



ADIRONDACK  
CHAPTER

*North American Rock Garden Society*

# *Green Dragon Tales*

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

April 2006

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**April 22 meeting: Seedling sale, Robin Bell in Patagonia**

You won't want to miss our April meeting. It will feature a slide presentation from chapter member Robin Bell about the remarkable and unusual plants he saw on his recent trip to Patagonia, as well as our 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Seedling Sale. Here's the skinny:

**Note the date:** It's a week later than usual (fourth Saturday instead of third) to avoid Easter-weekend conflicts.

**Note the location:** Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County, 615 Willow Ave. (where Dey St., Willow Ave. and Rte. 13 meet). If you need directions, visit [www.cce.cornell.edu/Tompkins](http://www.cce.cornell.edu/Tompkins) or phone (during regular business hours): (607) 272-2292.

**Note the tight schedule:** Setup begins at 11 a.m. If you are donating plants for the sale, please bring them between 11 and noon for pricing and set up. Bring a brown bag lunch and enjoy the company of your fellow gardeners between noon and 1 p.m., when Robin's presentation will begin promptly. To facilitate our tight schedule, time for announcements will be set aside beginning at 12:45. The seedling sale begins right after the talk.

This is your chance to share seedlings and to adopt a few to grow on for our May and August plant sales. Although we encourage members to bring in seedlings, you are welcome to bring in divisions and potted spring ephemerals such as dwarf daffodils, anemones, crocus, galanthus, corydalis, trillium, and so forth.

**Check out the garden:** Come a little early or stay a little late so that you can visit the Wurster Memorial Rock Garden on the Cooperative Extension grounds. There's sure to be plants of interest in bloom.

**Anne Klingensmith, speaker coordinator**  
**David Mitchell, plant sales coordinator**

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### **April 29 spring garden tour: Walton, Binghamton, Endicott**

Get ready for a great tour to three unique gardens. We will meet first at Rick Lowenstein's in Walton at 10:00 a.m. Bring a bag lunch to eat either at Rick's or on the drive to our next stop: Dana Keiser's Stony Hill Farm Greenhouses in Binghamton. Then it's on to George Erdman's in Endicott. (See directions at the end of this article.) If you're interested in carpooling – either looking for a ride or riders, contact me at: [pogr@aol.com](mailto:pogr@aol.com) or 607-656-4237.

**Rick Lowenstein's** garden, located in the foothills of the Catskills, is a mature 25-year-old Eden. In a past life, it was a working dairy farm. The fields were "bony" as the old timers say – strewn with rock. Working with the land, Rick has created a rock garden featuring many alpiners, including some of the more rare western species. He has allowed native and nonnative plants to self sow creating a large naturalized area including, for example, thousands of *Primula japonica*. A stone wall hundreds of feet long separates this riotous wild area from specialized beds including a cactus garden. A line of Spruce trees provide a wind break as well as a backdrop for sensitive exotics such as *Meconopsis*. A meandering stream and a pond provide habitat for water-hungry species, and it is all blended together to create a designer's garden to see, enjoy and, yes, envy. Thank you, Rick, for sharing.

**Dana Kaiser's** dynamic style is reflected in her bold and beautiful display gardens. The heavy earth moving equipment owned by her husband has allowed her to move huge stones for a rock garden fronting the house. The size of the stone demands large plants to provide balance at the same time creating pockets and crevices for the smaller species. A large sloping area between the house and greenhouse is a garden filled with specimens she has collected over the years and has offered for sale. The rare, the unusual and the oddities are her specialties and she takes pride in being on the cutting edge in her design work, her private gardens and her sale stock. Enjoy!

What many would-be gardeners would view with dismay, **George Erdman** has used as a gift. He transformed a steep slope rising sharply behind the house and barn into a natural-looking rock garden. Using rock, gravel and sand/soil mix as foundation, George has tucked tiny alpiners in the crevices and fissures of carefully placed stone and accented the whole with larger specimens for dramatic effect. The unobtrusive pathways allow access to all areas of the rugged landscape. He has artfully used raised wooden frames in front of the barn to showcase special-needs plants such as

bog species. As well, his innovative fish box troughs provide miniature habitat for prized alpinists that would be overwhelmed in the main garden. For those of us who have visited George's garden before, he has done a lot of work in the past several years and anticipates dividends this year. Let's go enjoy his rewards.

