Fern; Hepatica grow on dryish hummocks; and along a sluggish stream he is establishing

Primula japonica.

Growing just off the path was a gorgeous creamy white form of *Trillium erectum* that Dean found near Utica where he pulled off the road one day to look around.

After having spent a couple of hours with Dean I felt even more fortunate to have had the opportunity to visit his garden. As I said in the beginning, Dean is an innovator and if you haven't

read his writings I encourage you to do so as they are not only chock full of ideas and information, but are also entertaining and written from a perspective and approach to things that are likely quite foreign to most of us.



Nursery of The Month

Arrowhead Alpines

Specializing in rare perennials, alpine and rock plants, wildflowers and dwarf conifers

Arrowhead Alpines is a specialty nursery of 28 greenhouses located on 68 acres in Fowlerville, Michigan, USA. Their nursery is open for retail business from the time they are done shipping in mid- to late-May through mid-fall when the plants are put away. In the winter they are busy filling catalog orders.

They have greatly expanded perennial offerings this year. "There's lots of cool new stuff to discover, plus many of next year's new catalog introductions will be available. We plan to keep bringing them out as we get them potted up instead of holding them for the 2007 catalog. We have many rare and wonderful species from Central Asia, Turkey, Western North America, and China and new garden cultivars from Europe. By far the most extensive listing of new plants in addition to our already huge catalog listing. We also have many more large-sized specimens that are far too big to put on a UPS truck."

Their website is:

<http://www.arrowhead-alpines.com/>

Minutes of the July 1, 2006 Meeting

Chairman Peter George began the meeting with an auction of books, courtesy of Orlan Gaeddert and Geoffrey Charlesworth, who

have been downsizing their personal libraries. Classics by well-known authorities and other references on a wide range of plant topics brought in quite a bit of money for our chapter. Many thanks to Orlan and Geoffrey for their generous donations! **Show & Tell** began with Dean Evans' update on his methods for sowing and growing seeds for his rock garden. Several large black plastic pots of seedlings served as examples of his soil mix and successful techniques. Dean kept cutting the soil mix with SuperPave, Turface, and chicken granite grit to improve drainage and noticed better germination as a result. He also applies potash to the surface of the soil mix after rain. Carrier pigeons are another of his interests, and as he has a ready supply of pigeon bands (all uniquely coded) he used them to label pots sown with seed. He copies the code onto the corresponding seed packet and mounts the packets together on a board to track results. Another of his tips: use the colored flags from invisible dog fences to mark the location of newly planted items in the garden. You'll be able to find them easily to give them extra water. Dean's ingenuity is remarkable, as is his delight in



sharing what he has figured out or invented.

Elisabeth Zander brought in a pair of extra cool gardening gloves called Sun Grip.

They're

reasonably priced and have a nylon lining and polyethylene coating. She also announced that this year would be the last for the Berkshire Chapter to package seeds.

Eliot Jessen mentioned two rhododendrons he grows. *Rhododendron maximum* 'Leachii' has very compact

growth (his plant is about 8 feet tall now) and “nice little tresses.” The other is *R. m. ‘Mount Mitchell’*, an unstable cultivar known as a chimera. It has both light and dark red flowers on the same plant. The stems and leaves will be reddish if the flowers on that particular stem will be red. The red coloring stays through the winter but becomes less obvious. His plant is about 6 feet tall after 10 years.

Robin Magowan introduced our speaker, Larry Thomas, who is the founder of the Manhattan Chapter of NARGS and served as its president and newsletter editor. He taught ceramics for 20 years and gardens on a roof top balcony in New York City, so comes by the subject of his talk, “Contained Gardening” quite naturally. After showing potted palm trees, rocky terraced slopes, and troughs from around the world, Mr. Thomas focused on his 13 foot by 40 foot terrace on the 11th floor. It offers both southern and eastern exposures, with partial shade for Primulas provided by a potting bench. His homes for plants include a box constructed of pressure treated wood, a sand bed (4 inches of sand over a shower curtain), and a tufa mountain,

plus
strawberry
jars, and
hypertufa,
ceramic, and
granite
containers.

