



**December 2019
PVC Bulletin**

**Potomac Valley Chapter
North American
ROCK GARDEN SOCIETY**

Sue Simpson's alpine houses, Ayrshire, Scotland. Photo, S. Strickler

2020 Potomac Valley Chapter NARGS Events Calendar

Programs are Saturdays at 10am (coffee at 9:30 am), unless otherwise noted.

January 18, Sandy Horn --*"Conifers for the Rock Garden"*

US National Arboretum 3501 New York Ave., NE, Washington DC 20002

The **Southeast Regional Director for the American Conifer Society** and a **member of the Piedmont Chapter of NARGS**, Sandy Horn combines both her passions in this talk – conifers and rock garden plants. Beginning with the construction of a new rock garden installed this past summer in her North Carolina garden, Sandy shares all that she considered to make it the perfect home for conifers and other rock garden plants. Learn about the cultivars she chose and the conifers most likely to succeed here in the Mid-Atlantic. In addition to Sandy's new rock garden, she will show us her mature conifer rock garden, conifers growing in the immense crevice garden at Plant Delights Nursery in Raleigh, NC, as well as several other fantastic rock gardens that incorporate conifers as major features. Be inspired to try these plants in your own garden. **TOUR of the US National Arboretum Gotelli Conifer Collection to follow Sandy's talk, with USNA horticulturist Joe Meny**

February 15, Jeremy Schmidt--*"For Those About to Rock: Do-it-yourself Solutions for Gardening with Boulders, Crevices, and Everything In-Between"*

Brookside Gardens, 1800 Glenallan Ave., Wheaton, MD 20902

Jeremy A. Schmidt is the Research and Grounds Supervisor at Plant Delights Nursery/Juniper Level Botanic Garden in Raleigh, NC, (2008-present) and owner of a small business, The Horticulture Company. In the past three years, Jeremy has stacked over 1 million pounds of stone in specialized garden beds, supporting more than 3,000 taxa. Find out how his extensive hands-on experience with stone led him to innovate radical techniques for organically amending soil and creating garden spaces—notably, fighting

compaction with compaction. For more than two decades, Jeremy has studied and documented plant populations in their natural ranges and in planted situations, especially the genus *Trillium*, and he advocates for plant conservation through horticulture. By incorporating stone into the garden, he creates living art and botanical diversity in the landscape. When not in the garden, Jeremy is likely fishing on his boat.

Jeremy earned a bachelor's degree in Landscape Horticulture from Southern Illinois University Carbondale (2005) and gained curatorial and research experience at Longwood Gardens (2006).

March 22, SUNDAY 12:30pm, Todd Boland -- "*Spring Wildflowers of Utah's Mighty Five Great Parks*," Green Spring Gardens multi-purpose room (big auditorium) **NOTE: DAY AND TIME are different than usual,** 4603 Green Spring Rd., Alexandria, VA 22312

Utah's Mighty Five Great Parks" include Zion, Bryce Canyon, Capitol Reef, Canyonlands and the Arches National Parks. While hot and dry in summer, they are a flowering wonderland in the month of May and home to a multitude of dry westerner "alpines" along with cactus and succulents. If you are interested in a xeric rock garden, then this talk will provide you with many ideas of what to grow.

Todd lives in St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada, where he works as the horticulturist at the Memorial University of Newfoundland Botanical Garden. He is chair of the Newfoundland chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society (NARGS). He also maintains the NARGS "Plant of the Month" feature and is the administrator of the image galleries on the NARGS website. Todd has spoken to gardening groups across North America as well as in the UK and New Zealand. He has published 6 botanical guides to the flora of Atlantic Canada and most recently published his first gardening book *Perennials for Atlantic Canada*. When he is not in his garden, he is bird watching, a hobby that allows him to visit many exotic parts of the world.

April 18, Jim Hughes - "*Bonsai Principles Applied to Conifers in Troughs and Rock Gardens*" 6909 Pineway, University Park, MD 20782 (Jim's home)

PVC member Jim Hughes recently found himself talking with other members about growing and maintaining conifers in troughs and rock gardens. Growing them in a trough can be challenging even for the experienced gardener. Keeping them proportional to the trough or the rock garden is an ongoing task.

Jim moved to Maryland in 1995, partly to escape Zone 3 gardening in Minnesota, but also to pursue his love of bonsai. As a **Former Curator of the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum**, Jim keeps coming back to principles learned and practiced in his work. His talk details these principles and practices, which he has been using for more than 30 years to grow and maintain conifers in containers. Using bonsai from his own collection, Jim will also demonstrate his techniques and leave you with the practical knowledge to cultivate conifers in your troughs and rock gardens.

