



Newsletter

North American Rock Garden Society
Connecticut Chapter March/April 2011



APRIL MEETING

Saturday, 16 April 2011, 10 am
Quackin' Grass Nursery, 16 Laurel Hill Rd.,
Brooklyn, CT

Program: Slide presentation, topic not yet decided.

Notes: A number of books from the library of Peggy Taylor will be available for purchase/auction. And, if there is no late snow cover, we hope to have divisions of *Shortia galacifolia*, from Peggy's garden, for auction.

Bring your lunch, a chair, and a plant for auction or show and tell.

Quackin' Grass is a destination nursery. Its many display beds feature woodland, xeric and alpine plants, as well as those for the mixed border. Wayne Paquette, the owner, tells me to expect many new items for sale: a number of very late - Sept./Oct. - blooming daylilies (HH. 'The Last Melon', 'Butterscotch Harvest', 'Angles of White', 'Secured Borders'); *Disporum cantoniense* 'Night Heron'; *Geranium maculatum* 'Hazel Gallagher', a white flowering variant of the native; *Clematis fremontii*; *Helleborus argutifolius* 'Pacific Frost' with speckled foliage; a long-blooming *Epimedium* 'Amber Queen'; *Crocsmia* 'Distant Planet'.

Directions: From Hartford, take Rte.6 east to the town of Brooklyn. Watch for the Nursery/CT Grown sign on the right side of the road. Slow down. Laurel Hill is the next left. The nursery is the 2nd driveway on the right. If you come to the intersection of Rtes. 6 and 169, you have traveled exactly one mile too far.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Welcome Spring! Snow is almost gone from my yard. The Winter Aconites are blooming as are snow drops (in areas near the house). The Adonis bloomed yesterday and the Trailing Arbutus is in bud. The alpines in my troughs which were under several feet of snow, covered with boughs, survived. Time will tell how robust they are. I attended the Philadelphia Flower Show and took note of the **many** small troughs that displayed cactus, alpines and a variety of plants. A talk was given by Betty Mackey on "Making and Planting a Mudcrete Container", using a recipe similar to hypertufa. The main difference is addition of soil to the mixture. Copies of her handout will be available at our meeting.

Reminder: The **NARGS 2011 NATIONAL MEETING** will be held **June 17-19** in New London, New Hampshire (in the Lake Sunapee region). A **stipend of \$300** is available for members who have never attended a national meeting before...or as a reward for a member for their contribution to the chapter. The goal of the stipend program is to encourage participation at the local Chapter Level. To apply for a stipend, please send an e-mail or letter in writing to me.

Maryanne is doing an excellent job as newsletter editor. She would appreciate contributions from members: articles about plants (your favorite, tips for success...) and, as always, **suggestions** for workshops, speakers, garden tours are welcome.

Ginny



MEETING REPORT: 19 February 2011

By Maryanne Gryboski

A lively and enthusiastic group of 13 met at the home of Maryanne Gryboski for the February seed sowing workshop. **Dianne Huling**, five gallon pails of germinating mix in hand, led the attendees through a protocol that has served her for decades.

She uses a 1:1 of Fafard superfine germinating mix and grit, moistened to a damp-sponge consistency. Fill 3" pots with this mix, top-water the pots, thinly sow seed on the wet medium, and cover with a thin layer of sifted construction sand. If seed is very fine and dust-like, press it onto the wet medium for good contact but don't cover with sand. (If seed needs to be scarified, abrade it before sowing.)

Dianne places her pots in plastic trays and puts them outside if the seeds need to be stratified, or tops them with a clear plastic cover to maintain a moist environment and puts them on heat mats (any consistently warm - about 70 degree F - area will work). If light is necessary for germination, she recommends placing pots about 3" below the light element. For best results, she uses 1½" diameter fluorescent lights: 4360 lumens, 75 watts, 12,000 hours, 88CRI, 6500K. Once germination takes place, remove the cover so seedlings are exposed to good air circulation.

To pot seedlings on, Dianne's first suggestion is to forget the first-pair-of-true-leaves dictum and not be in a hurry. A better established seedling is easier to handle and less likely to be damaged in transition. For potting medium she uses a 1:1:1 of Pro Mix BX with biofungicide, Sun Gro Metro Mix 560 with coir, and grit, which is then dampened. Place medium in pot and make a hole with a small tool or one's finger. Prick out seedlings and place one into this hole, tamping the medium around the root mass. Since the rooting medium and the potting medium are both already damp, no watering is immediately necessary. Potted on seedlings can go right under lights.

Attendees then rummaged through the hundred-odd seed packets before beginning the ritual of mix-into-pot,

seed-onto-mix, pot-into-tray. Both Dianne and Judy Gasparino brought seedlings to share with the group as well, and their generosity was appreciated. Attendees went home with arms full of pots, visions of flora dancing in our heads and a sense of having spent a very satisfactory morning with gardening friends.



NORTHEAST SPEAKER TOUR

Chris Chadwell, modern-day plant hunter and veteran of 23 expeditions along the Himalaya from Kashmir through the borderlands of western Tibet into Nepal, is the leading authority on the study and cultivation of plants from this region. He is on speaker-tour this spring in the Northeast, and was originally booked to present to our chapter in late May. However, personal issues have necessitated that he cut short his tour. Although this is a loss for the CT chapter, you nevertheless have the opportunity to hear him at other area venues:

- American Primrose Society National Show, April 30, at Tower Hill Botanic Garden, Boylston, MA
- Berkshire NARGS, May 14, at Berkshire Botanical Gardens, Stockbridge, MA
- New England NARGS, May 15, at Assabet River National Wildlife Refuge, Sudbury, MA

For more information, check web sites of the above.

