

Newsletter

**North American Rock Garden Society
Berkshire Chapter June 2011**

Next Meeting:

Saturday, July 2, @ 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: Lori Chips:

Preparing to Plant a Trough



Lunch – BYO

We welcome dessert contributions. Lunch will be followed by a plant sale and a raffle

PM: Lori Chips:

Planting The Trough



AS THE GARDEN GROWS

It's hard to believe, but the calendar says we are in June already, and the weather is saying its summer time. It has been hot and humid this week, decidedly very un-alpine like. At times like this, while some plants languish, longing for cooler weather and more frequent rains, other plants really flourish.

My hardy cactus and succulents are looking great. Some of the semp rosettes are a few inches across. That these plants are doing well is to be expected though. Somewhat more surprising, *coreopsis grandiflora* looks wonderful, and has self sown in very dry rocky areas, like where my white stone meets my driveway. My mini rose garden is starting to bloom, with big pink scented flowers 8' off the ground on my William Baffin climber, and nicely scented very full light pink blooms on its neighbor, *Rosa rugosa* 'Thérèse Bugnet'. The 'red fairy' roses are a lush green, but not quite yet in bloom.

While the weather is un-alpine like, it has been near perfect for my tomato plants. Perhaps because rock gardening has helped me to appreciate plants that are a little different, and enjoy displaying them in containers, my

vegetable garden consists of two big green pots. One contains a sweet golden cherry tomato plant and the other a type of deep purple tomato from Russia. In both cases, the tomato plants are surrounded by marigolds and a single thyme plant, the soil coated in castor oil pellets. The good news is that I was able to buy such unique tomato plants at the local farmers market. The bad news is that the plants did not come with plant tags, and I no longer remember the exact names of the varieties. If you are wondering what the castor seed pellets are about, they are to repel groundhogs. The ones by me will not think twice about traveling under dark of night to the front of my house where they have eaten my tomato plants other years, and stripped all the leaves off a horseradish plant and hydrangea this year. So far the pellets appear to be working. My cherry tomato plant has about ten small tomatoes growing on it right now. I can't wait to see what they taste like.

Both the beauty and the curse of gardening is that there is always something to do, or something new to try. New plants to grow, new ways to grow them...the list goes on. Next month we will have the opportunity to plant troughs. When you are trying to decide what you want to plant in yours, I encourage you to try something new. I'm thinking of doing a hardy cactus garden myself. Most importantly though, have fun with it!

Text by Erica Schumacher & Photograph by Sam Hitt

OUR JULY 2ND PROGRAM (In Lori's own words)

Peter-
A note on the "Trough" meeting

Checklist for participants in the afternoon session: A trough, soil to fill the trough, attractive stones.

On July 2nd I will be giving a morning demonstration and talk on trough planting, delving into cultivation, siting, aspect, and the many aesthetic possibilities of gardening in these charming containers. I will talk about "anchor plants," buns & cushions, tiny groundcovers and the ever-popular "droolers," as well as the method of building up "earthworks" to

create miniature mesas and even gorges. Wintering over and weathering will also be discussed.



Lori Chips, Alpine Manager
lori.chips@olivernurseries.com

In the afternoon those wishing to participate in a plant-up will need to bring supplies. I will have a small selection of plants for sale from Olivers. I cannot supply the troughs, soil or rocks, so please bring these things with you. My advice is to select the more angular pieces of stone as these are more fun to design with and tend to look more natural when assembled to look like a "natural outcrop." Round stones are less pleasing. Bring more than you need in order to have a choice: 5 to 7 stones in a medium trough is not unusual, and don't be afraid of larger ones!

Also, please think troughs when gathering contributions for the plant sale, as it will be useful for the afternoon planters. My mission is to have this event be problem solving, inspiring and a whole lot of fun.

Lori Chips

BNARGS 2011 Program

July 2 - Lori Chips - Planting and Growing in Troughs & Trough Planting Workshop

August 13 - Ron Rabideau - Alpine Plants of China

Steve Whitesell - Rock Garden Design

September 3 - Member's Potpourri

October 8 - Cliff Desch - Gardening in Conway, MA

Joyce Hemingson - Rock Garden Bulbs

November 5 - William Cullina - Woodland Gardening

ALPINE HABITS: THE DROOLERS

Lori Chips © 2005

For softening the hard geometry of a trough there is nothing better than a plant gently and joyfully cascading over the edge. For a number of years we have affectionately referred to these charmers as “The Droolers” and besides the softening effect they also lend a welcome aura of antiquity to this kind of planting.

