



Newsletter

*North American Rock Garden Society
Berkshire Chapter July 2011*

Next Meeting:

Saturday, August 13, @ 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: Ron Rabideau:

Plant Hunting in China



Lunch – BYO

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

PM: Steve Whitesell:

In Celebration of Artifice



DOG DAYS OF SUMMER

My time in the garden has been limited lately. Unfortunately, so has my attendance at chapter meetings. I was unable to attend last month's meeting due a business trip, but will hopefully be able to attend next month's meeting. As some of you already know, I have a full time job as an engineer in addition to my position as chapter Chairperson, and there are time when these roles conflict. Please continue to be patient with me, and supportive of our Vice Chairperson Joyce Hemingson and other chapter members that help out in my absence.

While sometimes work and other non-gardening commitments have limited my gardening time, this week it has been mostly the weather. We are in the heart of summer weather with occasional thunderstorms, and temperatures above 100 called for later this week. Other than my potted plants, I am taking the "survival of the fittest" philosophy, meaning that if the plants in the ground can not survive on the water they get from Mother Nature, they will be replaced with something that will. If the grass starts turning brown and threatening to die I may change my mind, but for now, no sprinklers.

In the garden the red fairy roses that were in bud last month are in full bloom, as are many day lilies, and at least two species of Echinacea (*E. purpurea* and *E. tennesseensis*). Also flowering well is a beautiful purple Dianthus that Peter George gave me one year, telling me how it was

a wonderful alpine that bloomed all summer long. It has done just that for a few the past years. The only problem is that I lost all record of which plant it is.

My cherry tomatoes have been producing tasty little orange tomatoes since early July and the bigger variety is forming its first tomatoes. Some critter originally ate all the leaves off my pepper plants, and now they are located a few feet off the ground and are starting to flower. I am not sure if I will get much in the way of peppers before the weather turns cool again. Time will tell. My herbs are doing fine, and



much to the delight of my two cats, the catnip plant is now over 2 feet tall and covered in catnip buds. In the yard I have picked a few batches of black raspberries from the wild raspberry bushes that planted themselves. So naïve of me to think I had actually pulled out enough root to get rid of them a couple of summers ago. Oh well, at least now they provide fruit in addition to scratching me. Just as every rose has its thorn, so does every raspberry.

Erica Schumacher

OUR AUGUST 13TH PROGRAM

The morning program will be presented by Ron Rabideau. Ron grew up in Massachusetts loving plants. His dad grew one of the first PJM Rhododendrons in the mid 60s, and taught him to deadhead

rhododendrons when he was twelve which instilled a passionate interest in that genus which has lasted to this day. During high school summers he worked on a vegetable farm.

With a BS in Plant and Soil Science from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst in 1983, Ron worked in various capacities for seven years at a central Massachusetts nursery. In 1989, his persistence in scouting for rare and unusual plants led to the successful bid of his company to find and install unusual plants in The Lawn Garden, at Tower Hill Botanic Garden, in Boylston, MA.



Ron Hiking In China

In 1997 he moved to NJ and was hired by Hank Schannen, a noted Rhododendron expert, to manage the startup of **Rare Find Nursery**. **Rare Find** now offers the widest selection of that genus on the east coast as well as probably the widest selections of magnolias and witch hazels available. They also offer a huge range of other hardy trees, shrubs and perennials including many native and bog plants.

Ron has participated in 4 plant collection expeditions. In 2000 he traveled to Yunnan,

Sichuan and Hunan provinces of China with noted Camellia expert Dr Clifford Parks to study wild camellia populations. In 2002 he explored Southeastern Tibet including the famous Doshong La. In 2005 he explored with a small international group of rhododendron experts to extremely remote northern Arunachal Pradesh, India. Late summer of 2007 found him in the Altai Mountains of southern Siberia.

At **Rare Find**, Ron puts his passion for new plants to work seeking out new and noteworthy plants. He has been hybridizing rhododendrons since about 1987 and grows many seedlings from the Rhododendron Society seed exchange. He has several introductions including 'Absolute Citron'. Ron will show highlights of his two plant exploration trips to China in 2000 and 2002.



