



*Bombus sp.*

# **CURIOUS GARDENERS**

## **The Newsletter of the New England Chapter of NARGS**

**Winter/Early Spring 2020**

**Saturday, February 22                      Goodnow Library, Sudbury, MA**

**11:00 am**    Welcome; BYO hot drink. N-Z please bring snack or beverage to share

**11:15 am**    ***“More than Just the Buzz: Gardening for Biodiversity”***

Dr. Robert Gegear, UMass Dartmouth, will give a science- and data-based talk on native bees and their roles in the New England landscape

**12:45 pm**    BYO Lunch

**1:15 pm**    Short business meeting; Show and Tell about the plants we brought, and open discussion

**Saturday, March 21    Tower Hill Botanic Garden, Boylston, MA**

**10:30 am**    ***“Creating and Planting an Alpine Trough Garden”***

Lori Chips will take us for a deep dive into trough planting (for NE-NARGS chapter members only!). Lori is the author of *Hypertufa Containers: Creating and Planting an Alpine Trough Garden*

**12 noon**    Lunch; BYO or purchase in café. Visit THBG displays.

**1:30 pm**    ***“Troughs: Gardening in the Smallest Landscape”***

Open to the public for a charge; free for Chapter members (logistical details to come)

**Saturday, April 25                      Goodnow Library, Sudbury, MA**

**11:00 am**    Welcome; BYO hot drink. A-M please bring snack or beverage to share

**11:15 am Chapter member Harriet Robinson speaking on  
Spring-blooming Wildflowers in Greece**

**12:30** BYO Lunch

After lunch, we will depart to visit some of our member's April gardens. Details and directions TBA.

**Saturday, May 16**

**Littleton, MA**

**10:30 am Meet for tour at Marsha Russell's garden,** followed by traveling, with all our plant offerings for the auction, to the library to eat lunch, and then...

**1:00 pm Rare Plant Auction at the Reuben Hoar Library**

The library meeting room will be available to us starting at noon.

### **From the Chair**

I hesitate to say such a thing out loud, but it sure hasn't been much of a winter so far. Even while I'm uneasily enjoying the mild temperatures and lower heating oil consumption, the atypical weather makes me nervous. Is this weather or is it climate? We'll have time for discussion in the afternoon of the Feb. 22 meeting and I hope that people who have kept weather and plant journals over the years can share any patterns they've seen. Can we consider ourselves up a zone yet? What's your experience with pushing your luck on hardiness?

Our February meeting will give us some great information about the native pollinators that coevolved with our native plants. I had a chance to get a sneak preview a few weeks ago when Rob Gegear spoke to the Mass. Master Gardener Assn., and I'm looking forward to hearing his talk a second time! I assure you that you will learn a lot and will be looking for a few more native plants to add to your garden.

Also for the February meeting, I hope people will bring in something that's blooming (or just lovely) from their house for a big Show and Tell, like we had last February. It's fun to see what our members keep busy in the "off" season!

For the March meeting, we will head out to the Tower Hill Botanic Garden, which is cosponsoring our visit by Lori Chips. I'm happy to say that we have been able to arrange to have a morning session with Lori, so we'll have a great chance to ask questions and get a little deeper into things than we might when we attend her public lecture in the afternoon. It should be a really fun day, with the two talks and also the opportunity to enjoy the THBG indoor gardens. Our chapter members ONLY will be admitted free of charge to both the THBG property and the afternoon lecture, for which there is otherwise a charge, even for THBG members.

The April-May newsletter will have more information about the April and May meetings; the schedule at the beginning of this issue has the basics so you can mark your calendars and plan ahead.

We do not yet have a volunteer to handle Hospitality, so I am asking people to bring their own hot beverages for the moment. We'll have the usual paper goods on hand, but unless someone offers to bring coffee/tea/half and half/whatever, there won't be any. Let me know if you're interested in doing this and I'll explain what's involved. We also do not yet have volunteers to fill the offices that will be empty after November. Please do consider stepping up to help. Being a chapter chair isn't a difficult job, but it is a necessary function.

Registration for the NARGS Annual Meeting in Ithaca in June opened up Jan. 31. Is anyone planning to go? We'll talk about it at the February meeting. See you then.

