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March 2009

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## Rock Garden Basics Workshop March 21

*From Carol Eichler:*

Join us for our March program which is being offered in a slightly different format than usual - with 3 different speakers. We thought we'd focus on the "Basics of Rock Gardening" - in a mini-seminar format - to inspire you to make plans to build your own rock garden - or to refurbish an existing one.

**Michelle Jones Ham** will start us off "Easy Plants for the Rock Garden," offering inspiring photos and suitable plants that she has grown successfully.

**David Mitchell** comes next to talk about "Soil Mixes." David has been doing quite a lot of experimentation with different materials and formulas that he'll be sharing. Others are invited to chime in about their own experiences.

Lastly, **Robin Bell** will close by talking about "RG Construction Techniques." We hope the weather is cooperative so that we can go outdoors to view the different rock garden styles used on the Wurster Rock Garden, since it was designed to show these different styles.

Note we are meeting at 1 p.m. March 21 at Tompkins County office of Cornell Cooperative Extension (615 Willow Ave., Ithaca) for a program that should run about an hour longer than usual.

Many of you know Michelle Jones Ham who was a member of our Chapter for many years and served as our Chair before a new job meant she had to move. She didn't stop rock gardening and she cease her involvement with NARGS. Instead she became the driving force behind establishing a new chapter, the Genesee Valley Chapter based in Rochester. which is very much alive and well. In fact, they hosted the 2007 Eastern Study Weekend while still in their infancy. Michelle is also active

at the NARGS National level, serving on an ad hoc Committee to address membership issues and currently serving as manager of the slide collection.

Our own members David Mitchell and Robin Bell are both notable for their wonderful gardens and plant knowledge. Robin has been a frequent speaker. You can be sure they will provide us with a wealth of knowledge - from their own gardening experience - often the best kind!

## Help still needed for Seed Exchange

From Rosemarie Parker, [Gardener.Parker@gmail.com](mailto:Gardener.Parker@gmail.com)

Please help our chapter process the second round of the 2009 NARGS Seed Exchange. This year, one time only, **all chapter members are eligible to order seeds in this round, even if you are not a member of national NARGS**. This is a great deal, \$5 per 20 packets up to 100 packets. If you volunteer to help, you can fill your own order, choosing your own substitutes if your first choice is gone. And the first 20 volunteers can take a free packet to count towards MY order. The very extensive round 2 seed list is posted at [www.nargs.org/seed/exchange.html](http://www.nargs.org/seed/exchange.html).

Thanks to Susanne Lipari, we will be meeting in a great room (#211) of the Plant Science Building, the same building on the Cornell campus where we hold many of our monthly meetings. Parking will not be a problem as all sessions are evenings or weekends. There are jobs for people who need to stay seated, and ones who need to move around. Based on last year's statistics, we will need nearly 200 person hours of work, so the more people who volunteer the better. It will be interesting, maybe even fun, and I promise to arrange for munchies every session.

Please let me know if and when you can attend one or more of the workdays listed below ([Gardener.Parker@gmail.com](mailto:Gardener.Parker@gmail.com) or 607-257-4853). Too few or too many people per session are inefficient, so I really need an RSVP at least a few days ahead of each session.

Remaining workdays:

- Tue 3-10 6:30-9 pm
- Th 3-12 6:30-9 pm
- Sun 3-15 12:30-4:30 pm
- Sat 3-21 9-noon (before rock garden workshop @1pm)
- Wed 3-25 6:30-9 pm
- Sat 3-28 12:30 (if needed)

Thanks!

## Time to renew your membership

If you haven't done so already, please fill out a 2009 membership form and send it in, or bring it with you to the Feb. 21 meeting. If you received this newsletter via email, a membership form is also attached. You can also download one here:

<http://www.acnargs.org/join.pdf>

## March Plant of the Month – Woodland Plants

From John Gilrein, Plant of the Month Coordinator

For our March 2009 meeting, the plant of the month will be a mix of woodland plants. Our March selection from Eastern Plant Specialties includes:

- *Hepatica acutiloba* (sharp-lobed hepatica)
- *Uvularia grandiflora* (large merrybells, large-flowered bellwort)
- Trilliums, *T. grandiflorum* (white Trillium), *T. luteum* (yellow Trillium), and *T. sessile* (sessile Trillium)
- *Adiantum pedatum* (Northern maidenhair fern).

