

# Newsletter

North American Rock Garden Society  
Berkshire Chapter April 2009

## **Next Meeting**

**Saturday, May 16 at 10:30 AM**

Berkshire Botanical Garden Exhibit Hall,  
located 2 miles west of Stockbridge MA at the  
junction of Routes 102 & 183

**Chapter Business:** Show & Tell, Chapter  
business and general announcements

## **Special Program!**

### **Josef Halda**

AM - Plants of Central Asia

PM - Plants of the Balkans

Josef Halda will be our speaker, and that is sufficient reason to make sure you attend this meeting. Robin Magowan wrote a profile of Josef, and it begins on page 2. Josef is coming to our chapter as part of a national tour underwritten by NARGS, and this appearance is one of his few in the Eastern half of the United States.

As Robin points out, Josef is a botanical polymath. He's a seed collector, and explorer, a taxonomist, a writer and a superb grower of the rarest and the most challenging rock garden plants in the world. It will be a special day for us, and I'm hoping we get a very good turnout. And bring lots of questions! Josef is at his best in a 'question and answer' format.'

### **Lunch ---BYO**

We welcome dessert contributions. Lunch will be followed by our plant sale, so please bring at least one seedling or plant!

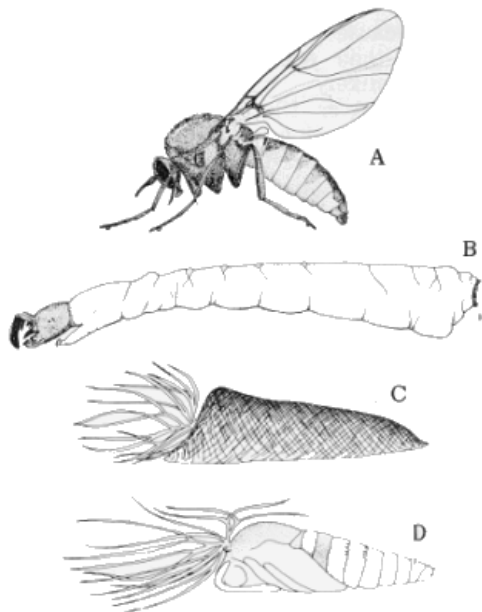
## From The Chairman:

In last month's Berkshire Chapter Newsletter, the editor reported that my deer fence had sprung a leak. White-tailed deer, *Odocoileus virginianus*, entered (and departed) the garden over an estimated 2 week period in mid-March. These incursions, the first since installation in May, were facilitated by deep snow. In places the top of the fence was at my eye level (and thus, not very high) and an easy leap for the deer. Most browsing was on rhododendrons. It now appears that the deer damage pales to that caused by voles, the



pine vole, *Microtus pinatorum*, to be specific. These little rodents of mass plant destruction operate from the bottom up *i.e.*, they eat the roots of herbaceous plants and gnaw the bark near ground level of woody plants. It is too soon to know the extent of their damage over this winter because various woodland plants have yet put on above ground growth (21 April). The numerous vole runways through the leaf litter indicate they were very active under the protection of the snow cover. I am now

collecting information on the Internet and word-of-mouth on repellents and toxic baits. Two weeks ago the first mosquitoes appeared. This early emerging species is not very aggressive. I have also had a few deer (black legged) tick bites (very itchy). This past weekend small numbers of black flies were circling my head. I wrote the following in the May 1993 issue of the Berkshire Chapter Newsletter: "These early blood-feeding pests, *Prosimulium mixtum* complex, produce a single generation per year. Females lay their eggs in small, vernal



**Black fly. A, Adult. B, Larva. C, Cocoon. D, Pupa.**

streams in May. The eggs survive the summer in the moist gravel of the dry streambeds and hatch as larvae in the late fall after the streams have refilled. In mid-May we can expect to be accosted by a second species, *Simulium venustum* complex. This black fly produces more than one generation per year. Females deposit eggs in small, permanent streams of up to 30 feet in width. These are the tormentors that seem to perpetually swarm around your head as a cloud of bugs and only occasionally

alight to bite. Their infrequent bites do not indicated a lack of lust for blood but rather their landing behavior is triggered by animals in a horizontal position (*i.e.*, on all fours). The upright posture of humans tends to foil this behavior. However, if you are crawling around in the garden weeding or planting – look out. The latest black fly to emerge (mid-June), *Simulium penobscotense*, also produces multiple generations per year but lays its eggs in large, 30+ feet wide streams. Thus, in the future, when the Connecticut River is thoroughly clean it will again serve as a mega-hatchery for this unwelcome guest in the garden. This must be one of the few disadvantages of clean water.

