

Newsletter

*North American Rock Garden Society
Berkshire Chapter September 2011*

Our October 8 Meeting Has Been



Our morning and afternoon speakers have been forced to cancel, and the Jewish Holy Day of Yom Kippur is the 8th, so we thought it best to cancel the meeting. Ergo, our next meeting will be our Annual Luncheon Meeting on November 5. It's a shame, but it has been a long time since we had to cancel a meeting, and our luck was bound to change. There will be a Tri-State Meeting on October 16, and many of our members will be there, as will several plant vendors and a superb speaker (our Journal Editor, Malcolm McGregor).

Go to

http://www.mcnaargs.org/Tri_State_Meeting_2011.pdf

for complete information

SEPTEMBER 11



Until 10 years ago this was just a date on the calendar. That all changed with the tragic terrorist attack on NYC and Washington, DC ten years ago.

As I type this article, I am sitting in the airport waiting for my flight, first to Newark, NJ then on to Birmingham, England. Today's date is September 11th, 2011. The TV behind me shows images of the new building going up stronger, more solid than before mixed with images of what was lost.

For those of you wondering why I am flying today, it is the most convenient day to get me to England in time to recover from jetlag and exhibit at a conference. I did not think of the date when I booked my flight, but I did not change it either. One of the ways I feel we can all honor those that perished in that tragic attack is to continue to live as we have always lived. Another way is to remember how people from around the world came together in the aftermath, and to each do at least one more nice thing than we might normally do.

How does any of this relate to gardening? For many of us, sharing with others around the world is done through plants and seeds. This can be as simple as giving divisions of plants to a neighbor that wants a garden but cannot afford one, sharing seeds with other gardeners around world, or perhaps helping an injured gardener with their garden (as a friend did for me when my appendix was out a few years back). There are many ways to be there for others. Whether it is in the garden or the board room, the playground or a park, I encourage each one of you to honor the memory of those that perished by bringing a little more light to the world. If one act of terror could accomplish so much harm, think of all the good that many acts of love and kindness can accomplish.

Erica Schumacher

THE NARGS SEED EXCHANGE

The seed exchange is one of the North American Rock Garden Society's most attractive benefits, and the reason why many of our members joined the national organization in the first place. Although it is just one of over a hundred international seedexes, it is one of the very best, filled as it is with rare and unusual genera and species across a number of wide-ranging genres. While our seed list specializes in alpine and rock garden plants, NARGS also recognizes that very few of us restrict our gardens to only those



2010 Seedex2 The seeds are ready!

subjects, so the list also includes seed of the

more interesting and hard-to-find dwarf shrubs, succulents, and smaller perennials.

These are also seeds of plants that are either not widely available commercially, or not available at all, so the seedex is often the only way to acquire such rare and unusual plants. The list also gives you access to further information on size and color, provenance (donors' location or collection sites) - as well as an assurance of phytosanitary cleanliness, and a better-than-average expectation of nomenclatural accuracy.



2009 Wisconsin-Illinois Chapter – using 'weighing boats'

As with all NARGS activities, the seedex operates through the generous donations of time and seed - and occasionally, finances - from its members.

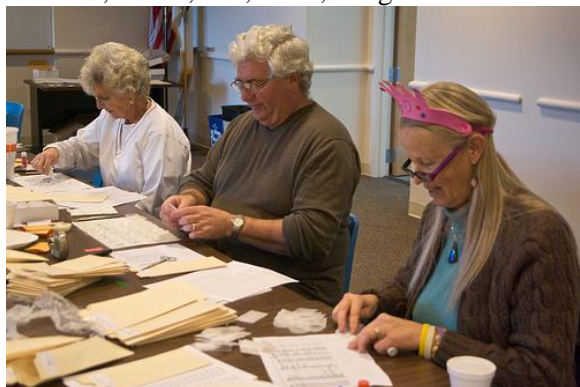
All the thousands of seeds come from member donors who, in return, receive an extra measure of seed packets in their orders, plus priority in having those orders filled. The major work of dividing and re-packaging those seeds (so that they may be shared among more members), and filling requests through two rounds of seed ordering, is handled by dozens and dozens of volunteers, throughout the continental U.S. Unfortunately for NARGS, our Canadian chapters cannot help with those tasks, due to strict U.S. seed import regulations; high shipping costs prohibit our chapter in Alaska helping in this activity, as well.