Gentiana acaulis at Les Quatre Vents in Quebec

Our afternoon program, titled "In Celebration of Artifice," will be given by Steve Whitesell, from the Manhattan Chapter. He writes: "Since joining NARGS in 1989, my favorite part of membership has been visiting the wonderful private gardens made by

other members. Over the years, I've found that the gardens I respond to most strongly share an affinity for strong architectural forms, rather than attempt to mimic 'natural' forms of rockwork or watercourses. Writers since the birth of rock gardening have emphasized the artifice of rock gardening and the necessity of isolating the rock garden from the rest of the garden. Introducing architectural forms allows gardeners to make a smoother transition from the house to the surrounding landscape, situate the rock garden close to windows and doors, and facilitate easier access to necessary gardening tasks. Successful examples from around the U.S., Canada, and Europe will help support this position."

BNARGS 2011 Program

August 13 - **Ron Rabideau** – *Plant Hunting in China*

Steve Whitesell – *In Celebration of Artifice*

September 3 - **Member's Potpourri**

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

Joyce Hemingson - *Rock Garden Bulbs*

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

DIONYSIA A CHALLENGING BUT GROWABLE GENUS

**TEXT BY HARVEY WRIGHTMAN – IMAGES
BY ESTHER WRIGHTMAN**

The plants in genus *Dionysia* have the reputation of being so demanding in cultural requirements that few people attempt to grow them. In elitist terms, they are beyond "difficult"; they are, "sensitive." They possess beautiful flowers, form tight domes of tiny leaves and have the intriguing habit of growing on near vertical walls with a

ledge of rock protecting them from full sun and weather. They are not easy to please, but are not impossible. As with other "sensitive" plants, we must determine their basic needs.

In culture, they are mostly grown in pots in a sand plunge bed in alpine houses of the specialist growers/collectors. Out of curiosity I bought a few from Roger Barlow some years ago. Those few that I have grown are quite heat



tolerant, but subject to rot from humidity and careless watering. In our greenhouse, we overhead water as a matter of course. But with the *Dionysia* we are especially careful with our watering, making sure that they are allowed to dry off. While we have potted specimens which we sell at the nursery or take with us to a sale, we don't list them as they are too easily damaged in transit. Two days packed in a box is about all they can stand.

Growing them outside is a challenge, but perhaps not so hard as has been imagined. I have noticed that a bigger issue is that they are subject to sun scorch, especially late winter scorch - that is, the side of the plant that faces south will start growth first and the cycle of warm day temperatures with freezing night temperatures is too harsh for the new growth, causing those south-facing rosettes to die-off. The solution is to provide indirect, bright light, mimicking the north facing "under-ledges" that they inhabit in nature.

When Josef Halda was here in 2009, he constructed an "underledge" especially for some *Dionysia* that he saw in our greenhouse. I didn't really hold out much hope; but, 6 out of 8 have survived and the floral display is well worth the



effort. The construction is straightforward: any large slab of stone can be supported and counter-weighted on one end enough that a small den can be dug out on the underside. Make the exposure to the north or north east and the plants will be protected from scorch. Some early day sun is OK, but protection from mid-day sun must be absolute. So far, we have used only some variations of the yellow flowered *Dionysia tapetodes* and a pretty, pale yellow hybrid, 'Annielle'. We'd love to add some variety to the palette.

REPORT ON THE JULY MEETING

Our usual Meeting Recorder has been quite ill for the past 2 months or so; and although he wishes to remain anonymous, a get well note to our only Belgian Chapter member would be appropriate and, I think, appreciated, if any of you feel so inclined. For this month, I will do the honors and try to replace him.

Our last meeting was a two- part "Lori Chips Doing Her Trough Thing," and it was more than I expected. The morning program saw her plant out a HUGE trough, while explaining her every move to the 40 or so Chapter members present. She did a beautiful job both planting and explaining, and the most common reaction after the morning session was that it was one of the best programs we've ever had, and "why don't we have more hands-on programs like Lori's?"

The afternoon session was a workshop in planting troughs. About 10 of our members stayed on, and for over 2 hours were carefully coached by Lori as they planted out the troughs



they had brought. Again, the group was unanimously delighted with the program, and they all indicated that they'd love to have additional programs like this one.

