

Newsletter

North American Rock Garden Society
Berkshire Chapter July 2010

Next Meeting

Saturday, August 14 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

AM – Bill Brown: *Spring Bulbs of Turkey*



Fritillaria elwesii – photo by Russell Stafford

Lunch ---BYO

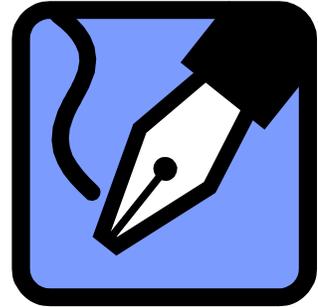
We welcome dessert contributions. Lunch will be followed by Show and Tell, a plant sale and an auction.

PM – Peter George: *Evolution of My Garden*



Editor's Message:

It has been my privilege and pleasure to be the editor of this newsletter for the past several years, but I don't believe I've ever written anything about what it's like to be the



editor. The editor's role (as I see it, anyway) is not to make the newsletter a vehicle for his or her own material, but to get others to submit articles. The success of the newsletter depends entirely on the quality of those submissions. So I would like to express my gratitude to the many contributors whose talent and generosity make editing the newsletter one of my truly cherished jobs each month. Thanks to them, the newsletter has become a valuable benefit of BNARGS membership.

This month we have another beautiful piece by Robin Magowan, and something both relevant and informative from Harvey Wrightman. In recent months we've had contributions from Lori Chips, Abbie Zabar, Elaine Chittenden and Anne Hill, and their beautifully written material evinces a quirky erudition that I, for one, relish. There are so many others who have contributed, all of whom deserve a personal thanks from me – and when you see them at meetings, please extend your thanks to them as well.

I am particularly pleased to be able to offer an article by John Hargrove this month. About 13 years ago I made my very first mail order plant purchase from his company, H & H Botanicals in Michigan. Three of the plants I bought then are still with me – a rather remarkable

phenomenon, considering both how little I knew in 1997 and the simple reality that 13 years is a long time for a rock garden plant to survive. I was very disappointed when H & H went out of business, not only because the plants were good and the prices reasonable, but also because the catalogue was such an interesting read. Fortunately, John and his wife finally re-opened their business last spring, and I really want to promote it, which is why this issue includes his article describing his nursery. John's style is reminiscent of Dean Evans' unique approach to gardening and related issues, and reading it reminded me of how much I miss seeing Dean's contribution every month.

The next program, on August 14th, features one Bill Brown and yours truly. Those who know Bill – and that is most of the rock gardening world – have reason to be excited about his talk. He is erudite and informative, and he knows how to entertain his audience. A tough act to follow, but I will do my best.

Finally, having started this note with some thoughts about the editor's job, I feel compelled to mention that, at some point in the future, I will be giving up the editorship. Every editor has to move on eventually, voluntarily or involuntarily, and I want to make sure that there is someone to replace me when the time comes. So if you are interested in taking on a portion of the job now, as training for the inevitable transition, please let me know. No, I'm not planning to quit anytime soon – I love it too much. But it will happen, so let's be prepared!



See you in a couple of weeks – and please bring some plants for the sale!

Bill will be bringing some very special bulbs for sale. Included will be *Colchicum agrippinum* and *Colchicum autumnale*. They will be priced WELL below market, too!

THE MUSIC IN A GARDEN

Robin Magowan



In earlier existences I had tried conventional gardening; the crazy quilt of a backyard cottage garden in Berkeley, or a series of ponds flowing out of an ancient spring in the English Cotswolds, without feeling I was making anything at all, let alone that I was more than a dabbler. When I visited gardens, the ones that attracted me were botanical gardens featuring single plants with prominent labels much like those displayed in a rock garden. As an impenitent traveler, I responded to the illusion that a geographical ordering conveyed. But when I came to northwest Connecticut the kind of garden I wanted to create resembled the one I had fallen in love with in Kyoto. But unable to find a site on a rocky hillside with a stream, I settled for an abandoned farm.