Seeds that are received from the Seedex, and then germinated and grown, often form the bulk of the supplies to chapter plant sales, the receipts of which then fuel the chapters' speakers and

activities.

New plants are made available to our members at little cost: I recall the first time I saw *Aruncus aethusifolius*: it was sold at an April fund-raising Rare-Plant Auction in Wilmington, DE, in 1983... 3 plants for \$105! In June of that year, I was able to purchase a plant at our Delaware Valley chapter sale for only \$.35, grown by the late Bob Way from NARGS seed.

And the seedlist makes for compelling reading. I've always curled up with the list - plus a huge pile of reference books on various genera, alpinists, woodies. The current online seedlists now come with their own references, in the form of links to Google pages, with further links to websites, books, and, often, images.



Barb Wetzel, Ed Glover, and Nancy Nedvick packing seeds

Filling out the form has always been a delicious, but occasionally frustrating, exercise. First, narrowing down choices out of thousands to just thirty-five. Then, making certain they are in strict numerical order, with none accidentally overlooked. Not to mention, writing up to four numbers clearly and legibly in those little boxes.

This year, the new online ordering system will make that operation easier for both those who fill the forms and those volunteers who fill the orders. When ordering, you will be able to:

- See a running list of your choices, both numbers and seed name;
- Switch taxon numbers easily between first- and second-choice grids;
- Move backward and forward in the list, choosing items as they appeal to you and, just before submitting, rearrange them all into correct numerical order with the click of a

button;

- Print a copy of the numbers/names you have ordered for your own records.

This becomes especially handy when you submit an order in the second round for all those alternative choices that are still available - maybe even more first choices that you can't get enough of.

Best of all, your orders will reach the volunteers who fill the orders in a clear, legible format, with all the seed numbers in perfect numerical order, so that there will be no mistakes because of undecipherable writing and no delays because of out-of-order numbers.

However, before you can use the online ordering system you must register your email address with our Executive Secretary, Mr. Bobby Ward. That way, the system will automatically recognize you as being eligible to order from the seedex. It couldn't be simpler:

Send an email to: nargs@nc.rr.com

In the Subject line, write (or copy-and-paste): NARGS seedex email address

In the body of the text, write your name and postal address

On December 15, the new 2011-2012 Seedlist will be posted on the NARGS website:

http://www.nargs.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=75&Itemid=123

...and you'll be ready to roll!!



There has been an unfortunate decline in donations over the past several years. While we still offer over three thousand taxa (plenty to choose from), at one point, we peaked at over five thousand! It would be ideal if there could be just as many donors as users of the seed

exchange. After all, it only takes five packets of different kinds of seed to be a donor. For that minor effort, you receive ten extra packets of your first choice (a 200% return!), plus priority in having your order filled (which gives you a better chance of receiving your first choices).

But, however you choose to do it - Enjoy our seed exchange this season!!

Joyce Fingerut - Director of the NARGS Seed Exchange

REPORT ON THE SEPTEMBER MEETING



Coryphantha missouriensis

http://www.kakteensammlung-holzheu.de/en/escobaria_missouriensis.html

The meeting was a big show, a most interesting show. It started with the traditional Show & Tell, featuring a superb fern, *Arachnoides standishii*, grown by Lori Chips, a much discussed impatiens (tall, magenta flower), *Zephyranthes* in bloom from Nancy Chute's cold greenhouse and a few non hardy cyclamens (*C. graecum*, *C. africanum*) grown from seeds by Elisabeth Zander. Since it is not always easy to have something interesting in bloom in time for a meeting, members had been asked to present pictures of what had especially caught their interest either in their own garden or in sites that they had visited in 2011. The resulting show was a great success. It was a true meeting of friends, talking freely

about their successes (and failures), comparing notes, asking questions, inserting personal reminiscences and anecdotes, much livelier and certainly as informative as spending an hour or so reading a plant magazine or surfing the net.

