

The Urban Rock Gardener



Volume 32, Issue 3

May/June 2019

MAY EVENT IN BROOKLYN

Saturday, May 18 at 10 a.m.

PROSPECT HEIGHTS GARDEN TOUR

Meet in front of 110 St. Marks Avenue

The tour will last approximately 3 hours

Open to MCNARGS and NARGS members only.

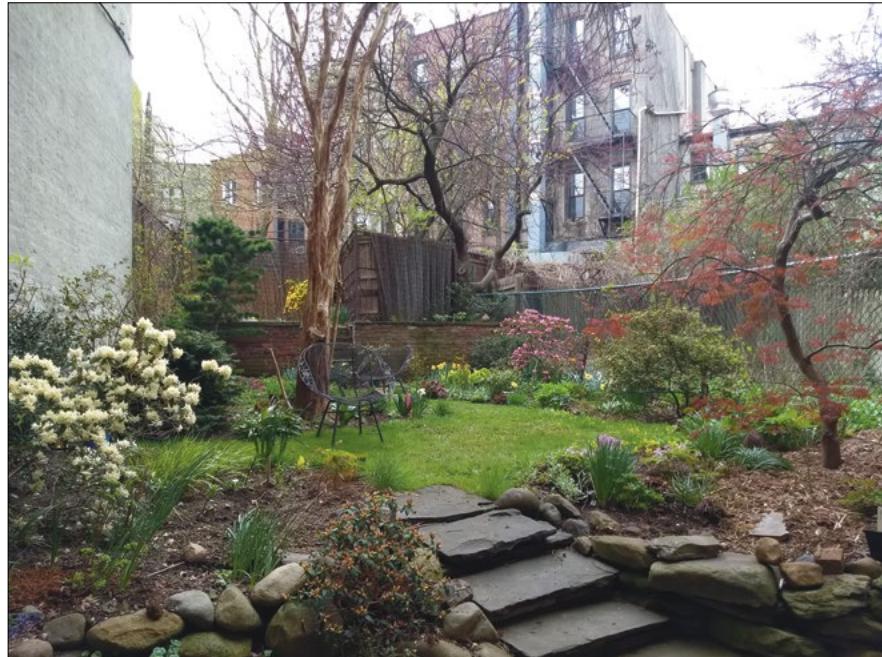
RSVP: Brendan Kenney at

nycbeard@gmail.com or 917-544-3288.

Please note: Limited capacity.

Reserve by May 16.

This is a group tour only. Gardens are not open for individual visits.



Jennifer Kalb's garden

TEXT BY PATTI HAGAN

PHOTOS BY THE GARDENERS (EXCEPT WHERE NOTED)

Absolutist rock gardeners be forewarned: the 2019 MCNARGS Prospect Heights Garden Tour will not be a straight-ahead rock garden event. Rather, we will be visiting *gardens with rocks in them*.

Prospect Heights lies on the terminal moraine deposited by the retreating Wisconsin Ice Sheet some 11,000 years ago. So the neighborhood is blessed with rocks, from pebbles to boulders to glacial erratics – giving its 21st century gardeners plenty to work with, around and through. Thus, Brooklyn gardening is *rock gardening* – whether you call it that or not.

JENNIFER KALB

110 St. Marks Avenue

WALK THROUGH JENNIFER KALB'S COOKBOOKISH KITCHEN and take in this tri-level garden through sliding doors/windows. Before you is a stone patio, then slate steps leading up to the mid-level lawn/garden, then more slate steps in the middle of a brick retaining wall – the foundation of her top garden. Now imagine it's the spring of 1981, when Jennifer first dug in; there was no garden, only a forest of ailanthus, *Sophora japonica* weed trees and a pack of dogs.

Jennifer grew up gardening in Worthington, Ohio ("always a major family activity ... we had a complete collection of the Way-side Gardens catalog.") While getting (highly) educated at Barnard and Columbia Law School, she joined the Indoor Light Gardening Society, the Gesneriad Society, and the New York Begonia Society

("The craze for begonias," she says, "comes and goes." MCNARGS members will see that it never went.)