April 25-26, **FONA Plant Sale**, US National Arboretum

May 16, **Green Spring Gardens Plant Sale**, Members provide the plants to sell!!!

May 23, PVC **Plant Exchange**, home of Ed Aldrich, 7820 Yorktown Dr., Alexandria, VA 22308

June 18-20, NARGS Annual Meeting hosted by the Adirondack chapter and Cornell Botanic Garden in Ithaca, NY Info: <https://nargs.org/article/foresight-2020-exploration-and-inspiration> and here: <https://nargs.org/news/2019-01-31/annual-meeting-and-tours-june-2020>

President's Message from Barbara Rose

Greetings PVC Members,

I'm Barbara Rose, the newly elected president of PVC. Thank you to Kevin for all his years as president, he is definitely a hard act to follow. It is with much anticipation and excitement that I look forward to serving our chapter. Just like most of you, I have had a passion towards anything

botanical and horticultural my whole life. When I return home after a plant exchange, I record not only the names of all the plants I've brought home, but also their provenance--which one of you contributed them. Then when I walk around my garden, I remember all you fine gardeners who gifted the plants and seedlings at exchanges that fill my garden beds.

For those of you that missed it, in October we had a fantastic trough workshop given by Rob Gimpel. Many of us made a round trough and a rectangular one. Several of these troughs will be planted and ready for the spring sale at Green Spring Gardens.

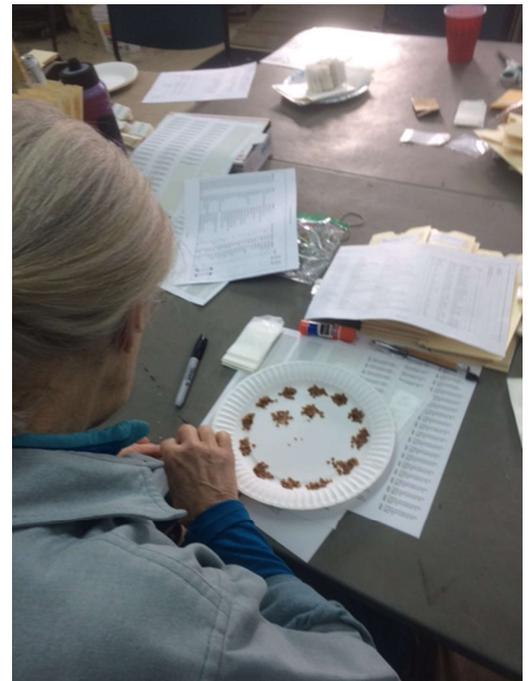
(Left: Rob and Candy K.)

Thank you to both John Willis and Kevin McIntosh for sharing their

expert approaches to seed germination at our annual meeting in November. **(See write-ups of their presentations in this Bulletin!)**

Many of us sorted seeds on December 7th in preparation for the NARGS seed exchange. Thank you again, Kevin, for heading up this effort. We had more volunteers than last year and many members reported how much fun it was to sit and talk, gossip, and trade war stories with others as they sorted and packaged seeds. Thanks to all who helped.

Right: Anne M. sorts seeds.



Please consider participating in the seed exchange which opens on December 15th! <https://nargs.org/2018-online-or25dering-information> It's a great deal! For only \$15 you can order 25 different species of seeds to grow yourself. It is very satisfying to start your own plants from seed. Also, consider growing some extra plants you can donate to sell at our booth at the spring plant sale.



Did everyone get their bulbs planted? I'm reminded that a tulip bulb takes five years to form from seed. In my own garden I tried something new this year with bulbs that I learned at Keukenhof, the famous Dutch garden outside Amsterdam. It's called "Lasagna planting". Three layers of bulbs planted in a circle that will bloom in stages over six and a half weeks. (**Above: my husband Gene planting bulbs**)

Wishing you all joyous winter holidays and hope to see you soon! Barbara

SEED Germination – NARGS SEED Exchange Opens DECEMBER 15th!

Thank you, John and Kevin, for writing up your germination practices after presenting at our November meeting. Many of you missed their excellent practical tips for starting seeds, so a written version is included here. **You can put the information to use in the coming weeks by participating in the NARGS Seed Exchange, opening Sunday, December 15th, <https://nargs.org/2018-online-ordering-information>** You must be a NARGS member to buy seeds.