With the farm came space, far more than a rock gardener needs. That brought the necessary services of a hired contractor to keep it up, the lawns, the barns, the pool, and all that contrivance. On the flat below my outcrop I tried making a raised bed in the approved manner. To kill the grass and weeds I laid newspaper over the heavy clay before setting down a scree composed of equal parts earth and gravel. But, after the first ambitious spadefuls, I had merely succeeded in throwing out my back. After that, I was reduced to gardening within my caretaker's structural creations. I was lucky in that my

caretaker, Lennart 'Swede' Ahrstrom, was an excellent painter who understood garden design and how to align a smattering of boulders so that they seemed a natural outflow from the outcrop. The boulders offered a ready-made structure not all that different from the automatic writing I had been using for over thirty years to generate poems. Saved from the responsibility of laying out a garden, I could devote my energies to populating the spaces Swede provided. The partnership allowed me to expand as my appetite and curiosity grew, so I introduced more large rocks and eventually larger mountain plants than some rock gardeners might tolerate.

But a rock garden of the kind I have been able to construct is an anomaly. This is an art form that does not require lots of space or particularly deep pockets. You can make an excellent garden on a small urban lot, on the deck of your suburban home, or the windswept terrace of a Manhattan apartment. I remember Brian Bixley wondering whether it was possible to have a great garden if you were not rather wealthy. But then, I find myself unable to understand the lure of greatness, in any field of endeavor. Isn't mere beauty difficult enough to achieve? I can't quite see myself as the dwarf standing on the sidewalk outside a massive iron gate holding up a placard, "SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL." But the smaller, the more jewel-like a poem or garden is, the more memorable it may be.

As a poet's craft and his sense of design matures, the longer the poem, something book-length perhaps, may seem a challenge worth taking on. But whether the result remains poetry is a matter of some debate. The carpet Spenser stitches together as he composes *The Faerie Queene* is spacious enough to cover several football fields; but no reader wants to scrutinize any too closely the verbal contents. The palette a poet writing in English possesses, with its

unparalleled wealth of synonyms, is so rich as to almost compel compression. How many mouthfuls of fruitcake can one consume?

I don't want to write poetry that can be devoured in a single glance. By paring away and continually compressing what I have written I create something a bit like one that the gardener achieves over a season: a succession of responses as the poem plays off against others in a collection. The sense of the whole enriches each individual utterance. The risk comes in that, by compressing too much, I may rob the poem of whatever energy originally sparked it.

A poem is more than a string of pearls beautifully strung. There is also the voice of the person who creates, chooses, and shapes that string of pearls. Individual words may be excised, but now at the expense of the voice. I need to be present in a poem, just as I am present in the garden, on my knees among the weeds and labels and tiny

blossoms setting a peanut butter laden trap for the bulb-destroying chipmunks.

A poetry like mine that draws aphoristic remarks entails some amount of compression, but compactness is not vital to poetry, or for that matter gardening. Poets like Richard Wilbur or James Merrill write as though the clarity their work achieves requires a distinct elaboration. Working in pattern, with formal meter and often enough rhyme, allows the subject-matter of their poems to deepen as they progress from one shapely stanza to the next until finally, what those rooms offer, is the sense of a dwelling, a house. The ability to fill with exactitude so much white space, line after line with its differently rhymed syllables and part of speech, makes sense if your subject is, like Merrill's, the Proustian one of remembered time. The elaborate art that allowed him to conceive a way forward as he wrote found an analogy in knitting crochet. He kept track of the stitches by



counting, one row after the next, the rhymes chosen in advance marking stations down the page. Merrill's art encourages a certain prolixity. Once the pattern was in place, there was little scope for the kind of further articulation that I do insistently; make an alteration and the whole design might need revision.

Rock gardening is a less number-oriented and more spatial art. I am concerned with the orchestration of a finite space in seasonal time. But space, however determined by the boundaries of the garden and the structural elements of rocks and tap-rooted bushes, is a



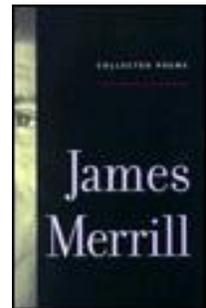
flexible concept. I can always extend the available dimensions by adding soil, or by carpeting soilless rocks with spilling plants, or by introducing plants shallow-rooted enough to thrive in near soilless conditions. A rock garden is basically space that asks to be discovered, and

I am always learning how to go about it. Can a design be more supple? What do I lose if I move a rock? With each touch of a finger the garden keyboard changes, as new plants, and with them new possibilities, come into visual play.