While considering this group of plants it occurs to me that there really are several categories for them; depending which they fall into defines how we use them and how they will behave.



Lithodora oleifolia – image by Esther Wrightman

The first category has to be the exuberant tumble of blossoming stems that offer a waterfall effect. Frequently they are plants that are larger than would be appropriate for most troughs. They are also plants that tend to have a definite “Bad Hair Day” at some point in the season. Aubrietas are a classic example. Most would probably overwhelm a trough (except, perhaps, the slower growing variegated ones) and although gorgeous in flower will go through that period afterwards of looking disheveled before new foliage growth begins again. But who would want to be without Aubrietas spilling from rock walls in the spring? A haircut helps in the interim. The same holds true for the larger spreading *Phlox subulata*. *Campanula portenschlagiana* and its variants will gracefully flow over the edges of things, but

really belongs in a wall to show off its stuff. *Satureja montana* ssp. *illyrica* is another case in point. I would miss its tiny profuse flowers in midsummer; but the relatively enormous trough it lives in is pretty crowded by the time it’s done putting out its prolific stems. *Androsace lanuginosa* is a lovely octopus. It sends out long stems with rosettes on the ends all of which throw umbels of flowers usually in June. It is somewhat unwieldy at both ends of its season; early it can look a little threadbare, and later when you must decide to cut off straggling stems with the rosettes on the ends, or not.

Lithodora produces beautiful flowing tresses spangled in that unbeatable blue that the best gentians possess. It is a finicky plant to keep for very long but its beauty and its long season of bloom make it worth it, even if it decides to vanish the next season like a spectacular annual.

Origanum ‘Kent Beauty’ is another stunning cascader with a very long bloom time. The ornamental “hops” it produces are actually rose stained bracts. The flowers themselves are tucked inside and are tiny and more fleeting. ‘Kent Beauty’ is large for most troughs but looks perfect if you raise it up somewhere in a container all by itself. In fact, many of these larger droolers are quite rewarding in monoculture. That is: grown alone in a good sized bowl, cylinder or urn. Another plus is that, once deep into their bad hair days the container can be moved to a less conspicuous spot.



Origanum rotundifolium ‘Kent Beauty’
<http://ourlittleacre.blogspot.com/2009/07/blooms-in-july.html>

Chaenorrhinum origanifolium is a chimera. Its first growth makes one want to classify it as a

cushion plant; then its flowering stems begin to elongate and tumble everywhere. Post flowering dishevelment is inevitable but cured by a quick clip-over. Unless you want it to self-sow... which it will do enthusiastically.

Two cascaders that really are in scale for a trough tucked in amongst other alpines are first: *Saponaria x 'Bressingham'*, the most compact soapwort I know of, with bright carmine flowers late and long. And second: *Gypsophila franzii* 'Nana Compacta' which will drool down a substantial distance inside one season and display tiny pale pink blooms.



Saponaria x 'Bressingham' – image by Richard May

I never quite know where to place *Helianthemum 'Ben More.'* It is a dwarf sun rose with rich translucent tangerine flowers. But it will acquiesce to flow over edges and always looks great in combination with other colors. I have even clashed it pleasantly with hot pink!



Globularia repens – image by Esther Wrightman

Category two “Droolers” are in fact, miniature ground covers that have run out of real estate. *Globularia repens* forms a close mat that has, for me, poured over the side and down the wall by several inches, which, on a trough wall, is a lot! A number of rock garden veronicas fill this bill too: *Veronica rupestris* ‘Purpurea’ with bright purple-blue blossoms will cascade out of a trough, so will *Veronica* ‘Sunshine’ with its gold to chartreuse foliage. The thymes oblige us, once they have used up the flat ground available, by spilling over the edge, perhaps as far as the ground below. Be forewarned however, thymes are thugs in a trough with the possible exception of *Thymus* ‘Highland Cream.’ Remember that the plant you see above ground is only half the story; a thymes roots can and will eat up every inch of available root space too.

