

# HUDSONIANA

February 2016

## CALENDAR

### Feb. 13 Saturday

Members with last names beginning from A thru K please bring breakfast item to share

#### **Ernie deMarie – 10 a.m. South African Plants for the Temperate Garden - Lyndhurst Carriage House**

Ernie will show a map of where in South Africa freezing temperatures are commonplace and thus where to look for potentially cold hardy plants. He will then show a number of winter hardy species in his gardens as well as annuals that re-sow. There will be familiar genera like delopserma, kniphofia and gladiolus and some less well known genera like Berkheya and Wahlenbergia.

Ernie earned a BS and Ph.D in horticulture from Cornell University. He first visited South Africa in 1984 and was immediately smitten with the flora. As a result, he decided to go back and earn a doctorate. His thesis was on tissue culture and interspecific hybridization of geophytic (tuberous) pelargoniums. As Desert Plant Curator at the NYBG from 1991 to 1996, he collected plants and seeds in South Africa in 1991 and 1993 for their collections. He introduced a number of South African species into horticulture in the US; and although he returned to high school science teaching in 1996 (and now teaches in Chappaqua), he has maintained an active interest in South African flora. He has a large garden at Horace Greeley HS which includes South African species, among many others. In 2012 he purchased a home in Briarcliff Manor where he is developing all the land on the property into gardens, including one garden devoted to African plants. He has a blog "A Not So Simple Garden" <https://geraniosgarden.blogspot.com> and is a member of many facebook plant groups, including several that discuss South African plants.



**March 12**      **Kim Eierman - Gardening Inspirations from the Smoky Mountains at Lyndhurst Carriage House**

**April**            **Chapter meeting to be determined**  
**23<sup>rd</sup> – Stonecrop sale**

**May 7**            **Plant Sale at Lyndhurst**

**Missing Midge Riggs**

by Lori Chips © 2015

The most telling thing I can say about Midge Riggs is that people adored her. I know they appreciated her for her knowledge about plants, her warmth, her ability to get things done. But I think people adored her most because of her sass. There was a twinkle in her personality that just made people want to be around her.

I first met Midge at NYBG around 1993 while I was still a student. One early memory is having the task of driving out to the Moshulu Gate to tell them to wave in Midge's husband Dave who was bringing in plants for the rock garden. I set out to do just that but as I pulled up to the booth in the Cushman I realized I didn't know Dave's first name. Or their last name. I gulped hard & said, simply, "Mr. Midge is coming with plants for the rock garden." The staff enjoyed that one, and it took me a while to live it down.

Midge was generous with her plants. Also with her expertise, her time, & her warmth. Her hospitality was well known to the Rock Garden Society, she hosted the annual picnic & BBQ for the Hudson Valley chapter many, many times. It was always anticipated and enjoyed by everyone, from the tour of her garden to Dave's burgers to the plant sale to finally, hanging out on her terrace by the waterfall & basking in a beautiful late summer day.

She had a scientist's mind, & one that was a steel trap for information that just floated out of mine. I was humbled by her Latin vocabulary of plants, her knowledge of rarities & their habitats. She knew how to grow difficult things.

When I had taken a job as propagator for the Rock & Native Plant Gardens at NYBG I was told to select someone who would be "my" volunteer, from among an interesting handful of people who regularly

volunteered at the Rock Garden. Oh, I considered picking someone to simply do what tasks were at hand, someone I might train the way I wanted. But I considered it only for a minute. I chose Midge. And was always emphatically glad that I did. She ran rings around a new rock gardener like me, but I learned a ton, & we laughed & had fun during the hours we worked together. Once as we were finishing up pricking out & potting seedlings before lunch, I looked down at my record sheet. I had forgotten to record the accession number of a particular aquilegia. "Oh, no problem," said Midge "it was..." and then she proceeded to rattle off the many digit number. "Uh, great." said I, trying hard not to show any skepticism as I wrote it down. It being my tail on the line I did sneak back into the greenhouse to check that number. She was exactly right. I never doubted her again.

