



# Newsletter

North American Rock Garden Society  
Berkshire Chapter August 2013

*campanula hybrid, lavender, and hakonechloa (photo by Dave Gehrs)*



## Next Meeting:

### August 3rd

am: Bill Brown

pm: Joyce Hemingson

### Sept 7th

am: Abby Zabar - Gardens: In Spite of the Odds

pm: the Big Plant Sale

### October 12th - Ian Young am & pm\*

\*Everyone please notice we have Ian Young of Scotland from the NARGS speaker tour coming in October. This is a special treat for us. it would be good to think of some publicity to share his visit, as well as our other speakers.

### July meeting notes

The proceedings started with a few remarks by Peter George, who had just been reelected as NARGS President last month. He mentioned that work on the new design for the WEB site was completed, So was the scanning of all the Bulletins and Quarterlies which are now available in electronic format. Some work and reorganisation are taking place in our Speaker's Tour program. He observed that considering all these offerings one would expect most if not all members of chapters to be members of NARGS, but that regrettably it was not always the case.

He also talked briefly about the NARGS Awards, their significance, how they recognize the outstanding work and activities of some persons in pursuing what are the main goals and interests of the Society. This lead smoothly and naturally to an announcement: NARGS has given the Marcel Le Piniec Award to John Spain. The announcement was greeted with prolonged and vigorous applause.

In presenting the official diploma to John, Peter pointed out to the new design embellished with a nice plant drawing by one of our premier botanical illustrators: Lori Chips.

The rest of the program consisted of two talks by Martha Oliver.

In the morning the subject was plant breeding. Not a dry and technically boring 'plant breeding 101', but a superb survey of all aspects of the subject, based on the many years of experience of the speaker and her husband Charles. Fortunately the Olivers had worked mainly with the genus

heuchera, a genus which has not been so worked over and over, that they had

to take all the steps from the very beginning and verify and apply interesting principles. Starting with the choice of parents, up to mass production and patenting. Two interesting observations, among many others: in selecting material in the wild one should prefer plants found living in harsh conditions: they impart more vigor and adaptability. One has to know how to store pollen properly: how else can one hope to cross species which bloom at different times or in distant regions? It was a great talk, and for those who wanted to know more and more details, Martha was willing and ready with great answers.

After lunch she spoke about plants of the Shale Barrens (with a subtitle "what we can grow"). The Shale Barrens are a small region squeezed between Virginia and West Virginia and offers rather special growing conditions, not like some of our hot humid summers. In fact these conditions may seem a bit harsh, yet we can grow many of these plants, although it must be recognized that they do not take competition happily. A shortened list includes *Phlox buckleyi*, *Opuntia humifusa*, *Saxifraga virginiana*; rather unexpectedly *Epigaea repens*; a nice *Eriogonum* but at up to 2' it is a bit tall for the rock garden; *Viola pedata* in various forms, all very cute; *Sedum ternatum*, very tiny, white flowered, doing well in the shade; *Antennaria virginica*, cute, tiny, 2" tall, easy from seeds, a good trough plant.

All this would have made a richly rewarding meeting but there was more. At the usual Show and Tell time we saw an unusual flowering *Rhododendron yakusimanum* brought by Elliott Jessen, and a rare *Calandrinia umbellata* grown from seeds by Elisabeth Zander. There was a good plant sale to which Lori Chips and others had brought quite a few unusual and interesting plants. However, the star was a superb intersectional peony "Copper Kettle" nicely shaped, in bloom and big: it took two persons to lift and move the tub in which it was growing. Truly a WOW plant. It was not part of the sale but was auctioned off separately. The plant had been brought by Alex and Lynn Kenner. Thanks you both.

\* A note from the chairperson Judy Brown: Thank you to Joyce for generously bringing the ice cream to the July meeting, it was appreciated by all!



## **Lets here it for one of our members John Spain!**

*Photo of John Spain by Elisabeth Zander*

As everyone in the Berkshire Chapter knows, John Spain is an expert on winter hardy cactus. He is also knowledgeable about various succulents used in the rock garden; more than casually familiar with dwarf conifers and woodland plants; and unusually adept with tender succulents and cacti as well. He wrote the book on winter hardy cactus, and his own collections and introductions are part of many of our own gardens. And John and Becky Lynn have become a part of our botanical lives in many other ways, with their willingness to share their knowledge and plants, their humor and good cheer, and their genuine interest in each of us as people.

