

The Urban Rock Gardener



Volume 30, Issue 3

May/June 2017

MAY MEETING

Monday, May 15 at 6 p.m.

NYBG Midtown Education Center, Room A

THE CHALLENGES OF GARDENING IN AN URBAN SETTING: RANDALL'S ISLAND PARK

With speakers from the

Randall's Island Park Alliance

PHYLLIS ODESSEY

Director of Horticulture

EUNYOUNG SEBAZCO

Horticulture Manager

KEVIN WIECKS

Head Gardener



Upper right: Rock Garden
Above: Water's Edge Garden in the fall



PHYLLIS ODESSEY will provide a brief introduction to Randall's Island Park and an overview of the development and design of the gardens on Randall's Island since 2006. This includes the Water's Edge Garden – the longest perennial border on ground level in New York City – the Rock Garden, and two wildflower meadows.

Phyllis received her landscape and horticulture certificates from the New York Botanical Garden. She worked on the installation of the Battery Park Conservancy Bosque Gardens with Piet Oudolf and Sigrid Gray. She is the recipient of the Chanticleer Scholarship in Professional Development and the Royal Oak Foundation Fellowship in Sustainable Gardening.



EUNYOUNG SEBAZCO will discuss the evolution of the Randall's Island Rock Garden: the challenges of creating the rock garden, the original design, plant palette and current usage. She will also cover the creation and challenges of the two wildflower meadows: Freshwater and Hell Gate.

EunYoung has degrees in Landscape Architecture from universities in Korea and Japan. She received a certificate from the NYBG School of Professional Horticulture, and has worked at Randall's Island Park Alliance since 2006. EunYoung oversees wide-range plant planning and manages the park's many gardens.



KEVIN WIECKS will talk about the development of the Water's Edge Garden, the challenges he has faced and the changes made over the course of time.

Kevin has been the Head Gardener for Randall's Island Park Alliance for the past three years. He was the Assistant Horticulturist at The Cloisters and Managing Horticulturist at LongHouse Reserve in East Hampton. Kevin operates Kevin Wiecks Horticultural Consultations, which serves the east end of Long Island. Although his true passion is herbaceous plants, Kevin has recently become an ISA Certified Arborist. He is currently working on a tree survey and pruning management plan for all of Randall's Island.

NYBG Midtown Education Center is located at 20 West 44th Street, 3rd floor, between 5th and 6th Avenues (General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen Building). This location is two blocks from Grand Central Terminal and near several subways.

JUNE EVENT IN BROOKLYN

Sunday, June 11 at 10 a.m.

FORT GREENE-CLINTON HILL GARDEN TOUR

Meet in front of 15 South Oxford Street
The tour will last approximately 4 hours

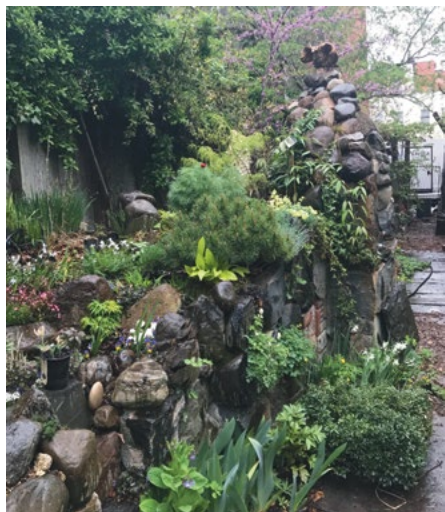
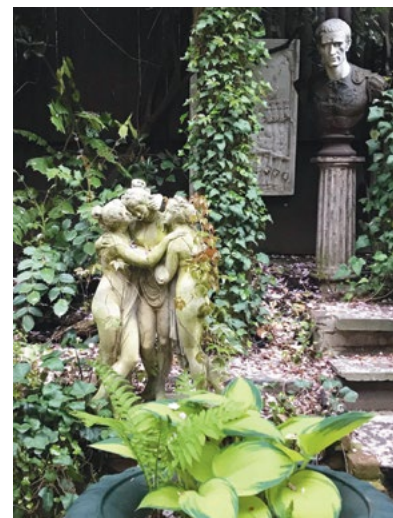
Open to NARGS and MCNARGS members only.

Contact Brendan Kenney at: nycbeard@gmail.com by June 4 to register.