Marge Bingham, one of the participants in the afternoon workshop, took the time and trouble to send me a CD with some photographs, so here are a few more of the people and their troughs.



In between the morning and afternoon session we had an impressive plant sale. Irene and Harvey Wrightman contributed about 45 trough-sized plants to the Chapter, which we sold quite quickly. And as always, Lori brought a few flats of plants from Olivers Nursery, which were sold at a sharp discount, again primarily for the trough planting. There were quite a few other plants available; so overall, it was one of our best sales of the year.



PFG

SOUTHERN NEW ZEALAND RANUNCULACEA

Text and Images by David Toole

The Maori name for New Zealand is Aotearoa, which means “land of the long white cloud.” So it’s appropriate that alpine Ranunculaceae, having a liking for cool damp conditions, are well represented here.

In my home province of Southland, located at the bottom of the South Island, sits the World Heritage area of Fiordland, where snow-capped mountains, rivers of ice, deep lakes, unbroken forests and tussock grasslands produce a landscape of exceptional beauty.

Spectacular *Ranunculus buchananii* flourishes on shady fell field and cliff ledges, where there is ample moisture from snow melt. Sometimes these areas are still under snow in late summer, and it is interesting to observe how far advanced the flowers are under cover, awaiting release.

Ranunculus lyalli, also known as the Mount Cook Lily, also grows nearby on more open, less specific sites. They frequently hybridize,



creating varying foliage forms with large white flowers.

No less impressive is the yellow flowered *Ranunculus sericophyllus*, which colonises snow banks and seepages in sheltered high areas and can often be found flowering in running water. Hybrids between this species and *Ranunculus buchananii* are known to occur in the wild, although I have never been lucky enough to come across them. (Maybe this year??) I understand their combined offspring can result in lemon color flowers.



The Eyre Mountains of Northern Southland, lying inland to the east of the wet granite peaks of Fiordland, have a drier climate. On its thin clay, partially sunny screes you can find *Ranunculus scirithalis*. It is easily overlooked when not in flower because its hairy foliage, which barely appears above the ground, mimics the surrounding rock. The single lemon yellow bloom sits within and is larger than the foliage.

On more mobile greywacke deep screes, *Ranunculus pilifera* can be found. It is a wonderful thick, almost succulent looking foliated plant that can appear in extensive



patches. The waxy looking yellow flowers are found on long stems that extend well above the leaves. Unfortunately, this last season I was just a little too early for peak blooming.



On the provincial border with the drier schist area of Central Otago are the Hector Mountains. This lowland range is home to *Ranunculus pachyrrhizus*, whose caterpillar-like stems creep along and through half buried cool rock crevices, moist gravel hollows and depleted vegetative areas. A number of other grassland species are also there, including *Ranunculus gracilipes*, which in a good year covers the ground in impressive numbers with small yellow individual flowers growing in open areas among the tussocks.

We garden on a very sheltered woodland plot (great for Trilliums, which are my true love!). However, my garden is not ideal for some of the specialized alpine plants that require air

movement and higher light levels. In the past I



used to cultivate a number of New Zealand Ranunculus species in large plastic pots with a mix made up of 50% grit and 50% bark/river sand/peat. I had to pay particular attention to watering and make sure that the pots were placed in a partly sunny position. And, of course, I was careful to protect the plants from green fly. As our winters on the coast here are snow free, the pots were placed under cover for about 3 months with just a little watering.

To maximize the chances of good germination, you must use fresh green seed, sown as soon as possible after collection. In my experience some germination can occur after one winter, with a larger percentage after the second winter.



This brief article only deals with a small number of the Ranunculus species that inhabit the slopes of the mountain ranges of New Zealand. (For example further up the South Island there are extensive areas of screes where other outstanding ‘buttercup’ species flourish.)

Recently I made an exciting find when I came across a natural hybrid between *Ranunculus lyallii* and *Ranunculus godleyanus* –a stunning cream flowered thing. This cross has been successfully repeated by a local alpine nursery in the hope that hybrid vigor will result in easier cultivation.

