

# Newsletter

*North American Rock Garden Society  
Berkshire Chapter      March 2014*

## Next Meeting:

**Saturday, April 5, @ 10:30 AM**

Berkshire Botanical Garden Exhibit Hall  
BBG is located 2 miles west of Stockbridge,  
MA at the junction of Routes 102 & 183



## Trough-Making Workshop

This meeting is hands on -- make a hypertufa trough for the chapter and one for yourself!

The idea is to make a trough to sell at our September plant sale, plus give a workshop that will encourage new members.

### Lunch – BYO

We welcome dessert contributions. Lunch will be followed by our Plant Sale



## EARLY SPRING MUSINGS



I woke up this morning (March 31<sup>st</sup>) to find snow on the ground. Last night's forecast did mention the possibility of light snow and sleet, but it surprised me nonetheless. After a winter of seemingly endless snow and ice and cold, our collective desire for warmth and sunshine is palpable, but it still seems to be a few days (hopefully *only* a few days) away. Just a day or two in the 50s will help my mood, and will certainly help the snowdrops, crocuses, daffodils and species tulips that I noticed on Saturday, finally showing themselves after their long winter slumber.

I haven't had much of an opportunity check my garden's early risers, but what little I have seen looks promising. My shorter daphnes show almost no winter burn, and although the taller ones have considerable leaf loss in the upper areas, there's still plenty of green below, and where the leaves are gone, the budding is good. Last year I lost a lot of leaves, several of my more winter tolerant plants were set back considerably, and a couple didn't bloom at all. This looks like a better year for all of them, which is something of a reward for having put

up with the so much snow all winter long. Beyond the daphnes, pretty much everything is still quiet, but the next week or two will tell the tale for most of my plants. I'll keep you apprised in the next newsletter, since at least some of you will be coming to the meeting here on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, and I hope there will be much to see and enjoy.



I've put out about 20 seed pots from the NARGS seed exchange and about 15 from the other seed providers like Alplains, Holubec and Piatek. I have a lot of warm germinators which will be potted up in early May, so I'm hopeful that I'll have a good year for seedlings. As a group we need to grow more from seed so our plant sales will be filled with interesting, desirable and growable plants. Volunteers and divisions can only provide a modest variety, and at some point the limited selection becomes a real issue for some members. So please try to try growing some new species or two from seed, and set aside a few of the seedlings for the chapter.

April 6<sup>th</sup> is the last day to sign up for the NARGS Sierra Nevada expedition scheduled for early July. Please check out the trip description at <https://www.nargs.org/sierra-nevada-wildflowers>. Our next Annual General Meeting is set for late August in Santa Fe, New Mexico; the registration page is located at <https://www.nargs.org/santa-fe-annual-general-meeting>. It will be a spectacular event, and I hope that many of you will consider attending.

Finally, I'd like every Berkshire Chapter member who is not a NARGS member to think about why you haven't joined. Of course, many of us are members and have been for some time; but a surprising number of you have allowed your membership to lapse, and some of you have never joined. I'd really like to know your views on this subject, because the issue of NARGS membership is going to become a subject of broader discussion within the entire

organization, and it is also an issue that we as a chapter need to address. This is not the right place to fully develop a discussion, but I feel very strongly about the relationship (or lack thereof) between NARGS and the chapters, and I'm going to promote this discussion in the next newsletter. So *please* think about how you feel about NARGS, and share with me your reasons for either belonging or not belonging.

See you soon!

*Peter*

## THE NURSERYMAN'S CHALLENGE

BILL ADAMS

Each year at Sunscapes Rare Plant Nursery the major task for the winter season is to prepare the selection of plants that will be offered for sale in the spring. It is desirable to offer as many interesting new plants as possible each year but achieving this goal is often challenging. My main source of new plants is from seed and there are reputable seed collectors in the United States as well as overseas. The selection of available species is voluminous and the descriptions and/or pictures entice you to order what you hope will be the next great selection of rock garden plants.