John and Kevin's approaches are somewhat different but complimentary. Many, but not all, seeds require cold stratification (a cold period), which you get "naturally" by putting seeds outside in January after planting, as Kevin does with all his seeds. Those seeds that don't germinate in the spring, can be left and may germinate with an extended period of temperature in the 60s to 70s. Kevin's technique is not generally appropriate for tropical seeds. John Willis, by contrast, uses a small greenhouse, grow lights, in addition to outdoor cold stratification.

If you want more detail on germination temperatures required for specific seeds one popular resource is Norman Deno's [Seed Germination Theory and Practice](https://naldc.nal.usda.gov/download/41278/PDF) <https://naldc.nal.usda.gov/download/41278/PDF> Starting on page 68, plants are listed by family. The last page of the document provides a key to abbreviations and symbols so you can understand the

Just a Few Thoughts about Seeds and Seeding Practice

John Willis (Based on a talk given to PVC members November 2, 2019)

Collecting Seed

One of the joyful parts of trying to grow alpine plants in our non-alpine environment is obtaining rare and unusual seeds and persuading them they will find our climate rich and rewarding. In this brief note I will share my annual efforts to collect and start seeds for the coming year. Keep in mind this is all about experimentation and seeing what works best for you.

It all begins with collecting seeds from your favorite plants and donating your extras to the various rock garden societies in preparation for their seed exchanges occurring in mid-winter. At this point I look forward to annually participating in the seed-exes within the North American Rock Garden



Society (NARGS), the Alpine Garden Society (AGS), and the Scottish Rock Garden Club (SRGC). **(Left: Harvesting Adonis seed)**

Many seeds are easy to acquire if you just pick the right time when the seeds are bursting forth.

Right: Eranthis Hyemalis seed

The Winter Aconite (*Eranthis hyemalis*) shares its seeds for about a week in great abundance. Like many spring ephemerals the seeds are attractive to ants and they will help spread them if you are not quick to collect them.



Other seeds are not nearly so



Ant harvesting Hepatica seed

easy to harvest. When seeds are very tiny or hidden in extraneous material it helps to have additional tools to collect them. There are various kinds of screens that you can buy for seed separation. I've invested in a set on nine stackable sifting pans that go from .5 to 01 inches (they are used by gold miners) to filter out just the size seeds I am looking for without all the chaff and rubble.



Donating the collected seeds to these seed exchanges gives you first choice among the thousands of species that are made available each year.

Right: Very fine meshed screen



Planting

When it comes to actually planting the seeds, I generally like to use three ¼ inch square plastic pots with a soil mix that is roughly 50/50 inorganic/organic, typically about 25% sand, 25% grit, and 50% general purpose planting mix such as miracle-gro or pro-mix. For seeds from plants at home in the mountains you can push the mix to the inorganic side, maybe 75% inorganic to 25 % organic.

The best source of grit is the gravel that farm stores carry for poultry farmers. It usually comes in three sizes and all are useful in various stages of planting, depending on how big your plants are. For seeding I usually mix in the small or medium size. For sand, get a general-purpose sand, and avoid very fine play sand.



Gran | Grit in 3 sizes

Other inorganic materials such as Turface or oyster shells can be used to taste.

In planting out the seeds I generally tamp down the soil mix then add the seeds to the surface, tamp again, and cover with a small amount of fine grit. The grit as a stone mulch helps with watering and discouraging algae and disease. (Right: Resulting Alpine Soil Mix)



I have a greenhouse, which helps with a lot of the seedling pots, but I also start many seeds in the basement under lights. Nowadays you can get quite good high intensity lights and keep good control of temperatures. If you go the Ontario chapter of NARGS (<http://www.onrockgarden.com/germination-guide/plants>) you will find a terrific database on germination requirements.

I find that most seeds can be divided into three classes by their initial temperature requirements — (I) Room temperature (68°), (II) Cool temperature (40°), and (III) Below freezing (usually cycling above and below freezing). For me that works out to Basement, Greenhouse, and Outside.



I suggest watering from below when you can control it (avoid overwatering).

Above right: Planting out seeds

Right: Gentiana dahurica seedlings

If you are lucky and the flower gods bless your planting, you will find a cluster of seedlings in your little 3 ¼ inch pot.



And then when you multiply that by many pots you realize you have an abundance of small plants all asking for your attention.

Usually I wait until I'm really sure the plants are firmly rooted and can be dumped out of the pot before trying to divide them. If all goes well, not only will you have the feeling of accomplishment that comes with growing unusual plants, but you will likely have extra plants to share with others through plant exchanges or the chapter plant sale at Green Spring Gardens.