*Vivien*

### **From the Editor**

Sometime ago, a paper wasp nest developed in one of my casual sun houses, and I was stung! So it was with great trepidation that I noticed one this June dangling from a branch of a small tree in the front yard.

The earlier nest had been attached to a wall at head height and proved to be an easy target



for a spray of pressurized insecticide, but this one was a good twenty feet in the air. What to do? My immediate instinct was to go with what I knew worked, but the jet probably wouldn't reach that high and would rain down on me in any case. And I'm not onto ladders anymore.



*Polistes sp.*

And so I pondered a while, and in good time noticed that they weren't in fact bothering me.

For the moment I settled for détente.

In the meantime, I noticed a coming and going of wasps in the kitchen. A little research brought clarification: that these, familiar as the ones that pester us in late summer when we try to eat something sweet, are in fact paper wasps in a different setting. The possibility of détente ended here when one stung my wife's finger, and it hurt. The hunt was on, made easy since they flattened themselves against the windows in their eagerness to get out.

Further research confirmed that my choice of co-existence had been wise, however wimpy. The nest would not be used again, weathering away over the winter. The wasps themselves, except for the queen, would die. And that would be that!

But how in the world does that work for the good of the species?

*Jim Jones*



## **Foresight 2020: Exploration and Inspiration**

It's not too early to be thinking about June. And why? As gardeners there are many reasons to look forward to summer and the NARGS Annual General Meeting and Conference I hope is one of them.

The Adirondack Chapter invites you to attend NARGS' Annual General Meeting— whether you are a return attendee or are considering attending for the first time. We promise an

action-packed few days that include visiting the public gardens of Cornell Botanic Gardens and some very special private gardens. We are eager to showcase the beauty of our area that is often described as gorgeous – which references our many gorges and waterfalls. But we're also proud of 40-mile long Cayuga Lake, the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest of the Finger Lakes, and the rolling, wooded hills and verdant gardens that surround it.

Each afternoon, after returning from field trips, you will be able to indulge your plant lust at our plant sales featuring an exciting list of specialty vendors. Dinner and evening talks will follow. We are thrilled to introduce the NARGS community to Kaj Andersen and the Bangsbo Botanical Gardens of Northern Denmark where he and his wife Minna, working alongside Zdeněk Zvolánek, have been instrumental in the construction and care of the world's largest crevice garden. Our other international speaker is Harry Jans, who needs no introduction to the rock gardening community but, believe it or not, is making his AGM debut. Harry, renowned for his extensive travels, will take us on a whirlwind around-the-world tour in 60 minutes — highlighting alpenines that he considers the best, new, rare, or strange, and looking at different survival techniques. For his second talk he will focus on the alpenines of Ecuador and Peru, two countries not often visited by plants people. Rounding out the Conference activities are book sales and signings, door prizes, and always the camaraderie of fellow plant enthusiasts.

We believe Ithaca will be the place to be this June! You might even want to consider extending your stay to more fully experience the Finger Lakes region. So mark your calendars for June 18-20 and start saving up to make the trip to Ithaca in the heart of the Finger Lakes region in the center part of the New York State.

The NARGS winter Quarterly as well as the website ([www.nargs.org/Events](http://www.nargs.org/Events)) contain the details. Online registration is now open.

*Carol Eichler, Adirondack Chapter*



*Rosularia rosulata* in rock crevices in planter with *Sempervivum*

## **A Few Unusual Hardy Succulents**

It is a fair assumption that most New England gardens accommodate at least a few Hens & Chicks (*Sempervivum*, including former genus *Jovibarba*), and certainly we all grow some requisite *Sedum* in our gardens, but other genera of hardy succulents are less commonly grown or even known about. One example is *Rosularia*, a small genus of approximately two dozen species, having a widespread distribution but with a center of speciation in Turkey and Central Asia. Relatively few are in cultivation, but all those that I mention here have been sourced locally from Russell's and Mahoney's garden centers, both supplied by wholesale grower Sunny Border in Connecticut. Those that I have tried are easy doers and reliably hardy through our New England winters, well suited to rock gardens, planters, and troughs.