A VISIT TO JOHN AND BECKY LYNN’S GARDEN

TEXT AND IMAGES BY JUDY BROWN



When Ed and I visited John Spain and Becky Lynn’s gardens in July, we were having the hottest day of the summer. What better weather could we have to experience the finest collection of cacti hardy to the climate of New England? The heat, their extensive outdoor cactus garden and even more in the greenhouse confirmed the feeling that we were in the desert. Fortunately, they also have a lovely woodland garden that winds down the hillside behind the house, avoiding the hot sun. Ferns, shrubs, and hostas are planted under the trees. The paths are close enough together that the wandering visitor can see the center of each section.

Their rock garden on a slope above the house is a wonderful combination of alpine plants, cacti, succulents and conifers, with more hostas in the shadier areas. Lovely Japanese cutleaf maples with leaves of several colors break up the rock garden.

Even though we knew John and Becky give classes on making hypertufa troughs, we were



John Spain

amazed to see the huge number of troughs of varying shapes and sizes behind their house, all planted with alpines and succulents.

We knew that John brings cactus plants to the BNARGS meeting sales, but we were impressed to learn that he has written the only book on growing winter hardy cacti. Ed was pleased to be able to buy an autographed copy of *Growing Winter Hardy Cacti in Cold/Wet Climate Conditions*. It seems that he will be going off on a new bent soon.

THE NARGS SEED EXCHANGE

The next two months our gardens may not be alive with flowers, but our plants WILL be producing seed. And we should be collecting some of that seed for the NARGS Seed Exchange. Our Chapter has some incredible gardens, with incredible plants, and we should be sharing our bounty with the rest of the rock gardening world. So take out a few minutes every day and collect some of that valuable seed for the SeedEx. Go to NARGS.org and click on 'Seed Ex'

FLOWERS FOR A DALAI LAMA

TEXT AND IMAGES BY CHRIS CHADWELL

Despite the heaviest monsoon rains and more landslides than I had experienced during 24 plant-hunting and scientific expeditions along the Himalaya (rains which caused massive flooding in Pakistan and a flash flood claiming over a hundred lives in normally rain-free Ladakh, just to the north), Stage I of this conservation project was completed during autumn 2010. I am grateful to the HPS for an award through The Kenneth Black Legacy; without this funding and associated encouragement this worthwhile project would not have begun.

My first port of call was Dharamsala, Northern India, home to Men Tsee Khang (The Tibetan Medical & Astrological Institute of HH - The Dalai Lama). Training for a Doctor of Traditional Tibetan Medicine is rigorous and takes many years, like that of our GPs. Herbal medicine is still the primary healthcare for Tibetan people – *gSo-ba Rig-pa* (art of healing) is practiced using a rich pharmacopoeia of plants gathered in the wild, plus assorted animal and mineral ingredients combined into formulations administered as powders, tablets, capsules, decoctions, pills, syrups and medicated massage oils from the Institute's clinics or dispensed in remoter districts by local traditional doctors. It is believed that one becomes sick when the three humours (wind, bile and phlegm) produced by the three mental poisons (desire, hatred and stupidity), along with seven constituents (food, blood, flesh, fat, bone, marrow, semen) and three excrements (sweat, urine and feces) are unbalanced. Four factors are responsible for imbalances, namely unsuitable climate, improper diet, improper behavior and the influence of demons!

I delivered lectures to staff and students of the Medical College, on Himalayan plants used in Tibetan medicine, comparing species from Bhutan (where I had been a consultant to The Royal Government in the 1990s, funded by the EU) and Ladakh (where I have named medicinal

species on a voluntary basis) with those found in the Western Himalaya (below).



Operating as I do off a shoe-string budget, I was delighted when my eldest son, adept at using E-Bay, secured a quality second-hand lap-top and digital camera, so thanks to PowerPoint I was able to include the Tibetan and Latin names of each plant with each image, invaluable as few were familiar with the botanical names and I struggled to pronounce some Tibetan ones! Fortunately I was able to lecture in English, and for those who find Latin plant names troublesome, may I stress their value, as without an international botanical language how would we communicate our judgments on the ornamental merit or cultivation requirements of a particular specimen in our gardens? Unless one can compare true like with like, such observations lead to much confusion and no little dispute!

