



# ADIRONDACK CHAPTER

*North American Rockgarden Society*

## *Green Dragon Tales*

February 2004

### **Adirondack Chapter**

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### *Letter from the Chair*

Happy New Year to all! And along with the New Year come new resolutions. This year the board plans to achieve the following goals: As member's renew their membership they will receive the new Membership Handbook; the vote to invest funds with the Tompkins Community Fund will be made at the February meeting; a new website is in the process; and we will continue to provide great workshops, speakers, and plant sales to our membership.

NARGS members may take advantage of the Winter Study Weekend events coming up in late January and February. If you do go please bring a summary back to the chapter meetings in February and/or March. These weekends are always a great learning experience and I hope NARGS members take advantage of them.

Thank you to all chapter members and friends who helped with sorting seeds for the NARGS seed exchange. Your help was greatly appreciated by NARGS. Our chapter helped sort over 800 varieties of seed. This is a great accomplishment, especially since it happened through the holiday season.

As you all know, over the past few years, the chapter has been working to increase membership. To remain a vital and healthy organization, we will continue our membership outreach. Please if YOU have family, friends, or neighbors who are gardeners, encourage them to attend a meeting or become a member of the Adirondack Chapter. If guests or new members attend a meeting, please make an effort to greet them and welcome them to the meeting. Encourage them to come back, maybe join the chapter, and share with them what you feel are the benefits of membership. I am proud that the Adirondack Chapter is currently one of the few chapters with growing membership.

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# The Garden in Winter

This Sunday morning after I came home from church, I made myself a cup of tea and laid a fire in the fireplace. The radio was on bringing me St. Paul Sunday as I sat in my blue chair and started working on the *New York Times* Sunday crossword puzzle. Our Christmas tree was still up, not to be taken down until Twelfth Night, and the Poinsettias on the hearth made a lovely indoor setting. As I worked the puzzle I would occasionally look at the roaring fire and through the sliding doors to the patio and the back woods. What a beautiful sight what with the recent snow outlining every limb on every tree and bush in the woods. On the patio

A small beech tree in the woods still retained its leaves and the brown seedpods still hung on silverbell tree. Off to the right of

with pleasure the varying colors and textures of the bark on the trees – from the alligator-like bark of the dogwoods to the dark fur-



the wrought iron chairs and table had a lovely blanket of snow. A dwarf boxwood had a dome snow hat which was quite enchanting.

the silverbell was the Kousa dogwood with its attractive flaking bark.

Putting down the puzzle I meandered out to the family room and gazed out the window to the front yard and woods. With icicles starting to form on the gutters, the scene of snow-laden branches was repeated in the front woods. Every truss on my six-foot tall Janet Blair Rhododendron had its own hat of snow as did the Japanese Hollies. Looking across the ribbon of lawn only a few of the stones in my wall were visible, but as the days go by and the sun returns they will reappear. First to emerge from their blanket of snow will be spots where the snow is not quite so deep or where the sun is stronger. I note

rowed bark of the pines, the smooth bark of the maples, the dark and light rough bark of the black and white oaks, the shaggy bark of the hickories. Surpassing them all is the reddish flaking bark of the paper bark maple. My snow covered sitting rock backed by rhododendrons makes a lovely accent along the path. Beyond that in the row of shrubs in the front hedge, the bright red berries of the spice bush cling tightly to each branch. Looking toward the driveway the Serbian spruce is a thing of beauty standing tall and narrow with its pendulous branches. Although I cannot see them from the window, I know that the row of Hemlocks make a picture of green and white on the south border. Although still in winter's grip, I

## *Cruising the Web*

One of my favorite times of the year is the month or so after Christmas, when one can spend more time on the computer browsing catalogues, gardener's webpages, botanical and horticultural institutional sites, etc. Google.com is my right-hand assistant in my wanderings.

For over 25 years, ever since I saw the lovely Adonis amurensis in Bill Hamilton's garden and was given a piece of it, I have wanted more forms of, in Bill's inimitable accent and words, this "Harbinger of Spring". But, alas, no one could give me useful information. And my searches online yielded only the occasional new form.

In chatting online with Jim Waddick, the co-author of 'Iris of China' (Timber Press) about my poor luck in finding new cultivars, Jim mentioned a nursery in Germany, owned by Jurgen and Susanne Peters. To my joy, it seems they have seven forms of Adonis, ranging from several variations on the yellow Fukujuso form to several forms of copper, red, and a double form. The plants are pricey, ranging from 16 Euro to 30, but no one has such a range of forms. Jim and several others of us are getting together an order which we hope will offset the 50 Euro cost of the phyto certification. I am hoping that they are able to send me some Primulas which they call hortensis forms. Hopefully these are as garden worthy as their name implies. The hepatica list will have

you salivating but for most of us, the prices are a King's ransom indeed. As well, there is an enormous list of gentians from around the world. Much of the site can be had in English.