The last category I’ve fabricated is also a cross-over group from another habit of alpine: the cushion plant. This type never waterfalls with abandon over the side. Imagine, for a minute, that extinct item: the shaving cup filled with shaving cream. It sort of billows up and foams over the edge. That is exactly what certain cushion plants will do, though rarely in the short



Asperula gussonei
www.skalnicky.unas.cz/obrazky/skalnicky/asperu_guss1v.jpg

span of a single season. Perhaps in two years *Asperula gussonei* with its soft foliage and pink tubular flowers will perform this way. *Androsace x 'Millstream'* has the same qualities and may eventually do the same thing. There are some wonderful tiny microphlox hybrids that do the shaving cup trick too. *Phlox sileniflora* is one; a tight mound with small white flowers. P.

'Betty' and 'Herbert' are two others. The colors are lavender pink and sugar pink, respectively and both are choice, congested miniatures. 'Betty' is here at the Nursery this season. 'Herbert', if all goes well, next year.



Photo © M Aspaker 150507

Androsace x 'Millstream'

The dynamic of cascading can often use a little help along the way. Always place the intended drooler at the trough edge that is facing the source of light. You want to encourage it to go out and down the side. A plant in the north corner of a trough will crawl across the trough towards the south, reaching for the light. Spend a few moments every now and then to train the



Phlox seleniflora - image by Peter George

plants over the intended edge. Last of all, realize that only thriving plants will consent to spill luxuriantly over the side of their container. Cultivate them well and cascade they will. Then all you have to do is sit back and enjoy the magic.

NARGS NATIONAL MEETING - 2011

Because we are fairly new members of BNARGS and our rock garden is only a year old, Ed and I were anxious to attend the annual meeting of NARGS, which was only a three-hour drive from our home in Troy, NY. Our expectations were greatly exceeded. We were inspired by all of the gardens we visited on Friday and Saturday and now are sure that we need at least one gardener. We found the talks by Arthur Haines and Bill Cullina most interesting and hope to visit Bill's Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens the next time we are in Maine.

The event was also a time to meet new people from other chapters and to catch up with old friend Harold Peachey. We were proud that Peter George was elected president of NARGS and that he cleans up so well. He traded in his orange vest for a navy sports coat for the occasion.

Judy Brown

Editor's Notes: Over the next few issues, I'm going to include more 'snapshots' of the National Meeting in New London, to give those who couldn't attend, a personal flavor of the 4 day event. There will be a 'real' article or two about the event, including photographs of several of the incredible gardens we visited. The photograph below is just one of many taken by Al Martin at Patsy Highberg's truly incredible garden. There WILL be more!

PFG



MAY MEETING NOTES

Plants, more plants, and only plants, from beginning to end. First we had a very special Show and Tell. Anne Spiegel had a very rare *Onosma alboroseum*, the coral form. Not

in



Onosma alboroseum – photo by John Stireman
www.nargs.org/nargswiki/tiki-browse_image.php?imageId=2516

bloom, but a very nice healthy specimen that she grew from seeds, which in itself is a feat. She shared with us the main points of her success (full sun, great drainage.) Then Carol Hanby produced a few branches of *Magnolia weisneri*. The flowers are spectacular and the fragrance is irresistible. What Carol didn't tell us, is that her plant is perhaps the best specimen on the East Coast, so much so that when the MSI (Magnolia Society International) had their convention last May, they trouped to Branford to admire it.

The plant sale had a wealth of nicely grown unusual plants including *Aquilegias*, *Arisaemas* (*dracontium*?) *Primulas*, *Campanulas*, etc. Most notable in our view, was a group of a dozen or so brilliant *Shortias*.

In the morning, Anne Spiegel shared with us a superb and eclectic collection of pictures: ""Rock Garden and alpine plants at their homes and at yours.", "yours" ? Wasn't this a gentle tease? No, it was a very friendly encouragement as was obvious from the second picture on. The first picture was *Eritrichium nanum*. The second picture was *Eritrichium howardii*, as beautiful as

his cousin, but much more amenable to cultivation, If happy it will even self sow. After that we were treated to a series of great plants, all outstanding specimens, either in their native habitat or in our gardens, troughs, etc. It was very comforting to know that in fact all are growable. Many phloxes, *Ph. kelseyi*, *Ph. pungens*, *Ph. borealis* (in a crevice), *Convolvulus compactus*, etc. Towards the end, Anne did show us *Nigritella nigra*, a charming little orchid that she saw in the Alps. Does anyone know whether it is grown in the USA?



