



Newsletter

North American Rock Garden Society
Berkshire Chapter June 2008

Next Meeting

Saturday, July 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.

**Sally Perkins will provide us with 2
programs:**

AM – Rock Garden Ericaceae

This talk will examine the dwarf and compact
growing plants that will respond well to a sunny
to shady rock garden situation. Rhododendrons
will be the emphasis.

PM – Wildflowers of The Blue Ridge

This talk is a result of her many trips along the
Blue Ridge from it's northernmost tip on the
PA/MD border to the Great Smokies. The
emphasis will be on the many plants found there
that are adaptable to the garden.

Sally has been a member of NARGS for 20
years and is active in the New England Chapter,
currently serving as their newsletter co-editor.
She is the District Director of the American
Rhododendron Society as well. Her garden is a
collector's garden, with a dominance of
Rhododendron species and hybrids. Wildflowers
are tucked in and 'allowed' to ramble to her
husband, John's, chagrin. Sally has a BS in
botany from the University of Maryland and an
MS in Cell Biology from the University of
Illinois

Lunch — BYO.

We welcome dessert contributions. Lunch
will be followed by our plant sale, so
PLEASE bring 2 or 3.



Editors Message – 6/22/08

*Two weeks ago Clifford Desch agreed to
serve as Chairperson of our Chapter for at
least the rest of this year. He won't have
time to submit a column for this issue, so I
again will fill the space as best I can, and
look forward to Cliff's first Chairperson's
Message next issue.*

My daughter Rachel took the picture you see
above on June 8th immediately after we
returned from a week in VA. I was surprised
and pleased that it had bloomed so well, but
given the heat and rain we had during our
vacation, this *Oxytropis* certainly was in its
element. This beauty, and so many others
flush with flowers, signify the high season
of the rock garden in May and June. Like
each of you who have an open garden, or
who have a trough or two, this is the time of
year we wait for and as it passes all too
quickly, I spend a part of every day just
sitting and looking at the beauty of these
plants. This is a just and ample reward for

the long hours I've put in during the previous 3 months, and to be fair, during the previous 12 years. I've tried to create a garden which has plants in bloom from snowmelt to snowfall and I think this year I will succeed. I had my snowdrops in March, and I fully expect to have *Polemonium caeruleum* blooming through the snow in early December, as I had last year. I discovered that my spring seedlings, if located in a warm, sunny and protected area of my garden, will bloom for the first time in late October, and will carry the blooms until they are buried under the first significant snowfall.

Our first meeting will feature Sally Perkins, whose first effort to give us a presentation was short-circuited by one of those March snowstorms we get most years. The meeting will be on the 12th, and I hope to see many of you in Stockbridge for this meeting, which will be our 2nd of the year, an oddity that resulted from bad weather and the subsequent late March Eastern Winter Study Weekend.

For the next few issues, I'd really like to have some of you write a thought or two about Geoffrey for the newsletter. He was so much a part of our Chapter, and so much a part of our gardening lives, that there has to be something you want to share with others about him, his impact on you and your gardening passions.

This issue feature 3 articles he wrote, two of which I don't believe have been published before, and one of which deserves a 2nd look. Pam Johnson is piecing together his writings from his computer files, and although we are unlikely to get the Charlesworth equivalent of Tolkien's Silmarillion, it will definitely be worth reading as it becomes available.

I would also ask each of you to drop me an email or a note telling me what plant or plants or seeds you are trying to locate. I will be posting these wish lists each month, and I anticipate that given our membership and their impressive range of gardening interests, that many of your 'must haves' will be offered through this medium.