In 1981, while on maternity leave after the birth of her son John, Jennifer turned her attention to the backyard space. There were only two levels – the current mid-level extended to the back wall of the house: there was no door into the outback, and nothing growing atop the rear brick retaining wall. In the mid '80s, a major excavation created the patio/rockery, allowing for sliding glass doors and access into the garden. The excavation also uncovered a monumental glacial erratic close to the new glass door. Jennifer's husband Jim had to move it. He winched the behemoth a few feet south to where it now rests – like a comfy-looking otto-

Continued on Page 2

110 ST. MARKS AVENUE

Continued from Page 1

man at the bottom of Jennifer's Rock Garden, with lesser erratics piled above. "The rocks were there," Jennifer says, "and the rock garden sort of evolved, improvisationally – we had to build the retaining wall and steps up to the [mid-level] lawn garden."

"I wanted grass and flowers," says this "Gardener, Esq.", so she started planting roses: 'Confidence,' 'City of York,' 'Christine,' 'Miss All-American Beauty,' 'Tiffany,' and a miniature, 'Magic Carousel', all the while facing the limitations of a city garden – trees, sun, shade, the fight for light. The birch tree died ("not planted in a mindful way") as did the snowball tree (*Styrax*), but the red Japanese maple has endured thirty years, as has the redbud 'Forest Pansy'.

The modest-sized crape myrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica* 'Tuscarora') Jennifer planted center garden has grown into an exfoliating giant. ("It's created its own shade issue." To chop or not to chop...?) A few years back, Jennifer installed a *Magnolia grandiflora* near the house ("the wrong cultivar – not fastigiate enough"), which was ousted in 2017 – "If it's a tree that shades things out, I'll get rid of it."

Lots of things came from the BBG's Signature Plant giveaways,



like the white rhododendron 'Mary Fleming.' Jennifer started ordering from Forest Farm in Oregon. "I wanted things that would have a presence all year long, so I kept adding shrubs. That's why I have the hollies and osmanthus. As shade came in, it became increasingly difficult."

About twenty years ago, at Suzy Verrier's North Creek Farm on Maine's Phippsburg Peninsula, Jennifer met *Impatiens balfourii* (Poor Man's Orchid). She brought this promiscuous self-seeder home to Prospect Heights, where it is now ubiquitous. Says Jennifer, "I've tried to grow everything I've seen that I've liked. It's a challenge. Seems like every year some plants disappear. A plant you've had for a decade decides to kick it off. I'm now trying to develop a permanent landscape – but the light keeps changing – and then I have these crazes: for eucomis, gesneriads, coleus-in-the-rocks, *Calamintha grandiflora* 'Variegata', Kenilworth ivy (*Cymbalaria muralis*) and *Rudbeckia triloba*. I sort of favor the perennials that seed in."

The third level top garden – originally Kalb Farm (rhubarb, cucumbers, sage, lavender) is currently in transition. The May-apple orchard above the brick retaining wall is at eye level when standing on the mid-level and quite charming. Jennifer muses, "plants are funny," and admits that sometimes "I grow lots of things I don't like."

