

Newsletter

*North American Rock Garden Society
Berkshire Chapter April 2014*

**Next Meeting:
Saturday, May 3, @ 9:30 AM**

Peter George's Garden at 22 South
Main St.
Petersham, MA 01366



Open Garden Visits

Come to Peter George's and Bruce
Lockhart's Gardens in Petersham, MA

Arrive at 22 South Main St., Petersham
at 9:30, spend some time perusing the
early season blooms, some weeds and a
few plants that are still in dormancy,
nibble the cheese and crackers, sip
some tea or coffee and then move on to
Bruce's beautiful garden 1/3 of a mile
away. Stay as long as you like, or
wander over to the open house at
Garden Vision Epimediums in
Philipston, MA, a 10-minute-ride, or if
you're really ambitious, the New
England Primula group is having it's
meeting at Tower Hill in Boylston,
MA, about 1 hour away.

See You Saturday!

I welcome food contributions, if you feel
so inclined. And please let me know if you
have any special dietary issues, so nobody
leaves hungry.

EARLY MAY MUSINGS



No one can fill a volunteer position
forever. I've served happily as the editor
of the BNARGS newsletter for close to a
decade now. But I recognize that at some point,
perhaps sooner than I'd like, I'm going to have to
cut back on some of my activities, and this job as
newsletter editor is certainly vulnerable to a
change in my personal status. So I'm beginning
this month's column with a brief comment on the
job of newsletter editor. I'd like other BNARGS
members to understand what the job entails, how
I do it, and how they could do it when I step away
permanently.

First of all, the editor should write a monthly
column. Obviously it's supposed to be
interesting and informative, but it doesn't have to
be long or especially "literary." Each month I
wait for a sort of epiphany, which always finds a
way to announce itself about 3 weeks after my
previous effort. Frequently the topic relates to
what's happening (or not happening) in the
garden at that particular time of year. Once I get
the idea, I simply sit down at the computer and
write it. Usually I go through a few drafts, and
given the timelines I operate under, that takes a
day or two. Then it goes to my editor, Marty
Aisenberg, who turns my workmanlike effort into
something almost literary.

Second, the editor needs to get others to contribute material to the newsletter. A few weeks before the deadline for each newsletter, I ask several people to submit articles. I almost always choose a topic and then sometimes discuss it with the person before they agree to write it; I've found that most people respond better to a specific topic rather than a general request for material. Over the years I've learned when and how to ask the people I'd like to write articles, and after years of badgering, I need to do very little pushing to get the material I need for each issue.

Third, the editor has to lay out the material attractively within the newsletter. When I receive the contributors' articles – usually later in the month than I'd like – I read them, correct any spelling or punctuation errors, and then begin the layout. I've learned a lot about layout, fonts and color from Abbie Zabar, who has been an advisor of sorts for years; I will always be grateful for her support and encouragement. I use the same format I inherited years ago; it has been updated as Word has been updated, but remains much the same to the casual observer. The format is simple but elegant, and it's exceptionally easy to drop material in without the formatting challenges that other software requires. I've learned how to move photographs into the text, how to change the location and shape of photos to fit the article, and how to make the titles look simple but elegant. When it's done, I re-read the whole thing to make sure it all makes sense and flows well from beginning to end, and then it goes off to Joyce for distribution. That's it. It's a lot of work for a couple of days at deadline time, but in the end, it's work I love, and hopefully all of you get some enjoyment from the end product.

Anyone could learn to lay out the newsletter with a few hours of practice and a little help from me – and someone's going to have to take over the job one of these days, so if you're interested, please let me know.

This month the Chapter is meeting at my garden on May 3rd. I'm excited to have visitors, particularly after such a long and dreary winter. My garden is beginning to look like a garden, rather than a rocky swamp, but I'm still

not confident that many plants that normally are in bloom by early May will, in fact, be in bloom by early May this year. But we all know the challenges we face as gardeners, and I won't apologize for what I can't control. So please come on Saturday and enjoy the company and (hopefully) the garden as well.