In general, all these plants want part shade conditions and a good, moist, well drained soil and are native to the Eastern U.S. Shade of deciduous trees and soil enriched with organic matter are beneficial.

*Hepatica acutiloba* is hardy in zones 3-8, height 6 inches, flower color pale to dark violet, blooms in early spring. This plant is found in rich woods and favors alkaline soils.

*Uvularia grandiflora* is hardy in zones 3-8, height 12-16 inches, flower color pale to medium yellow, blooming in early Spring. *U. grandiflora* also favors lime rich soils.

Trilliums are hardy in zones 4-8 (*T. grandiflorum* is hardy in to zone 3), height 6-20 inches, and flower in mid-Spring. *T. grandiflorum* has white flowers and is native to a wide area of Northeastern North America; *T. luteum* has yellow flowers is native to the Southern Appalachians; and *T. sessile* has maroon flowers is native to the Midwest. Both *T. luteum* and *T. sessile* are sessile species (the flowers are stemless, nestled in the leaves and the leaves are mottled). Soil pH preferences based on my references are: neutral to alkaline for *T. grandiflorum*, neutral for *T. sessile*, and acidic to neutral for *T. luteum*.

*Adiantum pedatum* is a graceful fern fond of calcium rich soils (a lime lover) but tolerant of a wide range of conditions. Height is 1 to 2 feet. It has black stems and is a slow spreader. This will tolerate more shade than the flowering plants above.

## 2009 program plans

Here's the **tentative** line-up for 2009. Check future newsletters or the ACNARGS blog (<http://acnargs.blogspot.com>) for details.

**March 21 - Rock Garden Basics Workshop** with Michelle Jones Ham, David Mitchell and Robin Bell. Tompkins County Office of Cornell Cooperative Extension, Ithaca, 1 p.m. (tentative). Details in March newsletter.

**April 25 - Miniature Hostas with Michael Shadrack**, Chairman and Bulletin Editor for the British Hosta and Hemerocallis Society and co-author of two Timber Press books: *The Color Encyclopedia of Hostas* and *The Pocket Guide to Hostas*. We will also have our annual Seedling Exchange. ~~Kenneth Post Lab, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.~~ Note new location: Tompkins County Cooperative Extension.

**Spring dates TBD - Philadelphia garden tour.** Overnight road trip to visit private gardens in the Philadelphia area.

**May 16 - Plant Sale at Ithaca Garden Fair.** Ithaca High School.

**May date TBD - Garden tours. Ithaca.**

**June dates TBD - Work trip to White Pine Camp.** Paul Smiths, N.Y.

**July date TBD - Picnic and special program.** Don and Lela Avery, Cady's Falls Nursery will not be able to join us. We'll keep you posted as alternative plans come together.

**Aug. 15 - 'Members Only' plant sale and picnic.** Kenneth Post Lab, Cornell University, Ithaca.

**Sept 19 - What's Wrong With My Plants?** with Michael Loos, horticulture educator with Ohio State University Cooperative Extension, Cuyahoga County and active NARGS member. Billie Jean Isbell's, Brooktondale.

**Oct. 17 - Program with speaker TBD.**

**Nov. 14 - Native Plants for the Naturalistic Garden** with Don Leopold, SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry and author of *Native Plants of the Northeast*. Kenneth Post Lab, Cornell University, Ithaca.

## ***Gentiana georgei* - A 'New' *Gentiana* from China**

by Stephanie Ferguson

Previously published in the February 2009 issue of the CRAGS Newsletter, *The Voice of the Calgary Rock and Alpine Garden Society* [www.crag.ca](http://www.crag.ca)

Many gardeners are familiar with the Genus *Gentiana* and for rock gardeners the dwarf alpine species are particularly irresistible. *Gentiana verna* and *Gentiana clusii* (including it's close relatives *acaulis*, *angustifolius*, *dinarica*, *occidentalis*, etc) are two primarily European introductions that have been very successfully cultivated by Calgarians for many years. Both species are quite variable, offering plenty of interest in the Spring, blooming heavily and reliably in May.

In our climate, the Autumn flowering Himalayan species allied with *Gentiana sino-ornata* and it's associated hybrids have proven less easy to please. While these bloom profusely in Scotland and other parts of Europe with a similarly humid climate, here on the prairies we are, at best, rewarded with a few tired flowers in



September-October. Certainly the failure of these popular and highly bred plants here has been made apparent by comparison with the success of *Gentiana acaulis* and *verna*.