Larry grows Lewisias in strawberry jars (*L. tweedyi* ‘Alba’, *L. columbiana*, *L. pygmaea* Arizona form, *L. rediviva*, and *L. cotyledon*). Primulas are given half-shade under a potting bench (*P. auricula*, *P. allionii*, *P. ellisiae* from Arizona and New Mexico, and *P. sieboldii* from Paul Held). Himalayan delphiniums grow well for him, as does *Phlox bifida*. His



shrubs include the dwarf elm, *Ulmus parviflora* ‘Hokkaido Island’ (a late breaker in mid- to late June), *Daphne arbuscula*, *D. ‘Lawrence Crocker’*, Japanese maples, and a witch’s broom of *Pinus strobus*. Some of his other favorites are *Potentilla subartica* ‘Nana’ (nice to touch) and *Iris gracilipes alba*. He also grows *Iris missouriensis* from Big Horn seeds collected with Howard Pfeiffer and Nick Nickou. His bellflowers include *Campanula portenschlagiana* (grown in a strawberry tower), *C. garganica*, *C. g. ‘Dixon’s Gold’*, *C. versicolor*, and *C. betulifolia*. Others plants he grows that are in the same family include *Phyteuma*, *Physoplexus comosa*, *Symphyandra*, and *Edraianthus*. Listening to Larry, we were struck again by the diversity and talent represented in our society of gardeners.

Announcements:

Peter George asked that members update their addresses and other contact information so it may be included as an insert in a future newsletter.

The BNARGS annual luncheon is scheduled for November 18 as a potluck event with a donation of \$10 suggested. Colston Burrell will speak about hellebores. It’s the subject of his latest book published by Timber Press.

Please send your dues to our treasurer if you have not yet done so. Newsletters will not continue to be sent to those who have not paid for this year.

Mark McDonough (“the Onion Man”) will bring a lot of plant material for our sale in September.

Open Garden Invitation

Saturday, August 19th - 1 pm to 4 pm Open Garden

Elisabeth & Rod Zander
127 North Street
Goshen, CT 06756
860.491.3329

Recorded by Joyce Hemingson

Picking Slugs in the Rain

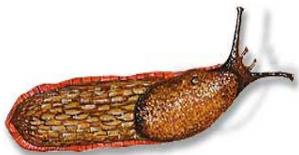
As I stoop or I bend
Can this joy ever end?
I caught you and your friend
And his brother.

As I lumber along
With a whistling song
I could dance, even prance
In these slick vinyl pants

With these boots on my feet
I forget to eat
For there's so much to do, it's a duty

There is joy in my heart
It's rough work, not fine art
But I play the part
For its beauty.

Uncle Dean



Tattletale Gardens

We can tell a lot about people by the way they dress, the books they read. By the way they decorate their homes, and, not surprisingly, by the way they garden.

Do their gardens display symptoms of tight control, or is there a tendency toward laxity? Do their gardens reveal the busy hands of a workaholic, or do they look terminally casual?

And how about the taste in color? Is it reticent, as evidenced by a choice of muted tones with a preponderance of greens? Or does it reflect a flair for flamboyance, with a palette of glow in the dark reds, oranges, yellows and magentas?

Do their gardens demonstrate the clear, unmistakable signs of self-assurance? Or do they betray an element of hesitancy and uncertainty?

Do their gardens hint at modesty, or do they smack of unbridled braggadocio? Do they play safe by conforming to widely accepted styles, or do they boldly declare an in your face style of their own?

When we make a garden, we give ourselves away. We expose our personalities at every turn. Whether our garden is simple and subdued, or brimming with excitement. Whether it's brash and confrontational, or prim and dainty.

I'm sure a psychologist could study a garden – anyone's garden – and sketch a very good picture of the kind of man or woman who made it.

So be warned. Garden with care. Don't let those pretty little pots of petunias tell the world something about you that you would rather keep private.

By Bob Siegel

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 – Harold Peachey
Independent Director – Elizabeth Zander
Newsletter Editor – Peter F. George
Meeting Recorder – Tom Clark
Plant Sale Chairperson – Bob Siegel
Program Chairperson – Robin Magowan
Refreshments Chairperson – Joyce Hemingson
Proofreader – Rita Evans
Speaker Housing – Anne Spiegel

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Membership is open to all members of
NARGS

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Please contact editor before reprinting
articles

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