Up to this point, the process has gone without a hitch. However, over the years I have found that the task now becomes more challenging. More often than not, the new and exotic do not develop into marketable, good performing garden plants due to a number of reasons:

- Seed fails to germinate
- Seed germinates poorly
- Seedlings transplant poorly
- Transplanted seedlings fail when planted out because they don't like your garden, your climate zone or your neighborhood.
- Seed germinates well, transplants well, plants out in the garden well but turns out to be invasive and takes years to eradicate.

But there are exceptions and each year, with the new crop of seedlings, we hope there will be winners.

This year Sunscapes is offering some of those winners:



*Castilleja chromosa*- image by Bill Adams

***Castilleja chromosa*** - Cultivating the indian paintbrushes provides a few challenges. The seed is generally not difficult to collect or purchase and the seed germinates without difficulty. However, the seedlings transplant poorly and require pampering in a shaded location until they recover from having their roots disturbed. Establishing the plants in the garden is also challenging since this species, as well as others, require forming an acceptable relationship with other plants. I have been most successful with *Artemisia frigida* as a companion plant but I have noticed that seedlings have been establishing in the vicinity of Eriogonums. *Castilleja chromosa* varies in color from yellow to screaming scarlet and is well worth the challenge.

***Convolvulus compactus*** – I have been growing this plant for a number of years and it is one of my favorite plants. Seed is never plentiful but the scarified seed germinates readily and the seedlings transplant easily. In the garden, the plants form neat mats of silky, silver foliage and white flowers. This species is much more tolerant of moisture than *Convolvulus assyricus*, a similar Turkish species.



*Convolvulus compactus* - image by Bill Adams

***Cryptantha humilis v. nana*** – This is the best dwarf *Cryptantha* that I have encountered. Although in my experience short lived, this species is relatively easily grown provided it has full sun and good drainage. I have had good success using it in a sunny trough. The small buns of silver-gray foliage start to produce attractive, small white flowers with yellow centers in early spring.



*Cryptantha humilis* – image by Bill Adams

***Moltkia petraea*** – I continue to be impressed with this shrubby borage, an endemic to the Balkans. I now have well established plants in my rock garden that produce good seed, although not every year. The seed is easy to germinate, the seedlings transplant easily and grow well in pots provided I use a planting mix with additional drainage material added. The clusters of dark sky-blue flowers appear in early to mid-June and are spectacular.



*Moltkia petraea* - image by Bill Adams

***Penstemon uintahensis*** – In this very large genus, there is a *Penstemon* species for almost any situation. But seldom do you find a performer as versatile and reliable as *Penstemon uintahensis*. This species is small enough for a trough or crevice garden but large enough for the rock garden and it always performs. Probably not best *Penstemon* for the hottest and driest parts of the garden but it will perform in part shade. Large blue flowers on short stalks are produced in early spring and never fail to put on quite a show.



*Penstemon uintahensis* – image by Cliff Booker

***Stachys lavandulifolia*** – This is, in my opinion, the most unique and beautiful species in the genus *Stachys*. However, for years I was unable to propagate or grow it successfully. But a few years ago, I noticed that High Country Gardens was offering it for sale by mail order. Since I had found it difficult I was sure that David Salman had made a mistake and would never be able to deliver on the offer. Subsequently, I was at the High Country Gardens Nursery in Santa Fe and, to my surprise I saw many flats of this

plant ready for sale. How could this be? Well, David informed me that he had obtained a special clone from another nurseryman that propagates easily and grows exceptionally well in the garden. I now offer this clone and it has turned out to be all that was promised.



*Stachys lavandulifolia* – image by David Salman



## NEWS FROM THE BERKSHIRE CHAPTER OF NARGS

**A**t the meeting of BNARGS on March 1, 2014 at the Berkshire Botanical Garden, our long-time treasurer Pamela Johnson requested again that she be relieved of her duties not only of treasurer but also web master. We thank her for her years of work for the chapter and thank Tom Flanigan for his service as co-treasurer.

Chairperson Judith Brown nominated the new treasurer and assistant treasurer, and Lindsey Liu seconded the nomination. It was approved

unanimously. As Treasurer, Elisabeth Zander will do the accounting and pay speakers as well as file the required forms for our not-for-profit organization with the State of Massachusetts and the Internal Revenue Service. Assistant Treasurer Jacques Mommens will collect and deposit in the BNARGS bank account all monies collected at meetings from plant sales. He will also collect annual dues.