PFG

Harvey Wrightman: Fertilizing Alpine Plants



Sphaeralcea coccinea – Harvey Wrightman

Through the years of running the nursery, now approaching 25, I have always looked to improve the way we grow plants in the garden. Alpines are especially demanding, in that they are plants that do not thrive in lowland areas. However, conditions of culture are a continuum and what is lacking in one component, may

be compensated with other factors. This need not be complicated; a few basic tenets will always remain:

1. Free draining soils. Wet and sodden soil lacks oxygen and encourages root and stem diseases.
2. Lots of air movement - again to dry the leaves and inhibit disease
3. Water that is near neutral or slightly acidic pH. It also is better if the TDS (Total Dissolved Salts) is below 200 ppm; better still below 100ppm - a level that is generally OK for orchids. You need a greenhouse mineral test from a lab such as A&L to determine the pH and TDS - only \$20.
4. Appropriate light levels - in most cases, open light to morning sun, the eastern exposure is the most desirable. In the heat of the summer afternoon, most alpines prefer to rest. Note well that there are plants which tolerate/want a hot, baking site.

The one area where I had the most difficulty, especially growing in pots, was with nutrition. Liquid feed was the primary fertilizer we used. In spring, one can provide a bi-weekly feed of a balanced product at a low rate ~ 100 ppm of Nitrogen, which converts to roughly 50gm / 100 liters of water. Soluble fertilizer is basically salt and adding it to water drives up the TDS - not so good in the hot weather - the possibility of fertilizer burn increases with heat. Think how beneficial a thundershower is for the garden. Rainwater, which is very low in TDS, provides needed moisture, cools the environment and also washes the plants, diluting the effect of excess salts. The problem with commonly used fertilizer salts is that they are geared to produce rapid growth of edible plants -for cabbages -

not the low-level constant feed that most alpines prefer.

I have also tried a number of slow-release fertilizers in pellet form. Of these, the one I came to like best was MagAmp, but it is no longer available. So it was with some interest that I spoke with a fellow selling organic fertilizer products to organic field crop producers in Southern Ontario. His most interesting product was Spanish River Carbonatite, a gritty sand that is applied much like a slow-release fertilizer. It has an favorable distribution of elements: Nitrogen .3%, Phosphorus 2%, Potassium .7%, Calcium 20%, Magnesium 1%, plus lesser amounts of trace elements. Carbonatites are of volcanic origin - magma flowing from the earth's core along a fault line. Vegetation growing on the carbonatite is very lush and is readily spotted from the air if flying over it. On the Spanish River site, there are white birches that are 90 cm (3') in diameter.



Saxifraga 'before' – Harvey Wrightman

We have been using it now for 2 years. The photos of the Androsace and Saxifraga are examples of "before and after" applications. The sax cuttings were very pale when planted into the tufa. A little SRC in the transplant hole in the tufa provided enough nutrition to restore them to health - this wouldn't have happened if just sand or tufa dust were used. With the Androsace

barbulata, the SRC was top-dressed on the pots in July 2007 (very dry summer here). The leaves turned green within 2 weeks. We use it now in all the mixes for plants. Since it is not dose-specific, one can use as much,



Saxifraga 'after' – Harvey Wrightman

or as little as seems appropriate. Plants need a reserve of nutrition. Too much, too fast is dangerous. Results are never dramatic, but plants look healthier with fewer pest or disease problems. My speculation about its action is that it may promote a healthier mix of soil microorganisms, which in turn may make nutrients better available to plants. Probably a complex series of interactions that is not understood yet. Certainly a good candidate for some basic research.



Androsace 'before' – Harvey Wrightman

I find it useful to include in some of the very lean, mineral mixes I use for plants that dislike too much organic content. Dry-land plants from the West respond well. There

are a very few things that don't tolerate the Calcium content, perhaps.

A few points to consider:

-Flora is generally richer on limestone mountains



Androsace 'after' – Harvey Wrightman

-There is a spike in the availability of nitrogen that occurs at the very end of snowmelt, when it is most concentrated, albeit in ice-cold water. Snowmelt plants have evolved to take advantage of this situation. The lesson for gardeners is to have the fertilizer in place at that time. Wheat crops are fertilized as soon as it is safe to drive on the field, sometime in early April.

-Now that we use SRC in the soil mixes, we use liquid feeds at half-rate.

-The use of SRC in mixes is similar to the use of a sterilized, fertile, garden loam.