Peter George

TOMMY THE TERRIER

DEAN EVANS



If you can't break that social barrier,
Could use an axe handle to measure your derriere,
Should be more active and merrier,
You need a rat terrier.

If your eyes and ears have faded from your years
He's alert to everything he hears – Shazam

On the fleetest of feet
He'll catch a creature that's not effete and hard to
beat
He's a rat terrier.

When my life was on the wane
With my hip a throbbing pain,
I got him as a companion from the Amish in Fort
Plain

While convalescing in my bed
Pondering what's next –being dead?
He'd lay there all day by my side;
When it was time for he or me to go outside and find
our tree
He slowly trod beside my walker, then watched me
do my therapy-
My 11 pound physical therapist worked me like a dog

He's stretched out upon my lap –
We've just awakened from our power nap – Shazam

He's my dog.

WHAT'S BLOOMING NOW?

JOYCE HEMINGSON'S GARDEN

Like all our gardens, mine is an ongoing collection of plants from many sources, with family, friends, meetings, trips and nurseries mingling together in my mind's eye as I work in it.



Yellow Dwarf Iris: Erica Schumacher often brings dwarf iris to our monthly plant sales, and this is one of hers. It stands about 4 inches tall and has bulked up well.



A soft yellow Primula with emerging bullet-like shoots of *Polygonatum odoratum* 'Variegatum'. Nancy Chute gave me the primula -- someone may know if the species is *P. elatior*?



***Corydalis nobilis*:** This large *Corydalis* from Seneca Hills Perennials produces handsome maroon-tipped yellow flowers in an interesting spiral arrangement. Plants disappear during the summer.



Helleborus orientalis with Narcissus in the background. Dark maroon or dusky pink Hellebore flowers need contrasting colors to show off in the spring. Daffodils help.

PETER GEORGE'S GARDEN



Erythronium americanum: Our native eastern Trout Lily, also known as Dog's-tooth-violet (the small white corms resemble teeth). You may have noticed that only mature plants producing 2 leaves will bear flowers. Plants can propagate from spaghetti-like vegetative offshoots, most noticeable after flowering is past.



Corydalis solida is a little bulb for partial shade and good soil. Plants go dormant in summer, so remember where they are located and try not to disturb. Self-sows nicely and forms new clumps.



Scilla siberica: -- with a honeybee near the right side of photo. Blue is useful in the spring garden as a contrast to so many whites and yellows. This scilla spreads by seed into the lawn and keeps ahead of the voles.

Like Joyce's garden, and so many others in our group, my garden is a collection of plants from friends, seeds, nurseries, and from our own BNARGS plant sales. At times I've considered adding the name of the person from whom I've gotten the plant to the labels I often use, but for now I'm still relying on my memory. In early spring many of the blooms are truly ephemeral, so many might be gone by Saturday, when many of you will be visiting.



Pulsatilla vernalis: A small and delicate pasque flower, it blooms early and its yellow and white flowers close to a subtle lavender after they are pollinated. It's taken me 3 years to get the plant to this stage from NARGS seed.



Corydalis schanginii* ssp. *schanginii: A small but lovely corydalis that features huge (by corydaline standards) flowers of soft rose-pink on long racemes above the fleshy gray leaves. It has been with me for almost a decade, which is when I purchased it from Russell Stafford's *Odyssey Bulbs* in Lancaster, MA.

<http://odysseybulbs.com/>

ELISABETH ZANDER'S GARDEN

IMAGES BY ELISABETH ZANDER



Every year I buy a few rooted sax cuttings from *Wrightman's Nursery*, and this one was set into some tufa about 7 years ago. It has grown well, and blooms reliably each spring. This year, due to the snow cover I suspect, all my saxes have done quite well, and most are in bloom right now.



