



Newsletter

North American Rock Garden Society
Connecticut Chapter March/April 2014

APRIL MEETING

Saturday, April 5, 2014 10 am
Tolland Agricultural Center (TAC)
Vernon, CT

Speaker: Russell Stafford

Russell Stafford of **Odyssey Bulbs**, a mail order nursery for rare bulbs located in South Lancaster, MA, will discuss *Choice Bulbs for the Garden in Autumn and Winter*. Russell has a master's degree in forest ecology, is an experienced horticulturist and botanist, and is a self-described plant junkie.

Social time at 10am; business meeting at 10:30, followed by speaker. Bring a bag lunch, something of interest for show and tell.

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.

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Smith College Spring Bulb Show
March 1-16, www.smith.edu

CT Master Gardener Assoc. Symposium
Saturday, March 15, www.ctmga.org

UConn Perennial Plant Conference
Thursday, March 20, www.2014perennial.uconn.edu

UConn Garden Conference
Friday, March 21, www.2014garden.uconn.edu

CT Cactus and Succulent Society Show
Sat./Sun., April 5 & 6, www.ctcactusclub.com

Stonecrop Gardens - Plant Sale
Saturday, April 26, www.stoncrop.org

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The snow I was calling for in the previous newsletter shows no sign of leaving: but the bluebirds have been at the feeder, the Barred Owl was calling last night, and the skunk has left its aroma, so spring is coming. Winter aconite (*Eranthis hyemalis*) near the house foundation has been in bud for the last two weeks.



A display with troughs at the Philadelphia Flower Show.

My husband and I traveled by Amtrak to the Philadelphia Flower Show this week. There were no flowers blooming along the city sidewalks as in past years: too cold and too much snow. The exhibit by the Delaware Valley Chapter of NARGS was outstanding. At our next meeting I will display pictures which show the plants in troughs, identified by their geographic origin. The tall troughs were displayed in an artist's palette design. I plan to contact that Chapter to learn how they prepare their plants for the show since I would like to see our Chapter have a presence at the Hartford Flower Show.

~Ginny

MEEING REPORT: February 16, 2014

By Barbara van Achterberg

Matt Mattus, of Worcester, MA, came down to Comstock Ferre in Wethersfield to speak to the Connecticut Chapter on *Collector Bulbs for the Cold Greenhouse*. While he did show us many slides of bulbs in his greenhouse, this was just the launching point for his wide-ranging talk.

Unlike our Chapter's secretary, Matt is no procrastinator. On February 18, he mentioned his talk to our group two days before and showed photos of the historic retail seed store at Comstock Ferre on his blog, *Growing with Plants*. Matt's "regular" job is "Creative Director-Integrated Play and New Media – Hasbro". Just how good he is with new media can be seen on his blog, which is currently a finalist for **Better Homes and Gardens** best gardening blog.

Matt's garden was first planted by his grandparents, whom he never met. His father, 50 when Matt was born, has just turned 100.

A man of seemingly limitless energy, Matt not only grows plants in pots, some of which he designs, outdoors in the ground, and in the greenhouse, but he raises Irish terriers, one of which came in third for that breed at the Westminster Show the week before his talk to our group! He has two acres of landscapes with 4 acres of woods. He loves sweet peas and plans to raise 64 varieties this year, each on a single pole. He cares for them morning and night, before and after work, and has a sweet pea party when they are at their peak. The slides from his last sweet pea party, with hanging lights above an exquisitely set table, are enchanting.

Oxalis, lachenalia (Cape hyacinths) and cyclamen are favorite greenhouse bulbs. He recommends that beginners order the African Beauty strain of lachenalia which is showy, easy and cheap. He raises all of these bulbs, many from seed, in large pots of Pro-mix. Everything

is repotted in July and kept bone dry. *Cyclamen graecum*, the wild form of the florist's cyclamen, is the exception: it gets *occasional* summer watering. In the fall, after the first cold night around Labor Day, he resumes watering. The first watering includes a little nitrogen fertilizer after which he uses low nitrogen fertilizer with more phosphorus. Oxalis has most of its roots near the top of the pot, then a long root, and a "backup" root system near the bottom. This comes in handy during droughts. A 10 inch pot with 8 or 10 oxalis plants is good for shows. *Oxalis lutea* is bright yellow with flowers lasting 2-3 weeks. *Oxalis versicolor* is candy cane red and white; pot it in soil and gravel, and then put the pot in a pan of water.



Matt Mattus shares a pose with Tamsin Goggin and the *Primula kewensis* which Tamsin brought in for show.

Allium callimischon is the only allium he grows. It has many tiny flowers and grassy foliage and it blooms in fall. It is important not to cut the dried flower stem off.

Matt finds that all autumn crocus blooms look the same unless you get the bulbs from a specialist.

See 'Report' *con't* last page

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PROGRAMS: Please talk to one of the officers if you are interested in working on the Programs Committee.

BOOK REVIEW

By Maryanne Gryboski

Spring Wildflowers of the Northeast: A Natural History

by Carole Gracie. Princeton University Press (2012), 272pp, hardcover; publisher's price: \$29.95

This book is both less and more than a wildflower guide. Less, because the author has chosen to concentrate on only about three dozen spring blooming wildflowers of the Northeast, an area encompassing the greater Northeast and northern Midwest of the US and of adjacent Canada. More, because she has provided us with detailed information on a wide range of aspects: plant characteristics, habitat, range, pollination techniques and seed dispersal, as well as medicinal uses, explanations of botanical names, pests, pathogens and predators. The information is based on Gracie's observations in the field or, in this case, the woodland, and on her solid research: 21 pages of references are listed at the end of the book.