-More info at www.carbonatite.com

When Gardening Becomes an Obsession

Most people take gardening quite casually (did you know there are even people who never garden?) and would be happy to grow a few tomato plants and string beans, or buy a flat of petunias or marigolds to give a spot of color from Decoration Day until first

frost. But within the loose category 'gardener' there are many different kinds and this vague term can be split up into many sections and subsections.

'Houseplant gardeners' (more politely: people who grow tender plants) includes people who grow in greenhouses as well as those who have only a sunny living room. Then you have to differentiate between hot houses, cool greenhouses and alpine houses that may or may not be allowed to freeze. Each category caters to a completely different set of plants with almost no overlapping.

In the open air there are even more divisions and subdivisions. Some gardeners call themselves landscape designers and may plant an arboretum or conifer garden, or affect a design they call an 'English' garden, a 'Japanese' garden or an 'Italian' garden meaning that they carry in their minds an ideal model that suggests a general direction in design and choice of plants. Most people would reserve a bit of space for such a fantasy and integrate it with the rest of the garden. There are sculpture gardens, some specializing in plastic gnomes, water gardens, wild gardens, woodland gardens, moss gardens, mono-culture gardens (roses, hostas, iris) and then there are Rock Gardens.

Rock gardening is described roughly as using a habitat typical of some aspect of nature, ideally mountainous, but which could include any kind of tundra, semi-desert, woodland, bogs and seeps found at the source of a stream and the ponds, puddles and marshes that are home to many species of plant. (You can do this on an immense scale as in Denver Botanical Garden, or in miniature in a container) Concentrating on one or a few of these habitats is getting close to becoming a

specialist, but there are still further choices of direction: habitat type would be one choice, another geographic location (only plants from the Rockies or Japan), or you might want to restrict yourself to plants under 6 inches, exclude yellow flowers, grow only bulbs. None of this makes you necessarily a plant nut but the madness is only a few steps away.

A further specialization concentrates a gardener on one particular genus. This has a parallel in greenhouse gardening with orchid growing except that orchids comprise an immense family of plants. For instance there are gardeners whose passion is the genus *Penstemon* or the genus *Androsace*. I have been through both of these phases and grieved to have to leave them behind. You may not have heard of either genus. *Penstemon* is almost exclusively North American with heavy concentrations of species in the Western States but a few in all the Eastern States too (except Maine). There is a *Penstemon* society (total membership 165) dedicated to their study: their botany, distribution, cultivation, hybridization and protection. Groups of devotees go on hikes in Utah, Colorado etc. photographing and drooling over stands of rare species.



Alan Bradshaw

Then there are people who grow *Androsaces*. Both plants and people are widely distributed (but sparsely) around the Northern Hemisphere. In the US the genus is

sometimes called *Douglasia* after the explorer who botanized the northwest. They are members of the primrose family but the genus has very few species. Their interest is in their rarity, the difficulty in growing them and the sheer beauty of the mats and cushions that are the forms of the best species. Beauty of course is very subjective and in my garden they have been dismissed as ‘that little thing’ or even ‘rubbish’ by a visiting perennial border gardener. But they are the jewels of treeless high places and have to be sought eyes down, back bent, hard to distinguish even in the mountains from more common crucifers and other less desirable beauties.

Many gardeners grow one or two of the easier species but the obsession arises when you find you want to grow them all and realize that New England is not hospitable to all the plants from the Himalayas or even from the European Alps and that *Douglasias* from Alaska are not only unobtainable but are the prima donnas of the rock garden. With obsession come humility and envy in equal measure. As a by-product you get called a garden snob.

Geoffrey Charlesworth

How to Give a Slide Talk on Alpine Plants

Preliminary Steps (with approximate time needed for each step)

1. Buy a house. (30 years)
2. Make a garden (10 years)
3. Study elementary botany, rudimentary Latin. Collect a library of Floras and encyclopedias. (may be done concurrently with #2)
4. Join several plant societies. (do this quickly in the early stages of #2)
5. Make a lot of plant friends. Attend a lot of plant meetings (continuous throughout a normal life)
6. Order seed catalogs from non-society sources. (a few hours) Wait for society seed lists (inactive period)
7. Research every new plant name in every seed catalog the same day they arrive. (one day per catalog)
8. Order seed. Keep records of orders. Fill out applications for seed from plant societies. (3-4 hours per catalog)