I purchased these miniature daffodils from *Nancy R. Wilson Bulbs* a long time ago, when I first started rock gardening. They have spread a bit, but have remained within the areas I originally intended them to be, and they bloom every year in late April and last 3 to 4 weeks.



What is spring without a few drabas showing their yellow blooms while everything else around them is still brown or just showing above the ground?

The rock garden had many setbacks this past winter. But now that the weather has turned, plants are showing their heads. Some are even full of bloom. Here's a pictorial trip around the beds:



Aethionema oppositifolia



Syntheris missurica



Saxifraga 'Paul Gaugin'

MARVELOUS MEMBERS

IMAGES BY ELISABETH ZANDER

After much planning by BNARGS board members, especially Elisabeth Zander, a trough workshop was successfully executed at the April meeting. The executive board was hoping to attract people who had never been to one of our meetings. To this end, Nancy Chute sent out press releases to many papers and email lots of garden clubs. Because of her efforts, we did have two new trough makers who joined BNARGS while working on their troughs.



Joyce Hemingson & Alex Kenner

Many thanks to Rod Zander for bringing a cement mixer and making innumerable batches of hypertufa mix and to Dean Evans who procured and delivered the 96 pound bags of cement, the peat, and the fibers. Lori Chips was kept busy overseeing the various troughs that people were making and talking about how to avoid slump. Some members made two troughs: one for themselves and one to plant and donate to the sale in September. All together it was a fun Saturday with temperatures in the 50's, not the 90's that we worked in last summer.



Mike Liu & Jacques Mommens

Marvelous member Lori Chips brought the brochures that she designed. We are hoping that

members will distribute these to places where new members will be attracted. The money for the printing of these brochures came from the discretionary funds of BNARGS member and NARGS president Peter George. In May Peter will not only open his gardens to BNARGS members, he has offered to feed us lunch. His generosity as well as that of all our members is greatly appreciated!

Judith Brown, Chairperson

NURSERY NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON WITH OUR
FAVORITE SUPPLIERS OF PLANTS

ODYSSEY BULBS

RUSSELL STAFFORD, OWNER AND
FACTOTUM



Arisaema candidissimum

The 2014 Odyssey Bulbs catalog is now on line. As always, we offer an extensive selection of some of the rarest and best hardy bulbs, corms, rhizomes, tubers, and other geophytic marvels for American gardens. And as always, among the delights are a few that are making their catalog debut, including the splendid fall-blooming snowdrop *Galanthus elwesii* ssp. *monostictus* Hiemalis Group ex Highdown (little bulb; big name); a beautiful pink-flowered selection of the spring-blooming snowflake *Leucojum*

trichophyllum; and several other species whose common names have no mention whatever of frozen precipitation in any form (something that we'd rather not hear mention of anyway after a winter that has not lacked for it). Happy browsing!



Tulipa kaufmanniana 'Ugam'

Wishing you every garden success and a dazzling spring (and summer and fall and winter!).

BEAVER CREEK GREENHOUSES

ROGER AND DEBBIE BARLOW

Beaver Creek Greenhouses is a mail-order specialty nursery located in the Selkirk Range in SE British Columbia just north of the US/Canadian border. Tucked into the east-facing slope of a narrow north-south valley at an elevation of approximately 2000' above sea level, our site would rate a cold Zone 5 on the USDA climate chart. Winters are long, quite cold with occasional lows to -30C (-20F) but with reliable heavy snowfall that helps to protect outdoor plantings. Spring weather is generally cool & unstable. Summers are short & hot but due to the elevation & surrounding forested hills, even very warm days are followed by cool evenings. Autumn is a long & drawn out season giving the

plants ample time to harden up & prepare for winter.