The URL is :

[http://www.alpine-peters.de/sprache/deck\\_engl.htm](http://www.alpine-peters.de/sprache/deck_engl.htm)

As I wandered even further trying to find more on adonis, I came across a mention, finally, by a gardener in Japan. Although the site is not elaborate, it is very interesting in that walks, plants and their growing sites in Japan are described, including Adonis amurensis. Amusingly, the links given are mostly for North American wildflower sites. Our craving for unusual plants from far-flung climes seems to be a universal passion.

I have contacted the owner of the site and am hoping to hear from him.

The URL is:

<http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~vm5s-tjm/e/indexe.htm>

And finally, I want to urge anyone interested in this lovely plant to consult Paul Christian's website. I have mentioned this nursery before, as probably having one of the finest websites I have ever encountered.

It is even more superbly done this Spring, with many plants added and much useful information as well, particularly on cultivation practices. There is now a page call Adonis Central, which

may clarify, for some of you, why you might have had problems in the past, keeping adonis going.

Although some of mine do grow in heavy clay and perform adequately, I certainly intend to lift some and make a good rich mix to encourage them to perform magnificently.

Do take a fresh look at Rare Plants. Here is the URL that will take you directly to the Adonis Central.

<http://rareplants.co.uk/adonis/central.htm>

Finally, for all die-hard rockers, here is a very nice site managed by a Belgian, Jozef Lemmens. Jozef provides a fantastic list of links which includes some for Andean plants, as well as others I've not seen. He specializes in androsaces, and has brief but entrancing write-ups about his travels to various locales that most of us will never see. There are great photos! Enjoy.

The URL is

<http://users.skynet.be/jozef.lemmens/welcome.htm>

Hopefully by the next issue, I should have some websites that will enrich our experience with the speaker for March, Alan McMurtrie whose topic will cover his extensive work with Iris reticulata.

As always, suggestions for websites of interest are most welcome. Just email them to me at [Arisaemaq@aol.com](mailto:Arisaemaq@aol.com).

*Marcia Meigs*

## In memoriam: Robert and Antoinette Wilkinson



The Adirondack Chapter has lost two great friends and founding members, Bob Wilkinson last February and Toni Wilkinson in November 2003 .

The accomplishments of both of the Wilkinsons were substantial and both stood out in their professions. Bob did research in plant pathology for many years at Cornell, particularly on diseases of beans. Toni was an editor extraordinaire and worked at Cornell in different departments over the years notably at the Bailey Hortorium where she worked with Bill Dress on *Hortus Third*. She was also an activist and one of the “Cornell Eleven”, a resolute group of women who, in the early 80’s, brought a class action lawsuit against Cornell University charging sex discrimination in denial of tenure.”

Toni and Bob lived for many years on Wyckoff Road in a beautiful home on a gorge, heavily shaded by many mature white pines. In this spot they crafted a wonderful garden full of shade-loving and ericaceous plants. Many large specimens of Rhododendrons and other unusual woody plants flourished there, under-planted with an abundance of small treasures, Asarums, Primula, ferns, Polygala, Buxus, and many others. The Wilkinsons were both avid collectors of special and charming plants. They also had an amusing collection of unusual and often whimsical rocks.

With their deaths, the Adirondack Chapter lost not only two accomplished plant-persons, we lost two good friends. We lost Bob’s quiet presence and droll wit. We lost Toni’s unfailing energy and enthusiasm. They both contributed greatly to making our chapter welcoming to all. Bob and Toni always shared plants and brought substantial contributions to plant sales. Bob was tireless in layering Rhododendrons and other woody plants to root new plants. After his death while helping Toni with the garden, I found that most of the Rhododendrons there had stems in various stages of rooting; many of us have specimens obtained in this way from their garden. Among their contributions to sales one might also find a white Cercis, rose-colored Lily of the Valley, purple Vinca, and the unusual native Pachysandra, to mention a few.

But beyond *all* of this they were both ever ready to share expertise and good counsel, to volunteer to make a project happen, or just to share a cup of tea. It is simply their kind and extra-ordinary company that I will always remember and miss the most.

Memorial donations can be made in their name to our chapter. We will decide in the future how to use the funds to commemorate Toni and Bob. Donations can also be made in their name to the Cornell Plantations where a Sciadopitys Pine will be endowed in their memory.

*Anne Klingensmith*

## Chapter Meetings

### February 21: Winter Gathering

Do you have a few special slides you'd like to share? Extra catalogs? A fantastic gardening tool? This is the meeting to bring them to.

And for an extra kick, Robin Bell has agreed to show his slides of Frank Cabot's garden in Quebec, Les Quatre Vents.

**Whetzel Room, Plant Science Building, Cornell University.**

Brown bag lunch at noon, program will start at 1 pm.

### March 20: Alan McMurtrie

of the Ontario Chapter will present a program on Reticulata Iris. You can check out his website at [www.reticulatas.com](http://www.reticulatas.com) for a preview.

**Whetzel Room, Plant Science Building, Cornell University.**

Brown bag lunch at noon, program will start at 1 pm.



