



# Newsletter

North American Rock Garden Society  
Berkshire Chapter September 2007

## Next Meeting

Saturday, October 6, at 10:30 AM

The Berkshire South Regional Community Center in Great Barrington, MA

For Directions please visit

[www.berkshiresouth.org](http://www.berkshiresouth.org) or call 413-528-2810

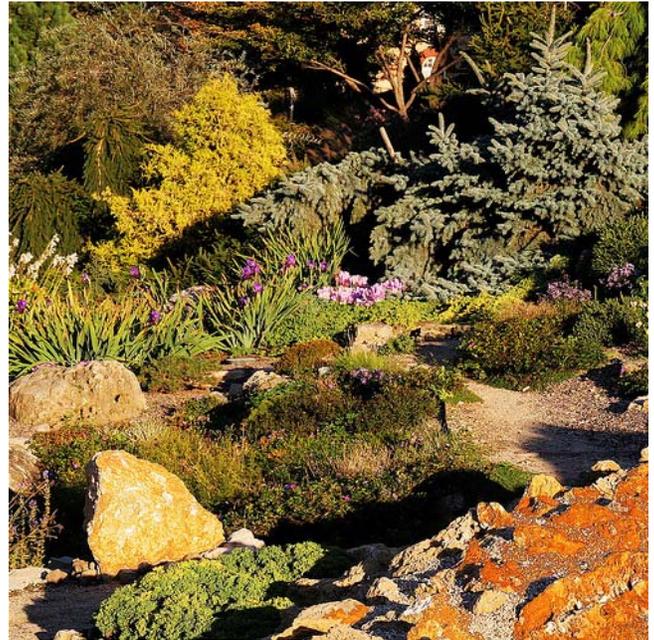
**Chapter Business:** There will be a brief business meeting, including election of new Chapter officers, and a Show & Tell, followed by our program.

Janis Ruksans will give two talks, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The morning talk is titled 'Growing Bulbous Iris,' and the afternoon talk is titled 'Growing Corydalis.'

Ruksans is one of the premier propagators of bulbs in the world. He established his nursery in his native Latvia in 1991, and distributes *Corydalis*, *Crocus*, *Allium*, bulbous Iris, *Fritillaria*, *Tulipa*, and other rare and unusual bulbs throughout the world. He has led and been a participant in numerous expeditions to Central Asia, the Caucasus, and other areas of the former Soviet Union searching for new bulbous plants. He is credited with discovering 3 new *Corydalis* species, 2 new *Allium*, 2 new *Iris*, while introducing and cultivating over more than a hundred bulbous plants previously unknown to the gardening world.

His catalogue now lists more than 4000 items that he grows in his nursery, and is expanding every year. He is the author of 6 books about gardening - two about forcing of flower bulbs, one about Daffodils, a monograph about Crocuses, a book about spring flowers, and his most recent book just released by Timber Press, Buried Treasures.

This is a rare opportunity to meet and learn from one of the true giants of horticulture, right here in Great Barrington, MA.



## Chairman's Message – 9/27/07

By Peter F. George

Summer is over, and my 2 years as Chair of the Chapter is over as well. I want to thank all of you for giving me the opportunity to serve you and the Chapter; it has been a challenging but exhilarating experience, and one I will cherish as long as I am capable of cherishing anything.

This month's program is special, and I am looking forward to attending the Annual Luncheon Meeting as a regular member of the Chapter, simply participating in the preparation, and letting the new Chairperson bear the overall responsibility for the tough work of organizing the event.

My gardens are doing surprisingly well given my lack of attention and the long dry period we experienced in August and early September. I will be putting in a few plants over the next week, but I'm mostly looking forward to enjoying a relaxing fall given the stressful year I've had.

Again, thank you all for your confidence and your support these past two years.

Peter George

## ***2007 BNARGS Program Schedule***

***November 3*** – Bill Mathis, owner of *The Wild Orchid Company*, will present a program on GROWABLE terrestrial orchids. In addition, he will have a supply for sale to our members. This meeting is our Annual Luncheon Meeting, and will be held at the Berkshire South Regional Community Center again.

## ***FERNS from Spore***

*By Harold Peachey*

For beauty, grace and elegance, nothing beats the ferns for the woodland garden, border, or rock garden.