Midge used to tell a tale about the legendary plant sales held at the home of Norman Singer & Geoffrey Charlesworth in Sandisfeild Mass. Regrettably, I came on the scene too late for those, although I knew the two of them well later on after joining the Berkshire Chapter in 1996. At those sales the competition for plants was understandably fierce. These two men grew astonishing things, many available absolutely nowhere else. I gather that nefarious members would attempt to cheat & tuck choice potfuls behind bushes. It evolved that Norman & Geoffrey would have people pull tiny pieces of paper bearing numbers for their first choices. It happened that 3 or 4 pots of a plant Midge had been yearning for were on the table, and worse yet, they were in flower. Oh, I know all rock gardeners pretend that they are way beyond the common lures of those folks at the typical garden center. The sophistication level being so high, the

appreciation of the buns & cushions, the names, the nativity and so on. That only holds so far. Put a flat of plants in front of NARGS members with only 2 or 3 in flower & those will certainly disappear first no matter what they try to tell you. So Midge was understandably uneasy, she had drawn a high number. I believe the plants were in the pea family, possibly astragalus, heightening the tension. So the numbers were called. Number one chose a flowering astragalus. So did number two. Before the final plant could get away, Midge chewed up & swallowed her number, raised her hand & grabbed the last plant.

She & my husband Joe got along famously. Too famously. They'd get into trouble, seated together in the back of the room during a long lecture, like kibitzers in the back of a classroom. Nevertheless, I'd love to see them together, at a Hudson Valley luncheon, a dinner in New York. They had too much fun not to enjoy it vicariously.

Over the years Midge became a loyal customer at Olivers where I work. She would sometimes bring lunch & we would sit outside & talk, what else? Alpine plants. When I spoke to her last it was this past spring & she sounded exactly like herself, funny, warm, full of ideas. She surprised me by saying that if she could make a deal with the higher (or lower) powers she would like to start all over again, now, in 2015, in astrophysics instead of genetics (her area of expertise.) She was moved & excited by what was going on in the study of space. I have no doubt she would have excelled there too.

Joe & I miss her deeply. And I know we are only two among many others who feel the same way. My brother says that certain people leave a profound wake behind them. Midge is one who did. Profound, but sprinkled liberally with fun & humor and everything else that makes a friendship so irreplaceably precious. There will never be another like her.

## **Chapter Notes**

**By: Don Dembowski**

### Remembering Midge Riggs:

It is difficult to add anything to the beautifully expressed remembrances of Midge by Lori Chips, but I feel I must try. She was a joy to be around, so often she saw the world through her own off-kilter sense of humor. As program Chair she negotiated with speakers without reluctance. Her generosity was abundant—she would always have plants dug up for a chapter sale (often potted up at the last minute) or provide a charming little trough. She often hosted the chapter's annual picnic and opened her garden to chapter members. I have plants that came from Midge that will always remind me of her, like the bluets that have spread so nicely as they did for her.

Lastly, there was her aversion to yellow flowering plants. She said they just didn't harmonize with the other plants. I think of her whenever I consider adding a yellow flower to my garden.

### Lyndhurst Rock Garden and Plant Sale:

What to do during the dead of winter? Well, you can plant seeds from the NARGS seed exchange and check out the offerings from nursery catalogs. Just yesterday I received a catalog from Rare Find Nursery. On the cover is a beautiful new *Cornus kousa* cultivar from Rutgers, "Scarlet Fire," with deep pink flowers.

The catalog also lists a *peris* 'La Rocaille' from Harold Epstein's "Connecticut" garden.

We are ordering plants for our May plant sale. I am hoping to get as many that are "deer resistant" as possible. The deer consistently forage among our plants at Lyndhurst. There is a large stand of *Callirhoe involucrata*, Prairie mallow, and they just start to come into beautiful magenta bloom when they get devastated. It happens every year. So regretfully those deep-rooted plants on the upper part of the garden should be replaced this year with varieties that stand more of a chance. Ideally, the replacement would also be summer blooming.