As a note, some species in western Africa (one appropriately named *Simulium damnosum*), Mexico, Guatemala and Dominican Republic are vectors of a nematode (round worm) that attacks and destroys the optic nerve leading to permanent blindness. The disease is called River Blindness or Onchocerciasis. You may breathe a sigh of relief that the black flies of North America do not transmit any disease or parasites of humans."

*Cliff Desch*

---

## Halda

Josef Halda came to love mountains as a youth doing rock climbing, a passion he shared with his wife and collaborator, the renowned artist Jarmila Haldova. It gave him the upper body strength useful for building gardens, especially for breaking up the striated monotony of crevice gardens with rather large chunks of rock. The mountains morphed into a love of plants, not merely alpine but vast floras, and a legendary career as a botanical taxonomist and plant explorer.

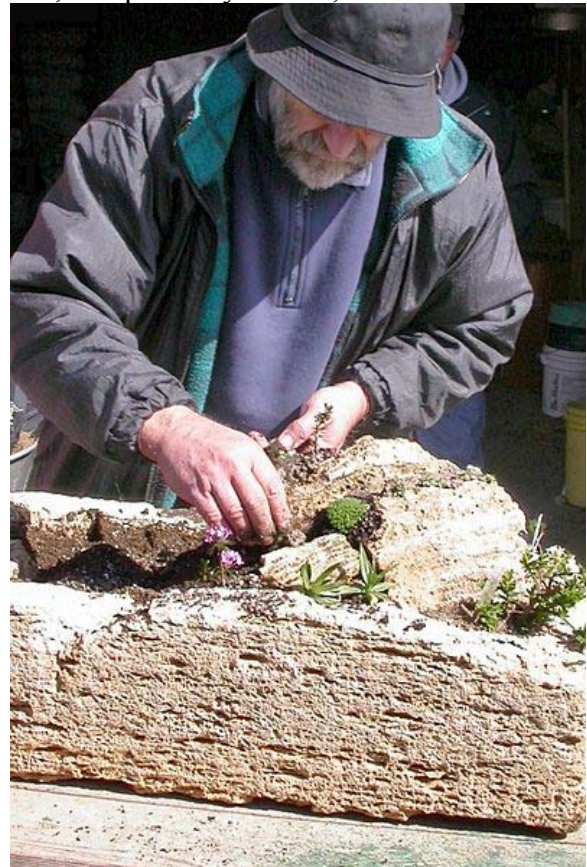


Halda Trough Planting – photo by Harvey Wrightman

Most botanists now do their work in labs, using molecular material and DNA to check out identities. Josef has always insisted on botanizing in the field whenever possible, where the plants often look very different from their supposed herbarium counterparts. In the course of rather extensive travel he has identified and named well over a hundred plants new to science. His books on genera—primulas, gentians, daphnes, peonies—were doable in that they could be found in similar terrain, if Alaska and the Celebes and everything in between can be said to stand in taxonomic relation to one another. He is currently working on classifying the vast tribe of violas, a rather more complex subject because of the variations caused by hybridizing, if that’s what it is. He has also been commissioned to provide a flora for the highest mountain in Irian New Guinea; difficult work when the tribesmen helping him find themselves being eaten by their nominal hosts. Aside from the book on violas, and the various other projects I’ve mentioned, Josef is

working now on the botany of dwarf conifers.