Predating angiosperms by hundreds of millions of years, ferns have evolved to fill any niche or artificial environment you may find or provide. We are fortunate in the Northeast to have over one hundred species of ferns growing naturally, most of which are readily adaptable to average garden conditions, and a few equal to the challenge of the most intransigent alpine plant.

Woodland gardeners will find a vast array of Pteridophytes available for any situation. The

Victorian Fern Craze of nineteenth century England produced endless varieties and forms of *Adiantum*, *Dryopteris* and *Polystichum* species with permutations and new forms being released regularly to the present. Plant explorers and adventurers are describing more new ferns from alpine and sub-alpine sites providing material and intrigue for rock gardeners and other esoteric types.

More ferns are becoming available on the market, but the best for rock gardeners and the more adventurous eclectic gardeners are best obtained through propagation from spore. Collection of ferns from wild populations is discouraged, but collection of a few spores from healthy populations provides the best chances of successful addition to your garden or alpine house. Spores are generally found on the undersides of the leafy part of the frond although some ferns are dimorphic (fertile fronds are significantly different from sterile fronds.). Look for sori (little bundles of sporangia) whose indusium (thin layer of cells covering the spore during development) have started to open. Carefully collect spore and store in the refrigerator. "Everyone should have a propagation refrigerator," said William Cullina at a seminar in Garden in the Woods.

Growing ferns from spore requires one main skill, PATIENCE! Here is a step-by-step guide to growing ferns from spore, an addictive and rewarding experience.

1. Use sterilized containers, I prefer new 4" plastic pots, but any container will do.
2. Moisten a peat based soilless mix, fill the pots to 1/4" after firming, and place in the microwave for 3-4 minutes, and be careful not to melt the plastic pot.
3. Once the medium has cooled, sprinkle a few spore on the surface, (hint -if you can see the spore on the surface you have planted them too densely).

4. Place the pot in a plastic zip lock bag, the cheap kind are best, not the freezer grade.
5. Place the baggie in a well-lighted spot, but not in direct sunlight, with moderate temperature.
6. WAIT! Do not open the baggie!
7. WAIT SOME MORE!
8. In two to four weeks you will see a green film forming on the surface of the medium.
9. In another 2-4 months, typically, you will see the formation of prothalli (heart shaped leafy looking material about the size of your little fingernail).
10. WAIT SOME MORE! Ah ah ah, don't open up yet!
11. If the prothalli appear too crowded, prepare a new pot as before and transplant clumps of prothalli to the new pot. It will look like one of those bad hair implants from the men's hair club.
12. Once true fronds begin to appear and reach an inch or two, begin opening the baggie for successively longer periods to harden off the new sporangia.
13. Transplant to a protected nursery bed or containers for growing on.

You have now successfully propagated your first fern from spore. If you ended up with one plant, you have saved yourself about \$12.00. In all likelihood you will have dozens or even hundreds of plants to give away, trade, sell or just to show off.

For more information about ferns visit the following websites:

Don Lubin: <http://www.nefern.info/>

Sue Olsen: <http://www.foliagegardens.com/>

The Hardy Fern Foundation:

<http://www.hardyferns.org/home.htm>

The American Fern Society:

<http://amerfernsoc.org/>



Ferns in the woodland setting: Oak Fern (*Gymnocarpium dryopteris*), Himalayan Maidenhair (*Adiantum venustum*) and Christmas Fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*) with *Gentiana scabra* var. *saxatilis*. The author's garden.



*Cystopteris fragilis*, another excellent fern for the rock garden

## **Positions of Responsibility**

Chairperson – Peter F. George  
Vice-Chairperson – Harold Peachey  
Secretary – Carol Hanby  
Treasurer – Pam Johnson  
Archivist – James Fichter  
Audio Visual Chairperson - Joe Berman  
Greeter – Harold Peachey  
Independent Director – Elizabeth Zander  
Newsletter Editor – Peter F. George  
Meeting Recorder – **Open**  
Plant Sale Chairperson – Bob Siegel  
Program Chairperson – Robin Magowan  
Proofreader – Cliff Desch  
Refreshments Chairperson – Joyce Hemingson  
Speaker Housing – Anne Spiegel

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Membership is open to all members of NARGS  
Dues \$10.00 single, \$12.50 Family  
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East Lyme, CT 06333

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Please contact editor before reprinting articles

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