### Chapter Dues:

You should have received a membership renewal form in the mail from our treasurer, Hedi Eulau. If you have not mailed it in, please do so or bring it with you to our February meeting. Unfortunately, Hedi is unable to attend the February meeting, but she has asked Jacques Mommens to collect the forms and dues in her absence.

## October 11, 2015 Meeting Notes

By: Jane Moyer

Our multi-chapter meeting was held on a beautiful, sunny, fall day at the New York Botanical Garden. We enjoyed the usual perks of a tri-state meeting: vendors enticing you to buy with interesting and unusual plants, a plant auction, and a plant raffle. It seems that no matter how hard I try, I always return home with more plants than I planned on getting.

Our speaker was Peter Korn. From Sweden, Peter gardens and lives just east of Gothenburg (Goteborg). Goteborg is on the west coast of Sweden so it gets plenty of moisture, but not consistent snow cover in the winter. Peter has lived in several places in southern Sweden, so he has had to deal with different conditions created by climate and moisture when selecting plants to put in his gardens. We saw pictures of both rock and alpine gardens as well as woodland gardens which Peter has created. In the October edition of *Hudsoniana* (Hudson Valley Chapter newsletter) there was a description of our speaker as a “seed-a-holic, a plant-a-holic, and most of all a dig-a-holic.” Peter likes gardening, but his passion seems to be in observing plants in their natural habitat and then challenging himself to create the same conditions in his garden closely enough to the wild to enable the plant to thrive. We saw dry, wet, alpine, and desert conditions found in the places Peter had visited (US, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Europe). Creating the many microclimates in his own garden requires him to truly understand the conditions needed by each plant, studying the conditions already present in his garden, and putting the right plant in the right spot. Moving dirt and rocks to create his microclimates is back-breaking labor, so I think I’d like to add construction-holic and perhaps work-a-holic to Peter’s description.

Over the years Peter has created rock garden, alpine, and woodland garden areas. His first talk was about the rock garden and alpine areas followed by a talk

about woodland gardens. We saw pictures of many beautiful places and then pictures of how he created similar conditions in his own garden. To create something similar to alpine meadows in Kyrgyzstan Peter uses a coarse sand bed. He puts down about 10 inches of sand (good for 5-10 years before it must be redone). Each plant has all soil rinsed away and is planted in the sand bed. It was explained that it takes longer to establish plants this way, but they become much hardier although slower growing. The 2<sup>nd</sup> year the plant starts to recover, and in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year looks good. Peter cuts and blows this garden once a year, in early spring. If you create vertical crevices in your sand bed, don’t forget to include small stones to keep the sand “in” at the drainage point.

We saw Peter’s south facing slope of about an acre. There are definitely microclimates here. There is water at the bottom which makes the bottom colder than the top of the slope. Springs also come up on this slope, so plants which require more water can be put around the springs, while plants like *Lewisia cotyledon* which don’t like to be wet may also be used on the slope. Peter observes the conditions and plants are put in just the right spot in order to do well. Some of Peter’s woodland garden is created by stacking dry peat blocks to form a raised bed. Moss will develop and hold the blocks together.

Among the many beautiful plants pictured were: *Podophyllum hexandrum* var. *chinense* with very dark leaves, *nomocharis* (seeds in capsule may already have roots, so plant immediately), *Meconopsis integrifolia* (dark spot in the flower raises the temperature and encourages insects to pollinate), *shortia*, *trilliums*, *primulas*, *arisaemas*, *liliums*, *iris*, *corydalis* (800 species in Scandinavia), *tricyrtis*, *gentiana*, and a beautiful blue flowering *Hepatica nobilis* ‘de Buis’ was the last slide.

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