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know that beneath the blanket of snow plants are stirring. Already we have 10 – 12 minutes more of daylight at the end of the day. In milder snow-free winters, the snow drops would have emerged and maybe even be in bloom. If I looked hard enough in such a winter, I could find a few grass-like leaves of spring beauty.

*Bill Plummer*

## Tips and Tricks to Seed-Starting

While I make no claims to be an expert (this is after all a column for beginners), I'd like to offer some tips and tricks from my own experience with growing plants from seed.

1. A sturdy four-shelf "workshop" shelving unit works well as a growing stand, is inexpensive, and provides a lot of growing space for small plants without taking up a lot of room.

2. Use 2-row fluorescent shop lights – no need for the more expensive full-spectrum "plant" lights on the market.

3. I keep the lights on 24/7. It's just easier – no remembering. And it's especially helpful to guarantee that emerging seedlings enjoy life-saving "sunshine."

4. Position the lights 3-4 inches from the top of the plants. Hang them from the shelving with a chain to allow you to adjust the height as the plants grow.

5. For potting medium you can't beat commercial seed starting soil mix. It holds moisture well – critical for seed germination, doesn't compact, and it helps promote vigorous root growth.

6. I fill small pots – 4-inch is my preferred size – with potting medium to about 1/4 inch from

the top. I like to sow the seeds in rows. The "organization" makes it easier for me to handle small seedlings at transplant time.

7. I don't cover small seed but do pat them firmly into the soil so there is good contact. Then, I mist over the top and lay a piece of plastic over the pot to help keep the seed constantly moist.

8. I check once or twice a day to see what needs tending. Water? I mist to avoid over-watering which seems to be my biggest pitfall. Have seedlings emerged? Remove the plastic. Do the lights need to be raised? Does anything need to be transplanted?

9. When seedlings are ready to transplant, at that point I switch to a gritty soil mix that alpiners prefer.

10. I transplant to 2-inch pots and can fit 2 dozen or more into a tray.

I haven't tried stratifying or any of the other techniques for the more difficult seed. That's for someday in the future. For now, I play the odds and am rewarded with enough success that I have more plants than I know what to do with. Bring them to the Chapter seedling sale of course!

*Carol Eichler*



Check out our new Adirondack Chapter website at

[www.acnargs.org](http://www.acnargs.org)

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We mourn the loss of two of our founding members, Toni and Bob Wilkinson. They were faithful and active members. Of the two, Toni was the more outgoing and made me, as a new member, feel both welcome and aware of all the wonders of gardening I had yet to learn. My appreciation for Bob came when I visited their home and viewed the depth and diversity of their woodland garden. Bob shared many of his woody cutting experiments with me and even dug a few Rhododendrons for me to try in my garden. Not a founding member, but one of the friendliest, Narda Jobmann, will also be missed.

The new year finds me in a new home and facing the opportunity to create a whole new rock garden. I will share a few of my experiences with you in moving my troughs and several hundred plants. I did not begin to dig plants until after the first frost. This way I was not moving plants that were actively growing. I placed small seedlings into 4-packs and watered them immediately. Larger plants went into long-johns or deep plastic containers and were also watered immediately. All plants were stored in the shade out of the wind. Directly after moving them to my new home, I placed them in a location out of the wind or direct sunlight. I was careful not to place any plants under an eave that would allow winter wet to soak them. I placed a large window over those

plants that are especially sensitive to winter wet. Troughs, I found, were best moved by taking the soil, stones and plants out of them. Even with a handtruck troughs are too heavy to move. I will plan to replant the troughs in the spring with the plants that survived the move.

I wish you all the very best in the New Year and hope we all have luck germinating seed, finding alpine gems in both known and unknown nurseries, or exploring alpine regions of far away places.

*Michelle*



The **Skaneateles Garden Club** is planning an English Garden tour May 20-30 of this year. It includes many gardens in and around London and a day at the Chelsea Flower Show.

Anyone interested can call at 315-685-3869 for details.

**Cooperative Extensions  
Horticulture Program  
presents:**

Sunday afternoon travel talks featuring gardens and the world of plants, to be followed by refreshments and a chance for gardeners and travelers or would-be travelers to socialize.

*Free and open to the public.*

**Sun. Feb. 29, 2-3:30 pm  
The Hillier Gardens and  
Arboretum - a Plantsman's  
Paradise**

Duncan Goodwin, graduate student at Cornell University and Head Gardener at Hilliers from 1994-2002, will share his images of the wide variety of plants at the internationally famous Hillier Gardens and Arboretum in England.

**Sun., March 14, 2-3:30 pm  
Eden Project and Gardens  
in Cornwall**

Harriet Becker, Co-founder of the Ithaca Childrens Garden and Tompkins County Master Gardener, who recently spent several months in England, will share her slides of the famous Eden Project and other gardens in Cornwall.

**Both events will be held at  
Cooperative Extension Educa-  
tion Center, 615 Willow Ave.,  
Ithaca**