John Spain opened the proceedings with pictures of *Coryphantha missouriensis* (he had brought a few for the plant sale), *Opuntia vivipara* (didn't he get some from Claude Barr, more than 30 years ago?). He grows cacti in troughs or in a big traditional rock garden, together with dwarf conifers, which not surprisingly sometimes grow a bit too enthusiastically. Pam Johnson is fond of her *Cypripedium kentuckiense*, *Glaucidium palmatum*, *Helleborus smithii* (with its up looking flowers), *Podophyllum emodi* and other shade plants. I suspect that Nancy Chute could have told us much about *Galanthus* and other bulbs, but she limited her choices to *Anemone nemerosa* 'Vestal', and a superb clump of *Trillium sessile* which did produce up to 20 flowers and glorious mottled leaves. And all the time there were questions: what exposure? Does that take full sun? What type of soil do you grow that in? etc. Judy Brown showed pictures of her rock garden before/after, a work in progress.



Glaucidium palmatum – image by Pam Johnson

Ken York sent photographs of his woodland and primulas. Something unusual? Juliet Mattila had pictures of a rock garden for orchids! Yes, some people grow orchids in some sort of high raised bed (great drainage): Where? Where was that? Hmm, it was in Quito, Ecuador. At 9000' orchids qualify as alpine, don't they? Closer to home Elisabeth Zander did show a rich assortment of plants that she grow mostly from

seeds: *Aster coloradensis*, *Clematis tibetica* (a bit rambling and self sowing), *Helleborus orientalis* getting full light in ordinary soil, a great Hepatica, probably a cross, that she received from Geoffrey Charlesworth, *Linaria alpina*, which blooms and blooms and blooms, *Phlox borealis* (from seeds, easy). And then Peter George told us about the new plants and plants which bloomed for the first time in his garden in 2011: *Degenia velebitica* (easy), *Anchusa cespitosa* (difficult), *Campanula nitida* (facing South), *Polygala calcarea*, the rare *Penstemon debilis* (from Bradshaw seeds), and of course his beloved peonies, perfect *Paeonia lactiflora*, and *Paeonia suffrutescens* 'Rockii'.



Penstemon debilis – image by Peter George

After lunch came the Show and Sell part the meeting. It had been announced as the BIG plant sale. BIG, really big it was not. In the past we have seen bigger September sales. However, if the quantity wasn't overwhelming, the quality was high, and so was the diversity of the plants offered. It is just that there was less duplication: where in the past we had 5 or 10 pots of a given plant, this year we had only one, albeit a older sturdier one. It appears that there were far fewer seedlings or recent divisions. This wasn't too surprising considering that many of us lost many seedlings during the scorching days of July and August. Yet, in defiance of the accepted rules of the market the prices were still low, and the tables were cleaned in record time. There was one (and only one) *Penstemon davidsonii*. I got it, I am happy. The dear penstemon may not be so happy if it hears that its new owner had killed two of its kind in the past. Buy and don't tell.

BEGINNINGS

By HARVEY WRIGHTMAN

I was asked how I got into rock gardening. We lived in BC in the early 70's and spent a year wandering and working. I had a very good friend who was from the East Okanagan area, near Lumby. At that time forestry was king, and the wood came into the mills so fast the burners could hardly keep up with the waste – smoke filled the Shuswap valley so thickly it would drop the jaw of a medical professional today. No one seemed to care. Travelling east from Lumby on Hwy #6, the road climbs into the Monashee. At Cherryville, the main logging road heads north following the Shuswap River. and eventually you can drive all the way up to Revelstoke. In those days, they were still cutting old growth Douglas fir, cedar and hemlock. My friend, Jim, was building a barn in his spare time, and so he would drive in the road to find cedar butts (3' diameter and more) that were left behind and were perfect for making shakes. One trip he suggested we ride in on motorcycles to get up to the "meadows" which were accessed by a long, winding trail used to bring in cattle for a short, intense grazing season. The trail was rough but passable. There was not much to see –



