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May/June 2010

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Plants, help needed for May 15 plant sale at Stewart Park

From David Mitchell and BZ Marranta, plant sales coordinators:

Now's the time to have your plant donations potted up so that they'll have time to recover and look great for the May plant sale. The sale will be held on Saturday, May 15, 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at a new location, Stewart Park. We will set up on Friday afternoon from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. Our booth will be located inside the large pavilion nearest the lake.

My driveway is available for dropoffs anytime before the day of the sale if you can't make it to Stewart Park. The driveway is on the Washington Street side of the corner of Washington and Esty Streets (402 Esty Street).

Now more than ever it is important that you have your plants labeled. An idea of the value of your plants would also help with pricing.

We need volunteers for setup Friday, day of sale setup, cashiers, plant advisers during the sale, and cleanup. Remember, members receive a discount on purchases at the sale. Please arrive early to help with late donations or jump in any time to help. Every pot should have a label and a price stick before the sale starts.

My phone number is (607) 342-3660 should you have any questions about the sale. Tompkins County Cooperative Extension can be reached at (607) 272-2292.

Day trip to Seneca Hill Perennials!

From Carol Eichler:

Chapter members are invited to tour Ellen Hornig's wonderful gardens on Friday, June 18th. Rather than trying to coordinate a caravan from a central starting point, anyone wanting to go should plan to arrive at her place about 10 a.m. Ellen's website has good directions: www.senecahillperennials.com.

For those going to White Pine Camp that weekend this will be an "on-the-way" stop. As a courtesy to Ellen, I'd like to let her know how many of us to expect. Please email me if you're planning to go. ceichler@twcny.rr.com

2010 program plans

Our **tentative** program line up for 2010. Details in future newsletters or: acnargs.blogspot.com

- May 15: **Plant Sale**, Stewart Park, Ithaca.
 - June 5-7: Chapter **Summer Trip** to Stonecrop, Storm King, New York Botanical Garden, Wave Hill, Planting Fields and more.
 - June 18: **Seneca Hills Perennials day trip**.
 - June 18-20: **White Pine Camp work weekend**. Trip full.
 - July 17: **Member garden tours**.
 - August 21: **Members only plant sale**.
 - September 18, October 16 and November 20 **programs to be announced**.
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Chapter Summer Trip June 5-7: Time to commit

From Susanne Lipari, membership coordinator (sel3@cornell.edu):

Please let Susanne (sel3@cornell.edu) know if you are going to attend some or all of our big excursion to visit some fabulous downstate gradens so she can finalize plans for lodging North of New York City and on Long Island. The trip is designed so member can join any or all of it. The itinerary includes:

- **On Saturday, June 5:** [Stonecrop](#) and [Storm King](#).
- **On Sunday, June 6:** Tour of the [rock garden at NY Botanic Garden](#) by garden's curator, Jody Payne. [Wave Hill](#). Cocktail hour in the courtyard of [Chelsea Mansion](#), one of the Gold Coast mansions.
- **On Monday, June 7:** [Planting Fields Arboretum](#), [Martin Viette Nursery](#).

Follow links and/or see April newsletter for more details. View map here: <http://www.acnargs.org/pdfs/2010summertrip.pdf>

From the Chair

I've just built a new rock garden. The upright stones are oriented south-north and I'm thinking of putting crevice plants in it. I think I subconsciously wanted to create a reminder of the Andes range where I've spent so much time over the years.

I'm looking for plants to fill it, but I don't want to over-plant which has been a tendency of mine in the past. I think some of the bun-forming rock plants would look good in the small 'outcroppings'



Any and all suggestions and visits are welcomed.

Billie Jean Isbell, chair

Electric Blue: *Penstemon nitidus*

Article and photos by Rob Staniland, originally published in the April 2010 issue of the CRAGS Newsletter (Calgary Rock and Alpine Garden Society)

Penstemon nitidus, or Smooth Blue Beardtongue, is a very striking and easily grown native plant from Calgary. It is suitable for dryland or rock gardens that receive most of the day's sun.



