

Newsletter

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

Next Meeting:

Saturday, April 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: Matt Mattus – *Tweeting The Alps* or
Texting Farrer, A Century Later



Primula auricula near the North Face of the Eiger
Photo by Matt Mattus

Lunch – BYO

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

PM: **Elisabeth Zander** – *Around The
World (and New England) of Vertical
Gardening*



Zander Crevice Garden – photo by Matt Mattus

More Detailed Descriptions Of Our Two
Programs Can Be Found On Page 7

YEARNING FOR FLOWERS



It is that time of year again when the calendar says its almost the end of winter, but large amounts of snow everywhere say it is not yet spring. I know I am not alone in longing to see bright yellows, purples and crisp whites poking their heads out of the ground as the symphony of spring starts with various crocus, snow drops (*Galanthus*) and winter aconite (*Eranthus hyemalis*). Despite the 1-2 feet of snow covering my front yard, I know I do not have long to wait. The snow is receding from the sides of my driveway, showing once again that it is edged with a mix of perennials and cotoneasters and not the white bumps in the snow that have been there for the past couple of months. And thanks to the date stamp on digital photographs, I realize that by the last week of March I usually have crocuses in bloom.

Is my yard always free of snow by the end of March each year? Absolutely not! Have I planted the earliest flowering crocuses I could find in the first patch of garden to melt each year? Sure I have! I also have several different varieties of heath (*Erica carnea*) in shades of pinks and white in front of my house. Along the side, within viewing distance from a window, I have more crocuses, including a lovely pale yellow *Chrysanthus* variety called “Cream Beauty”, snow drops, *Rhododendron mucronulatum* and many other plants. There are

many great options for early spring color. I try to add at least one more early blooming plant to the yard each year.

In the meantime, I wait for the snow to melt, and buy flowering house plants. I just got a beautiful yellow and pink orchid (*Phalaenopsis daniella*) at the grocery store. It makes a nice live centerpiece on my kitchen table and reminds me that once again, spring is just around the corner.

Text & photo by Erica Schumacher

A Primula in Philadelphia



This photograph was sent to me by Sally Cummings, who commented: *Thought this would interest you. It's from the Philadelphia flower show, taken yesterday, March 9.*

I guess some NARGS members do actually grow beautiful plants in pots, right here in the USA. I wonder how many of our own Berkshire Chapter members grow some plants in pots; maybe they could bring one or two to a meeting?

PFG

MOUNTAIN PLANTS OF THE NORTHEAST

~ TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY TOM CLARK ~

*"Mom, Martha and Susan are picking on me"!
"Thomas, leave your sisters alone, sit back and look at the pretty leaves"!!*



Crawford Notch, White Mountains, NH

That exchange pretty well characterizes my initial experiences in the mountains of the northeast. Each year on some promising fall day my family would pile into the car (I, stuck between my two older sisters, of course!) for a day-long excursion up to Vermont or New Hampshire to bask in the brilliance of the turning leaves and to have a picnic at some appropriately splendid overlook. Despite my siblings' best efforts to make these excursions rather less than enjoyable, it was the beginning of a deep appreciation, love and interest for the mountains and forests of the northeast.

By the time I was old enough to venture off on my own, (apparently when I was six or seven I

tried to do so at a roadside viewpoint but didn't make it too far!), I was off to the ski slopes. For years mine was a wintertime association with the mountains. But as my passion for plants exploded (and funds for skiing expended!) my ski weekends, quite abruptly, became summertime botanical forays and hiking adventures. Explorations in the hills around the Pioneer Valley of western Massachusetts and the rich diversity of plants encountered whet my appetite for new hikes, leading to unique areas with yet more plants to discover. My gaze eventually turned northward to the Green and, in particular, the White Mountains, and soon I was tramping along miles of trails tuned into everything green.

Spread across the lower slopes of this mountainous region stretching from the Adirondacks to Maine is the northern hardwood forest comprised largely of sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*), red oak (*Quercus rubra*) basswood (*Tilia americana*), yellow and paper birch (*Betula alleghaniensis* and *B. papyrifera*). In places, the latter two stand as great pillars of golden flakiness and alabaster whose canopies diffuse the sunlight creating a mesmerizing and ever-changing pattern of sun and shadow across a rich tapestry of ferns and woodland forbs. Here, too, are dense, emerald



carpets of shining clubmoss (*Huperzia lucidula*) and other lycopods – part of an ancient lineage of spore-bearing plants. Aside from the ubiquitous sugar maple, two other maples are frequent trailside companions: moosewood or striped maple (*Acer pensylvanicum*) and mountain maple (*A. spicatum*). The first is a splendid small tree whose young trunks and branches are smooth, green and finely fissured with whitish lines that justify another common name, snake-bark maple, but this is more often applied to its many eastern Asian kin. The broad, three-lobed leaves inspired another common name: goosefoot maple. Mountain maple is shrubbier and almost invariably multi-stemmed bearing more raggedly toothed leaves.