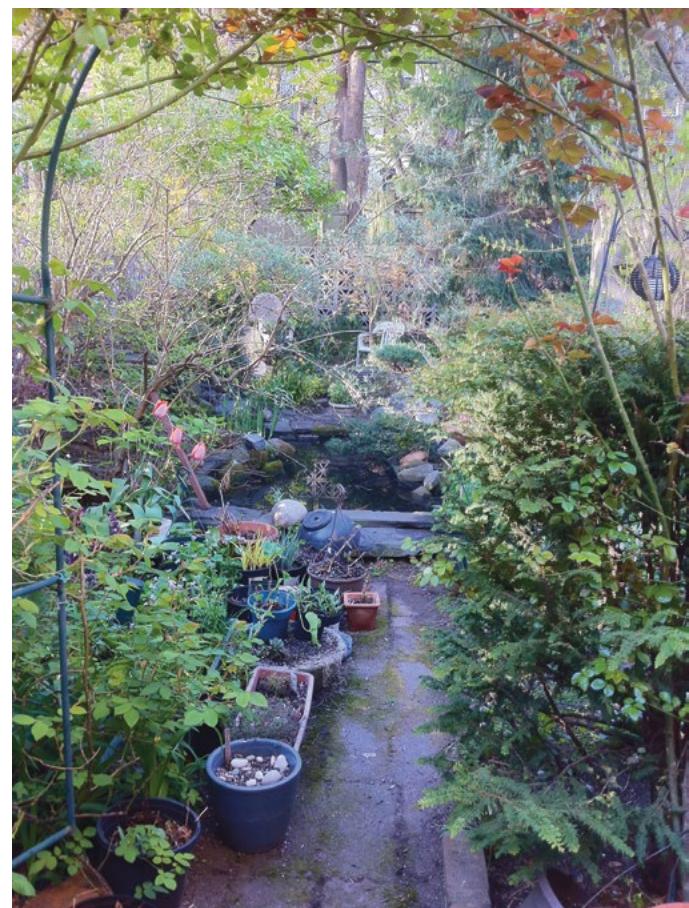
BARBARA OLDHAM 116 St. Marks Avenue

BARBARA HAS GONE ALONG TO GET ALONG as a happenstance Brooklyn terminal moraine gardener. Walk through the Oldhams' re-purposed 19th century blacksmithy and look south at a mono-level garden: patio, pond, lawn, and a tall evergreen tree line. But back in 1985, when Barbara began digging into the flatland out back, a brick path led straight to the rear beside a cement block wall, past a Hermit's Cave, to an ancient dogwood tree.

Having grown up gardening in Yellow Springs, Ohio, Barbara had three requirements for her new *jardin*: importing her Mom's lilac and lily of the valley, digging a pond and growing "a bit of lawn." Not far underground, however, an enormous glacial erratic interrupted pond excavation. Her husband David and crew extracted the massive boulder, gouging out a stream bed (now edged with asarum) en route to the back corner. To the Oldhams' amazement, the giant rock had been resting for 10,000 years or more on "pristine white sand, virgin sand from the Wisconsin Ice Sheet. Whereas the front garden was all hypodermics and plastic gloves."

The Oldhams inherited a built-in barbecue beside the pond, which they transformed into a mossy waterfall. Barbara says, "My style is to let it be and fill in with the little things" – like *Anemone* *thalictroides* and bloodroot – in frequent runs to Gowanus Nursery.

Ancient "roundish boulders" from the property, along with the ones regularly unearthed whenever the Department of Transportation is digging up the 'hood, edge the pond, along with a graceful





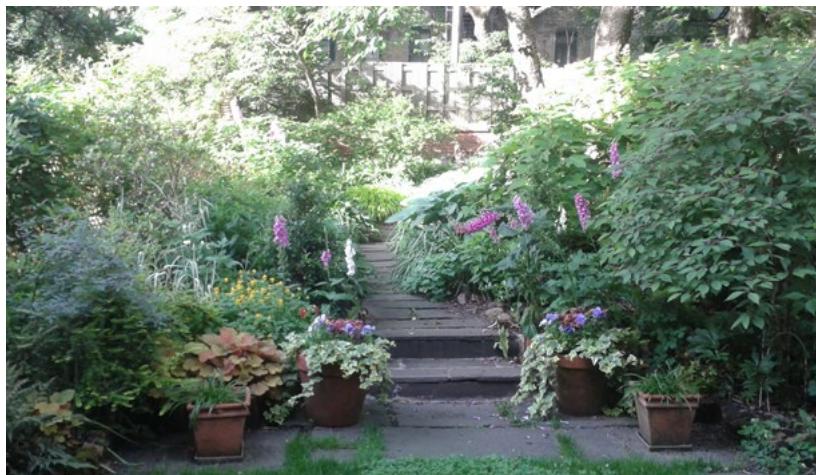
MARIA GARIBALDI 120 St. Marks Avenue

IN MAY 1989, TWO MONTHS BEFORE Bruce Ratner would begin tearing down their downtown Brooklyn loft home (ere MetroTech), Marcia Garibaldi and Paul Adam moved to 120 St. Marks Avenue. From the back parlor and back porch they looked down on a privet jungle growing on a lopsided turtle-backed grade, gently rising up south and dipping east.

Over three decades, the privet jungle has become Bronx native Marcia's "first real garden." But, in 1989, when a landscape architect friend looked out and intoned, "Well, you have to double-dig!", novice gardener Garibaldi did as told. She began "double-digging rocks" in her little patch of terminal moraine. (Double-digging the old privy yielded pottery and more rocks!) In time, Marcia re-planted her rocks along the sides of the slate path – a curving question mark – that "grades up" to the back fence. This wood-atop-brick fence was ingeniously designed and built by Paul: "a small takeoff from the BBG Japanese Garden fence."