Here are the **directions** from Ithaca. (Everyone else will just get to Main Street in Walton and pick up the directions from there.)

Rick Lowenstein, 1923 Fish Hollow Road, Walton. (82 miles, 1 hour 55 minutes from Ithaca.) Take Route 79 to Whitney Point. Turn left onto Route 206 and go to Walton. In Walton, take a left onto Main Street (Delaware St.) and proceed through town to Townsend St. Take a left on Townsend and go three blocks to East Street. Take a right on East Street. Go one block and then half a block more to a rounded left turn which is East Brook Road. (I believe it has a street sign.) Take East Brook Road and go for about 6 miles. When you come to Fish Hollow (Rick's road), which only goes left, there is a little red house on the corner and a street sign. Take Fish Hollow and go a couple of miles. Rick's house is on the left set back over a stream. The fire number is 9607. Rick says, "Come in."

From Rick's to Dana's Stony Hill Farm, 3801 Brady Hill Road, Binghamton. (65 miles, 1 hour 20 minutes.) Start out going northwest on Fish Hollow Road toward Dunk Hill Road. Go .6 miles. Turn right onto Dunk Hill Road. Go 1.2 miles and Dunk Hill Road becomes Bennett Hollow Road. Go 2.3 miles. Turn right onto County Road 21/Franklin-Walton Road. Go 2.9 miles. Turn sharp left onto NY-357 W. Go 6.6 miles. Merge onto I-88 W via the ramp on the left toward Binghamton. I-88 will merge with I-81. Go south on I-81 to Exit 1 (near NY Welcome Center). Cross river towards Conklin (Route 11). Turn left at light (T intersection), then an immediate right onto Conklin Forks Road. Go about 3.8 miles. Turn left onto Brady Hill Road. Go approx. 2+ miles. Stony Hill Farm is on the right.

From Dana's to George Erdman's, 269 Bornt Hill Road, Endicott. (16 miles, 30 minutes.) Go back down Brady Hill Road as you came. Turn left on Saddlemire Road. Then turn left onto County Road 117/Pennsylvania Avenue (**NOT** the way you came). Go 2.8 miles. Turn slight right onto State Line Road. Go 2.5 miles. Turn right onto NY-26 N. Go 6.7 miles. Take the RT-17 E ramp toward Endwell. Turn sharp left onto NY-17C/NY-26/E Main Street. Continue to follow NY-17C for 2.9 miles. Turn slight right onto Bornt Hill Road. George's is on your right, .2 mile.

***Peg Ross and Alice Davis, garden trip/tour coordinators***

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### **More garden tours May 27-28, June 24**

More garden tours are in the planning stages. We'll have more details in the May newsletter. But here's what we know so far:

On May 27 and 28, there will be an overnight trip to the Garden in the Woods owned by the **New England Wild Flower Society**, and also their new acquisition, Nasami Farm native plant nurseries, both in Massachusetts, plus some other enjoyable visits to nurseries and gardens. We will organize some car pooling.

On June 24, we will have a garden tour in the **Syracuse area**. Two of our members' gardens will be included, plus an exciting visit to Seneca Hill Perennials in Oswego, another of our members' businesses.

***Peg Ross and Alice Davis, garden trip/tour coordinators***

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### **Mark your calendar: 2006 Programs at a glance**

- April 22: Robin Bell in Patagonia, 5<sup>th</sup> annual seedling sale, Tompkins County CCE office, Ithaca.
- April 29: spring garden tour: Walton, Binghamton, Endicott
- May 20: Plant Sale, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Ithaca High School.
- May 27-28: Massachusetts garden tour. Garden in the Woods, more. Pre-registration required.
- June 17: Cutting workshop, Ithaca, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. \$25 per participant; pre-registration required
- June 24, 2006: Garden tour, Syracuse area, Seneca Hill Perennials.
- Others possible summer activities - TBA. Wurster Garden work party, annual picnic and members-only plant sale, workshops (rock wall building, trough construction), and more. Look for details in future issues of *The Green Dragon*. We welcome additional ideas. (Contact a board member. See People section below.)
- Sept. 16 - Maria Galetti of Alpines Mont Echo, expert grower of extraordinary alpine and rock garden plants from Quebec.
- Oct. 21 - Program TBA.
- Nov. 11 - Annual Meeting and dish-to-pass.