From a gardeners perspective it is less refined than moosewood.



Viburnum lantanoides

<http://flora.newenglandwild.org:8080/adoxaceae/viburnum/viburnum-lantanoides>

Oddly, the shrub layer in these forests is oftentimes rather poor, but where it is well-developed is frequently dominated by hobblebush (*Viburnum lantanoides*), a sprawling colonizing deciduous shrub that brightens the woodland realm with domed clusters of lace-cap flowers – a dense cluster of fertile flowers that attend to the business of reproduction surrounded by a tiara of pristine white, much larger and showier, sterile florets that serve to attract pollinators and are more akin to botanical lingerie. The large rounded leaves often turn in fall the most remarkable range of colors, often on the same plant if not a single leaf!



Dicentra cucullaria

While the snowy remains of winter still cling to the highest peaks and deepest gulfs, the deciduous forests we are ambling through are coming to life. Amongst the first to shrug off

the sodden remains of last year's leafage are a quartet of true spring ephemerals that make a fleeting, albeit very welcome, appearance each year. Our two native species of Dicentra, squirrel-corn (*D. canadensis*) and Dutchman's breeches (*D. cucullaria*) emerge with remarkably similar clumps of finely dissected glaucous foliage above which rise to scarcely a half-foot fragile looking flower stalks bearing white flowers. The shape of the individual flowers, however, allows for easy identification although their affinity to the poppy clan is far from obvious at first glance. Those of the former bear a diminutive likeness to a relative: the much huskier and widely grown bleeding heart (*D. spectabilis*); those of the latter are, as their common name suggests, not unlike dainty breeches hung out to dry. The yellow-flowered trout-lily (*Erythronium americanum*) and the delicate pink flowers of spring beauty (*Claytonia caroliniana*) herald spring's arrival. The song of this quartet is short but oh-so-sweet and by the solstice each has taken a bow and dissolved into the rich, woodland soil where they are so often found.



Cypripedium acaule

The orchid family is well represented in these woods, but in mid-June the widely known pink lady-slipper (*Cypripedium acaule*) steals the show. Throughout the forest its typically pink flowers with darker veining are readily encountered, but the roadside patches are even more spectacular often with multiple flowering stems arising from beefy clumps. Presumably the more abundant sunshine plays a supportive role in this floral exuberance. One peculiarity of this species in the northern forests, particularly (and coincidentally appropriate) in the White Mountains, is that a relatively high percentage has white flowers or white with the slightest kiss of pink. On one hike along the Imp Trail I counted a couple hundred blossoms and calculated that roughly twenty percent were white.

Other herbs in this rich forest include several woodland lilies - not true lilies (*Lilium*) but



Trillium sessile

members of the lily family and collectively comprise a group with which I am unaccountably enamored. The twisted-stalks (*Streptopus*) lack overwhelming floral beauty, but make up for it with mid to late-Summer crops of brilliant red fruits. As if some mischievous woodland nymph was at work, the pedicels of each of the two species in our area are curiously kinked adding just enough flair to incite admiration of this otherwise unassuming genus. As satisfying as I find it is to get in for a closer inspection of this singular feature I can't help but wonder what evolutionary path led to this? Perhaps it relates to pollination mechanics, seed dispersal or some primitive purpose. Rosy or sessile-leaved twisted-stalk (*S. lanceolatus*) is

the more diminutive of our two species growing as high as 18" and generally more widespread. Claspingleaved twisted stalk (*S. amplexifolius*) is more robust and is more commonly found in moister sites close to streams or along mossy seeps where it can top 3'. *Streptopus x oreopolis* is a hybrid between the two and has been recorded from the northern forest. Four other woodland lilies encountered more often than not in these woods are hairy Solomon's seal (*Polygonatum pubescens*), Canada mayflower (*Maianthemum canadense*), false Solomon's seal (*Maianthemum racemosum*), and wild-oats (*Uvularia sessilifolia*).

No eastern woodland would be complete without the presence of at least one species of Trillium, also members of the lily clan. Fortunately, two from the pedicellate group (with flowers occurring on a pedicel or stalk) are reasonably common in the northern woods. My mother always referred to the typically maroon-flowered *Trillium erectum* as 'stinking benjamin,' but I have yet to detect any malodor. As is true of all Trillium, a three-parted flower arises singly atop a whorl of three leaves. Painted trillium (*T. undulatum*) is a bit flashier sporting white flowers with a dramatic rosy-pink blotch in the center of each flower. In this case



Trillium erectum

the leaves are wavy-edged and have a slight bluish cast. One other very common representative from the lily family is *Clintonia borealis* which frequently grows into sizable and dense drifts of broad, deep-green, strap-like leaves above which dance clusters of smallish

chartreuse flowers. In late summer clusters of deep, true blue fruits create a striking display. Bluebead-lily will follow us high into the mountains where it can even be found in protected sites amongst the krummholz.