Right: Seedling waiting to be divided



And when things go *really* well, you also will find yourself with an unusual plant that can rarely be bought on the open market.

Right: Adonis Chichibu Beni from seed



How I Germinate NARGS Seeds

Kevin McIntosh (Distilled from a talk to PVC member November 2nd, 2019)

With the NARGS seed exchange right around the corner (December 15th), I thought it would be a good idea to describe a method I use to germinate seeds. It's very simple, requires a minimum of work and has been very successful for me.

Why Germinate NARGS Seeds?

- Produce numerous plants for your garden, plant exchanges or plant sales.
- Produce variants that can be superior to type (ex., variegated foliage [Fig. 1], different colored flowers, greater cold hardiness, etc.).
- Produce plants that you can't get anywhere else.



Fig. 1 Variegated Dianthus seedling

What Hardware Do I Use to Germinate NARGS Seeds?



Fig. 2 *Grow Ease Seed Starter Kit*

- I use a Grow Ease Seed Starter Kit (Gardener Supply Company). Cost is \$17 for one kit and \$45 for three kits.
- Each kit contains a 24-cell tray, platform, capillary mat, reservoir and clear plastic dome.
- The kit works by capillary action so the seeds and seedlings never dry out.
- The components of the kit are shown in Figure 2. The platform is placed in the reservoir containing water, the capillary mat is placed on top of the platform with one side immersed in water, and the tray is placed on top of the mat.

What Soil Mix Do I Use?

I use a mix that is 25% organic and 75% inorganic.

- The mix is (Fig. 3):
 - Seed starter mix (typically finely ground peat moss and vermiculite)
 - Turface
 - Gran-I-Grit (Starter, smallest size of crushed granite)
 - Crushed Oyster Shell
 - All components available from Southern States Farm Stores



Fig. 3 *Soil Mix*

How Do I Germinate Seeds?

- With the kit set up as described, I add the soil mix to each of the cells in the tray.
- I place the NARGS seed on top of the mix in the cells.
- I use a small bamboo skewer to mix the seed with the top layer of the mix.
- I moisten the mix with a sprayer and fill the reservoir with water.
- I label the cells with genus/species tags.
- I place the kit outside and cover it with a screen to keep out varmints and protect the seeds from heavy rain (Fig. 4).
- All of this is done in mid to late January when I receive the seeds from NARGS.



Fig. 4 *NARGS seeds sown and placed outdoors*



Fig. 5 Seed trays in May

- In March, seed germination begins and continues through April (Fig. 5).



Fig. 6 Seedlings transplanted from cell

Seedling Care

For me, this is the hardest part – what to do with all the seedlings that germinate. After years of separating the seedlings and attempting to grow them on individually in pots or in the garden, I have come to the conclusion that it's best to pot the entire cell into a pot with as little disturbance to the seedlings as possible (Fig. 6). If the cell is jam-packed with seedlings, I will rip the clump into 3-5 pieces and pot these up. When shifting to pots, I use a mix that is 50% organic/inorganic using the components described previously for seed germination. I also grow the seedlings on for a full year before planting them in the garden, protecting them in a cold frame during the winter. The following spring, the established seedlings are planted out or potted up individually for plant sales or exchanges (Fig. 7).

How Do I Get Seeds from NARGS?

- You need to be a member of NARGS (\$40 per year for an individual).
- The Seed Exchange goes live on the NARGS website for ordering (around December 15th).
- Seeds are \$15 for 25 taxa. <https://nargs.org/seed-exchange-news>
- If you contribute seed to the exchange or volunteer for seed processing, you get 35 taxa and priority for the seeds you ordered.
- You will receive seed around the 3rd week of January.
- There is a surplus seed distribution to NARGS chapters in early April. This seed is free and available to all PVC members.



Fig. 7 Seedlings potted up and ready

ASTERS

Anne Mazaitis

New England asters, *Aster novae-angliae*, are sort of a default plant in my changing garden, which is going from full sun to deep shade. From beds full of color and sun-loving plants to much less of that. From new beds to now old and areas in-need-of-updating. Good old asters have endured in my garden as they are easy, carefree and they dependably give a good show once a year. Below is what they looked like last year. (**Below**)



Most of my asters are unnamed though I do have A. 'Purple Dome', which is fickle in that it does not want to grow where I would like it to. So, I move it around and hope it will grow more reliably in its new location.

I have a knee-high modern very floriferous deep pink small flowered aster grown from a 1" cutting from a neighbor. (**Below right**)



I have an old-fashioned knee-high very early (middle of August) blue aster from the Netherlands in a new spot where it does much better and I get to enjoy looking down on it on my way to pick up the newspaper every morning.