Joyce Hemingson agreed to take on the responsibilities of Webmaster and is already working with the NARGS Internet contact person Daniel Dillon to move the BNARGS website and newsletter to the NARGS website.

*Judith Brown*  
Chairperson

## NOTES FROM THE MARCH MEETING

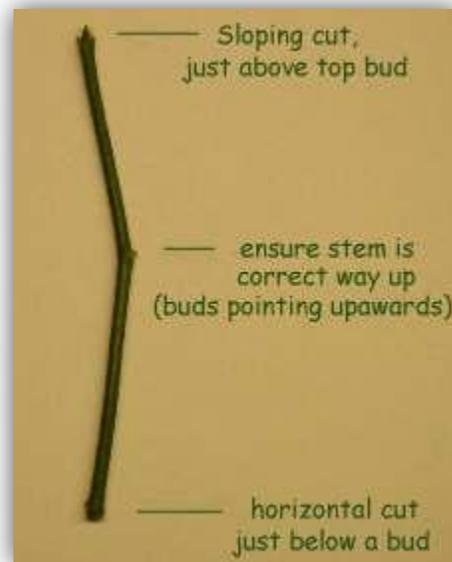
Right at the beginning, Pam Johnson announced that she couldn't go on assuming the responsibilities of the Treasurer and was ready to pass on all the necessary documents, files, etc to somebody willing to perform the various tasks. Judy Brown made an urgent call for a Treasurer and a Webmaster. Little time was wasted in discussing such matters there and then. However, after the lunch break several members told the Chairperson that they were willing to share some of the tasks, and Judy reported that information to the assembly. Organizational and procedural details will be ironed out during the coming weeks.

There were other announcements of interest : current work with seeds, reliable sources for seeds, dates for horticultural events in Connecticut and Massachusetts, a flower show at Smith College, a meeting with a show of the Connecticut Cactus and Succulents Society. It is always nice to share such information and/or get it from members with personal experience. Peter George reminded us of two important NARGS events: the first is the special guided field trip this Summer, covering areas from

Reno, NV, to Yosemite. Participation will be limited to 24 and as of 3/1 there were still a few openings. The second event is the NARGS Annual General Meeting in Santa Fe at the end of August. Details can be found in NARGS publications and on the NARGS website, [www.nargs.org](http://www.nargs.org)

A couple of publications and a few plants were auctioned off, but the bulk of a plant sale consisted of about 24 plants brought by Adam Wheeler, Plant Development Manager at Broken Arrow Nursery and our featured speaker of the day. Fittingly, these were shrubs and/or young trees.

There were very few flowers in evidence during the meeting, except two very nice *Primula x kewensis* brought by Tamsin Goggin and Elisabeth Zander for the Show & Tell. These primulas are very floriferous, the flowers a bright clear yellow, the beautiful foliage is covered with white farina. These are not difficult but they are absolutely not hardy in our area of North America.



The first presentation of the day was a comprehensive overview of propagation from cuttings, more precisely stem cuttings. Success with cuttings is not always easy or simple. It requires attention to many details and some luck too: Let us face it: some plants have their own

ideas about reproductive rights and do not take kindly to the type of procedures that we devise for our benefit rather than for the plant's. For us gardeners, cuttings offer great advantages: they assure uniformity and predictability, and also considerable economies of time. In one year a rooted cutting is established as a plant the size and maturity of which would have required 4 or 5 years of care if one had started it from seed.