As we gain elevation, the hardwoods yield to conifers that comprise the boreal forest that forms a dark evergreen band up to approximately 4,200' to 4,500'. Scant light penetrates this brooding cloak of balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*) and red spruce (*Picea rubens*). Little grows beneath the boughs save mosses, lichens, and a few other stalwarts, wood-sorrel (*Oxalis montana*) being one. Extensive ankle-high colonies of its three-parted leaves are frequently encountered but all-too-often with only a meager scattering of its lovely pink-veined white flowers. We also may find, in patches, the evergreen leaves of gold-thread (*Coptis trifolia*) with dainty white flowers on stalks a few inches high. This species, along with a few very close relatives, together, form a circumboreal band in appropriate habitats around the more northerly latitudes including parts of Greenland, accounting for a former name, *C. groenlandica*. One more that can be found threading its way along is creeping snowberry (*Gaultheria hispidula*). This absolutely prostrate sub-shrub bears two ranks of miniscule oval leaves along wiry stems. Although I've never seen them, somewhere along the stems and at some point in the season insignificant flowers occur. How do I know? Because the chicken that crossed the road told me, that's how!! Actually, white fruits a tad bigger than plump grains of rice follow the elusive flowers and can be found nestled in the mossy bed where this charming plant most frequently makes its home. Bunchberry (*Chamaepericlymenum canadense*) grows here as well, especially where the forest has opened to admit more light. A dense colony of this diminutive dogwood in full bloom is a welcome sight in this dark realm! The floral structure, although smaller, is strikingly similar to that of the flowering dogwood tree. But, as with many dogwoods, the showy white floral bracts are often, though forgivably, misidentified as petals. The true flowers huddle rather insignificantly, surrounded by the bracts. Attractive bunches of

red fruit develop as summer gives way to fall. Toward the end of one particularly long hike I spotted a variegated bunchberry along Edmands Path. For two years it persisted at Mount Holyoke College Botanic Garden before dwindling due to a diminished ability to photosynthesize, intolerance to lowland heat and humidity or both.

Tom is a long time member of the Berkshire Chapter of NARGS, and is currently the Collection and Grounds Manager of The Polly Hill Arboretum on Martha's Vineyard, MA. This is Part 1 of (at least) a 2 Parts.



A Few Days In The California Desert

TEXT BY ROBIN MAGOWAN & PHOTOGRAPHS BY
JULIET MATILLA

Californians offer tales of desert floors covered in flowers to the end of a valley. But in deserts that receive on average less than two inches of rain a year, such events don't happen very often. Spring, 2010, however promised to be different. Several phone calls from my children in Los Angeles alerted me that three inches of rain had descended on the desert in the six weeks between mid-January and March and they predicted an unusual blooming season. On the assumption that desert ephemerals behave like snow-melt plants—ready to zip into blossom at the very first opportunity—we booked a mid-March flight that would give us four days in Anza-Borrego State Park in San Diego county and another week farther north exploring Joshua Tree and Death Valley National Monuments.

The largest state park in the country, Anza-Borrego stretches southward from the Salton Sea almost all the way to the Mexican border. With ancient Indian sites and rare bighorn sheep to be glimpsed on its surrounding peaks, the park terrain is quite varied, for it includes an amazing variety of geological features. Securing a motel room at a late date took some doing, as we had to compete with desert flower aficionados who

had planned their field trips well in advance. We ended up staying in Octotillo Wells, an off-road vehicle mecca fifteen miles from the park headquarters in Borrego Springs, a surprisingly quiet but remote choice, as Borrego Springs boasts a quite lively art scene and actual restaurants. Our out-of-the-way motel did allow us to discover the Elephant Tree Nature Trail on our last afternoon, the slightly higher terrain making for a great variety of flowers.

Anza-Borrego surpassed our expectations. The air was constantly perfumed with sweet flower scents and the variety of geological features reachable within relatively short distances gave us more species than we could possibly identify. In some deserts the thorns can restrict you to the plants lining a road. In Anza-Borrego, however, the rain has created washes that allow for easy botanizing, leading one away from the road. These washes have formed over time a branching path-like pattern, flattened by animal feet and the odd plantsman. Ascending a canyon, the washes spread out like the veins of a hand and, feeling a bit like palm readers, we explored the veins, taking note of exactly how plants colonized their margins. Unlike the plants in more verdant meadows or woodlands, the California plants are surrounded by expanses of clean sand, which makes it easy to walk among them without trampling them or being impaled. We came to admire the care that the cacti, ocotillos and creosote bushes have put into siting themselves. It may help to be armed, like the intensely floriferous creosotes, with chemical