If the garden represents my discovery, the plants, in turn, allow me to actually inhabit it. Each represents a choice of my own, something that made me plant it here and not there. Having placed each where it carries a maximum visual impact, I become responsible for assuring its survival. Some gardeners think of their plant progeny as their friends, creatures who give you back in countless ways so much more than you give them. I think of them more as surrogates, different kinds of avatars, in the same way that a poem, or even a few lines in a poem, might be an avatar, something that represents me. But I can't allow the self-identification I feel to keep me from indulging in the giddiest joy gardening

allows—moving the plants about; a mistreatment all the easier when applied to creatures that are so tiny. Much of the pleasure I find in rock gardening comes the growing flexibility with plants and space, i.e. soil, that I am continually discovering. As conditions change and plants grow I keep re-examining siting choices. Would a different plant work better there? Which one? Each change brings others into play, and with each shuffle of the garden deck I am learning something, about plants, about a formal structure's capacities, and about myself as a plantsman.

For me, the making of a poem involves a similar discovery of space, only now the space I'm reconnoitering is pre-eminently a sonic one. Just as rain falls over a garden, bringing it to life (while allowing the gardener to sit at his desk, relaxed), so do those same falling notes of mist, of cloud, of wind against a window, set off something in me—a movement, a dance of sorts—that finds me racing off to grab a pen and paper and try to capture this fugitive auditory essence. As I put the verbal sensations down, one rain-filled note after the next, I have no idea where what I'm writing is going, only a sense that I am where what I'm writing is going, only a sense that I am where I need to be, in a new terrain, and that I am exorcising something, something that needs to be thus named and released. There is a definite space I am exploring, but unlike the garden it is a more subjective, internal one, made up of the incoherence for which we have no words that surrounds each one of us. Is it possible to orchestrate that incoherence, those raindrops, those cries of welcome, of loss, as music, and thus as something memorable? Much as rock gardening sets one o a



frontier of sorts, a defiance of zonal boundaries, of what may be considered growable, so in a poem I am mining that very slight frontier that lies between the unconscious world presented as sound and the conscious one of sight; between the late night and the rain on the roof with which I woke and the growing light in which I am trying to resolve those random sounds into

something another might see as music, as poetry, as even possibly clarification, dark space orchestrated.

How I register this crack in the dark, if that's what it is, is another matter, but it's safe to say that, like a garden, it rarely comes into being all at once. The balancing I need, of an internal set of sounds or music and an external objective setting with which a possible reader can identify, can take months, even years before it even begins to look right. But, as with gardening, there are skills I have acquired, Just as gardeners



learn by looking at other people's gardens, by reading about their plants, and, if possible, traveling to see them in their mountain habitats, so a poet learns over time how to refine his sensibility so as to be ready when what he needs to say strikes. Instead of plants, I am now filling this internal auditory garden with words, or something that rhymes with "words" such as "birds." It helps that the naming process involved in these transpositions is much more flexible than the placing of plants in a garden. I can move words about without jeopardizing their very existence; in fact, I may be required to move them about, as a way of testing possible sites. I can alter them too long as I respect their place in the soundscape that gives a poem its internal coherence. In a finished poem the words need to look as if they have been rooted in that very site from the first day of creation. But an astute reader may be able to detect now and then an earlier name or identity—that "word" under the "bird"—and in this way share in the compositional aspect. The truth of a poem, or a garden, becomes all the more tolerable when we can understand how provisional those plants, those words are. Neither a poem, nor a garden is an edict written in stone. Gardening, as a metaphor, allows me to register that sense of play, of discovery. A poem becomes, for me, the music in a garden.