My lectures were thankfully very well received, thanks in part to stories about noteworthy 'herbs' such as *Cordyceps sinensis* (known as 'Caterpillar Fungus,') which is not a plant at all but a moth caterpillar infected by a fungus, the sale of which has raised millions for the Maoist cause in Nepal, and *Ephedra gerardiana* (Joint Pine), recognized for millennia in China as an asthma-treatment, containing an alkaloid for which Maradona tested positive. Later, Mrs Urvashi Suri, daughter of the late Prem Nath Kohli, an Indian forestry officer turned horticulturist and conservationist, presented a Kohli Memorial Gold Medal on behalf of The Sino-Himalayan Plant Association (of which I am founder and editor) in recognition of the significant contribution of the Institute's staff, past and present, to the study of flora used in Tibetan medicine.

The Case for Cultivation: Inspection of the Herb Garden Dharamsala

There has been concern about the conservation of these 'medicinal' species for some time. Tibetan doctors are fully aware of the dangers – it is not just the sustainability of collecting directly from the wild (especially where the roots of medicinal species are required), but also destruction of habitat. Space is strictly limited on the site, with plots of level ground at a particular premium, so what can be spared for the Herb Garden is minimal. Furthermore, the modest elevation (c.1600m) means that few genuinely 'Himalayan' species are suited to that climate. An exception is the tall, adaptable *Inula racemosa*, which displays showy golden-yellow flowerheads; its rhizome alleviates shoulder and neck pain. Many higher-altitude species have been tried and failed – though I suspect a few more could survive, if raised by seed, a conservation friendly method allowing more gradual adjustment than transplanting roots. There is no tradition of cultivating *Sgaos-men* (high-altitude plants which would qualify as hardy in the UK) anywhere in the Himalaya, so even basic gardening techniques are unknown to most traditional doctors. On the other hand, *Throgs-men* (low-altitude plants), which include familiar culinary items such as ginger and pomegranate, are widely grown in tropical and sub-tropical climes.

Much better results have been achieved at the Institute's nursery in Ladakh where some 40 typically Tibetan borderland species are undergoing trials, and Eastern Himalayan species have been successfully raised on land near Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Gangtok (Sikkim). I spent some time in the herbarium assisting the Director, Dr Norbu, with plant identification, and at his request I will return in August, prior to my expedition to Ladakh. This will lead to further contact with members of staff specifically involved in existing cultivation projects. Following visits to various nurseries and trial grounds, I'll be able to make suggestions and recommendations, in reports and illustrated lectures. It is essential that any advice should build upon existing trials and be consistent with traditional practices. Too often,

Western ‘experts’ fly in briefly on major projects and hastily compose reports suggesting ‘improvements’ from their perspective, based solely upon ‘best practice’ in the West. Whilst good on paper, if few of their recommendations are adopted there is little to show for it! Better to make slow, steady progress on a small scale, over several years, which is respectful to the Tibetan way of doing things.

Collection of Seed from Hardy Perennials

I concentrated on what I describe as ‘woodland’ and ‘open location’ herbaceous perennials in the forests and on mountain slopes in the Western Himalaya above 2000m. A good selection was collected from specimens which should prove to be garden worthy though, as always with fresh introductions, an element of experimentation is involved. Most are little known in cultivation and it should be recognized that populations in the wild exhibit considerable variation, such that seedlings raised may exhibit different degrees of ornamental merit.

Seed was sent to the HPS Seed Distribution for specialist groups and experienced growers who we hope will in due course donate seed from the plants raised to the Distribution. The growers will also add to knowledge on cultivation, which I can pass on to Tibetan doctors. It’s particularly useful to know what happens several years on. Most records are limited to germination results during the first year after sowing, as methodical records over a longer period require careful labeling of each pot with both the collector’s abbreviation (in this case CC) and collection number. Please note, the collectors’ numbers are not an ego trip but essential for long-term record keeping, not to mention corrections to identification.