Our expert speaker didn't have any surprising tricks for us nor did he offer wonder recipes: because there are none. Too many factors influence the rooting process: genetics, plant physiology, and environment are important to a not negligible degree. There was no high point in this one hour presentation. It was organized as a chronological description of the operation, drawing our attention to some detail or significant point at each stage. Starting at the very beginning: which branch to cut and when, i.e. at which stage of its development? Which branch to cut? If one has a choice, which individual plant will be good stock? Right there are choices and decisions to make: Softwood (in active growth), green wood (just at the end of the active growth) or hardwood? Should we select a flowering stem or a vegetative stem? Where to cut? How big the cutting? Then comes the preparation of the cutting; removing and/or trimming some of the leaves, removing a flowering tip, pinching a growing tip, preventive disinfection with a mild bleach, wounding the end of the cutting and making a slanted cut rather than a straight one, using fungicides, using special hormones, etc: Here again the speaker made a great job of putting sense and order in a seemingly chaotic set of recipes and recommendations, stressing the fact that none of them has to be strictly followed, that all of them result from years of experience and practice with many diverse plants, and that all are ways to help processes that occur naturally in plants at often unpredictable degrees of strength and efficacy. Preparing a cutting is just one quick step in a long process. After that comes the choice of medium, the choice of environment (temperature, light, humidity of the soil as well as of the surrounding atmosphere, etc), ending in the often forgotten process of hardening a

rooted cutting. The presentation was very well structured, based on solid experience and observation, uncluttered by ready-for-use examples: these came from questions from the audience to which Adam was always ready to answer precisely and succinctly so they were never a distraction. In two words, the presentation was both informative and enjoyable for all of us.



*Hamamelis vernalis* 'Quasimodo'

In the afternoon, Adam Wheeler talked about *Hamamelis*, commonly called Witch Hazel, which is a very timely topic. After all, what else might be in bloom in our garden on March 1st this year?

We all know witch hazel. Or do we? True there are not many species beside the rather familiar native *H. virginiana* but there is enough variability even within a species to excite the gardener.

*Size?* Anything from dwarf multi-stemmed shrub, 4'X4' at maturity (*H. vernalis* Quasimodo) to very respectable 20' tall trees. *Shape?* Left alone they are rather unremarkable but they are very tolerant of pruning. They can be trained as bonsai, even as espalier. There is a pendulous form.

*Foliage?* Some put a spectacular display in the Fall, not so during the Summer, although there exist variegated forms showing two contrasting shades of green. Leaf retention is variable, depending on the species, but also cultivation and changing with age.

Flowering time is variable, as early as October,

as late as late winter. The flowering season extends for weeks. *Flowers?* They all have yellow flowers, don't they? Most of them do, some show a very pale straw color, some deeper hue, but some have reddish brown tints, orange tints. There is also a vibrant red (*H. japonica* 'Shibamichi Red') and a lavender purple one (*H. vernalis* Amethyst). Similarly fragrance is very variable, with some forms are intensely fragrant.



*Hamamelis virginiana* 'Little Susie'

There are many hybrids (aptly classified as *H. x intermedia*) and the variability within this group is promising. Many of these hybrids are rather vigorous growers and it is among them that one finds the most interesting breakthroughs in color and fragrance. All these *Hamamelis* seem to be tolerant of many conditions although in general they do not want too wet soils. It is a mistake to assume that they are basically woodland plants, one can grow them in full sun in which case they bloom prolifically, becoming truly eye-catchers.

*Jacques Mommens – Meeting Recorder*

## NURSERY NEWS

### WHAT'S GOING ON WITH OUR FAVORITE SUPPLIERS OF PLANTS

#### GARDEN VISIONS EPIMEDIUMS KAREN PERKINS, PROPRIETOR

**B**ecause we are a small, primarily mail-order nursery, we are generally closed to the public. However, during peak bloom, we open our nursery to visitors for two weekends each year in early May, because the best way to learn about the beauty of Epimediums is to see them planted in the ground in a garden setting. This year the open weekends are scheduled for Fri. – Sun. **May 2-4; & 9-11; 10am-4pm, rain or shine.** Our physical location is **10 Templeton Rd., Phillipston, MA 01331.** We are situated adjacent to the picturesque Common in Phillipston Center. (Please note that since Phillipston does not have its own post office, we share a zip code with neighboring Athol, and GPS locators often send you to a vacant field in that town. In that case, make your way -by recalculating or inquiry- to Phillipston Center.)