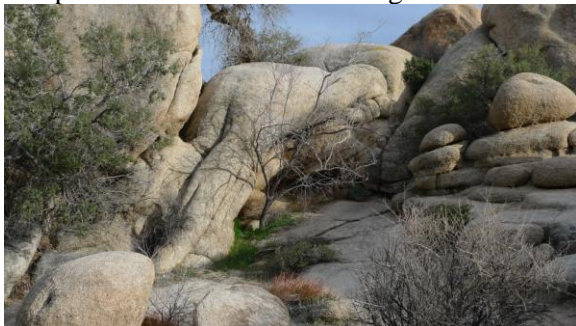
Hesperocallis undulate (sand lily)

hormones that keep competitors from seeding themselves nearby. These desert plants want

access to the infrequent rainwater, but they can't afford to be washed away by a sudden flooding. Some plants are clearly more successful at locating themselves than others. It was reassuring to find, beaming from a two-foot high eminence, a several hundred year-old barrel cactus, with a lively neighborhood sprouting all around it. Larger bushes provided shelter for smaller plants, delicate poppies or one of another variety of blue-purple *Phacelia* lodged in the slight shade of a group of stems.

Among Anza-Borrego's many photogenic marvels was the rather snake or whip-like desert lily, with its long blue-gray tapering leaves carrying a ghostly silver-white flower complete with protruding yellow stamens. Difficult to photograph were the large ocotillos whose lanky branches chained with small dark-green leaves ended in clusters of tubed crimson flowers. More rock garden scale were the pinkish-white Desert evening primrose.

We had guessed right about the best time to explore Anza-Borrego, but three days did not allow nearly enough time to do justice to the geology or the flora. Although the southern entrance of Joshua Tree National Monument was in profuse flower, we realized, as we drove north and the elevation increased, that we were several weeks too early for the peak of bloom. Death Valley had not received the fall rains necessary for early bloom, and the more profuse winter storms made prediction uncertain about what would bloom and when. Still, such beauties as the Mojave aster we found in Death Valley's Mosaic Canyon were thrilling: a glowing purple-violet atop a nine-inch stalk, enclosing a compacted flower of the darkest gold.



But as we know from our own efforts, a rock garden does not need flowers to look good. One

of the most satisfying features of Joshua Tree is its enormous softly rounded boulders. In a secluded area near the "Hidden Valley" campground that had once served as a corral for rustlers, the rim of boulders made for a space that could not have been more garden-like. One might not expect such large sandstone surfaces to accommodate a varied plant life. But the wind-driven pellets of sand, in scoring them, had made for an abrasive seed-friendly surface. And the seams in the rock conducted moisture to whatever plant had taken root without seemingly spilling a drop. There were plants everywhere in the scattering of boulders—many still dormant. The result was a garden in all but name, of a truly breath-taking expanse.



Joshua Tree in Bud

Each plant's position, rooted somehow in its massive boulder, was so improbable and yet so fortunate, that I found myself clapping, bursting into cheers, at each elated sighting. Once anchored, plants took on a classic bun-like contour that allowed them to collect and retain the minerals they needed.

The kings of this garden were the "Joshua" trees. These tree-yuccas are tall, several times my height, with branches that look like outstretched arms and flowers that weigh several kilos. Each purple-and-white bulb-like cluster will spread into several hundred waxy cup-like eruptions. When the flower head dies, the branch offering it bifurcates. Each flower—as many as six or even ten on a giant tree—adds its gesture to the fullness.

Editor's Note: The electronic version of this newsletter is much less costly to our Chapter and much more attractive for you. To change from print to electronic, please contact Pam Johnson. Thank you!

OUR APRIL PROGRAMS

AM: The Bernese Oberland is surely one of the most beautiful regions of Switzerland, and of course it is home to the most iconic alpine plants, which we all love to grow, but if you haven't seen the photos of **Matt Mattus** on his blog www.growingwithplants.com, or in his digital magazine *Plant Society*, you are in for a treat. Matt is going to share with us his most favorite images from his annual summer trips to Switzerland, Austria and the Dolomites of Italy.

Better yet, Matt does all of this botanizing completely wired, with a laptop strapped to his back, documenting every detail and sharing it on his blog each night. An artist's eye and a wired curiosity of an early adopter, Matt will inspire you to learn more about how new technology is changing everything, (in a good way!). If you are still groaning about the loss of Ektachrome, then this talk is for you. A hundred years after Reginald Farrer introduced to world to this most well known of environments, familiar to every alpinist, Matt shares how he re-discovers it in the new



Primula minima/ Italian Dolomites- photo by Matt Mattus

millennium by using Facebook, texting, iPads and laptops. Matt shows us how new technology has opened up all sorts of new possibilities even for us plant lovers.

PM: Our own Elisabeth Zander will present a short program on crevice gardens here and there. Slides will include a potpourri of additional local views from Anne Spiegel, Juliet Matilla, as well

as far away from Harry Jans, Vojtech Holubec, Marketa Nohelova and others.