Josef was a graduate student heading towards a professorial university career when the Soviets invaded the Czech Republic in 1968. When he refused to join the Communist Party, a university career as a botanist was no longer possible. With a family to support he turned to what the French call bricolage: working as a kind of stonemason building gardens (he has built well over a hundred, many of them real works of art, and with Zedenek Zvolanek he brought into being the style of gardening we call “crevice” gardening). More than anyone else, he is responsible for bringing mountain reality in all its variety into a rather new concept of what a rock garden can, and probably should, be.



Halda Planting Trough – photo by Harvey Wrightman

He has worked for the Dutch mass-market bulb growers, for whom he has provided a

beautiful new source of peonies from Mongolia.

Over the years, Josef has provided an annual seed list. Seed collecting is not all that remunerative, but it does pay for some travel. By returning to the same sites, year after year, he has picked up a knowledge of places and plants that strikes me as unique. When I traveled with him to Mount Olympus, I learned that he and Jarmila had already explored it well on twenty-five previous visits. During the Cold War, with the West off-limits, he availed himself of the possibilities of travel in the Soviet Union. The mountain areas were, of course, restricted “no go” terrain, reserved for the military. But somehow or other, Josef kept managing to pop up in places very few others get to, often enough illicit terrain, like the Burmese-Yunnan borderland where he and Jarmila have collected in exceedingly difficult conditions, because of weather and harassment by soldiers of various stripes. His travel to Tadjikistan was somewhat less difficult, in that he had a government contract that required a plane trip there once a month.

We are very fortunate that Josef will be addressing our next meeting; it is not often one gets to meet a great plantsman and explorer and garden designer that has contributed in so many ways to our vocation.

## *Nursery Open House*

---

**Garden Vision Epimediums** mail-order nursery offers over 180 species and varieties of shade-loving Epimediums and a selection of other choice, hard to find shade perennials. Plant explorer Darrell Probst has collected and introduced dozens into the trade. Prized for their easy care and tolerance of difficult sites, their graceful,

spidery flowers and brilliant spring foliage add excitement to the shade garden.



Epimedium x 'Kuki' – photo by Darryl Probst

*Come to our open nursery days Fri.-Sun. May 8-10 & 5-17 and Sat. May 23 (new this year, in order to see the later blooming Chinese species in flower) 10am-4pm.* The nursery is located at 63 Williamsville Rd, Hubbardston, MA. This event will be held rain or shine, and is the only time that the nursery is open to the public during the year. We will answer your questions and have a selection of plants for sale, but not a comprehensive offering. If you have your heart set on specific varieties; send your order ahead of your visit so we can pull it in advance. To protect our research collection, *please leave children and pets at home.* Some uphill walking on uneven dirt surfaces is necessary. Sorry, *no restroom facilities are available on site.* Refreshments



Epimedium grandiflorum 'Swallowtail' – photo by Darryl Probst provided. For more information or to have a

catalog sent, contact Karen Perkins at [epimediums@earthlink.net](mailto:epimediums@earthlink.net) or call 978-249-3863.

## Minutes of April Meeting

*Prepared by Joyce Hemingson*

Chairman Cliff Desch opened the meeting with a reminder that our speaker next month will be Josef Halda. **Note that the date is May 16—the third Saturday of the month.** Peter George announced that copies of the BNARGS newsletter would no longer be sent to those who owe dues for 2009. It costs about \$2,700 to print 9 issues of the newsletter, so every effort is being made to reduce printing and mailing expenses. You can help by signing up to receive the newsletter electronically (send an email to Peter at: [petergeorge@verizon.net](mailto:petergeorge@verizon.net)). Peter also reported on the combined Western Winter Study Weekend/Annual Meeting held in March in Portland, OR. He and Robin Magowan supported changes to the NARGS web site, but an alternate proposal was accepted. You'll find more about the meeting in the Spring 2009 NARGS Bulletin Board.

The question of whether to increase the dues for BNARGS was discussed and then tabled. It was suggested that there be an article in the newsletter and a vote taken at the annual meeting in November.

Cliff welcomed several visitors to our meeting, from West Stockbridge, MA and New York City, and from Troy, NY.

