

The Urban Rock Gardener



Volume 34, Issue 3

May/June 2021

MAY VIRTUAL MEETING

Monday, May 17 at 6 p.m. via Zoom

A Zoom link will be sent to members prior to this event

THE HIGHLANDS OF LESOTHO

Speaker:

Mike Bone

Associate Director of Horticulture and
Curator of Steppe Collection
Denver Botanic Gardens



A view of Sentinel Peak from Witsieshoek Mountain Lodge

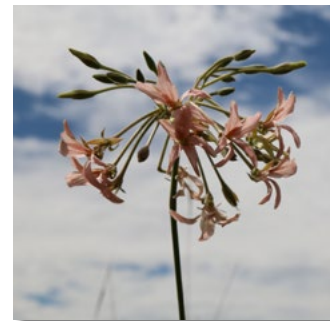
The Mountain Kingdom of Lesotho is a special place for many reasons. The unique flora is one of the draws for lovers of plants. The high elevation and unique habitats make it one of the world's biodiversity hot spots. The Maloti section of the Drakensberg Mountains has no native forest and therefore exhibits steppe ecosystems and every gradient from desert to alpine. In this talk we will look at some interesting specimens from this far-off place and experience a little of the culture and wonder of this Mountain Kingdom.



Berkheya purpurea



Eucomis montana



Pelargonium luridum



Delosperma on basalt cliff, near Bokong Nature Preserve



MIKE BONE has been with the Denver Botanic Gardens since 2002, where he has focused his career on the study of plants of the steppe regions of the world and their adjacent mountain ranges. In his time at the DBG, Mike has traveled to central and middle Asia, southern Africa, and extensively throughout the American west, to collect seed and study the plants and ecology of the steppes. When not traveling, Mike oversees DBG's Steppe Garden, trial gardens, plant breeding, and propagation of wild collected material brought into the gardens. Mike has been working with the Plant Select® program for more than twenty years to bring climate-appropriate plants to the marketplace for the Colorado front range and beyond. In his personal time, Mike is an enthusiastic gardener and collector of plants. At his home in suburban Denver, he has rock gardens, crevice gardens, steppe gardens, a small greenhouse, and vegetable gardens. As an author, Mike has been a contributor to six books published through the Denver Botanic Gardens including *Steppes: The plants and ecology of the world's semi-arid regions*. Mike also writes articles for local, regional, and national publications.

MAY GARDEN TOUR

THE GARDENS OF PAUL DAMBROSI and LISA PARVIN

Thursday, May 13 at 6 p.m.

Meet at 189-15 50th Avenue in Fresh Meadows, Queens

Open to NARGS and MCNARGS members only.

RSVP: Brendan Kenney at nycbeard@gmail.com or 917-544-3288.

Please note: This is a group tour only. Gardens are not open for individual visits. Masks are required. As we will travel together in vehicles to Little Neck, attendees must be fully vaccinated.

In 2014, Paul Dambrosi first invited us to visit his extensive tufa garden in Fresh Meadows, which includes a wide variety of alpine plants. The following year we toured Lisa Parvin's garden in Little Neck, where Paul had created another impressive rock garden. In 2018, we saw both gardens and now, three years later, the progress of two extensive tufa gardens in New York City will be of great interest. Some may recall that Paul whet our appetites with the tufa for sale at the MCNARGS 2013 Spring Plant Sale.

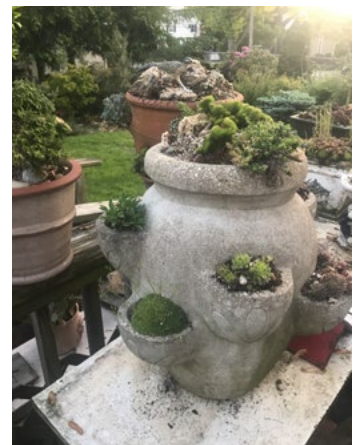
Public transportation: No. 7 train to Flushing-Main Street and Q27 bus (takes about one hour from Manhattan). Brendan will lead a group leaving the Fifth Avenue station (Manhattan) on the 7 train at 4:45 p.m. Parking is easy if you are traveling by car.

Please contact Brendan to confirm your attendance and to get further details.