Convolvulus compactus – image by Todd Boland
www.nargs.org/nargswiki/tiki-browse_image.php?imageId=680

Juliet Mattila, took us to Monarch Pass, Co, Arriving up there we first see these vast expanses of almost bare ground. Bare? Not quite. There are many great plants, but we want to see them at close distance. Many of these plants are not that rare and some are practically ungrowable: *Pedicularis* anyone? Most of these



Pedicularis parryi – image by Juliet Mattila

plants live in relative isolation, at some safe distance from their neighbors but in many instances several species clump together into small gorgeous "Nature's Rock Gardens". What



Sedum rhodanthum – image by Juliet Mattila

a delight to look from our height to a small patch of grey and green, zoom on a small white spot, zoom again to discover a *Saxifraga bronchialis*, zoom again, on a final close-up of the white flower with all its characteristic small red dots. There were other such gardens: One in particular featured *Saxifraga rhomboidea*, *Polemonium viscosum*, *Erigeron peregrinus*, growing happily in an area about 1 square foot if that. If Nature can come with such successful combination and arrangements, surely we could do worse than try to imitate her when planting our troughs.

THE WHALE

TEXT BY HARVEY WRIGHTMAN
IMAGES BY JULIET MATTILA

Coming back from the recent NARGS Annual meeting in New Hampshire, we took a side-trip to stay with Robin Magowan for a couple of days, knowing that they will be moving to New Mexico in the winter. What a surprise on driving in the lane to the front entry. Greeting us before this curious, stiff 3-storey New England style house is the most exuberantly luscious display one can imagine. The old rock garden mounds are now completely re-done in a Josef Halda

inspired style using a porous karst stone



from a local quarry. Erosion by weak acids creates the tiny cavities and fissures in karst. This particular stone has quite a bit of siliceous material, which is acid resistant, so these harder bits figure prominently in the surface appearance, and probably determine the inner structure as well. Not surprisingly, vegetation will grow directly on the karst even though very little soil is present. So, taking a cue from nature, Robin did plant in the crevices and anywhere he thought the roots might penetrate, and indeed he did push the boundaries. His planting strategies are:



1. Planting with topsoil sometimes mixed with sticky, local clay to better hold it all together.
2. A 2-step method, first using a succulent mat (*Sedum spp.* or smaller leaved *Sempervivum spp.*) which when established provides an thin organic mat to work a small transplant into. Some drought tolerant, non-succulents are worth trailing too; i.e., *Arenaria spp.*, *Gypsophila aretioides*, small *Thymus spp.*, and *Heterotheca jonesii* which Robin used in one instance. View

these as “nurse crops” somewhat akin to sowing clover with wheat to establish a new hay field.

3. Water frequently. This spring has been unusually cool and wet, so the task was simplified. None the less, water is the key factor to ensure survival and obviously he has made sure this is done.



Most of the garden is really the “horticultural scree” that is used by rock gardeners. What’s different is this step into exploiting the rock surfaces. Tricky and dangerous? Yes, of course, but worth the effort.

EDITOR’S NOTES

Having spent one week as President of NARGS, I understand why it’s so difficult to get members to serve in these administrative positions. It’s time consuming, surprisingly complex and requires a knowledge of NARGS arcana that is both frustratingly difficult to acquire, and even more difficult to implement. But, alas, I accepted the job, so now I will try to enjoy it.

The Conference was extremely compressed for me, and I came home exhausted. The Board Meeting on Thursday was long and coming at the end of Grazyna Grauer’s two year term as President, addressed a lot of issues with which she was involved including membership (which is increasing again!), the SeedEx (which is going to have an online ordering capability this year!), the budget (we were in the black last year, and expect to be in the black again this year), and several projects that are in the earliest stages,

such as a Shopping Cart for use on our website, and the ability to use credit cards.

The gardens we visited were spectacular, and although I’d love to reprise every one of them, Patsy Highberg’s garden is, in my opinion, a place we all should visit at least once. We haven’t seen her at a lot of meetings over the years, but it’s clear that she had better things to do with her time! I’m hoping to visit with her in the next week or two and tape an interview about how her garden happened to....well, happen. Al Martin of the Watnong Chapter has visited her garden twice to take a bunch of photographs, which will be available at some point on the website, along with a transcription of Patsy’s conversations with me about her garden. It should be very interesting, and will allow so many more people to experience the beauty and creativity of Indian Tree Hill.