(You can study Paul's mortise and tenon fence from a seat on the glacial erratic – endemic – in front of the Hinoki Cypress at path's end.)

According to Marcia, Paul was in charge of the hardscapes, beginning with the rectangular slate path neatly framing his square patch of lawn ("reduced about as much as I can get away with"). This is Paul's Greensward – "so mossy maybe we should leave it to moss," Marcia muses. "Paul says he's 'the porter,' which is all the more reason to re-purpose existing materials like the rocks. The vast majority of them were here, though once in a while people bring us rocks." One such gift-stone is a great mossed rock from Massachusetts that faux-verdigrises the patio next to the house.



Neillia sinensis. Early on, the Oldhams dug down eighteen inches and worked in plenty of (Bronx) Zoo Doo. Along with leveraging glacial erratics, says Barbara, "David likes to clip things out of his way. He goes out and attacks the rose bushes" – especially the climbing 'Cecile Brunner'.

In her non-gardening life, Barbara is an accomplished musician, specializing in the French horn. As a founding member of the woodwind ensemble, Quintet of the Americas, she has performed at Carnegie Hall and in over 300 concerts throughout the Western Hemisphere, including recent performances in Cuba. She is on the Performing Arts faculty of both Brooklyn College and NYU Steinhardt.

P.S. The Oldhams' first tenant at 116 St. Marks Avenue was the non-gardener Rev. Al Sharpton – during the Tawana Brawley scandal.

Marcia observes that Paul has a different sensibility and approach than she does. She is sure that "it wouldn't have worked out if we were both gardening ... Certain plants I grow for him, like the 'Golden Wings' rose from the 1950s, with its five petals like an apple blossom."

From fabric designer ("I did paintings – stripes, exotic leaves"), Marcia transitioned into hort at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden interning and earning a Certificate of Horticulture. In the meantime, in her home garden, Marcia "learned by working here by trial and error." By the spring of 1998, Marcia was a professional

gardener, working first at the Prospect Park Zoo, then for the NYC Department of Parks at Fort Tryon Park, playing a major role in the restoration and care of the Heather Garden. She says of her home garden, "It's not a collection. It's a view. When gardening became a vocation I had opportunities to be around other plant material." Marcia retired from Parks in 2013.

Step into this peaceful garden view – up slate steps from Paul's Greensward. Walk through masses of snowdrops and hostas ("This is a 'junk' hosta – it fills in good"), Mayapple, epimediums ("epimediums jump the fence – they're like rabbits"), the pewter-patterned leaves of a naturalized *Asarum splendens* colony, chartreuse-green hakonechloa, "gazillions of hellebores," Clematis 'Roguchi' and 'Etoile Violette', Geranium 'Wargrave Pink', *Polygonatum biflorum* var. *commutatum*, ferns, oakleaf hydrangea, *Rhododendron calendulaceum*, corylopsis and *Macleaya cordata*.

Marcia planted mertensia where she planted Lola, her last cat. *Requiescat in pace.*

PATTI HAGAN 117 St. Marks Avenue

IN 1982, A SCRAWNY, NO-ACCOUNT MAPLE – I called it *Acer nugariorius* – got planted in front of my house. After it died from fungal rot a few years ago, I remade the tree pit into a Sidewalk Rock Garden – with rocks lugged home from the constant DOT street digs throughout the Prospect Heights Historic District. My Sidewalk Rock Garden is densely planted with bulbs: bluebells, ipheions, crocus, *Ornithogalum nutans*, daffodils, and Chinese trumpet lilies. I also grow perennials: aquilegias, asters, hemerocallis, amaranth, hellebores, ajuga, fraises des bois, lamium, violets, primroses, *et alia* hortwise. Sometimes people steal my rocks and plants.

By chance I learned from Con Ed that some Parks Dept. arborocrat has ordered a new street tree be planted at 117 St. Marks Avenue. No! Not in this MCNARGS gardener's garden!



Photos by Jack Kaplan

ST. MARKS AVENUE/PROSPECT HEIGHTS COMMUNITY GARDEN 207 St. Marks Avenue

ESTABLISHED IN 1975, this community garden keeps bees, harvests rainwater, three-bin composts, and grows grapes, currants, gooseberries, black cap and red raspberries, crabapples, hops, fennel, ferns (Lew Soloff Fernery), milkweed, roses, lilacs, lily of the valley, violets, hollies, and a compost-volunteer peach tree – with a biergarten picnic table for lunch on a fine day.