The vast majority of ‘Himalayan’ hardy plants which grace our gardens have a medicinal use e.g. the roots of *Persicaria affinis* (formerly *Polygonum affine*) are used in formulations against lung disorders. I saw it growing gregariously in clumps on rocky ground, seemingly by the millions, the rich red autumn foliage rivaling any of the varieties in cultivation, but not a viable seed could be found!

Noteworthy herbaceous perennials at the fruiting stage during the expedition included: *Arisaema consanguineum* (impressive, numerous narrow leaflets); *Arisaema jacquemontii* (below), which



is likely to prove one of the toughest, quite able to cope with minimal shade; two forms of *Geranium wallicianum* (a highly variable species, best known for ‘Buxton’s Variety’ – the root used for stomach conditions); *Hedychium spicatum* (member of Ginger Family with scented white flowers – its rhizome used for



Geranium wallicianum

poor circulation caused by thickening of blood); *Iris milesii* (distinguished flowers, pale mauve with dark blotches); *Ligularia amplexicaulis* (statuesque and showy yellow flower-heads); *Lilium polyphyllum* (lovely yellowish exteriors, whitish interiors with pink); *Selinum tenuifolium* (attractive umbellifer with dissected foliage and the entire plant is used against fever from poisoning).

It must be stressed that all plants are considered toxic in Tibetan medicine, not just those we classify as poisonous. Their formulations are very much cocktails acting in combination, with anything from a minimum of 3 plant ingredients to more than 100!

Putting Something Back: Advising Tibetan Doctors On Growing Himalayan Hardy Plants

This project is consistent with modern-day conservation practice, a golden opportunity for the HPS to be involved directly in helping the people of the Himalaya through effective cultivation of the species used in Tibetan medicine. After all, many noteworthy garden plants originated in these regions and we, who enjoy growing them in our gardens, owe a collective debt to the countries of origin. Long gone are the days when Britishers, as we are still mostly affectionately known in the Indian sub-continent, simply went and took from what were considered to be 'our' territories. We should be putting something back.

Tibetan Medicine in India

In 2010 India recognized Tibetan medicine as one of its official medical systems, of great significance to the people of Tibet exiled there, and a boost to the Institute. But it requires the ingredients in Tibetan medicines be properly tested – and the only way the results can be transmitted widely is through the use of Latin plant names, of species which have been accurately and reliably identified by Western scientific methods. My unique knowledge of Himalayan flora means I am well placed to assist.

Stage II

Further funding has been received from the Kenneth Black Legacy to support the next stage of this project, which involves a seed-collecting expedition to Ladakh, known as 'Little Tibet', in September, and inspecting the medicinal plant nursery and trial ground near Leh.

NARGS NEWS

I imagine that you're all tremendously excited about the fact that I'm going to be writing about NARGS as if I were President. Wait, I AM President, so I guess I'm obliged to share stuff about NARGS with you, and I guess you're somewhat obliged to read it. Well, maybe not, but please try.

We need volunteers to serve on several committees. The biggest challenge all organizations face is getting people to volunteer, and we're no different. So if you have a few minutes, go to NARGS.org, look around the Committees section and see if there is something that interests you. We could use someone for the Audit Committee, one or two members of the Awards Committee and a couple of other spots I can't recall right now. Let me know if you're interested.

The NARGS Journal Summer Edition is out, and those of you who belong to NARGS should have received it already. For those who are not members, the Journal is really quite good now, much more interesting to read, and much more attractive just to ramble through. Malcolm Macgregor is a terrific editor, and I am confident that the Journal alone is worth the cost of a NARGS membership.

Next March, the Annual Meeting will be in Everett, WA, and will focus on the Eastern Cascades, an area not especially well known to rock gardeners. Please consider going, and check out the NARGS website for more information.

Although the workload is rather overwhelming, I'm pleased that I'm in a position to help move NARGS along, particularly in the area of technology. There are plans to put the Seed Exchange entirely online this fall; we now have a member database which ought to be online soon as well; and we're working on a shopping cart and credit card capabilities. Visit the website and the Forum and see how far we've come. See you on the 13th!

PF

Positions of Responsibility

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Vice-Chairperson – Joyce Hemingson
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Speaker Housing – Anne Spiegel

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