The taxonomy of these delightful little plants is mired in synonymy, confusion, and ongoing debate, with most species at one time or another ascribed to other Crassulaceae genera including *Prometheum*, *Sedum*, *Rhodiola*, *Cotyledon*, *Sempervivella*, and *Umbilicus*. But don't worry about all the taxonomic rancor: if you spot one of these at a local nursery, buy it and give it a choice well-drained spot in sun, being sure to attempt getting all of the grower's potting mix off before planting. Let's look at a few selections.



*Rosularia rosulata* rosettes

The first one I bought three years ago is *Rosularia rosulata* (a valid but seemingly redundantly named species), that grows into tight hummocks, looking very much like a small *Sempervivum*, with inner rosette leaves of bright green and outer leaves that take on shades of orange.

It stays lustrous green all winter, the tidy rosettes unfazed by whatever a New England winter wants to deliver, with the orange infusion coming in spring, then fading to soft melon tones in summer.

As with *Sempervivum*, flowering rosettes of *Rosularia* die after blooming but leave behind many rosettes or 'chicks' to carry on. Blooms are unremarkable affairs, modest stalks of small white to pinkish florets, fortunately not as absurdly tall and gangly as *Sempervivum* bloom stalks. *Rosularia rosulata* has been successfully growing together with sempervivums in my all-season outdoor planters, and as well is easy to grow in pots outside year-around, merely plunged in bark mulch for the winter to protect the roots.

I bought another *Rosularia* named *R. serpentinica*, much like *R. rosulata* but with rosettes that were considerably smaller and tighter, and had outer leaves tinged red.



*Rosularia serpentinica*

*Rosularia serpentinica* did not fare as well, I think because the root system was already compromised from the grower's inappropriate potting mix, a soggy blend of peat and coarse bark chunks, not at all what these plants want. My attempt at power washing the heavy soil off the roots resulted in weak plants, only one of which survived and then flowered itself out. I intend on trying this plant again, this time buying it mail order from Mountain Crest Gardens, where they sell several different *Rosularia* and *Prometheum* species.

Upon posting photos to a hardy succulents Facebook Group, I was told by an expert that both of these *Rosularia* species shown are in fact *Rosularia muratdaghensis* from Turkey. They recommend that I get the only botanical monographic on the genus *Rosularia*, by Urs Eggli, 1988, then go through the detailed keys on the species to quantify an ID. The monograph is now out of print but still available used, but unfortunately rather expensive. I reserve judgement on the species identification until I can get my hands on the Eggli monograph.

The next *Rosularia* is completely different and possibly my favorite. It is *Rosularia sedoides*, from the Himalaya. It grows as a small network of soft, open fuzzy rosettes, with new rosettes on short thread-thin stolons, and substantial single white flowers sitting just above the rosettes starting late August and lasting through September and October. I'm amazed that a plant that looks so gentle and delicate can be ruggedly hardy and utterly unfazed by whatever New England winters can dish out. Look for this plant at nurseries under one of

several names, the one stated above, or *Sempervivella alba* (its original name), and now sadly *Sedum sedoides*.



*Rosularia sedoides* (syn. *Sempervivella alba*), blooming in September

My final example of a stand-out hardy succulent plant is *Rhodiola pachyclados* (shown with *Sempervivum*).

Unlike my previous examples that grow from basal rosettes, this plant grows as a woody subshrub but with striking silver-blue foliage rosettes at the ends of perennating branches. In winter the plant appears as a small mass of dried stems with tightly closed



*Rhodiola pachyclados* with *Sempervivum* 'Green Wheel'

rosettes of green leaf buds at the tips. In the past two years I've grown



several plants, yet they haven't flowered; no loss as they have less than exciting white flowers. One grows this for the uniquely beautiful spring, summer, and autumn foliage mounds, excellent for all-season planters and rock gardens.

*Rhodiola pachyclados in winter*

With the genus *Sedum* having been split into a number of other genera in recent years (absurdly so in my opinion), it seems that, to fill the void, taxonomist lumpers are throwing other Crassulaceae species back into *Sedum*, as with this plant that now goes around as *Sedum pachyclados*, sigh.