*Epimedium x 'versicolor* 'Versicolor' – image by Karen Perkins

On those open weekends, we will be available to answer your questions, the display gardens and in-ground nursery beds are open for observation, enjoyment and photography, and we will have a selection of plants for sale, but not a comprehensive offering. If you have your heart set on specific varieties, send your order ahead

of your visit (give me at least 3 days notice, a week is even better), so that we can pull it in advance. We will also have for sale a small selection of other choice, hard-to-find shade perennials, a few favorites of which are not listed either in the catalog or on the website.

To protect our collection, *please leave small children and pets at home*. And please keep to the paths, and leave labels in the ground as you enjoy your visit. Also make sure to take care of any restroom needs **BEFORE** your arrival, as there are *no public restroom facilities available on site, and no nearby public restrooms*. Light refreshments and seating in the shade is available. The nursery is relatively level, but a little uneven with narrow paths. It is a working nursery, rather than a public garden, so you may want to bring your sneakers and leave your stiletto heels at home.

www. <http://gardenvisions.org/>

### **WRIGHTMAN ALPINE NURSERY** HARVEY & IRENE WRIGHTMAN

**W**rightman Alpines is moving! Harvey and Irene sold their farm in London, Ontario and purchased a 23 acre oceanfront property in southwestern New Brunswick. They will be moving their nursery, but the move will take place over the summer, starting in June, so the Stonecrop Sale on April 26<sup>th</sup> may be the last time you can get plants from Wrightmans for a while. The best strategy is go to their website, [www.wrightmanalpines.com](http://www.wrightmanalpines.com), pick out your plants and email them with the list. They will bring your plants to Stonecrop for you to pick up, saving the shipping costs, and actually getting you what you really want.

A few of their new plants they are selling this year are *Penstemon crandallii*, *Paeonia ostii*, *Phlox mesoleuca* and *Phlox hoodii*. Check out the website for their other new items!

Harvey wrote: *Hi Peter, We're moving - we sold the farm for our asking price and now will make an offer on a 23 acre property in St. Andrews, NB, suitably located at 480 Brandy Cove Rd. next door to the Huntsman Marine*

*Aquarium. We have very good leaving terms and will be able to relocate the nursery.*



*Penstemon crandallii* – image by Esther Wrightman

### **FAR REACHES FARM** SUE MILLIKEN & KELLY DODSON - PROPRIETORS

*Editor's Note: I visited this nursery 2 years ago and it is spectacular! Their selection of plants is unusual and most are growable here in New England. I took this material from their website, so visit it for MUCH more information.*

**W**elcome to our online store and hope you find many of the rare plants offered as fun as we do. We've been collecting, growing and learning about plants all our lives and the excitement has simply grown with time and we look forward to sharing our phytomaniacal obsession with you. There are worse things to be afflicted with than gardening. Take a moment and read some of the categories to your left on this page like "About Our Plants" for example so you know what to expect.



*Mandragora officinarum*

We have many more plants available here at the nursery that are not listed on our online store. Many are too large or don't ship easily or are in small quantities or we just haven't managed to get them up on the website. If we just didn't need to sleep, we could get more done. The nursery is not open all the time so check our hours and open days.

We propagate and grow most of our plants ourselves which allows us to grow many more impractical species than we should. Many times people shy away from a rare plant thinking it is hard to grow, but more often, it is difficulty of propagation or simply not fitting into a standard nursery routine that makes a plant rare in commerce. Of course, not all of our plants are uncommon - that would be leaving out way too many good ones such as some of our favorite herbaceous genera like Trillium, Meconopsis, Podophyllum, Paeonia, Paris, Heloniopsis, Crocosmia and then the woody genera like Sorbus, Styrax, Magnolia, Decaisnea, Hydrangea and the like.

We will be adding new plants frequently so do check back. [www.farreachesfarm.com](http://www.farreachesfarm.com)

## Orlan Gaeddert (1928-2014)



Long time ACS (and BNARGS) member, National Officer and Director, Orlan Gaeddert of Canaan, NY, died March 1, 2014, in California where he and his late wife LouAnn had moved to be closer to their children. He had been

diagnosed with cancer over a year earlier; he was 86.

“Orlan was the first person to greet me when I sat alone at a bench during my first ACS National meeting back in the early 90’s,” said ACS President Larry Nau. “Over the years he was quick to remind all of us on the Board that we needed to reach out, meet and engage members and learn how the Society can better serve them. He lived by his own example.”