<http://www.ontariowildflower.com/andyfyon.htm>

9. Plant seed as it arrives (3 months)
10. Inspect seed pots daily from March 15 to August 31. (30 minutes daily)
11. Transplant seedlings when correct size daily May 1 to Sept 30. (variable 5min-5 hours)
12. Plant seedlings in situ when correct size. May through Sept as needed (average 1 hour)
13. Weed the garden etc. (Any time remaining every day)
14. Buy cameras. (More than one event required. The first few cameras will not be satisfactory. Continue buying until satisfaction achieved. One day per event)
15. Buy film. Experiment with lenses, tripods, flash, and filters. Discard all equipment except the satisfactory

camera. Take photographs of plants, garden scenes, nature in general, other peoples gardens and plants, plants in mountains, pictures showing habitat, woodland plants in situ, bog plants etc. (Spend about an hour a day on fine days, even when cloudy, even when sunny. Avoid windy days. Avoid days too cold for the camera to work. All cameras rely on batteries for one function or another. In mountains take photos whenever you see a new plant and then continue taking pictures of the same species until there is no better example available. This may impede progress but remember you are there only for photography. If you come back with no photographs you have wasted a day in the mountains. You will never come back to this location. Don't waste time sight seeing. In the mountains you must take photographs even on windy days and in rain. If the plant is rare enough it may be hardly recognizable and still have value for a slide show. This implies that taking photographs of a plant at a great distance will be useful, especially when the audience is really knowledgeable.)

16. After having the slides developed at a photo shop you can trust you will want to rush to show someone every slide. Resist this until you have eliminated those with severe deficiencies such as sun streaks, camera or plant movement, wrong focus, pictures in bright snow with subjects too dark to recognize. (First viewing: 20 minutes. Decisions to discard bad photos: 1 hour per photo)
17. Write the species name on every slide. If there is only a mountain try to remember where you were. Often the name of the country is sufficient. (1 hour per box)
18. As boxes of slides accumulate you will be waiting for an invitation to give a slide talk at your local chapter or garden club. Sometimes you are asked to give a

talk on a particular subject. Usually you can choose your own topic and in any case once you are on the podium nobody can stop you changing the subject matter to suit your own plans. Therefore you can start thinking about talk formation. A talk on your own garden gives you a free ego trip. A talk on a single genus will require much research. (a few days). There is nothing worse than being upstaged by some busybody botanist only too glad to tell you that the name you think you knew is now obsolete. Best prepare a few caveats that will cover such embarrassments such as sweetly asking him or her if they have ever grown a particular species you are sure is impossible to grow where they live. (3 hours for thinking. 1 hour for anticipating hostile audience member)

19. At this point you will realize your slides are in anonymous yellow boxes or in inappropriate carousels or thrown haphazardly into plastic bags and cardboard boxes. You probably started trying to be organized by buying metal boxes with slots for slides. After an annoying accident with the metal and finding it troublesome to insert and extract slides from over designed slots you have now resigned yourself to mild chaos. Whatever your system it will take time to find any slides at all that fit your topic but you must find at least twice as many as you think you will need to be sure of putting together even the simplest talk about your own garden. (1 hour to get the slides out, 8 hours to select 160 slides. Do this in 2 sessions to avoid burnout)
20. Choose the slides you are going to use; as you select each slide place it in a carousel and write down the name of the subject so that by the time you have finished you have a crude slide list. (2 hours)

21. Use the slide list to write a script. Even if you don't refer to the script it acts as insurance that you don't forget the plant name. The script should include whatever story you are going to tell about the plant. Remember long stories mean one slide is going to be on the screen for a long time. This is dull and is the most feared situation for an audience who have come to see pictures of plants. Your story may be hilariously funny but the plant on the screen is not. Even *Eritrichium nanum* becomes boring when stared at for too long in a dark room. (script writing with revisions: 3 hours).



Eritrichium nanum.