Look for more details on these events in future issues of *The Green Dragon* and on our website: **[www.acnargs.org](http://www.acnargs.org)**

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### **Letter from the Chair**

Last month we brought in our first speaker for the year, Lee Ginenthal, who spoke about hardy roses. While roses are not thought of as a rock gardening plant, they are certainly plants of widespread interest and it seemed to be reflected in a well-attended program. It was so good to see new faces in the audience.

It occurred to me that we might learn from this meeting and schedule each March with a speaker and/or topic of broad appeal. Since we are just getting started with our program year, this approach would expose new audiences to our Chapter and hopefully we'd gain some new members.

Nationally, the Rock Garden Society has been seeing a steady decline in its membership – 10% in 2005 alone. Robin Bell, who attended the Board meeting at Eastern Study Week-end as our Chapter representative, reported concern over this decline and considerable discussion ensued about how to turn the trend around.

Contrary to this trend, our Chapter has seen a modest but steady increase in membership. Our membership numbers around 100. Furthermore, in the last year our Rochester faction spun-off to form the brand new Genesee Valley Chapter and has already grown to a membership of about 40. So why is the membership growing in central New York?

Certainly outreach has been a focus for us, but surely other Chapters focus on member recruitment too. Personally I believe outreach – and by that our primary efforts are devoted to newsletter, website, and meeting publicity – combined with quality speakers keeps our membership robust.

We try to bring in speakers that match our gardening interests and to grow our knowledge of plants. “Rock garden” is in our Chapter name but our purpose has not been limited to alpiners and sub-alpiners. We tend to be eclectic gardeners who enjoy and want to learn more about plants, not just alpiners – but also low-growing perennials, dwarf evergreens, bulbs, woodland plants, etc.

If this approach works and keeps our membership strong, then I say “let’s go with what works.” Hooray for eclectic!

This month is member recruitment month. Our membership runs on the calendar year and it’s time to renew for 2006. If you haven’t done so, you may be getting a phone call and friendly reminder from one of us on the Board. At \$10 for an individual membership, your Adirondack Chapter NARGS membership is an incredible bargain. (You can pick up membership forms at any of our events or download one at our website: [www.acnargs.org](http://www.acnargs.org))

**Carol Eichler, chair**

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## **A Sampler of New Flowering Shrubs**

*Editor’s note: This article from Mary Hirshfeld at Cornell Plantations (reprinted with permission) comes to us via David Mitchell, our plant sales coordinator. David thought it would be a good way to whet members’ appetites for the green cuttings workshop he’s organizing for June 17, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. The workshop will be led by Nina Bassuk, woody plant expert and director of the Urban Horticulture Institute in the Department of Horticulture at Cornell. We’ll meet at Kenneth Post Lab greenhouses at Cornell to discuss cutting techniques, then move on to the shrub collection at Cornell Plantations to take cuttings of some of the plants, and then back to mist benches at the greenhouse to root our cuttings. Participants may also bring their own cuttings. There will be a fee of \$25 for this workshop but the end result should be a tray-load of rooted woodies to take home.*

In recent years, gardening has become so popular that it is now profitable for nurseries, individuals, and experiment stations to undertake the time, expense, and risk involved in developing new varieties. Plant variety protection legislation, patent laws, and trademark rights are allowing breeders to recoup the often extensive costs involved in breeding and selecting new cultivars. The diversity of choices available among ornamental plants is expanding at an astonishing rate.

One previously overlooked area that is now rapidly gaining ground is the development of new varieties of flowering shrubs. These varieties expand our choices of plant size, flower color and form, hardiness, and disease resistance. Indeed, the choices available are increasing so quickly that the shrub collection at Plantations has been expanded this year to accommodate as many new varieties as our climate and site conditions will permit.