For our morning and afternoon programs, we heard from Alan Bradshaw, owner of Alplains – Alpine Plants on the Plains, a seed company specializing in western dryland seeds. Some of you may remember Alan from the Eastern Winter Study Weekend in 2007. After working as a software designer, he turned to seed collecting. He published his first seed list in 1990 and now carries over 1,000 species collected from 10 states. Visit his web site, [www.alplains.com](http://www.alplains.com), to see what is available.

Alan's slides covered the diverse and difficult territory where he collects seeds, including terrain best suited for the herd of 120 mountain goats he surprised one day. He searches records in herbaria to locate populations of uncommon plants, and hikes to places that few people are likely to go more than once. The seeds may be easy to

access, as in the 3-inch pods of *Astragalus megacarpus*, but it requires hours of painstaking work with tweezers to extract them from *Astragalus hyalinus*, the "vegetable sheep" of North America. His explorations have taken him to limestone outcrops in Death Valley for *Mimulus rupicola*, volcanic hills for *Phlox grayi*,



basalt slablands in Idaho for *Viola beckwithii*, and red sandstone slopes for *Astragalus saurinus*, which tolerates

selenium. The geography and topography of the locations was just as compelling as the plants themselves. It's a wonder that these alpinists can tolerate the tameness of a rock garden or trough after adapting to such exotic places. Alan has had a remarkable career, following the reproductive cycle of thousands of species and helping preserve the vegetation of the wild west.



*Shortia uniflora 'Grandiflora Rosea'*

For *Show and Tell*, Alexandra Kenner brought in *Shortia uniflora 'Grandiflora Rosea'* purchased from Bovees Nursery in Portland, Oregon ([www.bovees.com](http://www.bovees.com)). Joyce Hemingson brought flowers of early bulbs: *Narcissus minor*, *Bulbocodium vernum*, and *Galanthus nivalis 'Flore Pleno'*. The chapter plant sale brought in \$260. Please write yourself a note now to bring a few plants in next month—our sales are a major source of income during the year.

---

## Porterhowse Farms

*Editor's Note: During my visit to Portland, I met the proprietors of several outstanding mail order nurseries. I will be profiling them in this and subsequent issues. Some of you have certainly dealt with them in the past, but given the quality and the relative scarcity of many of their plants, it seems appropriate to make sure that all of our membership be exposed to them. This month I am profiling Porterhowse Farms. I met Don Howse for the first time on this trip, and thoroughly enjoyed him and his incredibly inventory. I have two of his really special dwarf Abies in my garden right now, and they are doing extremely well. His shipping technique guarantees a safe delivery.*

Porterhowse Farms specializes in the collecting and production of unusual conifers, both species and cultivars. The conifers range in size from large trees to dwarf and miniature forms. There are more



Hard Pine Bed – photo by Don Howse

than 2000 species and cultivars represented in the collection. The nursery site, located 30 miles east of Portland, Oregon, near the foothills of the Cascade Mountains and the Columbia River Gorge has several acres of gardens and arboretum. Visitors are welcome to the nursery and gardens to view the collection, and evaluate the plants for their own setting. If planning a trip to the Portland area, and wishing to visit Porterhowse Farms, call or write ahead to make sure the owner, Don Howse is available to welcome you.

Many of the very dwarf and miniature forms of the conifers are ideal for the rock garden, trough, or other special container, or intimate garden setting. According to the guidelines set down by the American Conifer Society, miniature conifers generally are those that grow less than 1" annually, and are often represented as buns or cushions. A few are irregular and upright in habit. Dwarf conifers are those that grow from 1" to 6" annually. These miniature and dwarf conifers are often represented in rock gardens or alpine garden settings. These diminutive conifers give substance to the

alpine garden when the flowering plants are dormant. They offer color, texture, and form to the garden throughout the entire year.



Abies Bed – photo by Don Howse

Porterhowse Farms sells plants on site, or by mail order. The current list of available plants in #1 pots, or smaller, can be viewed on the website. A representative selection of the available plants is kept in the sales area at the nursery. Being a “Plant Addict”, Don keeps an assortment of Saxifraga, Sempervivums, Jovibarba, Lewisia, and other rock garden plants available for sale too.