<http://pagesperso-orange.fr/COLIN.BARKER/Images/Flowers/Eritrichium%20nanum%2001.jpg>

22. Rehearsals. Two or three needed. At least one of them with a critical friend. A hostile friend is counterproductive. (Total time about 1 hour and half)
23. The Talk
24. On the day you can let people think that you just threw the talk together. This will partially excuse your bumbling delivery. Remember to repeat the name of every plant. Make the most of your privileged position on the podium by indulging in a little one-upmanship.
25. After the talk you will be on a high. You will want to make a lot of promises to strangers to send them plants or seed.

This is normal and no after talk promise can be expected to be fulfilled.

Geoffrey Charlesworth

Dear Tomato Lady,

Your specimen tomatoes have now been fully tested by our tomato-tasting team. The results, which I am sure you are anxiously awaiting, follow:

Shape: As perfect as a Faberge egg decorated in pearls and gold leaf, this prolate spheroid is the aim of every breeder of note. **Color:** How Handel would have loved this fruit as the perfect example for Polyphemus' song: How ruddier than the cherry, as he waited for a chance to capture fair Galatea.



Firmness: Can only be compared to the right breast in Botticelli's Birth of Venus that longs to be fondled by every art student in Firenze.

Fragrance: The hayfields of the Orkney islands two weeks before the wild flowers and grasses are to be mown have the same delicious pungency.

Taste: As the late, great Maggie Teyte singing the songs of Auverne evoked the sweet, gentle breezes rippling over the remote hillsides of southern France, so these

fruits conjure on the taste buds the same essence of Summer.

Acidity: The same Ph as the golden sands of Long Island where the azalea Polar Bear lusted after in vain by King Gustav of Sweden grows to perfection.

Mouth: We remember the sensation as the most modern hybrid between Plum and Apricot crosses the lower front teeth on to the sensitive central section of the attentive tongue.

Number of pieces tested: 1

Number of experts performing tests: 1

Overall opinion: Good to Very Good.

Taste testing department chair,

GBC

Easy Does It

Easy Plants For The Beginner, From A Beginner

There are quite a few ‘evening primroses,’ but I grow *Oenothera macrocarpa ssp. fremontii*, which is native to Kansas and Nebraska. My dad gave me a seedling two years ago, and I planted it in sandy soil where it gets full sun all day. It’s grown substantially over the past year, and this year it’s covered with blooms daily, which open at dusk and stay open until around noon the next day.

My dad’s plants are huge, and they’ve been in his garden for years, and the picture below shows how loaded with flowers his plants are this spring. (The picture was taken in the afternoon, so most of the flowers were closed). I guess ‘huge’ is a relative term, but they are about 15 inches tall, and about 2 feet across, so they do need a bit of space to grow properly. So far his plants have not seeded around too much, but there are always a few seedlings to transplant, and

they seem to do fine if they are kept moist for a few days after transplanting.



I’ve watched them carefully during the day, and they are periodically visited by various insects, but they are pollinated by sphinx moths in their native haunts, which visit them at night and are supposed to be much more effective pollinators than our local insects. Yet my plant and my father’s plants all developed seeds, so there must be a local pollinator, perhaps one of our sphinx or hawk moths.

The best feature of this plant is that it blooms continuously from June through September, producing big, yellow flowers in great abundance, and making sure that as the summer progresses, there is still color in at least one part of the garden.

Rachel Flowers

Reminders:

Please make sure that your dues are up to date. If you are not certain if you’ve paid for 2008, contact Pam Johnson, our Treasurer.

And send me the names of any plants or seeds that you are having trouble locating, so I can post your request in the next newsletter.

And *please* consider writing something from your memory about Geoffrey.

PFG



BERKSHIRE BOTANICAL GARDEN

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July 2008 Programs -

All programs take place at the Berkshire Botanical Garden unless otherwise stated.