PAUL DAMBROSI'S GARDEN



LISA PARVIN'S GARDEN



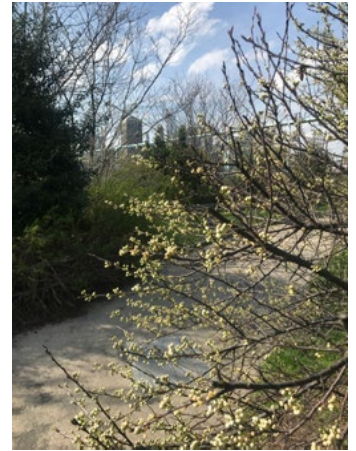
JUNE GARDEN TOUR PIER 6 AT BROOKLYN BRIDGE PARK

Thursday, June 10 at 5 p.m.

Open to NARGS and MCNARGS members only.
RSVP: Brendan Kenney at nycbeard@gmail.com or 917-544-3288.

Please note: CDC protocols will apply.

Rebecca McMackin will lead us on a tour of this remarkable ecological haven for native plants and their pollinators on the Brooklyn waterfront. A wide variety of species are present throughout. Areas include the one-and-a-half-acre Flower Meadow, Flower Meadow Dense Hedgerow, Privet Beds, Secret Path, Dune Meadows, and Dunes Pine Bumps.



NOTES FROM A BROOKLYN GARDEN

By Judi Dumont, Chair



Canceled, Rescheduled, Suspended and Delayed

The last year has been tough on in-person gardening events to say the least, and the Covid effect is lingering into 2021. Longstanding annual events are being rescheduled or canceled. For the first time in its 108-year history, the Chelsea Flower Show will be held in September rather than May. The Philadelphia Flower Show (usually my personal, unofficial, beginning of spring) will be held in June, rather than an early March slot, and in a new outdoor location. Fans of the popular annual May Plant Sale at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden will have to wait until 2022 for the rush through the gates to get the first, best, pick of plants.

And MCNARGS is no exception. Our annual Plant Sale, which was to be held in a new Brooklyn location in 2020, was canceled, and sadly, it is canceled this year as well. Likewise, our much-anticipated Tri-State Meeting, generally held in October, will not be held in 2021. These events take significant advance planning and coordination, which are not practicable this year due to the continuing uncertainty surrounding the pandemic.

Our monthly meetings will continue to be held via Zoom into the early fall. But hope springs eternal, even in a pandemic, that we'll soon be able to get together in person again, at our monthly meetings and at our larger events. We will of course keep members posted via the newsletter and by email.

The Season of "Uh-Oh" and "What's That"

As I write this, spring is well underway, and I'm surveying my tiny garden on a daily basis for signs of plant life, and also to find the absence of plant life, which indicates (or should indicate) a space for another plant. Nature abhors a vacuum, and in a garden as small as mine so do I, and any open ground is fair game for tucking a new plant into. Easy enough with the early risers that are up and growing strongly by this time in the season (clematis, aquilegias) but for the lay-a-beds (*Begonia grandis*, *Arisaema candidissimum*) it is more tricky. This leads to the "Uh-Oh" (substitute your favorite epithet here) moment when you thrust your trowel into the barren soil, only to realize it's not so barren after all.

An "Uh-Oh" moment can also be a "What's That" moment if after your surprise at finding anything growing in this space, you also cannot remember exactly what it is that is taking up the valuable planting real estate. A "What's That" moment can also occur with an early riser that indeed looks like a plant worth keeping but one that just seems totally unfamiliar. In my garden there is a quite large pot currently occupied by a stranger. As it grows, it will likely move from "What's That" to "Now I Remember." The moral of this tale is make copious notes and take many photos.

Reasons to Join NARGS, Our Parent Organization – First in a Series

The photo above of the meconopsis (and me) was taken at the Edinburgh Botanic Garden during a tour of public and private gardens in Scotland sponsored and curated by NARGS. NARGS tours, available to NARGS members only, are exceptionally well designed, with guides (and participants) who are particularly knowledgeable about plants and their habitats. New tours are offered every year.

The Urban Rock Gardener welcomes Judi Dumont as Chair of the Manhattan Chapter of NARGS. "Notes From a Brooklyn Garden" is the first of what she promises to be a regular column addressing issues of interest to the membership.