Mountain Meadow a long time ago (That's Harvey, with the big hair!)

until the last turn; and then, it was the most perfect alpine meadow I could imagine. No cattle had arrived yet. What was there – well 40 years later I can't remember it all, but the sight of hillside flush with *Dodecatheon pulchellum* (or something like it), spiced with some *Aquilegia flavescens* and *Castilleja* sp. still lies vividly in my mind. Nothing really special, but all so perfectly arranged. It was this vision that was the inspiration. Unfortunately, you can't easily live in such places – 10' of snow will stop those ideas.

When I built our house in SW Ontario, we finally had the opportunity to act on the inspiration. Using the few stones available, the first rock garden took shape and I began looking for the plants. There were so few commercial sources in North America and though it's hard to imagine, there was no internet search, so growing from seed was the best choice. At that time, "shares" in a seed collecting expedition was the norm; but, this always gave the impression that distribution was based on a fraternal basis, with those deemed as superior



Dodecatheon pulchellum – image by Esther Wrightman

growers, receiving preferential treatment. Jim Archibald and the Czech seed collectors democratized the process to a simple commercial exchange, which suited me better. The best aspect about rock gardening is that it is an egalitarian experience. Money and class status mean nothing, and the Czech's, who suffered through 40 years of totalitarian suppression, have provided us with the most advances in both plant material and cultural methods.



Gentiana futtereri – image by Esther Wrightman

I wonder where the next generation of seed collectors will come from. I can't say with certainty, but I can speculate it will be China. The recent Czech collections from there comprise a whole section of their own; they may become the largest section. China is still controlled with a heavy hand. It is illegal for citizens there to collect seed for commerce. Having escaped the last great glaciation, the diversity of the alpine flora is huge. A growing number of locals with expertise are interested in

this flora. One wonders what ideas they will offer. This will all develop, heavy hand or not. All it takes is the inspiration of a vision.

EDRIANTHUS

By Dean Evans

Fall – I don't like the thought of that - if it is the precursor to another winter like I endured early this year. It wouldn't let up, with each day being a trial for even the strongest person. The rock garden plants thrived and rejoiced as the sun warmed the air near the ground. They bloomed early and their wonderful colors awakened a desire in me to grow plants as I once did 8 or 10 years ago. I made an order to Alplains on the 3rd of September and received it a week later – nine packs of seed. There will be orders to Holubec, as I just asked my wife to print the catalog. I find planting seed in March offers the greatest results. I cook the soil and store the filled seven gallon pots in the barn until needed. I presently have 10 stored and will start cooking soil in earnest the week of Sept. 12.



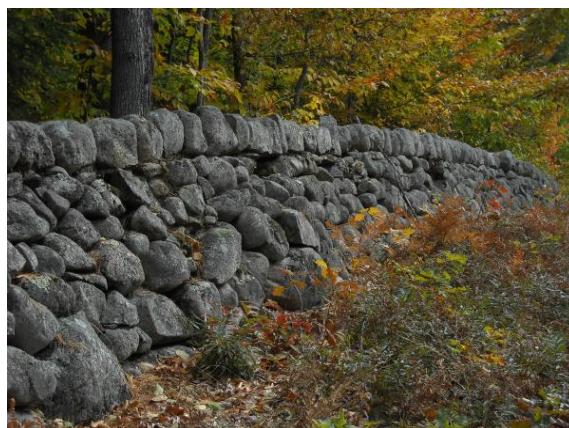
Edrianthus tenuifolius

http://www.anniesannuals.com/plt_lst/lists/general/lst.gen.asp?prodid=3030

Meanwhile, I am dumping pots and using some of the plants in my garden for fall planting. I plan to bring 40 *Edrianthus tenuifolius* to the October meeting. The organization obviously needs the money their sale should generate. Edrianthus of any species are exceptional plants for your garden. Early in my attempts at growing plants I produced a beautiful group of

Edrianthus pumilio. They bloomed and I showed them at a meeting and received a number of compliments. That encouraged me to try growing many other plants. At one point I had over 300 pots going. This gave me a large number of plants to risk in marginal growing situations, with less concern for losses.