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

BOB HARMON 15 South Oxford Street

DESPITE A DEGREE IN ANIMAL HUSBANDRY, Bob Harmon deserves a degree in Plant Husbandry. His double-wide garden, some four decades in the making, moves uphill on four levels of brick, stone and architectural artifact. Bob describes it as "the Brooklyn version of a Greco-Roman Disneyland." At the top level, peering through vines, Caesar leers down at the Three Graces. One level below them a gnarled and rigorously pruned wisteria hangs out on a distressed temple fragment. En route to the temple of Venus de Milo, one passes a coral bark maple – *Acer palmatum* 'Sango Kaku' and a shady fernery. Nine large koi live year-round in a 5 ft.-deep tiled pool with summer tropicals – such as bananas – in nearby planters and urns. Ever conniving for more sun, Bob has skillfully pruned up a large pink dogwood. Balzac shows up in his herb patch, too. "Children were found in parsley beds." Verticals work throughout, by means of ostrich ferns and a threesome of *Ilex crenata* 'Sky Pencil.' Wonderfully atmospheric!



RAGNAR NAESS 107 Hall Street

OVER FOUR DECADES, Ragnar Naess's Wallabout Plantation has become the BBBG – Backyard Brooklyn Botanic Garden – spanning three verdiginous lots behind his North River Pottery studio and house.

"My garden was designed for this view," observes Ragnar, sitting on his potting stool and gazing out the plate glass windows: a stone path skirting his retired kilnroom, a perennial green seaweed sculpture, a towering crabapple, ferns, trilliums, epimediums, climbing hydrangeas, trifoliate orange trees, and an ethereal bamboo forest of 40-footers.

The original garden (with Japanese moon-viewing pavilion) flourished squarely behind the 107 Hall Street kiln shed. At the end of the 20th century, Ragnar had the chance to buy back-to-back lots next door: 105 Hall Street (with house) and 104 Ryerson (empty). This allowed the expansion of Naess's exuberant, no-holds-barred garden east to Ryerson (across the street from Walt Whitman's house).

In this growing garden, Ragnar has been joined by another garden-lifer, husband David Charles. Around 2004, after they'd marked a Long Path view axis from Hall to Ryerson, the Big Dig began. When Ragnar joined the two Hall Street houses, massive buried boulders were hoisted out of the shared basement rock wall and piled up. The lesser stones, dropped off by the Wisconsin ice sheet terminal moraine, were unearthed in an eight-year dig beside the Long Path, heaped up and christened the Default Rock Garden, a sort of hermit cave with steps up the outside, allowing lithophytes to drape over and drop into the rockery, both walls and roof.

Various mounds of talus and scree have grown along with the botanical roster: a fastigiate beech, apple trees, calycanthus, lilacs, weigela, viburnums, *Pieris japonica*, azaleas, hellebores, trout lilies, hydrangeas, crape myrtle, mock orange, mountain ash and fir (from Cliff Island, Maine), Chinese astilbes, *Rosa glauca*, tree peonies, clematis, variegated toad lilies, and more.

Ragnar is always auditioning new plants. "As I progress I move everything down the line," toward Ryerson. "I call it Restless Plant Syndrome." David notes: "Ragnar finds an unusual plant? He wants it!" (The grown-up Wiggly Willow got rooted after the rest of a flower bouquet went to heaven.)

Ragnar has put up plywood fences – plywood mosses up nicely – in a series of curved bays, bermed up with his own custom soil mix. In the beginning all soil was dug and screened to 18 inches. The Naessian-enriched soil recipe approximates a sort of French double-digging: 1/3 screened *in situ* soil, 1/3 compost (courtesy of the NYC Parks Dept.) and 1/3 Miracle-Gro Garden Soil. A watering system is buried throughout. A pond may follow. Be warned: this is the ultimate Go Slow Garden. Speed Gardeners will miss everything that makes the BBBG very special.

Brooklyn Garden Tour continued on page 3

FORT GREENE-CLINTON HILL GARDEN TOUR *(continued)*



MIRJAM FARKAS 198 Washington Park

BEHIND A MONUMENTAL BROWNSTONE, just east of Fort Greene Park, grows Brooklyn's own Secret Garden. The maker of this extraordinary double-wide garden, Mirjam Farkas, is a small, extremely bright-eyed elf, who began life in a beautiful garden in Transylvania. You enter this magical place quite the way Alice got into Wonderland: you climb through a big back parlor window, and descend metal stairs through herbs and roses into a sunken, rose-walled, clematis-climbed garden of interesting textures, fragrances, colors, composition. (Mirjam is a textile designer and a skilled soil designer – concocting her own recipe of compost, loam and sand.) If you're lucky you may catch her great tree peony protected from the sun under a Japanese parasol or her orchid patch in bloom, or her ambrosial, quatrefoil French roses, or you can just quietly garden-meditate beneath an aerial jardin chandelier.