Patti Hagan admiring the lilacs



Composting station with water-collecting roof and beehives



A scarecrow guards the individual plots

Photos by Jack Kaplan

AFTER THE TOUR...

...IT WILL BE TIME FOR LUNCH! What better way to end your tour than dining *al fresco* in the Community Garden? Here are some recommended eateries along Vanderbilt Avenue for take-out (or otherwise):

- **Zaytoons** – 594 Vanderbilt/St. Marks
- **Little Cupcake Bakeshop** – 598 Vanderbilt/St. Marks
- **Unnameable Books** – 600 Vanderbilt
[not for eating but delicious]
- **American Vegan** – 612 Vanderbilt
[try a Purple Amazon!]
- **Milk Bar** – 620 Vanderbilt/Prospect Place
- **Joyce Bakeshop** – 646 Vanderbilt/Park Place

WHO NEEDS SPRING FLOWERS? THE JOYS OF EMERGING FOLIAGE



While we all wait impatiently for spring's floriferous show in our troughs and gardens, we should remember to take time to appreciate the color, texture and form of emerging foliage.

JUDI DUMONT

Clockwise from lower left: *Adiantum pedatum*, *Anemonella thalictroides* 'Cameo', *Matteuccia struthiopteris* 'The King', *Saxifraga fortunei* 'Pink Elf', *Mukdenia rossii* 'Karasuba', *Androsace sarmentosa* var. *watkinsii*

Photos by Judi Dumont

THINKING OF MOUNTAINS



I happen to be quite fond of sempervivum, orostachys and related plants, but have watched too many of them rot away during the winter. They're not dying due to low temperatures, but because of too much moisture collecting around their necks. Even when following the directive to supply good drainage, I have found a collection of rotted leaves in the spring. Gradually the idea of counteracting the effect of freezing water around my plants meant that I needed to look close up at the way they grow in the wild or in gardens of fellow gardeners. I saw them clinging to rock faces or chunks of tufa at perilous angles where water swiftly drained away.

So these were the steps I took: before late December, I found all pots, plastic or terra cotta, that had favorite species of sempervivum, *S. heuffelii*, or orostachys, and set them at an angle. Some plants were in pots too large to move, and some, such as the *S. heuffelii* that were still in the small containers in which they were shipped, were easily moved inside my greenhouse. But the primary example of my "Mountain Method" was eight cultivars

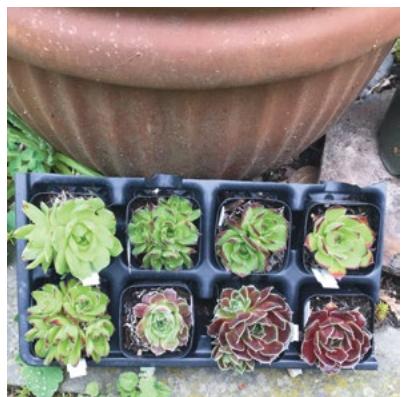
of *S. heuffelii* and an orostachys in a wide, shallow container that I leaned against the trunk of my paw paw tree facing due south. They have not only survived winter and the heavy rains, but seem to have thrived. I have not changed their angle of repose.

I know that there are many easy-to-grow sempervivums that don't require any special attention, but for those of you who are willing to fuss over special hardy succulents, try the "Mountain Method" and let me know if it works. What might also work is to bring them indoors on a window sill and cut back sharply on watering. But I find that that method takes more attention than the other. ("Now when did I last water?")

Just to cover all the methods I have met up with, someone I ran into in Austria with a superb collection of succulents, mostly cacti, said that he overwintered them in a dark closet! I figure you could do worse than try the same thing with your showy sempervivums, thereby giving a wink to the steep slopes of their native habitat.

Note: Mountain Crest Gardens supplied the *S. heuffelii* that I presently grow.

LOLA HORWITZ



Photos by Lola Horwitz

Two examples of setting plants at an angle for overwintering. Top: unpotted sempervivums. Bottom: shallow container leaning against the trunk of a paw paw.

NARGS STUDY WEEKEND: ROOTED IN DIVERSITY

Several of our members recently attended the NARGS Spring Study Weekend hosted by the Delaware Chapter, on May 3– 5. David Culp and Charles Cresson opened their gardens to visitors, and Brendan Kenney went, camera in hand. Here are some of his photos, which need no captions – they speak for themselves.