Shrubs have traditionally been selected for their flowering characteristics and, to a lesser extent, for their fruit displays. A number of new shrub introductions offer attractive, colorful foliage that creates the possibility of using them in new ways. *Forsythia x intermedia* is a good example of how shrubs are changing in previously unimagined ways. Until recently, all forsythia breeding focused on improving flower-bud hardiness, ignoring plant habit and foliage quality. The result were forsythias that overcame the snow-line effect (where flower buds above the insulating snow were killed by cold winter temperatures, but retained their bland green foliage and large, ungainly growth habit).

Forsythias 'New Hampshire Gold', 'Meadowlark, and 'Northern Gold' do indeed offer hardy flower buds but they retain the large size and gawky habit of their predecessors, growing long canes at awkward and unruly angles. More recently, breeders have begun to scale down plant size and tame growth habit to produce a smaller, more graceful shrub. From France comes a series of very low growers all with cultivar names that include "Court", such as 'Courtasol', or 'Courtacour', but are more frequently sold under their trademark names of 'Golden Peep', 'Goldilocks', and 'Gold Tide'. All mature at under 3 feet, and are covered head to toe in flowers in early spring. Of the three, 'Gold Tide' is the least showy in flower, although it has attractive foliage and a spreading, slightly arching habit that makes it an ideal groundcover plant. These smaller forsythias also sell well because they look very appealing in containers, both in and out of flower, whereas the taller selections look really ungainly when out of flower, and if they don't sell in spring, they will not sell at all.

Another wonderful new forsythia is 'Fiesta', with bright gold leaves edged in green and a reddish tinge to the new stems. The gold remains clear and strong and does not leach out in full sun. 'Fiesta' originated with Duncan and Davies nursery in New Zealand and has been available to American gardeners for several years. The plants we have here at Plantations have remained very compact and have not exceeded 3.5 feet in height, although I have seen some nurseries describe this as reaching 5 to 8 feet in height. Others say it tops out at 3 feet, so there is some confusion about what 'Fiesta' will mature into with age. Another selection that will be arriving at Plantations this spring is 'Kumson', a selection of the Korean forsythia (*Forsythia viridissima* var. *koreana*) selected for its unusually patterned leaves, traced with white veins against a bright green surface.

Old fashioned weigela (*Weigela florida*) is another shrub that is still dismissed as having only one season of interest that should be hidden away when it is not in flower because of its drab foliage and graceless habit. However, both Canadian and French plant breeders have taken an interest in working with weigela, and new selections offer colorful foliage, a wider and clearer range of flower colors, and improved, more compact habit.

'Red Prince' and 'White Prince' are two introductions from Iowa State University that have the typical upright-arching habit of the species and can reach 5 feet in height. Both have the floriferousness so valued in the species and in May are draped with clusters of tubular flowers in bright red or clear white. Foliage quality on both is exceptional, their thick dark green leaves providing a wonderful foil for the flowers.

The Dancer Series, selected by Felicitas Svejda of Ag-Canada for compact habit and improved flower color, offers a nice array of flower colors on shrubs scaled down to meet the needs of today's smaller gardens. Look for 'Rumba', 'Polka', 'Minuet', and 'Samba'. The hardiest of these are 'Samba' at 2 to 3 feet in height, with red flowers and dark green foliage edged in purple, and 'Polka', an extremely floriferous pink selection that reaches 4 to 5 feet in height.

Two weigelas offer dark purple foliage that is a great improvement over the dirty brown leaves of 'Java Red'. Both are of Dutch origin, and were selected by Herman Geers. 'Alexandra', trademarked as 'Wine and Roses', reaches standard weigela height and displays pink flowers against rich purple leaves. It is a recipient of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society's Gold Medal, which recognizes landscape plants of outstanding merit. 'Elvera', trademarked as 'Midnight Wine', is a diminutive version of 'Wine and Roses' that reaches only 2 feet in height and makes a nice addition to plantings of herbaceous perennials or annuals.

The elderberries, previously grown sparingly for their edible fruit, have been transformed into gorgeous foliage plants that can be used with other shrubs. And when coppiced, or cut to the ground each spring to keep their height down, they make nice additions to a perennial or annual planting. The black-fruited European elder (*Sambucus nigra*), offers the widest number of variants. All have proven to be highly adaptable to soil conditions here at Plantations, tolerating both dry and wet sites in sun and shade, although they are at their most luxurious in rich, constantly moist soil with just a touch of shade.