Broken Silo Nursery

I worry that just as we are starting over again, we are actually on the precipice of extinction. It's almost as if we are witnessing the systematic demise of this way of life as one small nursery after another falls to the wayside. But before getting into that, I should back up and introduce myself. My name is John, and I'm a plantoholic. It has been six years since my last nursery, and I'm sorry to report that I have fallen off the wagon. Now I won't go into the psychology behind how one is borne into this world craving plants, unable to resist the impulse and urge to grow something in the garden knowing full well that the damned thing will probably just die—but at least you tried, right? No one can completely understand which neuron got fired in the wrong direction to warp an individual into that of being a gardener. 'Just plant nuts' probably sums it up best. But what I do know, and explicitly understand, is the deep-seated disturbance behind anyone trying to run a specialty nursery at this moment in time: Sadness. There is somewhere, deep down inside each of us, sadness in the notion that many of today's gardeners are missing out on something special. That in this climate of standardization and branding and trademarking, they are missing out on the true joys of gardening: that of discovery, and the sense of adventure.



Anchusa caespitosa

It's what drove my wife Lea Ann (just Ann to all of us) and I to open H&H Botanicals way back in 1995, that sadness and longing for the adventure of growing plants from far away

regions—places we'd probably never be able to visit in our lives.

We had been dabbling in the plant business for a few years by then, and knew our way around the industry fairly well. So it just seemed a logical progression to open up our own nursery, and join in on all the fun that everyone else was enjoying. At the time, my mother was phasing out the nursery end at her farm to focus on other endeavors, so we struck up a deal to lease her existing greenhouses and some land to build houses and display areas our own. This would



Aloiopsis spathulata

be our first lesson in the business—never work with your family, especially when your family has a “competing” business on the same property. Pettiness always ensues, employees on the other side plot to get rid of you, and obnoxious customers of the other half scream nepotism. It doesn't matter if you are working like a dog and paying though the nose to keep the grounds nice for everyone, you're a guest and certainly a threat to someone. But that's neither here nor there.

It would be four years before our first catalog, as we built stock, a customer base, and tried to define ourselves in a very crowded marketplace. Specialty nurseries were everywhere, bookshelves were full of volume after volume of botanical treasures—can you imagine walking, today, into a Barnes and Nobel's and finding a copy of Duncan Lowe's, *Cushion Plants for the Rock Garden* on the shelf? —people were seriously gardening! And they were *serious* about gardening—and not just becoming “Master” Gardeners.



Oxalis 'Dark Dick'

At that time, herbs were a really big thing and our first catalog, in 1999, reflected that. It was a simple catalog, fairly straightforward, listing page after page of herbs and scented geraniums, and showing off the beginnings of my once famous Thyme collection. The catalog itself was adorned with a simple drawing—I say simple because I can't draw well, and I'm a simpleton—of *Thymus vulgaris*. But I also had a few rock plants thrown into the mix, being that rock gardening was my new hobby at the time. Of course, sales were awful. Little did we realize that herbs were actually the big thing of 1998, or so it seemed. The real problem was that herbies are notoriously cheap bastards and honestly grow about five plants: parsley, sage, rosemary, oregano, and thyme. And once you have parsley, you've got parsley. Does it really matter if it's flat leaf or curled? But what we did sell were the rock plants.

Yes. Rock plants! Here! It was here that I found sanity, people that were truly into plants. These were people that had a sense of adventure, a sense far away places, and a good sense of potty humor. I could be myself—a silly rube—without drowning in a sea of pretentious bores. These were people that made stands and stood of individuality.

I bet you didn't realize just how important of a social commentary gardening really is.

It was four years until that first catalog, and it would be another four until our last. During that time, we road a wave of botanical delights and bizarrely esoteric catalogs—the height, for me, being *The Well Armed Garden*, in which a

frumpy gardener is out harvesting from her field of (literally) arms. Of course, being post 9-11, the catalog proudly displayed a stamp stating that it was banned in the Hanson controlled territory of Mmmbopistan, yet another Muslim regime hell bent on plotting against us. To this day, I wonder if the boy-band group known as Hanson ever realized what delight and horror their song “Mmm Bop” would become connected with as thousands of people opened their mailboxes to find a pleasant elder lady chopping off arms in the garden, leaving bloody stumps behind.