About 5 years into rock gardening I started planting in crevices. I found it very difficult initially. It was extremely hard to get the plant to survive, due to an inability to get a consistent packing of soil around its roots, although if a plant could grow for 2 or more years it generally would survive. The problem, I found, was the soil would work away from the plant, eventually creating a void. This was caused by drying, ants or freezing and thawing. After all, water freezes. It results in a 300 psi force being exerted in all directions equally. This forces soil and, for that matter, stones – the crevices – away or apart. This is the reason that farmers speak of their fields 'growing rocks'. When a field is plowed, dragged and disked the soil loosens, breaking up compaction. The freezing of the soil moisture causes the stones to rise towards the surface. This can be as much as a quarter of an inch a year. Even under stones of considerable size there will be a void and a compacted pan. Spring rains wash silt into this space, acting as a shim. This process continues year after year until the plow point catches or hooks an edge, upturning the stone. In olden times these stones were rolled and pushed onto a stone boat, dragged over and congregated along



hedgerows. In slow periods in November, before the winter snows made this work too difficult, fences were re-built or expanded. I was told

once in my youth that if a man could build a wall properly in one day, that is, three foot high, three foot wide at its base, two foot across the top and for a stretch of a rod (16 ½ feet) he was worth his pay, and was kept on the farm with room and board provided. Of course this was pre-TV. This is obviously more than you wanted to know about stone fences but the principles are the same – frost heaving can be minimized with a full understanding of drainage.

THE NOVEMBER LUNCHEON MEETING

As usual each November, we're closing out our Chapter year with a special luncheon meeting on November 5 at the Red Lion Inn located in Stockbridge, MA. Joyce Hemingson, our Vice Chairperson is heading up the event, and she needs to hear back from each of you that plan on attending by October 28. Checks should be mailed to her @

Joyce Hemingson
PO Box 207
Colebrook, CT 06021
860-379-6425
jchemingson@aol.com

The first course is salad of field lettuce with house vinaigrette. The choices for the main course are: Pan Seared Salmon with chive puree, or Hand Carved Native Turkey, pan gravy. If there are some vegetarians, that is not a problem. Seasonal Fruit Crisp is dessert with coffee, decaf and hot tea. Any other beverage is on a cash basis
The cost is \$28.00

Our business meeting, including the election of new officers, will begin at 10:15 at the Berkshire Botanical Garden meeting room, and our program will begin at 10:40. Bill Cullina is our speaker, and he will done in time for all of us to

get over to the Red Lion for our meal and friendly chatter. See you then!

PFG

SEPTEMBER MUSINGS

As you now know, we've had to cancel our October meeting. One consequence of the cancellation is the loss of one last opportunity for our members to gather up some choice plants before winter sets in. Dean was going to bring some very special plants, in quantity, and that obviously won't be happening. I had a bunch of plants which seemed to appear in my garden just after the September meeting, and with some Peony divisions, would have made a nice addition to more than a few gardens. And Harvey Wrightman sent me a box of 3 very special species for our Chapter, which I'm going to have to find a way to get to you before winter as well. He sent us 10 *Adonis vernalis*, 10 *Gentiana paradoxa* (the real thing!) and 10 *Lobelia siphilitica* 'Mistassinica'. I'm going to bring them to the Tri-State meeting on October 16, but if any of you want one or more of these plants, please let me know and I'll try to find a way to get them to you. No, they are not free, so contact me for the pricing. You can read about them at www.wrightmanalpines.com.