The 2011 American Primula Society Show

A dazzling array of primroses will greet visitors to Tower Hill on April 30th and May first. The long, sunny hall will hold an intoxicating display of primula in pots,



"The judges gushed over this auricula grown by Judith Sellers from New York State" – photo and quote by Matt Mattus, 2008

each at the peak of its beauty and deserving of a prize. From first sight of the newly transformed botanical garden to the final plant purchase, APS members and other primrose lovers will find the 2011 APS National Show as welcome as spring. Throughout the show members will be welcomed and registered at the APS table at the hall entrance, and all Tower Hill visitors will be offered educational materials, membership information, and primrose books and theme products for sale.

A pre-show garden tour for members, families and guests will be offered on Friday. On Friday evening all registered attendees are invited for dinner and a greenhouse and garden tour at the home of Matt Mattus and Joe Philip in Worcester. Details these events will be available at the membership table.

On Saturday at 2 PM, join us for a presentation by modern-day plant hunter Chris Chadwell. Chadwell, who is the veteran of twenty-three expeditions, is the leading authority on the plants from the Himalaya. His own English garden, which contains hundreds of introductions from the Himalaya, may be the world's smallest botanical garden. His seeds, sold by packet or subscription, are popular with Alpine enthusiasts worldwide.

A friendly and lively Banquet and Awards Ceremony will take place On Saturday evening at a local restaurant. On Sunday from 10: 30 to noon, a Round Table Discussion will be lead by Chris Chadwell, Kris Fenderson, and Rodney Barker. This event is popular with primrose growers of all levels,

Nurseries from throughout New England, including, Rocky Dale Nursery of Vermont, Sunny Border of Connecticut, and Mountain Brook Primroses of New Hampshire, will offer primroses and other fine plants for sale throughout the weekend. New venders of primroses and other desirable plants are welcomed. Please, consider selling plants at this show.

Tower Hill has changed since our show last year. The \$8 million expansion is now complete. The restaurant has been reconfigured and the gift shop improved, and two new gardens have been added: the Winter Garden, an Italianate courtyard created by the angles of new and older buildings that highlights plants of winter interest; and the "Limonaia," a 3,500 square foot Lemon House built to accommodate the Garden's collections of camellias and citrus.

This spring join us in Massachusetts to enjoy a cheery weekend of total primrose immersion. Indulge your senses, support the society, and meet other primrose lovers to learn and talk about, and generally have a good wallow in our favorite plant. From armchair gardeners to serious exhibitors, everyone will find something of interest.

http://www.americanprimrosesociety.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=117&Itemid=146&limitstart=1



The Nature of Perennials

Text and Drawing by Lorie Chips

No single category of plant can or will fulfill all of one's gardening needs. "What is a perennial?" is not as foolish a question as it might at first seem. The easy answer is: an herbaceous plant that returns every year. Fair enough, as far as it goes. A very common question I hear is; "Will it flower all season?" My usual response is: *No perennial flowers all season*. In my experience any claim by catalog or pot tag that they do is instantly suspect. The handful of "perennials" that approach all season bloom generally prove to be rather tender, thus pushing them inexorably into the realm of annuals. And this is the reason we grow annuals, for summer-long color.

There are a small number of perennial plants with a very substantial bloom time. Hellebores come instantly to mind. The decorative part of the



inflorescence is not actually a flower: it is a bract. The fertile flowers are tiny and insignificant and resemble nectarines. All of which brings up another point: flowers that really aren't flowers often last longer. The same usually holds true for doubled flowers. Generally, once a bloom has been fertilized the entire plant switches gears in an effort to produce seed. The flamboyant petals have done their job in attracting a pollinator and they drop fairly quickly. (We deadhead spent blossoms in order to prevent the plant from switching gears, so that it will continue to produce flowers for us.) Many double flowers are harder to pollinate, and many are actually sterile, hence, they last longer.

The re-blooming of a specific plant is a somewhat different issue. Have you ever visited a wholesale grower? I suppose it is fair to say that if, among thousands of one cultivar a smattering are in flower whenever you look out then they can be called ever-blooming. It doesn't mean that when you buy a single plant it will then be smothered in blossom from May to October. I have always thought it a bit curious; everybody loves the Lilac and the Dogwood. Both bloom only once at their appointed time, and no one holds it against them that they do.

Order-of-bloom is another spiny topic. Everyone wants lavish overlapping flower combinations all season long "like an English garden." Or a cottage garden. (These two are not precisely the same thing.) The problem is we do not have the same climate as England, far from it. Our latitude is different; we have brighter sun, hotter summers and colder winters. Our perennials sometimes bloom out quicker, thus fewer plants overlap. Also, the English "look" cannot be reproduced on a strip of ground three feet wide by fifteen feet long. Gertrude Jekyll's very famous herbaceous border was two hundred feet long and it was deep. To have color in

synchronous combinations you need this kind of space. In order to have sequential bloom you need plenty of room to "layer" plants from front to back so that when a set of plants finishes the next set can take over. Jekyll also had a workforce of gardeners to keep the border staked, deadheaded and tidy. And she cheated. Entire clumps of plants were lifted once bloom was finished. Tropicals and annuals were often plugged in, or biennials which had spent their first, non-blooming year, in a nursery bed far out of sight of the garden.