---

## Special Announcements!

1. Malcolm McGregor, the author of the widely heralded book on Saxifrages, will be speaking at the CT Chapter on May 23. The meeting will begin at 10:00 AM, and Malcolm will begin his talk at 10:30.

From I-84 eastbound, take exit 67. Go left off the exit. At the 2<sup>nd</sup> light, turn right onto Route 30 (Hyde Avenue). TAC is on the right, past Rockville Bank.

2. There will be a book sale at the Lenox Library, Main St., Lenox, MA, on August 28, 29, and 30, featuring about 100 books from Caroline Church’s collection. The books are all gardening related, but not specifically devoted to any one gardening genre.

## 2009 Programs

May 16

AM & PM - Josef Halda - "Plants of Central Asia" & "Plants of the Balkans"

June 6

Tour of Cliff Desch's Garden, Conway MA

July 18

AM - Joe Strauch - "Gardens Near & Far"  
PM - Local Garden Visit - Members Only

August 8

AM & PM - Alan Grainger - "From Seed to Showbench" & "Kentucky Wildflowers"

Sept 5

AM - Judy Sellers - "Primulas"  
PM - The BIG Plant Sale

October 10

AM - Lola Lloyd Horwitz - "My Doing and Undoing: A Garden in Change"  
PM - Members Potpourri

November 7

**Annual Luncheon**

Priscilla Twombly – *Program to Be Announced*

---

## **The 2009 Stonecrop Plant Sale**



This was my third year going to the annual plant sale at Stonecrop gardens the weather was the

best by far. In the two previous years, the weather was overcast and very cool, while this year it was sunny and **hot**. There were some notable changes this year, including a new parking area and as well as several new vendors. I found the new parking to be easier for those of us who left with large quantities of plants, or for those who purchased one or more troughs.

Among the 1<sup>st</sup> time vendors was Betsy Knapp, who brought her exceptional Hypertufa troughs. Richard May had his usual array of alpinas, but he's had some problems with his Asian primulas and all of his gentians, so they were in short supply. And Don Dembowski, a Berkshire member, supplied some really unusual woodland plants including a giant Chinese Solomon Seal, *Polygonatum sibiricum* 'Purple Passion,' and some double *Trillium grandiflorum*.

I was ill that day so I did not do my usually socializing and shopping, but I did spend time watching the crowd. I saw a lot of new faces, which is always good. There were quite a few families there with young children, some of whom were very interested in the plants. I watched the vendors help one person after another and from where I sat I couldn't see either the Wrightmans or Maria Galletti sit down for a break. I loved watching the socializing, as plant experts in the crowd answered questions and helped people shop. It is always a joy for me to watch people such as Lori Chips explain every aspect of a plant, from where it grows in the wild, to how long it has been cultivated, to where to plant it in a garden. I saw Elizabeth Zander taking photos of the crowd, shopping, and helping people with plant questions!

I have to say were it not for the experts from the Berkshire Chapter, the vendors would never have had a chance to breathe!

I am looking forward to next year's plant sale and hope that the weather will be as cooperative. I have a feeling this plant sale is going to continue to grow, and because it occurs

during prime growing season, it should continue to prosper.

Article by Rachel Flowers - Photos by Elisabeth Zander

## Open Garden Announcements

On May 23 at 10:00 A.M. the garden of Nick Nickou and Carol Hanby in Branford, CT will be open for visitors. Also on May 24 at 10:00 the garden will be open for Garden Conservancy and there will be a \$5.00 entrance fee. For anyone needing directions they can be requested by writing [nnickou@snet.net](mailto:nnickou@snet.net). Parking is on the street. The rhododendrons should be at their peak of bloom.



On May 8, and throughout the summer, Peter George's garden will be open to anyone wandering into North Central Massachusetts. The first date was chosen because his gardens look about as good then as they every do (which is not all that big a deal, by the way), and because there are likely to be some members going to the Epimedium sale at Garden Visions in Hubbardston, MA, just a few minutes away from Peter's house in Petersham. Peter will be providing some food and drink, so either email or call Peter a day or so in advance and he'll see what he can do to meet your dietary needs.