So when the time came for the NARGS Awards Committee to begin the process of selecting award recipients for 2013, I knew that I was going to nominate John for something. But I had some difficulty figuring out exactly which award to nominate him for. His garden is certainly worthy of an award, and that was my initial thought. But after thinking about John – whom I've known since I joined NARGS in 1995 – it became clear that, as great as John's garden is, his most impressive achievement has been his role in introducing winter hardy cactus to the rock gardening community. So all I had to do was figure out which was the right award to honor that particular accomplishment. I decided that the Marcel Le Piniec Award was the perfect choice. The Committee showed great intelligence in agreeing with me, and John got his well deserved award, which we presented to him at the June BNARGS meeting.

I think that the best part of my job as NARGS President is making sure that deserving people get their due, and John's award has been one of this year's high points for me. There are many others who have yet to receive recognition they deserve, but at least I know I helped bring a smile to John's face, a small payment for the pleasure that knowing him has brought me over the years.

One additional person related to this (and the other NARGS awards) deserves special mention. I asked Lori Chips, another of our estimable BNARGS members, to re-design every NARGS award. Her efforts have been extraordinary, creating beautiful, evocative and botanically correct designs which are worthy of their recipients.

Peter George

*The Marcel Le Piniec Award was established in 1969 and is given to a nursery person, propagator, hybridizer, or plant explorer who is currently actively engaged in extending and enriching the plant material available to rock gardeners. This may be a joint award if two people have worked closely together. The recipient need not be a member of NARGS.*

<https://www.nargs.org/north-american-rock-garden-society-awards>



## Creating Moss Gardens

by Erica Schumacher

One of the things I like most about attending BNARGS meetings is the wonderful people that attend them, many of us driving over an hour each month. A fun part of the meetings for me is show-n-tell, where much like in kindergarten people bring interesting things to share with others. Unlike in kindergarten, instead of stuffed animals and toys, I am often treated to seeing unique plants, new garden tools and sometimes even a brief description of a new gardening technique.

At our most recent meeting John Spain showed us how we can use extra plant saucers, pieces of tufa and other materials to make beautiful and interesting moss gardens. The best part is that picking what you want the moss to grow on sounds like the most difficult part. Basically, he sets up the media that he wants the moss to grow on and places it somewhere near where there is moss. He made it very clear that he is not pre-treating with buttermilk. At most, I think he sometimes scatters bit of moss on top to speed up the seeding process. He makes sure that the moss garden is placed somewhere that it can accumulate rain water, but only when standing water remains does he drain the moss garden. The rest is left to nature. As seen in these photos, he has accumulated an interesting collection of moss.



I love his approach to moss gardening both for its simplicity and its creative use of native plants in the garden.



## Gehrs' Garden by Judy Brown



photos by Judy Brown

On July 20, our newsletter editor David Gehrs opened his gardens, Frog Hollow, to the public. Since Ed and I are always interested in seeing what others are doing in their gardens, we traveled up the Northway to see what David had growing. We were blown away by the hundreds to thousands of daylilies. David not only has every color daylily imaginable, but he has hybridized and patented three. His wife Katie slaked our thirsts with iced tea while their dog Gracie followed us around the gardens. It was almost impossible to believe that so much was growing on one acre of land. The second miracle is that they have no deer nibbling on the delicious buds of the daylilies. Perhaps the horses next door are deterring them.



Gehrs' hybrid daylily



Of course, David has rock gardens as well. He mentioned that they were overgrown, but they looked fine to us, especially with Gracie lounging in one of them.





Gracie chilling in the rock garden



A few Gehrs' hybrid daylilies



Within his one acre of gardens Dave has garden rooms with cattails growing in a bog, water features, shade gardens, and a fire pit surrounded by flowers. Unfortunately, my camera missed these because there were so many gorgeous daylilies to photograph.

**Berkshire Chapter -- 2013  
Positions of Responsibility**

Chairperson - Judith Brown  
Vice-Chairperson - Dean Evans  
Secretary - Carol Hanby  
Treasurer - Pamela Johnson/Thomas  
Flanigan  
Newsletter - David Gehrs

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