People often wonder what happened with their garden by July and August. There are simply far fewer things that normally flower at those times. It takes a lot of planning to have a lovely garden in the dog days of summer. One way to begin to rectify the midsummer doldrums is to shop at



those times, and go garden visiting at those times. If you only stop in at the garden center when the Iris and the Peonies are drop-dead gorgeous at the point of sale, then most likely, that is the kind of garden you will have. Most people do not allot enough space to the midsummer stuff.

Increasing the size of the patches of things like *Echinacea*, *Hemerocallis* and *Helenium* will go a long way towards livening up the show.

I have been known on occasion to wax euphoric about the beauty, appeal and usefulness of foliage. Not everyone I happen to be talking to is open to this. Let's face it, if it's not vegetables for the table, then it is brightly colored seductive flowers that draw one into gardening in the first place. I read somewhere that it is a mark of aesthetic maturity once the gardener begins to turn his attention to foliage. Stages of this have even been mapped out. It's the silvers and soft grays that first begin to capture the budding foliage fan, burgundy and bronze come next, and finally, gold and chartreuse. There are many people to whom gold leaves will always look chlorotic and sick. Having watched viruses do

their evil work I genuinely understand this response. It has as much to do with the texture of the plant in question, its habit and its tone, as with the color. On some plants an aberrant color or variegation looks unhealthy; this is a matter of personal taste. I doubt that any *Primula* with mottled or yellow leaves would make me anything but uneasy knowing how prone to mosaic virus they are.

Shade is another monumental concern that needs to be addressed, and it comes as a big surprise to people how different are the degrees of shade. Nothing will flower in a tunnel, and the ribbon of ground on the north side of the garage overhung with evergreens is exactly that. If you have high moving deciduous shade there are many things that will thrive. But be aware that what arches over your plants is only half the story. A flowerbed choked with fibrous maple roots will take its toll on your plants and on you.



Astilbe chinensis

I sometimes believe that Americans, New Englanders in particular, are an unashamed race of Druids. Don't get me wrong; I worship at the foot of *Acer griseum*, *Oxydendron*, and *Enkianthus*. I only wish I had the space for a grove of *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*. However, the suggestion that even a weedy light starved maple could, perhaps, be cut down strikes horror into most peoples souls. I don't advocate clear cutting. It's just that you can't

have your hemlocks and flower your roses too. At least not in the same spot. Selective thinning, pruning and limbing up, especially on the south side of the garden, can do a world of good.

For those who don't know what conditions or sort of shade they have, my suggestion is this: get a bunch of annuals. Put in a few sun lovers, a few half-shade plants and a few shade plants. They will tell you what perennials will eventually be happy. If marigolds die then you won't be able to grow Russian Sage there either. If even *Impatiens* and *Begonias* refuse to flower, then you will have to resign yourself to foliage effects.



Anemone nemerosa 'Wyatt's Pink' - photo by Tom Clark

All of which brings me to the question I probably dread being asked most: "What will flower in summer in my shade garden?" Frankly, there are only about two and a half things. There is a difference between shade *loving* and shade *tolerant* plants. *Astilbes* will flower in some shade, but not dry shade. They are actually happier in a sunny bog. *Cimicifugas* will send up lovely tall white spires late in the season; but the best snakeroot I've ever seen received better than half a day of full sun. (Full sun, by the way, means *at least* five hours of unobstructed sunshine, some of it falling in the middle of the day.) Hardy geraniums are said to be shade tolerant but they will not be tight and floriferous with less light. Japanese anemones will grow and flower in some shade, but these tall late bloomers will *always* lean toward their light source, so leaning had better be part of the plan. *Kirengoshoma palmata*, come to think of it, is one late bloomer that performs just fine in a substantial amount of shade.

This is really a lesson in evolution. Spring wildflowers or woodlanders fairly dance along the floor of the woods in April. *Trillium*, *Sanguinaria*, *Anemone nemerosa*, *Disporum*, *Arisaema*, the list is a long and delightful one. They are all busy making flowers, being pollinated and producing seed just like every other Angiosperm in its appointed time. Once the deep cool green shade of summer sets in, the show is over until next year. That's why we call them ephemerals. The good news is that we can take advantage of the time before the canopy of the trees obscures the sun. Many spring flowering bulbs are perfectly happy in the woods. Carpet your shade garden with *Scillas*, with *Chionodoxas*, *Eranthus*, *Galanthus* and even early daffodils. Grape hyacinths, so invasive in a rock garden are utterly charming planted and multiplying along a woodland path.

Having the best garden you can have is based on knowledge. Know your conditions. Know your exposure, your soil, and especially your own preferences. You wouldn't put a primula out to bake by the mailbox, don't sentence a lavender to a slow death in deep shade. Experiment. Take chances with design and plant combinations. But don't try to challenge the laws of Nature. Nature will always win.