Ignore the taxonomic gyrations, find these wonderful plants, and add them to your rock gardens and winter-hardy all-season planters.

*Mark McDonough*

### **Advance Notice of October Meeting - Save that Date!**

While we normally meet on the third Saturday of the month, in October 2020 we will meet on the 10<sup>th</sup>. So please don't schedule any trips for the holiday weekend!

The reason we are meeting on this date is so we can host Gerhard van Buiten of the Botanical Gardens in Utrecht, whose travel in the Northeast is being underwritten by a donor to NARGS national, as was

the visit by David Charlton last October. NARGS president Elisabeth Zander says that Gerhard is a wonderful speaker, and certainly his topics sound interesting. The possibilities are listed below; I would say tentatively that we will be able to enjoy two of these three. Definitely the Urbanite one, not that we have a shortage of rock in N.E.

**"The rock garden of Utrecht Botanic Gardens, the Netherlands"**

a brief history and introduction to the garden, the blessing and curse of rock gardening in the Dutch climate, many choice alpines and secrets from our nursery.

**"Urbanite: rock gardening in a country without natural rock"**

We have over 30 years of experience with the use of recycling material in the rock garden. Concrete, roof tiles, aerated concrete and blast furnace slag make beautiful rock gardens and the plants don't care.

All about the Material, the building and the plants on our famous concrete crevice spheres.

**"Peatbeds, a perfect place to grow woodlanders and plants of alpine meadows"**

The peatbeds at Utrecht Botanic Gardens make the show for many months in spring and early summer. Our collection of Arisaema, Trillium and many Epimedium species thrives here among hundreds of other woodlanders and alpines from East Asia. How we provide drainage in winter and watering in summer, try to reduce the use of peat and other challenges.

## NARGS-New England Chapter Membership and Dues

**Membership** in NARGS-NE is \$10.00 a year payable January 1 to Ernie Flippo, 264 Wales St., Abington, MA 02351. Payment may also be made in person at a meeting.

**Local Chapters:** –There are thirty-eight NARGS affiliated chapters active in North America. Chapter events include lectures, an email newsletter, garden visits, field trips, demonstrations, and plant sales. These friendly gatherings provide a wealth of information; offer a source for unusual plants, plus the opportunity to be inspired by other gardeners in your region.

Our Chapter meets 7 times a year (February, March, April, May, September, October and November), publishes a newsletter in email format, and organizes garden tours in May and June.

**National Organization:** We encourage you to join the national NARGS organization. [www.nargs.org](http://www.nargs.org) Dues are \$40.00 a year. Benefits include a seed exchange, a quarterly publication, and an on-line web site featuring an archive of past publications, a chat forum and a horticultural encyclopedia. NARGS national also conducts winter study weekends and holds their Annual Meeting in interesting places.

**Reminder: BE GREEN Bring Your Own Mug**

**Directions to Goodnow Library, 2 Concord Road, Sudbury**

From Route 95/128 and the East: Take Route 20 West through Weston and Wayland into Sudbury. At the first light in Sudbury turn right onto Concord Road. The library is on the left.  
From Route 27 and the North: Follow Route 27 south into Sudbury. At the traffic light in Old Sudbury Center turn right ( south) onto Concord Road. Follow Concord Road approximately 1 mile and the library is on your right.

**Directions to the Reuben Hoar Library in Littleton, MA**

From Rt. 95, take Exit 29B, Rt 2 West toward Acton/Fitchburg. In 8.4 miles bear right onto Rt 2 West/Rt. 2A West/Concord Tpke/Elm St. At roundabout, take 3<sup>rd</sup> exit onto Rt. 2 West/Union Tpke. In 7 miles, take Exit 40B for I-495 North toward Lawrence/Lowell. In 1.3 miles, turn right onto Rt 110/Rt 2A/King St. In half a mile, turn left and the library will be on the right. Park in the back of the building.

From the north: take Rt. 495 South to Exit 31, take ramp right for Rt. 119 toward Acton/Groton. Turn right onto Rt. 119/Great Road. In .4 mile, turn right onto Rt 110/Rt 2A/King St. In half a mile, turn right and the library will be on the right. Park in the back of the building.

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