Gaeddert’s instincts for people were honed by a career in advertising, marketing and direct mail merchandising. After military service in World War II he attended Harvard on the GI Bill and after graduation moved to New York. He spent most of his career at Time Inc in New York, the world’s leading magazine publisher with such titles as *Time*, *Life* and *Sports Illustrated*.

A typical project would be to access the consumer demand for a Time Life Books series on cooking or gardening before the actual books were created. Through market research Gaeddert was able to provide the editors and publishers with data that would not only determine if the series was viable but also how many volumes in the series the consumer could be expected to buy so that they could adjust their production schedule accordingly.

These prodigious skills he applied to ACS when, in 1995, he published the results of a comprehensive survey that, as Jerry Morris wrote in his [History of the Society](#), “startled” ACS management who assumed that the membership consisted of people like themselves who modeled themselves after the Society’s founders. Gaeddert’s survey “disclosed that 78% of us grew conifers as a hobby rather than as a profession and only 22% grew conifers for sale. The typical member has less than 25 different conifer cultivars.”

After relocating to California and giving up his conifer garden back east Gaeddert enjoying keeping up with friends and family by e-mail, watching Netflix (*The Bucket List* was a recent

favorite) and smoking his pipe in the courtyard of the assisted living center where he resided.

“Orlan did not feel sorry for himself,” wrote his son Andrew. “Nor did he want others to feel sorry for him. ‘I had the best wife, great friends and colleagues’ was a frequent saying.”

He is survived by his son Andrew Gaeddert, of San Francisco, California, and his daughter Martha Brooke, of Portland, Oregon.

*(This first appeared on the website of the American Conifer Society)*

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

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

## ALPINE PLANT SALE AT STONECROP GARDENS



**When - Sat, April 26, 9am – 3pm**



**Where** - Please follow signs to park in horse field

**Description** - Stonecrop is delighted to announce the 8th annual North American Rock Garden Society’s plant sale to be held on site here, Saturday, April 26th from 9am to 3pm. In addition to Stonecrop’s offerings of alpine plants and troughs, the following nurseries and vendors will participate in the sale:

**Wrightman Alpines**, Ontario - Grower and supplier of choice alpine plants and rock garden plants.

**Garden Vision Epimediums**, Phillipston, MA - Grower and supplier of Epimediums and other choice shade perennials.

**Jay's Nursery**, Watertown, CT - choice conifers. Debra Pope, Auburn, MA - Creates unique, custom hypertufa troughs.

**Don Dembowski**, Pelham, NY - Spring Ephemerals and Woodland Wildflowers.

**Bill Perron**, Cortlandt Manor, NY - Offers a variety of Cyclamen species, Arisaema, and Hellebores.

**My House Leeks**, Gloucester, MA - Succulents, sedums and alpine planters.

We hope you can join us for this special event and take advantage of viewing Stonecrop’s spring bulb display. Refreshments will be available for purchase. Admission for non-members is \$5 - members are free.

## **Positions of Responsibility**

Chairperson - Judy Brown  
Vice-Chairperson – Dean Evans  
Secretary – Carol Hanby  
Treasurer – Elisabeth Zander  
Archivist – James Fichter  
Audio Visual Chairperson - Joe Berman  
Greeter – Open  
Independent Director – Erica Schumacher  
Newsletter Editor – Peter George  
Meeting Recorder – Jacques Mommens  
Plant Sale Chairperson – Peter George  
Program Chairperson – Elisabeth Zander  
Proofreader – Martin Aisenberg  
Refreshments Chairperson – Joyce Hemingson  
Speaker Housing – Anne Spiegel  
Webmaster – Joyce Hemingson

## **Published 10 times per year (Feb. through Nov.) by the Berkshire Chapter NARGS**

Membership is open to all members of NARGS

Dues \$10.00 single, \$12.50 Family

Payable to the Assistant Treasurer

Jacques Mommens

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Deadline for The Next Newsletter is April 20,  
2014

Please contact the Editor before reprinting  
articles

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