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed here are those of the author. Any resultant ruffled feathers are her responsibility alone.



BNARGS 2011 Program

April 2 - **Matt Mattus** - *Tweeting the Alps*
Elisabeth Zander - *Around the World (and New England) of Vertical Gardening*

May 14 - **Chris Chadwell** - *Alpines of Kashmir & Growing Himalayan Rock Garden Plants*

June 4 - **Robin Magowan and Juliet Mattila** - *Colorado*

Anne Speigel - *Alpine Plants Growing in their Homes and Yours*

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 - TBD

October 8 - **Cliff Desch** - *Gardening in Conway, MA*

Joyce Hemingson - *Rock Garden Bulbs*

November 5 - **William Cullina** - *Woodland Gardening*

March 5 Meeting Notes

The March meeting opened on a very cheerful note: Joyce Hemingson and Pam Johnson were presented with the framed certificates of their Chapter Service Awards and they were greeted with an enthusiastic round of applause. After that we had the 'Show and Tell': Elliot Jepson had brought a nice primula and a fully budded *Daphne genkwa* (below). The latter generated a



lot of interest and this was the start of lively exchanges and discussions, the best growers among us sharing information and experiences: how many forms exist, what distinguishes them, who grows them, are they hardy, are they long lived, etc. Too bad that wasn't recorded. The transcript would have been the base for a good article.

As usual, we heard two lectures. Albert Martin took us on a guided tour of Mt Washington, the Mt. Washington Valley and the Alpine Garden Trail. He gave us an extensive and thorough description, well documented and illustrated, covering many aspects of these areas, such as access, climate, topography, quality of trails, growing conditions of the local plants. And of course, the plants themselves such as *Cornus canadensis*, *Ledum*, *Hedysotis*, sedges,

and *Diapensia*, that “most beautiful and temperamental of alpinists” (Linc Foster).

In the afternoon, Tamsin Goggin showed us many of the plants that she saw in Chile. The diversity was extraordinary, reflecting the diversity of the country, stretched over more than 4000 kms and more than 30 degrees of latitude, with deserts in the North, high volcanoes, Mediterranean climate in Santiago,



Calceolaria darwinii

temperate rain forest, down to the spectacular Torre del Paine and Patagonia. In fact, the main theme of the lecture was that diversity. Tamsin didn't try to show us everything that she saw; it would have been impossible, and she wisely limited herself to a little over 100 plants. It was a quick visit to an incredibly rich virtual botanical garden, and at each stop our guide added a few informative comments about the characters of the plants, their habitats, their beauty and even sometimes about their growability in our regions. Sure, we saw the rosulate violet, and *Calceolaria darwinii* and *Convolvulus dissectus*, but also a few trees such as *Araucaria* and *Nothofagus*, shrubs (*Ribes magellanicum*), ferns, orchids, *Alstromerias*, *Lathyrus*, *Tropaeolum*, and many more. But not so many that at the end we weren't looking for more and started dreaming of going to see all these plants in situ. I for one am ready to sign up for Torre del Paine.

-“So, it seems that this was a good meeting?”
-“Indeed, it was, and very well attended too.”
-“Yet, this being March 5th, there was no plant sale?”

-“Wrong! Joyce Hemingson had brought a large tray of big amaryllis bulbs, and believe me they went fast!”

Thanks Joyce.

Jacques Mommens

From The Editor:
I received the following email from Joyce Hemingson:

In the next newsletter, please ask that members contact me at jchemingson@aol.com or 860-379-6425 or speak to me at the April meeting if they would like the annual luncheon meeting to start at 10:00 am with a program at the Berkshire Botanic Garden, followed by lunch at the Red Lion Inn, OR if they would prefer the reverse order, lunch first, program second (which is what we did in 2010).

Thanks, Joyce

Book Review

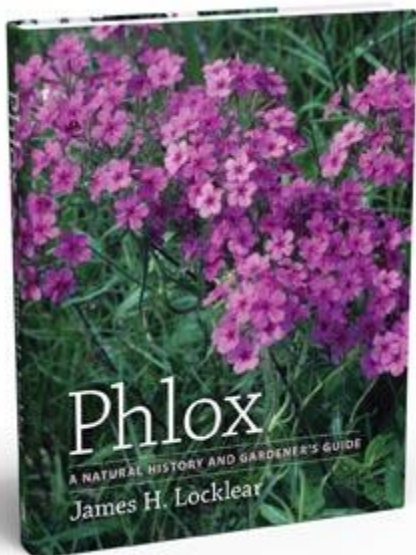
Phlox: A Natural History and Gardeners Guide by James Locklear. Portland: Timber Press, 2011. 316 pages. Reviewed by Peter George

In May of 2007 our Chapter hosted Jim Locklear, then the Curator of the Nebraska State Arboretum, who gave us two excellent presentations, including one entitled “On Fire for Phlox.” That talk was based on Jim’s early work on a book about Phlox for Timber Press, which has just now been published. Having been fortunate enough to receive a review copy, I’m pleased to be able to offer you my perspectives on this most excellent book.