During the past several years there has been an increasing interest in Chinese alpine plants. Czech seed collectors, in particular, have explored and collected at altitudes high enough to find hardy plant material potentially suited to Calgary's climate. It is important to understand that Calgary's growing conditions are not at all typical of the gardening community at large. Our dry, steppe climate is much like that of Mongolia or large parts of Central Asia. Much of our plant material (made available through the commercial nursery trade) comes to our gardens through the "moist filter" of the Pacific Northwest and Eastern Seaboard of North America, The United Kingdom, and Holland. Sometimes this pattern of selection and distribution works (for woodland plants, certainly) but more often (in the case of alpine and steppe plants) this commercial network tends to limit, rather than expand, our choice of plants. Thus, our debt of gratitude for these recent discoveries and introductions by these Czech explorers cannot be overestimated.

In the past couple of years, the Czechs have focussed on Chinese gentians and made many of them available by seed. Initially, I was wary. Like many of you, I had already spent enough money attempting to grow the aforementioned Scottish (and German) cultivars. These plants would spread and bloom for a couple of years, then promptly die from a lack of whatever specialized dietary or environmental requirements I denied them. Eventually, I decided to try ONE Chinese gentian - *Gentiana georgei*. This offering appealed to me for two reasons: the seed was expensive (the Czechs always put a high price on beauty) and because the accompanying habitat descriptions looked promising for us (3900 metres, Limestone scree).

*Gentiana georgei* has proven to be as beautiful and hardy as I had hoped. It blooms from late August until October. It's large flowers are a uniquely beautiful colour - a glistening blue-lavender accented with strong dark stripes and spotting. When in bloom the entire plant does not exceed 10cm in height. While it does not increase as quickly as does *Gentiana clusii*, it reliably adds a rosette each year. Seed is set quite late in the season (October). Garden collected seed has proven viable even at this late a collection date. The only apparent way of achieving a large and thriving community of *Gentiana georgei* relies on seed propagation rather than vegetative cuttings or division (this plant is not stoloniferous).

I believe that *Gentiana georgei* has a bright future in Calgary because it seems to be quite easily cultivated. I am growing it in sand - in a cool and sunny location, although it has not yet been subjected to a fully hot / sunny aspect in our garden. It receives the occasional dose of bonemeal and is not allowed to dry out.

One of the original Czech plant explorers, Josef Halda, will be coming to lecture here in Calgary April 16th. Halda has written a beautifully illustrated monograph entitled "The Genus *Gentiana*" and is certainly qualified to answer any questions you may have regarding this exquisite classification of plants.

**Ed. note:** *Ferguson's approach to matching plants to Calgary conditions is interesting. What's your experience with steppe plants in our area? What *Gentiana* species do you recommend for Adirondack Chapter gardeners?*

## From the chair

I went out today before writing this and strolled around my garden to take stalk and 'talk' to several of my favorite plants. The Hellebores tell me they are ready to bloom. The *Iris reticulata* say burr, show myself? Not yet. The hardy grasses look aggressively like they are ready to take over the whole territory and the mat-forming alpinines look green but vulnerable without their snow cover that has melted in the last few days. They seem to be saying: "Oh dear, it's so bright out here."

**Come early to the March 21<sup>st</sup> meeting** at the Cooperative extension and help work in the Wurster garden in preparation for our workshop. Michelle Jones tells me she is excited to return to our chapter and participate in the workshop. As a past chair of our chapter who moved to Rochester and started a NARGS chapter there, it will be wonderful to welcome her back. She hopes to bring seedlings as gifts but says she has not had much luck with germination yet. She will discuss several plants that are growing in the Wurster Garden. David Mitchell will cover soil mixes and Robin Bell of our chapter will cover construction techniques.

**Please help with the seed exchange.** If you have not participated in the seed exchange, please sign up with [Gardener.Parker@gmail.com](mailto:Gardener.Parker@gmail.com). We need your help.

**Billie Jean Isbell**

## Other events

Mark your calendar for Garden Conservancy Open Days: Tompkins County: June 13 & July 11, Oswego: June 13, Marcellus: July 12. More details to come at the Open Days website: <http://www.gardenconservancy.org/opendays>

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## People

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## Green Dragon Tales

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 April.