There are many purple-leaved variants of *S. nigra* that are indistinguishable from one another, yet have appeared under a number of different names such as 'Purpurea', 'Foliis Purpurea', and 'Porphyrifolia', all of which have now been collected under the umbrella of the name 'Guincho Purple'. This is indeed a striking plant with deep reddish-purple foliage and lovely platters of cream flowers tinted with pink.

*Sambucus nigra* 'Gerda', trademarked as 'Black Beauty', is an improved version with rich dark-purple foliage that has just arrived from England. It was developed by plant breeders working at the Horticultural Research Institute associated with the East Malling Research Station in England, and has been a raving success since its introduction to European markets in 2000. At the other end of the color spectrum is *S. nigra* 'Pulverulenta', with its striking albino foliage. Its pale green leaves are so densely spotted with cream, white and pink that little green is visible, and the lack of chlorophyll results in a slow-growing plant that is best sheltered from the strong afternoon sunlight.

A bright gold-leaved variant that brightens up a shaded nook is 'Madonna', whose foliage is marbled with tones of green and yellow. This has not proven rambunctiously vigorous at Plantations; it has remained around 4 feet tall and has not needed coppicing

to keep it in bounds. Finally, for fans of interesting foliage, 'Linearis' is an excellent choice, its thread-like finely divided foliage offering a delicate ferny texture that sets off the bolder purple-leaved forms well.

Selections of the bigleaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea macrophylla*) that can be enjoyed for their foliage alone are useful additions to our Ithaca gardens, where most winters kill back the flowering wood, leaving luxurious foliage that returns on new growth--but without blooms. *Hydrangea macrophylla* selections are traditionally divided into two categories, based on the structure of their flower heads. The lace-cap types have flower heads characterized by a central dome of tiny fertile florets encircled by large showy sterile florets producing a delicate airy effect. The hortensia types, aptly known as "mop heads," have a large congested globular flower head that often bends stems down with their weight.

Cultivars of both flower types abound, and when grown in a protected site in Zone 5, or better yet Zone 6, all are indeed lovely midsummer blooming shrubs. For those of us in Zone 5 that do not have a protected site, several of these make lovely foliage plants. 'Variegata' produces lush mid-green leaves decorated with a crisp white edge and it will produce the occasional lavender lace-cap flower head. 'Lemon Wave' is a real looker, with leaves irregularly colored with yellow, cream, white, and green. One nursery catalog aptly describes this as having "mauve lace-cap flowers if you live in a mild climate, but who cares?" Both of these are best grown in a lightly shaded spot to prevent the leaves from drooping in the high heat of mid-day.

'Ayesha' is a mop head with arresting thick, dark green foliage of tropical dimensions. One year it even managed to produce one small globular flower head that remained eclipsed by the fantastic foliage. It dies reliably to ground level every winter and rebounds in spring with thick sturdy stems draped with gorgeous leaves. A tiny moppette that remains beneath the snow line and thus does flower annually is 'Winning Edge'. This rarely exceeds 12 inches in height, making it a worthwhile compliment to herbaceous perennials or ferns, and covers itself throughout the summer with diminutive mop heads of pink flowers. When you visit Plantations, look for hydrangeas in cool shaded nooks in the rhododendron collection and search out elderberries, weigelas, and forsythias in the sun-drenched beds of the shrub collection.

**Mary Hirshfeld, Cornell Plantations**

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### **Letters to the Editor: Protecting plants, more on Epimediums**

*From Bill Plummer re: Epimediums and Friends in the March issue, reprinted from the Minnesota Chapter newsletter:*

As an *Epimedium* enthusiast, I would like to add that *the Epimedium* guru is Darrell Probst of Garden Vision. Visit his website at: [home.EarthLink.net/~darrellpro](http://home.EarthLink.net/~darrellpro).

The workhorse in my garden has been *Epimedium x rubrum* which I brought from my father's garden shortly after I started gardening. It has been very vigorous for me, and initially I used it to edge the paths leading onto my front woods. They now line the driveway and the path around the garage as well.