It made me laugh.

Along the way we made a lot of friends, and offended our fair share of people who just didn't laugh at Hanson and amputation. Through it all, it was a wonderful ride.

H&H Botanicals breathed its last by the end of 2003. During the time between then and now, the last thing I wanted to see was another damned plant. I hated them! These were the little devils that caused my ruination.

Or at least that's what I kept telling myself.

I was still in love with plants, still had the sickness. In 2006, we sold our house to move out into the country. Here was the opportunity to start gardening again, completely anew. And of course, having the sickness, I couldn't help myself when it came to the urges to propagate, to pot up, to have plants sitting around in flats. It's a compulsion akin to stuffing blind dates into the freezer for later snacking that only someone like Jeffery Dahmer would understand—you just can't stop yourself!

But I never thought I'd be back in the nursery business again, though there were days I longed for it, remembering the good ol' times—the sadness was often rearing its ugly head. Yet, I had a job that paid well with a euphoric sense of corporate provided security, and I found a little time here and there to pursue my other passion—writing.



Hemerocallis 'Ed Mercer'

Even though times were good in that I was making money, we had a new home (albeit a really old farm house with lots of “character”), and everyone was healthy—hell, I even had a few publishing credits under one of my pseudonyms—the notion of reopening a nursery on just a small scale kept creeping up. Ann knew I was restless, knew that the sadness was taking hold.

So the day finally came when she said, “You know that you still have all of your old equipment, why don't you build yourself a greenhouse?” Why not, indeed?! Our first greenhouse went up before the end of October, and was destroyed by a tornado before the end of May.

That went well.

Ignoring this blatant sign—you know, the one singing and dancing around beating cymbals, screaming, “This is a bloody big sign!”—we salvaged as many of the plants as possible and rebuilt the house and I began propagating and building up stock with the notion of maybe running a little hobby nursery on the weekends while I worked during the week. We soon settled on a new name, realizing that H&H Botanicals was long since dead and buried. We were now: Broken Silo Nursery, inspired by the single silo standing over on the south lawn. Of course it's not “broken” per se, but Lone Silo Nursery sounded too much like a ranch, and the idea of telling people to go visit BSnursery.com really put a smile on my face.

Our “Grand Opening” actually marked our second season in business. Of course, the Michigan economy would change the idea just



Eomecon chionantha

running a little part time nursery as I found myself unemployed, and more-or-less unemployable. But, we were off and running. Even though I maintain that this is just my “Retirement Nursery” and I’m more or less futzing around, it feels right. And it’s been a rocky start. Out of the handful of customers that stopped by that first season, only two couples have been repeat customers.

Two!!

And this season has been just as dismal so far. Plus, it doesn’t help when one of the Garden Centers in the area keeps removing all of my signs, and apart from asking them nicely to please stop, while brandishing an axe, there’s nothing I can do about it besides lose more advertising money.

But a slow go at this point is not the scary part. A slow start is expected. What *is* the scary part is the climate in which we jump back into this. So many of the heyday nurseries have disappeared. What was once a crowded field is now a barren wasteland peppered here and there with the remains of old frames and weed encrusted display areas. So many of our friends have gone. All of them casualties of a growing disinterest in variety, of conformity to the box-store mentality. How can a small nursery compete against these giants that have the capability to sell plants either at wholesale—or

just pennies above wholesale—because they make their money off either other merchandise (and view plants as just a marketing ploy to get customers into the store), or off of volume sales, or off of all the branding and trademarking that results in selling items at huge prices because namesake? How can the small nursery, the ones that have made it their lives to be as knowledgeable about the plants as possible, survive in a climate where customers have been conditioned to trust only the Garden Centers—you know, the ones’ populated by a fleet of college students that can’t successfully manipulate a calculator, much less understand that *Petasites* is *not* a tree.



