



# Newsletter

**North American Rock Garden Society**  
Connecticut Chapter March/April 2013

## MARCH MEETING

Saturday, March 9, 2013 10:30am  
Tolland Agricultural Center (TAC)  
Vernon, CT

**Speaker: Betty Ann Addison**

**Betty Ann Addison** from Gardens of Rice Creek in Minneapolis, MN will give two presentations. The morning presentation (11am) is entitled *Landscaping with Rock and Alpine Plants*. Many believe that rock gardens are the highest horticultural art. The combination of rocks and rare mountain plants brings to our gardens an aspect of wonder. Sun, shade, wet soil or desert lovers can all thrive in northern rock gardens. Illustrations of colorful alpinines and their niches in the wild and then in garden interpretations will inspire your own garden design.

The afternoon talk (c12:45) is *Breeding Hardy Rhododendrons: Flower to Flower*. Beautiful species and hybrids of this fantastic flowering shrub may be combined to create totally new plants. Besides being fun, hybridizing adds a deeper appreciation of rhododendrons. Betty Ann grows many of Connecticut's favorites in Minnesota and has used them to create new hybrids. She will share novel techniques to create and grow on hardy hybrids that will enable you to produce your own new plants.

Betty Ann Addison has over 40 years experience growing alpinines and building nature-inspired landscapes with them. Designing gardens with year-round interest that seem to organically grow from their site is her specialty. Visit <http://www.gardensofricecreek.com>.

Bring lunch; there will be plants for auction.

Directions to TAC: From I-84, take exit 67. If traveling eastbound, take left off the exit; if traveling westbound, take a right. Turn right at the light at Rte. 30. TAC is on the right, past the Rockville Bank.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Snowdrops near my garage door continue to bloom; I covered them with a pot to give protection from the 30 inches of snow we received February 8<sup>th</sup>. And when the snow melts, I will look forward to the cheerful blooms of the winter aconite, *Eranthis hyemalis*. In my winter reading, I came upon an article by W.J. Hamilton, Jr. of Ithaca, N.Y., in the 1986 bulletin of the Rock Garden Society, an excerpt of which follows:

“The plant is a native of Europe and Asia and has found its way around the world. Its tuber-like root, actually a rhizome, increases its size rapidly. The short stem supports an Elizabethan ruff of leaves, forming a quaint collar for the handsome flower. The deeply slashed leaves somewhat resemble those of the true aconites (*Aconitum*), which early herbalists considered poisonous. The presumably toxic property was used to poison wolves. It is for this reason that the flower was given the names Wolfsbane and Winter Aconite.”

The Winter 2012/2013 issue of the *Rock Garden Quarterly* contains a beautifully written article about **Eleanor (Ellie) Spingarn** by Barbara van Achterberg. Ellie was a gifted rock gardener and is considered the founder of the Connecticut Chapter of NARGS. In the ‘Bulletin Board’ supplement to the 1986 issue of the *American Rock Garden Society Bulletin*, it was announced that Ellie was given the Connecticut Chapter’s Service Award at its Annual Meeting in Stamford on November 16, 1986.

I propose that we review the history of NARGS and the contributions of gifted gardeners such as Ellie. They have a lot to teach us.

Thanks to Bonnie Maguire for the publicity about our March 9<sup>th</sup> meeting. The *Hartford Courant* had featured the announcement prominently on the ‘At Home’ page.

~Ginny

## APRIL MEETING

Saturday, April 13, 2013 10:30am  
Rain Date, April 20  
Home of Jeana Richo  
841 Litchfield Tpke. Bethany, CT

### Making Light-weight Troughs from Styrofoam Boxes

**Dan Richo** will lead us in this **outdoor workshop** where we transform good-sized Styrofoam boxes into troughs that resemble stone. The boxes will be provided but plan to bring rasps or files, a stiff metal brush and any gouging tools to create a rough, textured look. After the box is roughed up, we'll go over it with a heat gun which will be available there for our use. Be prepared to be covered in tiny balls of Styrofoam, so wear old clothes. You will go home with a trough that will need to be painted, a process which Dan will describe.

Those wishing to make a trough should contact Maryanne (phone/email in box below) by April 6<sup>th</sup> so we have some idea of the number of boxes to have on hand. Bring your lunch and plan to visit nearby Broken Arrow Nursery after the workshop.

**From I-84 eastbound**, take Rt. 8 south via exit 19. Go 4.8 mi. to exit 27/Maple St. Go straight onto S. Main St., which turns into Rt.63, for about 5 mi. Turn slight left onto Litchfield Tpke.; go .2 mi. to house.

**From I-84 westbound**, take exit 26/Rt. 70 toward Cheshire/Prospect for .3 mi. Turn left onto Waterbury Rd./ Rt. 70 for .2 mi. Turn right onto Summit Rd. for 3.1 mi. Turn left onto Rt. 69 and follow for 3.5 mi. Turn right on Rt. 42 for 1.2 mi.; turn left on Rt.63/Rt. 42/ Amity Rd. for .4 mi. Turn left on Litchfield Tpke.; go .2 mi. to house.

**From Merritt Pkwy.**, take exit for Rt. 69, just west

of tunnel. Go north and take first left onto Lucy St. Take first right onto Amity Rd./RT. 63 for 8 mi. Take sharp right onto Litchfield Tpke.; go .2 mi. to house. If you lose your way on the day of, call **203.393.007**.