MARY COLE 190 Washington Avenue

AS IN MOST BROOKLYN GARDENS, bluestone is underfoot here, and free-moving Japanese painted ferns and heucheras have made themselves at home in the cracks between stones. Long ago the bluestone rectangles on the right and left sides were pried up and propped on edge to make generous planting troughs. (A rear bulkhead holds a towering taxus.) In a mid-garden plant island – the re-purposed sandbox of Mary's son, now 44 – is a companionable assemblage of low-growing *Pieris japonica*, blue spruce, hellebores, a rusty orange heuchera and a surprisingly tall, many-stalked fothergilla. Mary terms this garden "somewhat maintenance-free" with "a blue theme" in stones, plants and furniture. Treat yourself to a most comfortable sit on a pale blue French Sunburst Garden Armchair, circa 1930. ("I first sat on them in the '60s.") For more about this chair, see page 4.



MARY COLE 218 Washington Avenue

GRANITE BELGIAN BREADLOAVES pave the driveway up to the 218 Washington garden gate. This 40-year-old double-wide garden backs onto two Charles Pratt-era carriage houses. Around a large, sunny green are trees (hornbeam, Red Jade crabapple) and shrubs (PeeGee hydrangeas, azaleas), satisfying Mary's weakness (strength?) for unusual leaf textures. Tucked into one corner is a most charming red-brick, skylit artist's cottage – with fireplace. Enchanting! As a children's librarian, Mary was influenced by the illustrated books of Beatrix Potter and Gertrude Jekyll and the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, where she volunteered for a year. ("The BBG was my savior" after moving from Chicago.) Mary's garden remains a refreshing retreat for reading and socializing with family and friends.

TEXT BY PATTI HAGAN
PHOTOS BY BRENDAN KENNEY

**"C'EST COMME ASSIS
AU SOLEIL"**



Photo by Brendan Kenney

Mary Cole's Sunburst Armchair in her 190 Washington Avenue garden

Developed in the late 19th century for Parisian parks and boulevards, the "Sunburst" armchair, with bent steel rod and spring construction, was patented by François A. Carré in 1866. Various versions exist of this extraordinarily comfortable chair. It was produced in Paris by the Val d'Osne foundries, and Schlesinger Wiessener & Co. of Vienna and New York, and by Lalanc & Grosjean (New York) which later purchased the patent from Carré. It remained popular until the early 1930's.

BRENDAN KENNEY

AN ENDANGERED GEM ON ELIZABETH STREET



All garden efforts are inherently ephemeral. Savor the architectural and horticultural pleasures of the Elizabeth Street Garden in Nolita this spring and summer, as its future remains in doubt. A new non-profit, Elizabeth Street Garden, Inc., was formed recently, intent on suing the city to stop the planned construction of affordable housing, which would replace the exquisite garden. Friends of the Elizabeth Street Garden, the non-profit founded in 2012, was unwilling to litigate. The situation is complicated, but come to relax and enjoy this garden gem. It is located adjacent to 209 Elizabeth Street, and is open (weather permitting) on weekdays from noon to 5 p.m., and on weekends from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. www.elizabethstreetgarden.com.

BRENDAN KENNEY



Photos by Brendan Kenney

PLEASE NOTE...

Registration for the Madison meeting is still open!

**WISCONSIN SPRING GARDEN GALA
IN MADISON, WISCONSIN
NORTH AMERICAN ROCK GARDEN SOCIETY
STUDY WEEKEND**

Friday to Saturday, May 19 – 20

Registration is filling up for this event, which features talks, garden tours and buying trips to two great nurseries.

It will make an exciting spring adventure for you and your gardening friends.

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

For further information, email questions to:
NARGSWIS2017@gmail.com

**URBAN FARM EXPLORATION DAY AT THE
RANDALL'S ISLAND PARK ALLIANCE**

See rice, fruit and vegetables being grown in an urban environment. Chickens, an apple orchard and innovative composting are featured.

**Saturdays & Sundays, 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.
recurring through the fall**

Check schedule at www.randallsisland.org

**NORTH AMERICAN ROCK GARDEN SOCIETY
UPCOMING EVENTS**

PLANTSMAN'S TOUR OF WYOMING

June 14 to 19, 2017

THE ITALIAN DOLOMITES

June 21 to 28, 2017

See *The Rock Garden Quarterly* (Winter 2016/17) for details.