THE BIRTH OF A ROCK GARDEN (AND A ROCK GARDENER)

A few years ago, while I was visiting an accomplished gardener in the Boston area, I confessed that I was dreaming of creating a garden on a piece of property my partner and I had just purchased in upstate New York. While sipping white wine by her field of columbine, she suggested I join NARGS. She raved about the helpful community, the exciting seed exchange, and the exceptional plant sales.

Within a few months I had joined both NARGS and the Manhattan Chapter, and discovered she was right. That first year, I ordered way too many seeds and took copious notes during member meetings. I scribbled down a few gardening goals for myself: buy Lori Chips' book about troughs, plant every variety of primrose, take a walk through the lush garden atop the Irish Hunger Memorial. I bought so many plants at the Tri-State meeting, I had to make at least two trips to my car.

That summer, now a newly-minted NARGS member, I decided to create a rock garden. With pickaxes and shovels in hand, we cleared a nineteen-foot circle from an existing slope and excavated to create level ground. We dug a fire pit in the center of the circle and created a rambling rock wall along the slope. I was happy to unearth huge rock after huge rock during the excavation which were collected for, and sculpted into, the wall replete with little pockets for planting. Right away I was able to relocate a few sempervivums from other areas of the property to new homes in the rock wall.

It wasn't until the October Tri-State Meeting at NYBG that my

dreams really started to come true. I made a few purchases from different tables of plants to include in my new rock garden: gentian, dianthus, more sempervivums, and a miniature tree. Almost everything lived and bloomed the following season. Of course, these blooms all happened during quarantine, as I watched them every day, sometimes every hour. I was overjoyed.

I was forced to make other plans when the annual plant sale was canceled this year. Masked up, I made the two-hour trip to Oliver Nurseries in Fairfield, Connecticut. When I arrived, Lori Chips directed me to many wonderful additions for my garden. As I write this, the *Draba rigida* has just sent up its delicate, bright yellow flowers. The wealth of knowledge that comes from the MCNARGS newsletters, the *Rock Garden Quarterly*, and many discussions, have been invaluable.

As my rock garden continues to grow, so does my patience. I wait for my seeds to establish and grow, and as I get ready to transplant, I hope for each one to bloom. This year, I am hoping my pulsatilla, which I planted in 2019, will finally flower. After going to Elizabeth Lawson's talk about primroses, I requested practically every possible primula seed in the seed list and now my seed trays are full of seedlings. I look forward to this time next year when they have all been safely transplanted and are ready to bloom.

MICHAEL PARRISH

Michael Parrish joined MCNARGS in 2019. He gardens in the Hudson Valley.



Gentian



Sempervivum



Draba



Dianthus

A HOUSE AND GARDEN TALE

I have a tale to relate that took place between fall 2020 and the present.

I had a flooding problem in my brownstone basement whenever there was heavy rain. Since one of the bigger floods was due to my neighbor's irrigation system freezing and pouring water downhill to me, I tended to blame all subsequent floods on causes outside my house.

Bad idea! Better to get knowledgeable insights from people who know houses and drains.

We uncovered a very old leader attached to the house and inside the greenhouse — covered back when I was concerned about the look of my favorite space. It was cracked and losing water in many places, flooding both the greenhouse and the basement during heavy rains and snow melt. The immediate solution was to divert the building's watershed to a temporary leader running across the greenhouse roof and into the downspout which had, until then, drained only the greenhouse's watershed. (Did you follow that?) So, instead of too much wetness inside the house, I now have a rather "aquatic" garden.

Now that winter is over, I look at the garden and consider whether I will make the necessary repairs and send the water back to my sewer line and downhill into the Gowanus Canal. I have decided to leave things as is. The water sinks in more rapidly than you might imagine. But while I have puddles, I also have birds who like nothing better than to jump in and bathe. During this last winter I found that watching the antics of birds was a wonderful antidote to Covid strictures. When there were no puddles, I immediately filled an improvised bird bath. This also provided drinking water. The birds obliged by providing their songs.



The Tool Pelican watching over the puddle garden. The bright red flower is a South African bulb, *Scadoxus multiflorus*.



The "downright ugly" leader

my spring design problem. I will enjoy it! I may be reporting later in the year that skunk cabbage have taken over my garden. But so far, my local Tool Pelican is nodding his approval.