**Fruit and Flower Still Life Drawing
Friday, Saturday & Sunday
July 11, 12, 13: 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Cost members \$185; Non-members \$195**

**Materials list provided All levels
Bring a bag lunch**

Learn botanical illustration using colored pencils. Combine the sensual shapes of flowers and fruits in compelling compositions. Learn ways to create textured backgrounds and decorative borders with brilliant hues. This color medium can create colors smooth as glass and rough as sandpaper and mimic an oil painting, pastel or watercolor. Participants should bring a pear and other fruits and flower to include in their drawings. Instructor **Carol Ann Morely** is an illustrator and dedicated teacher of botanical illustrations in Dover, NH and founded the Botanical Illustration Certificate Program and teaches at the New York Botanical Garden

**A Primer on Daylilies
Saturday, July 16, 10 a.m. - Noon**

**Lecture/Field Study, Plant Sale
Cost Members \$16; Non-members \$21 All levels**

Melanie will be selling some of her exceptional daylilies

dug on her farm North Country Daylilies

Daylilies comprise a large group of garden-worth plants that support the background of the summer border. Focus will be on the varieties forms available to cover a four-month period of bloom.



Discussion will include bloom time, height, color, and designing with perennials. Cultivation, siting and health care will also be covered. Instructor **Melanie Mason** is owner of North County Daylilies in Buskirk, NY. She grows over 1,200 registered daylilies as well as nearly 10,000 seedlings for a hybridizing program.

**Watercolors in the Summer Garden
Thursdays, July 17, 24, 31; 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.**

**Cost Members \$95, Non-members \$105, Individual classes \$37.50. Participants provide own material
Beginner/ intermediate**

View the summer garden with an eye for color, mood and texture and capture it on paper with watercolors. Learn the basics of this medium, color mixing, brush techniques and composition. Students will learn step by step how to create a watercolor. New techniques demonstrated at each class. Beginners

are welcome. Attend the series or pick and choose individual classes. Instructor **Linda Novick**, a Pratt Institute graduate has taught art for thirty years. She has numerous workshops in the U.S. and Europe

Woody Plant Propagating

Saturday, July 19; 10 a.m. - noon

Hands-on Workshop

Cost Members \$30, Non-members \$35

All levels

All materials provided

This lecture/workshop with a woody plant specialist **Adam Wheeler** will cover how to collect, prepare and propagate flowering shrubs and other woody plants by greenwood cutting.



Participants will take actual cuttings and learn techniques needed for insuring successful rooting. Easily propagated shrub varieties, cultivation needs,

timing and care will be the program's focus. Participants will take home a tray full of unusual woody planer cuttings to cultivate at home. Instructor **Adam Wheeler** is the Propagation and New Plant Development Manager for Broken Arrow Nursery, Hamden, CT, a specialty nursery with a focus on woody plants.

Hosta Day

Saturday, July 19; 11 a.m. Bedside Chat 1 p.m. Lecture "Hostas"

The Diamond of the Garden

Free for members, regular admission for non-members

Receive a free hosta plant for attendees! Join **Meg and Jim Dalton**, members of the Tri-State Hosta, Upstate New York Hosta and American Hosta societies for a bedside chat on cultivation, hybridizing and protection of hostas. A



lecture will follow covering, landscape uses, designing with hosta, companion plants and history of this great plant.

Japanese Style- Paper Covered Baskets

Thursday, July 24; 10 a.m. - 4 p.m

Cost Members \$75, Non-members \$85

All levels

Materials fee \$15 paid to instructor.

Bring a bag lunch.

Covering baskets with handmade papers has a long tradition in Japan. Participants will weave a basket of natural cane in the morning. After lunch the baskets will be covered with handmade papers and old Japanese book pages. Small decorative elements (gold leaf, beads and tiny buttons) can be imbedded in the surface when damp. As the paper dries, it shrinks around the cane revealing the weave pattern. Instructor **Nancy Moore Bess** is a master basket maker and exhibits her work worldwide. She is the author of *Bamboo in Japan*.

Elisabeth Cary

Berkshire Botanical Garden

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Positions of Responsibility

Chairperson – Cliff Desch
Vice-Chairperson – Robin Magowan
Secretary – Carol Hanby
Treasurer – Pamela Johnson
Archivist – James Fichter
Audio Visual Chairperson - Joe Berman
Greeter – Open
Independent Director – Peter F. George
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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Please contact editor before reprinting
articles