Lewisia pygmaea – photo by Magnar Aspaker

For me, the most sobering and alarming moment came recently when I got a postcard in the mail saying the Barry Yinger’s, Asiatica, was closing. This is a devastating blow to the plant community, being the utter loss of the single source for so much interesting and unique material. But, being the idiot I am, what should have been a wake up call saying, “Get out! Get out, now!” instead, I scraped together as much money as I could afford and went off to Pennsylvania on a buying trip with the notion of maintaining as much of these woodland rarities to cultivation as possible. Why? Well, someone has to. It’s that sadness inside of me, the one I mentioned earlier, that keeps asking, “Who will carry on?”

Unfortunately, and if Barry's closing is any indication, the call for such rarities is almost becoming a rarity in itself.

Back in H&H days, though there was a noted decline in the number of more unusual varieties being sold each season, we still made it a point to maintain an adequate number of each in stock before adding it to the catalog. For rare plant, or an uncommon variety, you made sure there were at least a couple dozen sitting around because you'd probably sell about eight or nine in the catalog. Now, it seems that it's safe to have five or six plants ready to ship as you might, *might*, sell one. But most likely not.



Gentiana angustifolia

Today, mostly the customers that stop by are looking for tomatoes. I know, I know—my signs that I've dotted the countryside with say absolutely nothing about us carrying tomatoes (traditional and unusual perennials, rock plants, and daylilies are what's listed), but yet these hearty souls remain hopeful that Broken Silo Nursery will be the nursery they expect to see out here in the middle of nowhere. And, true to form, if the plants are not what they expect to see, they go away annoyed, telling all of their friends, "That place doesn't even carry tomatoes. Bunch of amateurs. What a gip!"

Yup, five of everything—more than enough.

We had a gentleman stop by earlier this season, a younger guy, not much older than I was when Ann and I first opened H&H, and I truly admired his honesty. He walks up as I'm

carrying a flat of Double Bloodroots in full bloom out of the greenhouse, and says to me, "I'm looking for cheap perennials." Of course I bite and ask how cheap? "About a dollar, each." Oh yeah, he's serious. Great. But instead of laughing him off the property, or getting insulted, I explained that we can't sell plants that cheap and why, and offered a few suggestions as to where he could go. So he chatted for a few minutes, while I'm still holding this flat of plants, and he gets this look across his face, one that I recognize as the look of sudden dawning that says, "Holy crap! Those things are incredible." It's that look of intense interest that every new gardener gets when they finally, *finally*, cross over from the Garden Center mentality—the moment where they no longer accept the doldrums of mimeographed garden fodder these places push and over-hype and over-market like something found at a McDonalds drive-thru—into the realm of being a plants person. It's that look of trepidation and excitement, one that's inwardly screaming, "Oh God this it!" You know, sort of like having sex for the first time, but without all the awkward, "Where the hell does this go? And what is *that!*?" So he asks me what I'm holding and where to plant them, all requisite information. And he's marveling at the pure beauty, the truly godlike creation as if all that is good in the universe could possibly be condensed into he one small item that I'm holding in my hands. I can see he's now dying for one of these. He asks the price. I tell him. He pauses, the universe just whipped some fresh fertilizer in his face and it's time to contemplate options. And that's when he does the unexpected: "Will you take a dollar for one?" What could I do?

That was the only dollar I made that day. I bought Fox a candy bar.

I just hope that my loss of revenue is someone's gain, and that that single plant will be the proverbial seed that'll grow and nurture a passion in a budding plantsman. We're all a dying breed here: Everyone who has marveled over what's coming up in the seed pots; everyone who has poured over catalog after catalog with ecstatic relish, picking and choosing and planning; everyone who has

sought something new, something different; everyone who can actually pronounce Campanula; we are all on the edge of extinction, and looking over. Without breaking the cycle of what the new gardeners are exposed to, the flash and brilliance of box-stores where you can pickup a readymade garden of plants just like Susie's next door, and also buy a 2 liter of soda and a copy of In-Touch magazine (because Brad and Angelina are on the cover again, this time sawing some Somalian baby in half because Brad still loves Jen and is taking half everything), where will be? Who will carry on, when all of us are gone?

Yes. Deep down I know that I'm an idiot and the worst businessman on the planet. Reopening



Gypsophilia aretoides – photo by Bob Skowron

any type of nursery in this day and age is utter suicide. Instead, I could retrain and be sitting in an office somewhere, earning a decent living, eating McDonalds for lunch and secretly Facebooking my afternoons away. But it's that question of "Who will carry on?" that drives me mad, fuels this insanity that says, "You must grow the plants—even though they won't come."