Parking is in the field on Spring Street, through the open barway. His phone number is 978-724-0299, and please call if you are intending to visit.

-----  
**Please make sure that you've paid your dues for 2009!!**



## Editor's Oddments

As Editor, I get a lot of emails from NARGS, most of which I discard without forwarding them to you, the membership of our Chapter. This past month I received several that I feel are important enough to share. I'll paraphrase, since they all were rather lengthy.

1. NARGS will soon need a new editor of the Journal. Jane McGary is retiring from the position at the end of 2010, and the search is on. It appears that the NARGS Board is interested in dividing up the responsibilities, and is seeking someone who can and will elicit interesting material from our members. There are several other stated goals, but the only real issue (in my opinion) is to find a way to make the Journal both interesting and accessible. We have a rather wide variety of members, with a tremendous range of interests and abilities, and the Journal needs to provide content that makes everyone want to read it when it arrives. I think that the Committee, consisting of Maria Galletti, Anne Spiegel and Mike Riley, would like some suggestions. If you have something to offer the Committee, please email them  
@ [nargseditorsearch@verizon.net](mailto:nargseditorsearch@verizon.net).

2. NARGS has decided that we need 'Interest Groups,' modeled on the AGS approach. Tony Reznicek is chairing this effort, so if any of you have any ideas, or are interested in serving on an Interest Group, please contact him @ [reznicek@umich.edu](mailto:reznicek@umich.edu).

3. NARGS needs a lot of help with their website. If you have interest in assisting, please contact Grazyna Grauer @ [grazynalg@sbcglobal.net](mailto:grazynalg@sbcglobal.net).

Our next plant sale will have a dozen or so rather nice additions from Wrightman Alpines, as a result of our group purchase. The selection is surprising, and I am sure that there will be a lot of interest in these plants, and the revenue will certainly help our coffers. I'm not sure how the plants will be sold, but I'm sure that we'll find a way that will be fair to all.

Our next issue will be focusing on our gardens, and I'd love to offer anything from a simple photograph to an article describing your garden, its origins, its strengths, its focus, or pretty much anything related. It's hard for some of us to visit each other's gardens, but we all are curious, and it would be great to sate some of that curiosity. Robin and Elisabeth have written about their gardens, and most recently Cliff Desch and John Spain have given programs about their gardens, so let's all try to get me something to share with the other members. The closing date for the next issue will be May 20, so there isn't a lot of time!

Finally, we need to look at our by-laws as they relate to NARGS membership. The by-laws provide that in order to be eligible for membership in BNARGS, you must be a member of NARGS. I don't know how many of you are NARGS members, but I do know that it's been some time since that by-law was enforced. Perhaps it's time to revisit it, and decide to either change it or enforce it.

Hope to see you all at the next meeting, featuring Josef Halda.

PFG

## Positions of Responsibility

Chairperson – Cliff Desch  
Vice-Chairperson – Robin Magowan  
Secretary – Carol Hanby  
Treasurer – Pamela Johnson  
Archivist – James Fichter  
Independent Director – Peter F. George  
Program Chairperson – Elisabeth Zander  
Meeting Recorder – Joyce Hemingson  
Audio Visual – Joe Berman  
Refreshments – Joyce Hemingson  
Speaker Housing – Anne Spiegel  
Plant Sales – Bob Siegel  
Greeter – **Still Open**  
Newsletter Editor – Peter F. George  
Proofreader – Martin Pepper Aisenberg

**Published 10 times per year (Feb. through Nov.) by the Berkshire Chapter NARGS**

Membership is open to all members of NARGS  
Dues \$10.00 single, \$12.50 Family  
Payable to the Treasurer  
Pamela Johnson  
PO Box 203, 140 Main Road  
Monterey, MA 01245

Deadline for Next Newsletter is May 20, 2009

Please contact editor before reprinting  
articles

Peter F. George, Editor  
Berkshire Chapter NARGS  
PO Box 833  
Petersham, MA 01366