Almost but not quite as vigorous is *E. pinnatum*, with longer-lasting yellow flowers. It, too, lined part of the path into the woods, but now lines paths off the rear patio. The third of my original Epimediums is *E. youngianum niveum*. This is a smaller plant with white flowers, and in the dry site has not spread.

In the last several years I have gotten additional varieties as they became available and am still evaluating them. I use them as edging for my astilbe bed. As they spread I will probably replace *E. x rubrum* with them. There is now a book by William Stearn, *The Genus Epimedium* available through the NARGS Book store.

*Bill Plummer, Horsehead, N.Y.*

*And from Marcia Miegs Brown, sharing pictures and strategies she used during this fickle winter we had:*

I thought perhaps you might enjoy seeing what I spent an hour doing in the gardens this afternoon after I realized that the temperature was dropping radically.

I ran around with three dozen or so large pots, hoping to save bloom on the most treasured plants. I've already covered about sixty or so plants with hotkaps, glass cheese domes, and plastic pots and buckets over the past two cold days.



Sadly, quite a few tree peonies are just too large to cover and I fear I may lose the blooms on those.

This is truly the worst year in memory for an early bloom due to the January/February "spring" and the bitter cold following.

Nature reigns...smile.  
Hotkaps are a blessing.

*Marcia Meigs-Brown, Ithaca, N.Y.*



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## Other events

Artist **Paul Cooper**, author of *Gardens Without Boundaries* and *Living Sculpture* will present at two seminars, free and open to the public on the Cornell campus: April 24, 11:15 to 12:05, Plant Science 404 (Whetzel Room) and April 25, 12:30 to 1:15, Johnson Museum, 6th floor conference room. Cooper will examine the work of artists and designers who explore the botanical and horticultural sciences to create **living art**, including topiary, arborisculpture, turf works and other traditional approaches, as well as more contemporary techniques.

**Cornell Plantations** has scheduled many classes and tours this growing season, including April 29 Arbor Day celebration and wildflower walks Tuesday evenings in May

starting May 9. The programs are often offered for just a small suggested donation. For more information, visit [www.plantations.cornell.edu](http://www.plantations.cornell.edu), phone (607) 255-2400, or visit the Garden Gift Shop at Cornell Plantations.

Garden Conservancy **Open Garden Days** this year are June 10 and July 8, both Saturdays. Look for details of local open gardens in the May *Green Dragon*.

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### Want to read more about rock gardening?

If you can't read enough about gardening, I could use some help. As editor of *The Green Dragon*, I receive newsletters from other NARGS chapters across the continent. There's a great spirit of sharing between most of the newsletter editors. See for example, *Epimediums and Friends* in the March issue, reprinted from the Minnesota Chapter newsletter.

The problem is, I don't have time to read through all the newsletters I get to identify articles that might be of value to our chapter's members. If you'd like to read some of these newsletters and flag interesting articles, let me know and I'll forward some to you. (Email: [cdcramer@twcny.rr.com](mailto:cdcramer@twcny.rr.com)) For those of you without computers, I'll bring hard copies of some newsletters to meetings.

Keep in mind, too, that this sharing between chapters is a two-way street. I'd love it if more of our members would share their expertise through our newsletter so that other newsletter editors can tap our knowledge and share it with members of their chapters.

**Craig Cramer, Newsletter editor**

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### People

Questions? Want to find out how you can help the Chapter? Don't hesitate to contact one of the volunteers who help make everything happen:

- **Chair:** Carol Eichler, [cme24@cornell.edu](mailto:cme24@cornell.edu), 607-387-5823
  - **Treasurer:** Carolyn Yaeger, [cao2@cornell.edu](mailto:cao2@cornell.edu), 607-844-9462
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### The Green Dragon

Published eight times a year (Feb., March, April, May/June, July/Aug., Sept., Oct. Nov/Dec..). Submit articles by the fourth Friday of the month preceding publication to Craig Cramer: [cdcramer@twcny.rr.com](mailto:cdcramer@twcny.rr.com). Note: The next issue of *The Green Dragon* will be in **May**.