There are very few of us left, now, the specialty nurseries and seedsmen that make it their duty—their drive—to keep plants in cultivation. Even

the big names are fading away. And each season, more and more fall after finding that they can't keep going. That the world has either changed too much, the economy is too bad, or, simply, people have lost interest. Who will carry on?

And now, I leave you as I have transplanting to do and cuttings to take.

John Hargrove
Broken Silo Nursery
<http://bsnursery.com>

Chinese Gentians, Part I

Harvey Wrightman – photos by Esther Wrightman

The recent expeditions of Czech seed collectors to China have brought us an explosion of new material that is proving surprisingly growable. Gentians are on everyone's list of desiderata; and, the Chinese species have the added feature of blooming later, which is a reason they are still relatively uncommon in culture. They can still be in bloom when the snows arrive in late September and October. Seed collecting is a game of chance with the weather. Throw in a dash of political unrest (always a threat), and it's easy to understand how special these collections are. Most of my previous experience was with named varieties (hybrids) of fall blooming gentians, and these, largely calciphobes cultivars, were not very practical for our soils. Not so with these new collections, as no lime intolerance is exhibited, even though I added carbonatite deliberately to the seed mixes. This is a big advance factor for growing. This year we have plants large enough to bloom, both in pots and in the garden, and I can offer a glimpse of what will be showing up in specialty catalogues.

***Gentiana szechenyi* (*G. georgei*)** - A monopodial type where all the stems emerge from a central stock, rising to ~ 10 cm with broad, lanceolate leaves making impressive looking clumps of dark olive color. Single flowers – huge trumpets that stand erect and are some of the loveliest imaginable. Some are white or pale blue with greenish stripes. The pollen on the anthers is royal blue. Relatively rare in cultivation, it blooms late in nature. In our garden this year, it bloomed in July; but the season was advanced at least 2 weeks..



Gentiana szechenyi

According to Josef Halda, *G. szechenyi* is more chasmophytic in disposition. I planted most in narrow crevices with clay and with a raised aspect. This worked well and plants have bloomed and are now making secondary shoots – bringing the promise of some vegetative reproduction in September. One I put in soil, and it definitely does not like this richer, wetter environment. Halda advises also that it will grow better within a low mat. *Silene acaulis* will

as will the smaller *Arenaria spp.* I find that *Gypsophila aretioides* ‘caucasica’ is perfect. Not too aggressive, ground hugging and very hardy. The mats protect both the crown and the surface roots from disturbance. New buds will form in the mat for the same reasons. Possibly, the mats encourage a more favorable soil microflora – that’s speculation, but many gentians are found in alpine pastures growing with a variety of plants. Josef said that the darkest blue form is found on Habashan. A related species, *G. stipitata* is like a microform with flowers about 1/3 the size.

Gentiana futtereri - A trailing type, but the branches do not make aerial roots. Leaves are narrow and lanceolate, densely arranged on the stems. Flowers are single and held erect. The dark azure color is complimented with green striping. Although the plants are relatively compact, the flowers are large - ~ 40mm long x 12mm wide. Our first plant produced about 10 blooms. In checking the provenance of the



Gentiana futtereri

plants, Halda's monograph, "The Genus *Gentiana*" was very helpful – especially the detailed illustrations showing flower parts. Even so, there is some confusion with some of the Czech collections – nature is messy, and species can be quite variable. None of this uncertainty gives reason to "pitch the flat". I am sure that there will be many new and worthwhile plants. This is a species with bright coloring and it will demand a prime setting. Planting it with *G. szechenyi* would make a bold statement. In the high alpine pastures, such pairings are not infrequent.