LOLA LLOYD HORWITZ

NORTH AMERICAN ROCK GARDEN SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING



EDGE OF THE ROCKIES

DURANGO, COLORADO

AUGUST 5–8, 2021

Hosted by the Rocky Mountain Chapter

In many ways, Durango is the heart of North America. It lies not only at the edge of the San Juan Mountains (the most massive range of the Colorado Rockies) but at the edge of the Colorado Plateau's rich canyonlands, and it brushes against the Chihuahuan Desert uplands of New Mexico to the south and east. Mesa Verde rises to the south and west — a blue-gray mesa filled with the largest, densest concentration of Pre-Columbian architecture north of Mexico.

This conference will adhere to CDC guidelines
Attendance is limited to 200 persons

Registration open now at www.nargs.com

YOU CAN ATTEND THE NARGS ANNUAL MEETING AT A DISCOUNT!

MCNARGS is offering a stipend of \$300 to a member who would like to attend the NARGS Annual Meeting in Colorado. There are two stipulations — this must be the member's first time attending an Annual Meeting, and the member must agree to write an article for the *Urban Rock Gardener* about the conference. (Only one stipend offered per meeting.) Please email applications to www.manhattannargs@verizon.net.



Thanks to the stipend offered by the Manhattan Chapter, Nancy Crumley attended her first NARGS Annual Meeting, held in North Carolina in 2017. She had a wonderful time, as she related in an article for the *Urban Rock Gardener* (January/February 2018). Pictured, left to right: Steve Whitesell, Kathy Gaffney, Nancy, Anne Mehlinger and Lola Lloyd Horwitz.

MANHATTAN CHAPTER OF NARGS MEMBERSHIP & RENEWAL

If you would like to join MCNARGS, if you owe past dues, or if you would like to make a contribution to our chapter, please mail a check (payable to MCNARGS) to our Membership Secretary:

Nancy Crumley
324 Seventh Avenue #4R
Brooklyn, NY 11215

\$30 for a 1-year membership

\$75 for a 3-year membership

Please indicate your address, phone number and email address, and let Nancy know if you would like to receive a paper copy of the newsletter, or if you prefer to receive it by email only.

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Email address: www.manhattannargs@verizon.net

THE MANHATTAN CHAPTER of the North American Rock Garden Society, founded in 1987, is a group of gardening enthusiasts who are dedicated to the propagation and promotion of an eclectic range of plants, with emphasis on alpine and rock gardening selections. Our Chapter programs, designed for a sophisticated mix of professionals and amateurs, cover a broad spectrum of special interests such as rock and alpine, woodland, bog, raised bed and planted walls, as well as trough and container gardening.

The Urban Rock Gardener is a newsletter published by the Manhattan Chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society.

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Our gratitude to Michael Riley for donating the printing and mailing of the *Urban Rock Gardener*.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

September 20 (via Zoom)

How Plants Got Their Stripes

JOSEPH TYCHONIEVICH

Horticulturist, Author

Editor of The Rock Garden Quarterly

October 18 (venue TBD)

Pot Luck

ABBIE ZABAR

Horticulturist, Artist and Author

Please note that the annual Tri-State Meeting, normally held in October, will not take place this year



THE NORTH AMERICAN ROCK GARDEN SOCIETY

JOIN TODAY. NARGS is for gardening enthusiasts interested in alpine, saxatile, and low-growing perennials and woody plants. Annual dues in the U.S. and Canada are \$40, payable in U.S. funds. VISA/ Mastercard accepted.

Benefits of membership include: *The Rock Garden Quarterly* with articles on alpines and North American wildflowers; annual Seed Exchange with thousands of plant species; study weekends and annual meetings in either U.S. or Canada; and book service.

Join online at www.nargs.org. Or write: Bobby J. Ward, Executive Secretary NARGS, P.O. Box 18604, Raleigh, NC 27619-8604.

The NARGS *Quarterly* is now online and members have free access at www.nargs.org/rock-garden-quarterly.

WE HOPE TO SEE YOU AT ALL OUR UPCOMING EVENTS

Submission deadline for September/October issue: August 20

MANHATTAN CHAPTER OF THE NORTH AMERICAN ROCK GARDEN SOCIETY

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