Another part of the New England mix is a quite a dark **purple aster (Alcova)** came from Alice N. who used to live in the Alcova neighborhood of Arlington, Virginia.

You can just see it in the big **picture above** on the right. (**Left is a lovely but unknown Aster**)



I used to have a chipper/shredder. Asters made the most beautiful mulch. Now I cut the asters that have flopped and are in the way and stack them between four and six foot poles to form a wall. (Below right)



I collect quite a few aster-sticks and use them as markers for new and upcoming plants (**below left**). That way I know where these hoped-for plants are and where I should not tread. (Hah!) The rest of them I let be through the winter. Some show a bit of fall color that goes well with the foliage of *Rosa spinosissima*. (**middle bottom**) I like the way the birds hop and flit through them and of course a layer of snow makes them outstanding.



Something Else for Your January Calendar

Discover Bunny Mellon's Oak Spring Gardens with **Judy Zatsick, Head Gardener** Sunday, January 26, @ Green Spring Gardens

Rachel "Bunny" Mellon was a gardener, artist and icon. She created countless gardens for famous friends and family, including the White House Rose Garden and the Potager du Roi at Versailles. But her most intimate garden is the half-acre, walled garden at her estate in Upperville, Virginia.

Head gardener and PVC vice-president Judy Zatsick shares the joys and challenges of carrying on the spirit of Bunny Mellon at Oak Spring.

Program runs from 1:30 to 2:30pm. Cost \$10/person; \$12 at the door. Call 703.642.5173 for more information.



A glimpse into the walled garden. photo: S Strickler

Register online:

https://fairfax.usedirect.com/FairfaxFCPAWeb/ACTIVITIES/Details.aspx?session_id=82083&back_url=fi9BQ1RJVKIUSUVTL1NIYXJjaC5hc3B4



Three Plants Seen in Scottish Gardens I Hope to Grow

Sarah Strickler

The cooler, cloudier, more blustery weather of Scotland certainly makes for different growing conditions than here in the DMV (Scotland is not necessarily wetter than the U.S. mid-Atlantic despite its reputation). So we did suffer some heartbreak on the NARGS tour of Scotland last May, seeing charming, unusual-to-us-plants

we cannot possibly grow. Yet there were also many we could try. Here are three. I have noted where you can probably get them in the U.S.

Anemone obtusiloba (previous page) is a butter-cup relative (notice the leaves) we saw in many gardens – ‘Pradesh’ was one popular cultivar (does not seem available here, alas) with azure blue flowers splashed with white and bright yellow stamens. It was blooming profusely in early June. Here it is in Sue Simpson and George Watt’s garden in Drongan near the southwest coast. Nurseries carrying it comment on its variability, which may be due to a vast native range from the Himalayas to western China. **Far Reaches nursery carries ‘Big Blue’** (paler blue flowers), a plant they brought back from Scotland coincidentally!

Salix x boydii is a fuzzy, grey-foliaged willow with rounded leaves that seemed to appear in every private garden we visited in Scotland. Several members of the Manhattan chapter are growing it and their exclams of “Boydii, boydii, there’s another boydii,” became a joke, as they spotted the plant over and over. And no wonder it is ubiquitous there; it is a naturally occurring hybrid found in the Scottish Highlands in the 19th century by William Boyd. Diminutive and slow growing – 1 to 2 inches a year -- the plant discovered in the wild was purportedly 6’(yes feet) tall! An ancient. I see **Iseli Nursery** in Oregon carries it (Susannah Farm in Boyds, Maryland, could get it from them) and **Broken Arrow** in Connecticut has also carried it. **The plant to the right** grows in Ian Christie’s garden north of Perth and looks almost as if he created a bonsai with it.



Fritillaria camschatensis (Rice lily or Chocolate lily) is a bulb native to the Pacific northwest with a history as a starchy food source among north American Indians in that region. It was blooming in



lan Christie’s garden and I was attracted by the deep dark, wine-colored, almost black, flowers and contrasting yellow anthers. I have since learned the flowers have a nasty smell. This Frit likes a shaded moist situation in humus-rich soil. We’ll see. It’s available from **Thimble Farms nursery in Canada**, which ships to the U.S.

DUES: \$15 per year. Please send to treasurer Margot Ellis, 2417 N Taylor St., Arlington, VA 22207

Editor's note: All photographs are by the article authors unless otherwise noted.

PVC web page: <https://nargs.org/chapter/potomac-valley-chapter>

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