Adonis vernalis – image by Esther Wrightman

Our November meeting will include our Annual Business Meeting, since we can't have on in October. We'll be having elections, so please try to get to the Berkshire location a bit earlier since

we're going to have to start at 10:15 to get the meeting in and leave enough time for our special program. Right now we're still looking for a new Treasurer, and I'll be calling a few of you in the next week or so to try to convince at least one of you to take on the modest but critically important position.

I'm having difficulty getting enough time in the garden given the weather and my surprisingly busy NARGS schedule. The job of President is more involved than I ever imagined, but there is great satisfaction in working on something that is really meaningful to so many of my friends across the world. It's often very difficult to convey to people what an 'organization' actually does to benefit its members, but I'm working hard at getting that message out in a way that people will find accessible and to which they will respond. We'll have to see how it goes, but for now there are several significant events in our future, as well as the ongoing efforts to improve our website, the Quarterly Journal and the Seed Exchange.

First, we're going to have our 2012 Annual Meeting in Everett, WA, sponsored by the Northwest Chapter of NARGS. It is going to be an interesting and exciting meeting, focusing on an area of the Northwest relatively unknown to most of us. For more information, go to: http://nedm.drizzlehosting.com/2012/images_wsw_2012/folding_a dd.pdf

The 2012 Eastern Regional Meeting is going to be held in the Fall, and hosted by the Allegheny Chapter in Pittsburgh, PA. I cannot explain why there is nothing on the NARGS website about the meeting, but I'll keep you apprised when the meeting information is posted. It's scheduled for Columbus Day weekend, by the way.

For 2013, the Annual Meeting is going to be held in Asheville, NC, and should be a terrific meeting with opportunities to spend some time botanizing in Western North Carolina in addition to the vendors, speakers and garden visits. We're in the early stages of planning the Study Weekend, and all indications are that we're going to have a late summer meeting in

Sante Fe, NM! It will be a new location, at a time of year when most of us are finding little blooming in our gardens. New Mexico, on the other hand, has a summer monsoon, and late August is when everything there is in bloom. Spectacular bloom! I'll keep you apprised as both of these meetings take shape over the next month or two.

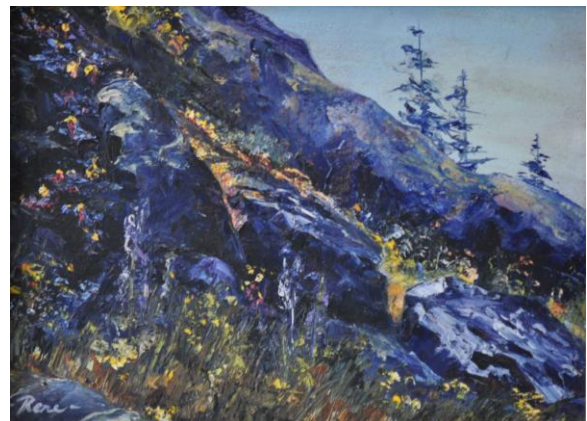
As you already now know, the Seed Exchange is upon us, so PLEASE make an effort to gather up some of the choicer seed in your gardens and send them in before November 1. Here's the link again:

http://nargs.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=158:seed-donation-instructions&catid=75:seedex&Itemid=123

As many of you know, Cliff Desch had serious surgery recently, and I really am happy to report that the surgery was successful, the patient survived, and he's cured of what was once a fatal disease. I spoke with him this past week, and he's looking forward to joining us at the November Luncheon Meeting!

Finally, I want to thank all of you for a great year. I have been attending BNARGS meetings since 1996, and it has always been a real pleasure to share the time with such wonderful people. My garden has grown and evolved as a result of the knowledge and the plants you've shared with me. I intend to continue developing as a gardener, and look forward to many more years of activities and education, hopefully sharing those good times with all of you as well.

PFG



Painting by Irene Wrightman – circa 1970

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 – **Open**
Program Chairperson – Elisabeth Zander
Proofreader – Martin Aisenberg
Refreshments Chairperson – Joyce Hemingson
Speaker Housing – Anne Spiegel

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Deadline for The Next Newsletter is September 20, 2011

Please contact the Editor before reprinting articles

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