Gentiana arethusae – A smaller plant looking like a loose growing moss with its mass of tiny leaves held closely on the trailing stems. Terminal flowers that stand erect, the petals are tissue thin and colored a delicate pale blue. Slow growing and well behaved, *G. arethusae* is



Gentiana arethusae

perfect for a tiny wedge between rocks. Again, it gladly nestles in a mat of *Silene acaulis*. With this protection, the crowns soon go multiple and if you are game, they can be teased apart as new divisions. This was one of the first of the new collections I grew. I was apprehensive as I feared that they would not grow well for us. Using the elevated "clay/crevice" treatment works for the chasmophytic species. I would venture that using this method, *G. wardii* and *G. pyrenaica* would be worth a shot. Success so far is such that I will try more collections – for as long as they are available. The political and social problems of this part of the world are constant. Halda's last trip to Burma in 2008 netted a stay in jail; so, no more Burma. The unrest in Tibet quickly sent a flood of refugees

into Qinghai and "security" there soon tightened. As Josef said, "...China is always ready to explode."

Seed Sources:-

Vladislav Piatek www.alpine-seeds.com - list ready in October

Mojmir Pavelka www.pavelkaalpines.cz - list in November

Vojtech Holubec

<http://www.villevekster.com/wildseeds.html> . -

list in November

Josef Jurasek e-mail

jurasekalpines@atlas.cz list in December

2010 BNARGS Programs

August 14

AM: **Bill Brown**, *Spring Bulbs of Turkey*

PM: Peter George, *Evolution of My Garden*

September 4

AM: **Barrie Porteous**, *Unusual and Underused Perennials*

PM – **The Big Plant Sale**

October 9

AM: Andy Brand, [Broken Arrow Nursery](#),

New Dwarf Conifers & Japanese Maples

PM: Eric Breed (from Dutch Rock Garden Society), *Going Wild for Bulbs*

November 6 - Annual Lunch

Sydney Eddison, author of [Gardening for a Lifetime: How to Garden Wiser As You Grow Older](#)

A Garden Visit and A Trough Workshop

Anne Hill – photos by Elisabeth Zander

Elisabeth Zander's rock gardens in Goshen, Connecticut run behind the stone wall by the street, reach to the shady wildflower garden and edge the patio by the house. Rocks and plants, both small and large, are set in a natural design.

The design has grown in stages from the first raised bed 9 years ago, to the elevated waist-high area to the newest spot by the house. Like many gardens, it grew with the energy and

imagination of the two owners, Elisabeth and Rod Zander.



The garden looks natural because the rock came from the quarry on the site with fine crushed granite between the rocks and sand beneath the beds. The diversity of plants from around the world look at home in the Connecticut setting of native rocks.

Rod Zander's craftsmanship and eye for the possibilities of stone make it artistic overall. Zdenek Zvolanek designed the raised bed for saxifrages.

Some of the larger plants grow by some very large rocks, for example, the species Peonies growing by the wall. Small saxifrages are wedged by smaller rocks. The diminutive plantings in the troughs breakdown the size element even further, but add their own rhythm as they are placed throughout the gardens. The troughs are left out over the winter in this zone 5 garden.

Plants are growing where they are happy; Ramondas on the very shady side of the wall area, Saxifrages in the breezy bright light, Primula in spots for their individual needs, and cacti tucked back under the overhang of the porch. Volunteer seedlings often get to stay like the Thlaps in the path and Sisyrinchium nearby.

Elisabeth has the expertise to manage a vast vocabulary of plants. Everywhere you look, you see more plants tucked in spots. It was interesting to learn that some of the saxifrages are the new hybrids by Karel Lang from the Czech Republic. Perhaps during the current

drought Elisabeth will water, but usually she does not.

The patio and area around it are the most recent addition, but add the most visual punch to the yard echoing the raised beds, linking the far area to the house and supplying a more personal context for the whole rock garden. Penstemon, lavender and poppies will be at one edge when the patio is finished.



Places to sit, a variety of benches and chairs, are placed throughout all areas. Elisabeth pointed to the breakfast area farther from the house and the patio table for dinner. This garden is used and enjoyed. Indeed, the members of the rock gardening group attending the tour happily spread out to sit and eat lunch.



John Spain showing us how to build a trough

Editor's Note: We also had a most excellent trough building workshop, run by John Spain and attended by about 15 members. This workshop followed lunch and the plant auction and sale.



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