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PROGRAMS: Please talk to one of the officers if you are interested in the Programs Chair position.

NEWS FROM EASTON

By Barbara van Achterberg

2010-2011 was the winter of our discontent, the winter with 4 major snowstorms here in Easton, one dropping 27 inches of wet snow requiring 4 thrusts of the shovel to lift each foot of snow. Our driveway, a tenth of a mile long, was a sheet of ice after each welcome visit from the guy with the snowplow. Did I tell you the driveway drops 20 feet on each side over the brook? Every time I drove anywhere I gripped the steering wheel and said a prayer. If we wanted to reach our chicken house and compost pile (and we did) the paths had to be dug and re-dug by hand. That was my job, as Johan's cardiologist wouldn't let him shovel. On January 31, our 5-year old grandson, Will, walked the path to the chicken house and discovered the first egg of the new year.



But finally winter's end is in sight! Any snow in March is sure to melt fast - isn't it? It has completely melted on the south slope from our terrace to the grass below. Snowdrops and this beautiful clump of winter aconites are blooming there today, March 8.



Today, the rock garden has its first two *Crocus sieberi* blooms and a single golden bud of *Adonis amurensis*, right on time. Other parts in the garden remain white, with some drifts left by the plow still 4 feet high. As

the glacier recedes, I find pachysandra clumps 30 feet away from their bed, and many broken branches, especially of rhododendrons and holly. Two rhododendrons have alarmingly drooping leaves, even on a mild day like today. I suspect that the low growing plants, still cozy under the snow pack, will come through just fine, as will my two large troughs under that high mound of snow behind Will's head in the first picture.

The 8 by 13 foot greenhouse, insulated but unheated except through a window cranked slightly open all winter from the attached dining room, had major ice dams this year for the first time. Every winter we let the temperature in the greenhouse go down to the mid-thirties, but never before have we had ice dams like this. But then, never before have we had 7 foot icicles hanging from the greenhouse eaves and the eaves all around the house! At least only the greenhouse leaked. Just yesterday I took down all the buckets I put out to catch the leaks. The plants did not need any watering - they got it through the windows and skylights. But at least the roof held; raking the snow off was impossible. It was built well by Johan back in 1989.

Speaking of the greenhouse, 7 pots of seeds planted January 15 from NARGS seed have germinated there: *Draba cappadoccia* - yellow; *Erigeron aureus* - yellow; *Linum perenne* - blue (for my new cutting garden); *Nemophila menziesii* - blue/white; *Oxytropis pseudocarpa* - purple; *Phacelia campanularia* - blue (another taller one); and *Primula elatior* - pale yellow. A pot of *Fritillaria meleagris* germinated from last year's planting. Other plants kept in the greenhouse are blooming: *Hepatica americana*, its flowers the same shade of blue as the flowers of the dwarf rosemary shrub behind it; *Primula vulgaris*, with its wonderfully fragrant flowers in the color for which primrose yellow was named; and numerous *Cyclamen coum*, all pink, but with varying leaf markings.

Finally, we are once again, after some years, tapping our sugar maples; this year only three taps, one in each tree on our terrace. We planted those trees in 1975 and 1976 and they now give us needed shade all summer and the sweetest of syrups. The wood stove in the basement which partially heats our house also cooks down the sap, and we finish it under close supervision in the kitchen. But now that the crocuses begin to show, the season won't last much longer. Please excuse me while I go out to gather the sap, and then take another tour around the garden. Maybe something else will be coming through.

BOOK REVIEW

The Caucasus and Its Flowers

Vojtech Holubec & Pavel Krivka, LOXIA 2006

This sumptuous book, written primarily for “lovers of mountain flora and growers of rock garden plants,” is divided into two main sections. The first gives a history of botanical exploration in the region, followed by its geography, geology and climate and how these elements are reflected in its vegetation. Zonal maps and landscape photographs visually add to the understanding of the conditions under which these plants grow.

The second and larger section is composed of plant portraits. Over 500 species, almost all with accompanying photograph(s), are listed. Thorough plant descriptions, habitat, distribution and cultivation suggestions are included. Thumbing through this section, one cannot help but begin a wish list for future seed exchanges.

This beautifully illustrated book is certainly one you will want to sit down with. Take advantage of the chapter’s copy; borrow it soon.

Maryanne Gryboski



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UPCOMING EVENTS

CT Cactus & Succulent Society Annual Show

April 9 & 10, at Naugatuck Valley Community College
Speakers – Vendors – Free Admission
www.ctcactusclub.com

Stonecrop Gardens Alpine Sale

April 23, at Stonecrop Gardens, Cold Spring, NY
Wrightman Alpines, Evermay Nursery, Garden Vision
Epimediums & more - \$5 Admission
www.stonecrop.org

American Primrose Society National Show

April 30 & May 1, at Tower Hill Botanic Garden,
Boylston, MA. Rocky Dale Nursery, Mountain Brook
Primroses, Joe Pye Weed’s Garden & more
www.americanprimrosesociety.org

CT NARGS – Anne Spiegel’s Garden

Sunday, May 15, carpool to the garden of Anne Spiegel
in Wappingers Falls, NY. This open, windy, sun-baked
garden is a steep area of stepped ledges with extensive
scree, sand beds, and crevice gardens. Details
provided in the May Newsletter.