Stock Plants at the Nursery

Since the early 1980's we have been growing & selling a wide range of perennial plants. Over the last five years or so, we have narrowed our focus to concentrate on dwarf hardy plants suitable for growing in rock, woodland & alpine gardens as well as in the container plantings known as alpine troughs. We are also steadily increasing the number & variety of native plants we grow including many that feature substantial drought tolerance. All the plants we sell are grown here at the nursery. Many are propagated by means of seed, cuttings & divisions from the large collection of stock plants we maintain. In addition, we travel to various areas of Western North America each summer collecting seed of native alpine and dryland plants for trial & growing on at the nursery. Additional seed comes from exchanges with fellow nurserymen and seed collectors all over the world.

We ship our plants throughout Canada & the United States while our seed is shipped to customers all over the world. Please note however that all sales are done via mail-order only, we regret that with our limited space and staff, the nursery is not open to on-site shopping - we thank you for your understanding! We do attend various trade sales, conferences & garden shows in Western Canada & the United States through the year. We are always happy to meet customers at these sales, putting faces to names & orders is always great fun!

Many of the plants we grow are alpiners - that is, low-growing perennials that grow near or above tree line in mountainous regions around the world. Increasingly however these mountain plants are being joined in our lists & collection by dwarf perennials from dryland regions of

Western North America, Turkey, Central Asia & elsewhere. Both groups of plants share many of the same adaptations to help cope with the severe challenges of their environments. Both must deal with high levels of ultraviolet light, brutal temperature changes night to day & season to season, fierce winds and periodic drought conditions. The adaptations these species have had to make to grow in these extreme environments make them especially attractive to gardeners seeking to recreate naturalistic gardens in small spaces. Most obvious among these



Seed collecting, White Cloud Peaks, Idaho

adaptations is the compact low growth habit often manifested as mats, cushions or tight domed 'buns' - all shapes that deflect & lessen damage by battering high winds & simultaneously minimize moisture loss. Foliage of both alpins & dwarf dryland plants are often wooly or densely coated with a pelt of fine hairs that provides protection from high levels of ultraviolet light. Others have succulent foliage to help retard moisture loss. Whether wooly or succulent, the foliage of many of these wonderful hardy plants is also more or less evergreen. This is an important consideration as the foliage of any garden plant is on display all year round (unless of course under snow!) while blooms are often of only fleeting duration. Few other groups of plants can boast such a rich diversity of foliage color, texture, shape and arrangement.

Foliage interest aside, these dwarf plants also often feature great 'flower power'. In nature, even small plants need to attract pollinators & in challenging environments like mountain slopes & high dry tundra, this can be even more difficult to

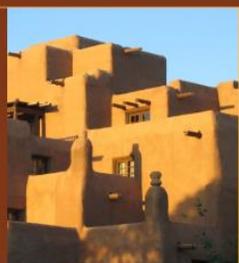
achieve. As a result, the blooms on many of these dwarf plants tend to be large & showy, often quite out of proportion to the diminutive size of the plant itself! Colors too can be particularly rich & vibrant while a surprising number of species also



Lomatium canbya

feature fragrant blooms to further entice the all-important insect pollinators. The culture of alpine & dry land rock garden plants has something to offer to all levels of gardeners, from easy to grow vigorous carpeting plants smothered under sheets of brilliant springtime blooms to the choicest high alpine rarities that can offer a worthy challenge to the skill of even the finest 'green thumb'. We hope you enjoy browsing our website & plant lists & find within some alpine & dryland gems to grace your own rock garden!

Register for
AGM 2014
Santa Fe, NM
Aug 28-30, 2014



www.nargs.org

Check the Program page
of our website for the
full list of 2014
programs

<http://bnargs.org/Program.htm>

Positions of Responsibility

Chairperson - Judy Brown
Vice-Chairperson – Dean Evans
Secretary – Carol Hanby
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Audio Visual Chairperson - Joe Berman
Greeter – Open
Independent Director – Erica Schumacher
Newsletter Editor – Peter George
Meeting Recorder – Jacques Mommens
Plant Sale Chairperson – Peter George
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Speaker Housing – Anne Spiegel
Webmaster – Joyce Hemingson

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Please contact the Editor before reprinting
articles

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