ANOTHER HOOSIER IN MANHATTAN

By Brendan Kenney, Chair



"I'd take a guy a lifetime to know Brooklyn t'roo an' t'roo. An' even den, yuh wouldn't know it all." Thomas Wolfe's words from 1935 are still true though the famous dialect has been softened over the years. Our June tour will be a good opportunity to become familiar with some fascinating Fort Greene and Clinton Hill residents and their gardens. Glacial erratics are a common feature of the gardens in this part of the most

populous borough, which is a reminder that alpine plants once flourished in our area. Patti Hagan guided me through three Brooklyn neighborhoods as we scouted future garden tours. Indeed it would take a lifetime just to know Brooklyn gardens. Future tours will explore more treasures.

MANHATTAN CHAPTER MEMBERS attending the NARGS Study Weekend in Madison, Wisconsin anticipate coming back with new ideas and no crazy snake worms. The Wisconsin Hardy Plant Society had to cancel their May 20 plant sale due to fears of spreading the Asian exotic *Amyntas agrestis*. Each year of gardening must be cherished in a changing world.

RECENT TRIPS TO INDIANA have included several visits to Rosie's Gardens in Indianapolis. Supporting local nurseries, especially growers, is critical to ensuring the future availability of a wide range of plants. Frequent patronage of nurseries such as Gowanus Nursery allows them to expand their offerings. I have been duly impressed at the increased selection at Rosie's in just a few years time.

A NIGHTTIME PERUSAL of the Astor Place/Cooper Square renovations with John Rommel ended in a confrontation with a man trampling the native plants with his dog in tow. Clearly, more horticultural awareness is needed. Tony Rosenthal's "Cube" is back in place after a two-year absence in time for its 50th anniversary. The expanded plaza and planted areas will be interesting to watch as the plant material grows in over the summer (if John can manage to protect those plantings!). Unfortunately, many of the bioswales and enhanced tree pits here and in other locations in the city are not functioning well. Dead plants and standing water too often are features. Tree pits open to the curbside invite both those exiting parked vehicles and dog walkers to compress the soil.

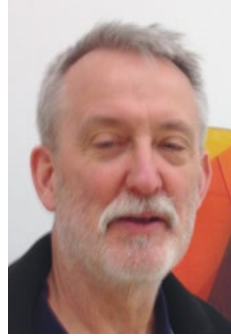
Perhaps in our great city it would be best to not "know it all" as we explore our urban landscape. Focusing on the delightful bits sustains us.

Brendan Kenney

Jane Allison, who lived in the Village for 60 years, wrote a newspaper column called "A Hoosier in Manhattan" for many decades.

WHY DON'T YOU?

by Steve Whitesell



Keep dividing your best plants. There is no better source of good plants than your own garden. If you have extras, donate to the chapter plant sale.

Transplant trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants now before they finish leafing out. Your success rate will be much higher than in three to four weeks, even if you're a little careless.

Take time away from your garden at this busy season to visit others. Get inspired by the work of others and bring back the best and most applicable ideas for yours. Take a choice plant as a greeting for the gardener if it's a private garden.

If there is an area in your garden prone to erosion or an adjacent wall or foundation prone to water penetration, repair it now before it gets any worse.

MANHATTAN CHAPTER NARGS

Membership Form

Date: _____

Please complete this form and give it with your payment (cash or check payable to MCNARGS) to Nancy Crumley (Membership Secretary) or Yukie Kurashina (Treasurer) at a chapter meeting.

Or, mail a check with the form to:
Yukie Kurashina, 3217 Hull Avenue, Apt. 8D
Bronx, NY 10467

Please check one:

- Individual \$20 Individual - 3 years \$50
 Student \$15 Gift Membership \$15

Current members may give a Gift Membership to a new member.

PLEASE PRINT NEATLY:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Please 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?

- Plant Sale Committee member Help increase our presence on Social Media
 Help plan October Tri-State Meeting 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*.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

Monday, September 18

**Rockefeller Center Troughs:
Manhattan Canyon Ecology, from
A Plant Perspective**

JOSIE LAWLOR

Lawlor Mapping & Design

Sunday, October 22

Annual Tri-State Meeting

Planting Fields Arboretum
Oyster Bay, NY

Speaker:

YASEMIN KONURALP

Author of "Wildflowers of Turkey"

Owner of Runner Tourism

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 alpiners and North American wildflowers, illustrated in color photographs and pen and ink drawings; 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, USA.

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 THE UPCOMING EVENTS

Submission deadline for September/October issue: August 25



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MANHATTAN CHAPTER OF THE NORTH AMERICAN ROCK GARDEN SOCIETY

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New York, NY 10025

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