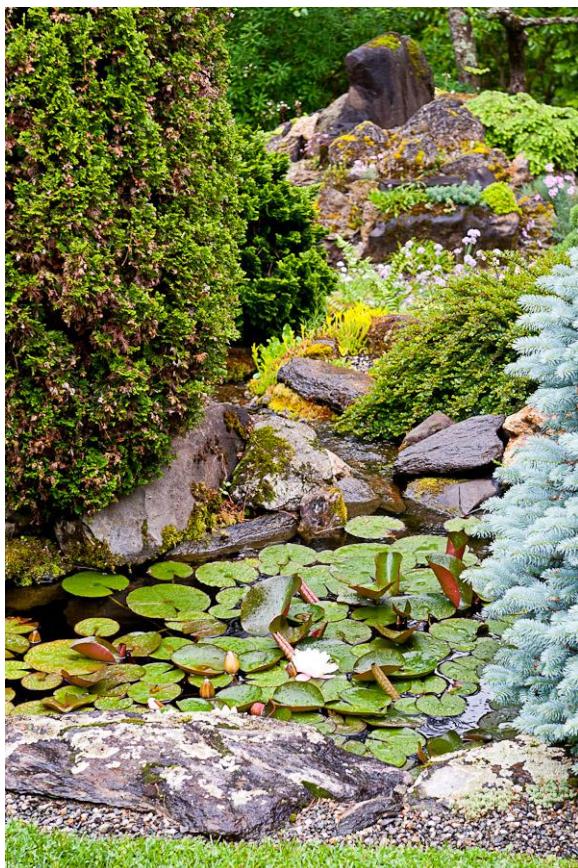


This Saturday we’ll not only have Lori Chips giving us a program and a workshop, but we’ll have the opportunity to purchase (for a pittance!) some extremely choice trough plants that Harvey and Irene Wrightman contributed to our Chapter. They both are extremely generous people, and the Berkshire Chapter (among quite a few others, by the way) has been recipient of that generosity in so many ways over the past decade. Oliver Nurseries, Lori’s employer, has also supported us (among others, too) with hundreds of choice rock garden plants over the years, and they, too, will be providing us with plant material for the workshop. So all we have to bring is a trough or some kind of container, some soil or soil-like material, a few rocks, some money, and Lori will provide the rest. Lori

is one of our Chapter treasures, talented and generous and always looking for ways to strengthen the Chapter by helping all of us become better gardeners!

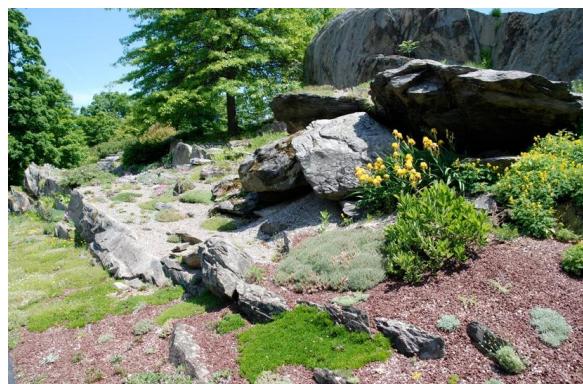
I will also be bringing a tufa trough of rather substantial size, which has been provided by the Wrightmans. It's not a gift, but rather is being offered to us at a huge discount, so either I'm going to use it for a raffle, or perhaps auction it. Its retail value is \$500, but all we have to come up with is \$250 to pay the Wrightmans, and if we can get more, the Chapter gets to keep it. So if you feel particularly flush this week, and are convinced you need a large asymmetrical tufa trough, bring your money, soil and rocks, and buy the trough at the meeting, and let Lori help you plant it perfectly.

Here are 2 more of Al Martin's photographs of Indian Tree Hill. Consider them as appetizers for the more comprehensive word and picture program you'll be offered later this year.



And finally, a bit of important news from the Conference.

Anne Speigel received the Linc and Tammy Foster Millstream Garden Award, which reads "*In recognition of her outstanding rock and alpine garden.*" For those of us who have visited her garden, the award is a 'no-brainer.' For those who haven't visited it yet, add to your list of 'destination gardens.' It's an amazing creation, and one we simply shouldn't miss.



Anne's Garden – images by Cliff Booker



Positions of Responsibility

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Please contact editor before reprinting
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