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### Meeting Report: February 16, 2013 Pruning of Trees and Shrubs as presented by Kevin Wilcox

*by Barbara van Achterberg*

The Avon Free Public Library provided a beautiful modern space for our first meeting of the year. The program room with adjoining kitchen could have held dozens of people. But only a small group of us were fortunate enough to hear Kevin Wilcox' excellent interactive slide presentation on pruning perennials, shrubs and trees.

Kevin is the owner of Silver Spring Nursery, a destination nursery in Bloomfield on Cottage Grove Road. The nursery specializes in choice woody plants, and is known to connoisseurs who have made the trip there or have purchased plants he donates at the twice annual Connecticut Horticultural Society auctions. He gave each person a handout with an outline that followed the slide show and had room for taking notes. This made the secretary's job much easier.

When to prune: prior to growth starting in late February-early March or during growth, not after. If a plant flowers in spring, prune after it flowers. Never prune in the fall or early winter unless you have to because of storm damage or disease.

Equipment: anvil pruner - crushes stems, ok for annuals or perennials; bypass pruner, such as those made by Felco, better for twigs; loppers and saws for slightly larger branches. Bypass loppers do not crush like long anvil pruners.

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### NARGS CT CHAPTER OFFICERS

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

Cleaning the equipment: he literally takes apart each pruning tool during the winter. We gasped at the pictures of disassembled shears, but he said we could always take digital pictures of the process to help us reassemble them. After disassembling, clean with rubbing alcohol and a rag, sharpen, oil (with 3-in-one oil), reassemble, clean off excess oil.

Trunk vs. branch: to me, this was the most fascinating part of the talk. The trunk “considers” a branch a foreign entity and encapsulates it so that if the branch falls off, it can repair the damage. When you cut outside of the branch collar you can see this.

A-B-C cut: when cutting a branch, first cut underneath, outside the collar, about a third of the way through the branch; then cut all the way through from the top, a little further out the branch, to let the branch fall safely without tearing the trunk. After these two cuts are made, cut as close to the collar as you can without cutting into it. He showed us how to remove crossing branches, remove damaged branches, prune understock growth and remove diseased branches. Prune azalea gall before the spores ripen. To save a dogwood tree from borer, you have to get it really early. He showed how to tip, nip and take out stragglers.

Rejuvenation pruning for deutzia, rhododendrons and other broadleaf evergreens: after blooming, you can cut them almost to the ground. For lilacs, cut oldest trunks to the ground, but after years of neglect don't cut too many at once or the plant might die.

Pruning pines, spruces and firs: get rid of brown needles stuck in the middle of the plant so you don't get fungus; these conifers need air flow.

Pruning hydrangeas: wait till growth buds emerge and be careful not to injure yourself, as hydrangeas have many sharp shoots sticking up.

Tipping back: the taking off of growth buds, which can often be done with fingers to keep plants small; a perfect job for a rock gardener. You can even do this with rhododendrons.

Dead-heading: the best way to have annual flowers on mountain laurels and rhododendrons.

Removing mutations: the entire mutation must be removed or it will grow back. A few mutations are desirable; tell a nurseryman if this is the case.

Crossing roots: just like crossed branches, these should be removed.



Barbara van Achterberg demonstrates her super sharp Silky pruning saw to Bonnie Maguire, Kevin Wilcox and Regina Cirilli in the parking lot of the Avon Free Public Library.

After the program, I invited the speaker and audience to my car to see my favorite new tool in use - a super sharp Silky Zübat saw. I was able to cut a branch over 2 inches in diameter in a minute, leaving beautifully smooth ends. This saw, which comes in a snazzy sheath, is also great for getting into tight underbrush to cut out my *bête noir*, oriental bittersweet. It is extremely sharp, and touching its triple blade will result in cut fingers. It cannot be sharpened and must always be pulled, not pushed. After examining it, Kevin Wilcox advised me to clean it with rubbing alcohol and then wipe it dry, which I did as soon as I got home.

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### Tool Order

I am interested in ordering a “Garden Knife” as seen in the Walt Nicke catalogue. It has a 3” Sheffield Stainless Steel blade in a 4 ½” orange plastic handle and sells for \$22.95 plus S&H. I plan to use it for grafting or to make clean final cuts when pruning. If anyone is interested in placing an order and sharing S&H, please contact Maryanne Gryboski.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**CT Hardy Plant Symposium:** March 2

[www.cthardyplantsociety.org/calendar](http://www.cthardyplantsociety.org/calendar)

Speakers: Katherine Tracey of Avant Gardens and Joann Vieira of Tower Hill Botanic Garden

**UConn Perennial Plant Conference:** March 21

[www.2013perennial.uconn.edu](http://www.2013perennial.uconn.edu)

For the professional but open to all

**UConn Garden Conference:** March 22

[www.2013garden.uconn.edu](http://www.2013garden.uconn.edu)

For the home gardener

**CMGA 2013 Garden Symposium:** March 23

[www.ctmga.org](http://www.ctmga.org)

Speakers: Andrew Burtling of Scott Arboretum, Dan Benarcik of Chanticleer, and others

**CT Cactus and Succulent Soc. Show:** April 6, 7

[www.ctcactusclub.com](http://www.ctcactusclub.com)

Speakers, vendors, free admission

**Stonecrop Gardens Alpine Sale:** April 27

[www.stonecrop.org](http://www.stonecrop.org)

### UConn's Greenhouse Friday

Drop-in at 12:15pm on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday through March to tour the EEB Greenhouse located behind the Torey Life Sciences building on 91 N. Eagleville Rd. Tours are led by emeritus Botany faculty Dr. Terry Webster and Dr. Gregory Anderson.



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