DAVID CULP'S GARDEN



CHARLES CRESSON'S GARDEN



IN MEMORY OF DELPHINE ORAVETZ



Delphine was a stalwart member of MCNARGS and a Director on the Board of the Greater New York Gesneriad Society as well as a member of the 6th and B Community Garden. And she was a PIT, a member of the exclusive club called the Rare and Pit and Plant Council!!! She was also eclectic in every way imaginable and charming, more or less.

She loved to bake cookies made with green tea, and another called Fairie Cookies for which she gave me a recipe complete with a colored pencil drawing of a cherubic fairie!

She was a great friend of Bob Jurgens, another of our members who is waning in years and health, but who is still a member of both MCNARGS and the Gesneriad Society.

I will miss her flaming red hair and wit to match.

MICHAEL RILEY

Delphine is the reason I became a member of MCNARGS. She gave me a membership as a Christmas present many moons ago.

We gardened together at 6&B Community Garden for decades. Her plot was always stunning and chock full of roses and irises and primroses. I so loved her fritillaries.

She adopted two kitties born in our garden who lived to be about twenty, and fed our resident cat Oreo every morning for many years, who only let Delphine touch him.

She loved painting and gave me delightful portraits of my pooches.

At our garden's Easter Egg Hunt, she dressed up in a bunny costume and hopped about passing out candy.

She was a true gardener.

MARY BUCHEN

2020 NARGS ANNUAL MEETING CORNELL UNIVERSITY

Ithaca, New York
June 18–20



EXPLORATION & INNOVATION

Optional Pre-Conference Tour: BOTANIZING THE ADIRONDACKS

June 15–17

Optional Post-Conference Tour: GARDENS OF THE LOWER HUDSON VALLEY

June 21–23

REGISTRATION NOW OPEN (for tours only)
See NARGS website for info: www.nargs.org

WHY DON'T YOU?

by Steve Whitesell



Divide and conquer. Now is an ideal time to cut up choice clumping plants into many individuals. Why buy more plants when you can increase what you already have to fill in bare areas and enlarge existing groups? Plants that would die if divided in a month or two are much more successfully attempted now, early in the season, but act quickly before days heat up.

Divide emerging pots of seedlings before they get too crowded and it's more difficult to untangle intermingled roots without damage. Keep some for yourself, some for gifts and some for a chapter plant sale.

Bring in sand, gravel and soil to raise and level sunken paving stones and fill depressions. Do this early in the season so you can concentrate on watering, weeding and pruning as days get hotter and motivation diminishes.

Take time to visit other gardens and take notes on things you'd like to add and future revisions you'd like to make. The successes of others can be your best teacher.

MANHATTAN CHAPTER NARGS MEMBERSHIP & RENEWAL FORM

Date: _____

Please complete this form and give it with your payment (cash or check payable to MCNARGS) to Nancy Crumley (Membership Secretary).

Or, mail a check with the form to Nancy Crumley at:

324 Seventh Avenue #4R
Brooklyn, NY 11215

Check one:

- 1-year Membership \$30
 3-year Membership \$75

PLEASE PRINT NEATLY:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Check all that apply:

- I am renewing my membership I am a new member
 I would like to receive a paper copy of the newsletter
 I would like my newsletter via email only

We are a volunteer organization and would like your participation in our activities. How can you help?

- Help with Plant Sale Help increase our presence on Social Media
 Serve as Webmaster Contribute articles to the newsletter
 Other: _____

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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*.

WE HOPE TO SEE YOU AT ALL THE UPCOMING EVENTS

Submission deadline for September/October issue: August 15

**MANHATTAN CHAPTER OF THE
NORTH AMERICAN ROCK GARDEN SOCIETY**
5½ Jane Street #4R
New York, NY 10014

UPCOMING EVENTS

Monday, September 9

TBA

Sunday, October 13

Annual Tri-State Meeting

Ross Hall, New York Botanical Garden

Speaker:

CLIFF BOOKER

Lecturer, Photographer and Writer



BOTANIZING ARGENTINE PATAGONIA, 2020

NORTHERN PATAGONIA: Nov. 30-Dec. 11

SOUTHERN PATAGONIA EXTENSION: Dec. 12-16

REGISTRATION NOW OPEN

For details, see NARGS website: www.nargs.org

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: *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.

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