Phlox viscida – photo by James Locklear

I'm not a botanist, but I did know that Phlox is a genus almost exclusive to North America. Now I know that there are 61 species, with only one endemic to another continent: *Phlox siberica*, found in the Altai Mountains in southern Siberia. Otherwise they are pretty much all over North America, the only states without a native species being Maine, New Hampshire and Rhode Island. In short, Phlox is a genus that essentially grows everywhere we garden, and that can certainly be an integral part of any garden we can imagine.



Jim has structured his book in a way that allows it be read as literature or used as a reference. He opens with a discussion of the botanical history of Phlox, the explorers who originally discovered it and brought it to Europe or distributed seeds and plants throughout North America. Then he takes each species in alphabetical order, and provides us with a brief but densely informative review of all aspects of

the species. Each species gets a two or three paragraph general description, followed in



Phlox griseola – photo by James Locklear

almost all cases by an excerpt from an historical treatment, followed by taxonomic notes, followed by a discussion of the species' geography, followed by a discussion of its environment and associations, and finally a few words about cultivation. Some of the species have a section on subspecies as well. And, of course, there are 72 photographs, grouped in the middle of the book and showing a good percentage of the species in situ.

The general descriptions are beautifully written, and all of the information presented in the other sections is accessible and well organized. For example, a gardener wondering about *Phlox muscoides* would find the following:

Like some grizzled little troll from a fairy tale, Shoshone phlox always keeps interesting company—most of it dwarf; much of it in exile. This hoary, humped-back plant is a near constant presence in the wonderful rock plant communities of the Wyoming Basin, reigning amidst the mounds and mats, cushions and carpets that cling to wind-scoured escarpments and ridges. Many of these plants are the compact, miniature species in their genus, and a number occur nowhere else,

isolated here from both the norm and the world.

Dramatic and extreme reduction of leaf, stem, and inflorescence is required of plants banished to the cold desert barrens of the Wyoming Basin, a crucible melding, in Gretchen Ehrlich's experience, "torrential beauty" with "absolute indifference." Perhaps it is telling that most of the companions of Shoshone phlox also have silvery foliage, as if the dross and alloy of easier living had been forged out of them. That plants even bother with such places makes you shudder a bit at the resolve to *be* and *beget* that throbs on this planet.

Absolutely beautiful, and a perfect reflection of the literary skills Jim demonstrates throughout this wonderful book. No gardener will be left feeling unfulfilled or uninformed after reading *Phlox: A Natural History and Gardeners Guide*, and it will prove an invaluable tool when considering which of the beautiful and varied members of this marvelous genus to add to our gardens.



Phlox hoodii – photo by James Locklear

NARGS 2011 Annual Meeting, June 17-19

An old New England farmer once said "My best crop is the rocks I harvest from my field." He was perhaps exaggerating to make a point, but not by much. In northern New England, the rocks left by the glaciers can be a nightmare when planting a new garden. And each spring brings forth a new crop.

So what's one to do? Rather than be cursed as an obstacle, the presence of rocks provides New England gardeners with a unique opportunity to create a garden perfectly suited to its site. Come see for yourself! From the magnificent White Mountains in the north of New Hampshire and the rolling Green Mountains of Vermont, through the Lake Districts and many historic and quaint regions, New England is filled with rock gardens of beautiful flora and unique species.



One afternoon will be spent at the The Fells, the historic Lake Sunapee estate of statesman John Hay. His son, Clarence Hay, was one of the original and prominent members of The American Rock Garden Society (ARGS), the predecessor to NARGS. Clarence worked with Italian stone masons to build an extensive rock garden during the 1920-30's from rocks located elsewhere on the large property. The result is an extraordinary natural-looking creation. For over 30 years Clarence maintained an extensive index card file in which he meticulously noted scientific name, cultural information, source of plant material, and field observations for 600 different species and cultivars of alpine plants. Clarence died in 1969. Following decades of neglect, volunteers and a small staff continue renovations of the impressive Clarence Hay Rock Garden.

<http://fellschapter.wordpress.com/registration/>

Positions of Responsibility

Chairperson – Erica Schumacher
Vice-Chairperson – Joyce Hemingson
Secretary – Carol Hanby
Treasurer – Pamela Johnson
Archivist – James Fichter
Audio Visual Chairperson - Joe Berman
Greeter – Ed Brown
Independent Director – Clifford Desch
Newsletter Editor – Peter George
Meeting Recorder – Jacque Mommens
Plant Sale Chairperson – Bob Siegel
Program Chairperson – Elisabeth Zander
Proofreader – Martin Aisenberg
Refreshments Chairperson – Joyce Hemingson
Speaker Housing – Anne Spiegel

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