She tells the story of each chosen taxon from its incipient emergence in the often still cold soil through the unfolding of its stems and the unfurling of its leaves, to its flower and fruit. The meaning of its name, both botanical and common, may lead to a discussion of its cultural uses or contemporary scientific purposes. Who knew that the sap of bloodroot may have hallucinogenic properties or that Mayapple, once the principal ingredient of Carter's Little Liver Pills, is a source of the phytochemical podophyllotoxin from which two semi-synthetic cancer treating drugs are derived.

A self-described visual learner, Gracie has included an exceptionally large number of photographs which complement the text. Close-up views of an inflorescence being visited by a pollinating insect or with some petals removed to reveal its hidden reproductive structure, of a variety of fruit shapes such as the "grenade-like" fruit of the skunk cabbage, of exposed roots, tubers and rhizomes, and of various seeds, all offer visual evidence of the characteristics described in the written word.

This book is written for all wildflower lovers. Plants are arranged by common name in a nod to the beginner while changes in botanical nomenclature are explored. Gracie's love of wildflowers and her curiosity about all things connected to them is beautifully conveyed in this interesting and entertaining read and goes a long way to enriching one's appreciation of both wildflowers and nature itself.

GARDEN TIMES IN MARCH: BULBS

By Angela H. Fichter

This column was drafted in February, after the snow storms. Just before the snow I checked my garden for snowdrops, and there they were in bloom! Snowdrops are so strong and winter hardy that they come right up through the frozen soil with their white-petalled head coming first. I wonder how they will like having a few feet of snow fall on them. I'll let you know.

Next bulb to bloom in my garden will be aconite, a small bright yellow flower coming from a bulb. Once the flower is done blooming, it will set seed and thus help to make more plants as bulbs grow. In March, it is nice to see a bright, cheerful color in the garden.

One little secret about bulbs is where you plant them. The closer they are to a heated building, the sooner they will come up and bloom. There are certain places in Connecticut cities where daffodils are planted between the city sidewalk and the brick wall of a building. Those daffy dills are blooming a month before mine, which are all planted in the yard far away from any building.

One of the first green stalks to come up in the spring from a bulb is hardy amaryllis, *Lycoris squamigera*. It sends up a mass of tall, thick, green stalks, but no spring flowers. The green stalks turn brown and wither up in the summer. By late summer the brown stalks are lying flat on the ground and disappearing. Then, with no warning, up spring reddish flower stalks that grow very high. They are topped by beautiful pink flowers that are lily shaped, but are not real lilies. Some people call them Chinese surprise lilies, since they originate from China. The flowers are gorgeous pink and attract butterflies and hummingbirds. I bought mine years ago, and they survived because, unbeknownst to me, they prefer a warmer climate than northeast Connecticut, so planting them ten feet from the house made them happy. Sometimes ignorance is a benefit to the gardener, though more frequently it is a hazard!

Another bulb that brings joy is allium, which is a blooming onion. Particularly attractive are the giant ones, which send up a stalk several feet high and put out a ball of tiny flowers similar in shape to those put out by chive plants. The ball of flowers from the giant allium is at least as big as a softball. You plant the giant allium bulb between six and eight inches deep, which is more work than a number of other spring flowering bulbs, but worth it for the beauty! And these plants are deer resistant.

So plant your bulbs in the fall, and enjoy them when they bloom!

'Report' con't from page 2

Patience is required when growing bulbs from seed. For dwarf narcissus, order seed, plant it 3 inches deep in a pot and wait for the grassy leaves. The plants go dormant in May and then should be kept dry until the first cold snap around Labor Day. The second year you get stronger grass; in the third year you might get flowers.

Plant narcissus bulbs tight. If you don't have enough bulbs, use packing peanuts. Do this with eranthis, too.

Tecophilaea cyanocrocus is the blue Chilean crocus said to be extinct in the wild; *Tecophilaea violacea* is another species. Both have extraordinarily brilliant colors. They are being micropropagated in the Netherlands and hopefully will come down in price.

The garden leading up to Matt's greenhouse and the less formal gardens on the property are exquisite. Visit his blog, www.growingwithplants.com, to see pictures.

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(Telos Rare Bulbs, www.telosrarebulbs.com, carries many of the bulbs that Matt discussed during his presentation. If anyone is interested in participating in a group order to share shipping charges, please contact Maryanne Gryboski. *ed.*



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ODDS AND ENDS

Jeana Richo advises that she has a number of **Styro-foam boxes** available for lightweight troughs if anyone is interested. Contact Jeana at fricho@snet.net; she is willing to bring them to the April meeting.

Ken Graham is **placing an order with Timber Press** for the Rhododendron Soc. and extends an invitation to our chapter to join. Check www.timberpress.com to see if there is anything you are interested in. Cost is 1/2 the publisher's price plus shipping. Contact Ken at sunseton24@aol.com.

After repeated communications with NARGS website technician Ben Burr, Maryanne Gryboski has succeeded in putting all the Connecticut **Chapter newsletters since 2011 online**. To view, go to www.nargs.org, click on the top right banner ABOUT US, from there scroll down to 'Chapter Newsletters' on the left column, and select Connecticut Chapter. Since the revision of the website, your secretary has been trying for a year to post our meetings there without success. I am very impressed that Maryanne has succeeded in putting the newsletters online, and gladly accept her offer to post upcoming meetings there too! They will appear on 'Local Chapters', right above Chapter Newsletters.

Barbara van Achterberg