P. nitidus is found in the Southern Canadian prairies and Southeastern British Columbia, from the Dakotas to Idaho, and South through Wyoming to barely reach Colorado. It is adapted to dry, exposed locations that are harsh enough to keep competing vegetation sparse or patchy. In Southwest Alberta it is most commonly found on dry hillsides and escarpments, usually facing South or Southwest. Locally it is common especially on the old river and creek escarpments, and on exposed foothill crests well into Kananaskis.

Multiple short stems usually remain close to the ground as a loose mound 5-10cm high, with leathery, gray to greenish-blue, evergreen leaves that are narrow and 5-10cm long. They are truly evergreen and seem indestructible. The flower scapes stretch up to 15 or 25cm high and have shorter, broader and sharply tipped leaves even within the raceme of flowers. While the foliage is beautiful, the flowers are striking; they are a brilliant azure blue, 1.5-2 cm long, narrowly funnel shaped, and often have a pinkish purple neck that accentuates the flower and foliage colors. They are stunning, almost electric, as they open in late May and last well into June.

The plant is tolerant of most neutral to basic soils, of any texture and position that either sheds excess water or drains reasonably quickly. With good drainage and a sunny exposure it will flourish. The form is smaller and the colors seem to become more intense with leaner soil and sunnier exposure. It will be drought tolerant once roots have reached deeper soils that do not completely dry out. It does not tolerate shade from larger neighbors.

Native companion plants include *Antennaria* species (pussytoes), *Anemone patens* (pasque flower), *Gaillardia aristata* (brown-eyed susan), *Geum triflorum* (old man's whiskers), *Oxytropis* species (locoweeds) and especially *Eriogonum* species (wild buckwheats or sulfur plant).

Grasses such as *Koeleria macrantha* (Junegrass), *Bouteloua gracilis* (grama grass), as well as the taller spear and needle grasses (*Stipa* species) provide a naturalistic setting. I plan on trying more Eurasian species from high elevation ridges and steppes to add diversity.

I have kept a few in the gardens for over twenty five years, grown from seed I collected on local hikes (and borrowed from other CRAGS members when I neglected to propagate). It is best to always keep a few growing, as individual plants will probably disappear within five to ten years. Fortunately it is fairly easy to establish from seed and may self sow a few plants if the surrounding soil is left undisturbed.



Seed must be planted outside in the fall, or cold-moist stratified for a couple of months before seeding in spring.

The seedlings are tough and many have survived winters exposed in plugs above ground, waiting to find a place in the garden.

The flowering stems are very stout and their sharp pointed leaves and seed capsules become dry and hard by autumn. I find it easiest to use a pruner to cut them off at half height, dump seed into a paper bag, and then use a gentle wrist twist and rocking to break the bases of the stalk, holding the live crowns and stems steady to avoid tearing them out.

This is sometimes easier to do the following spring. You will need reasonably thick gloves to avoid the sharp points. I have read that softwood stem cuttings can be rooted in sand or vermiculite, and have seen side stems that should be amenable to being removed and rooted.

References:

- Flanagan, J., 2005, Native Plants for Prairie Gardens, Fitzhenry and Whiteside Limited.
- Hitchcock, C.L. and Cronquist, A., 1973, Flora of the Pacific Northwest, University of Washington Press
- Moss, E.H., 1959, Flora of Alberta, University of Toronto Press

Keeping Garden Records

by Josie Pazdzior

Reprinted from the March 2010 issue of the Ottawa Valley Rock Garden and Horticultural Society Newsletter.

If you've ever destroyed (realizing later) a perennial planted in the fall and then forgotten, you may have wished that you had a garden plan or some record that might have prevented this. This is just one of the practical ways that keeping good records can help a gardener. (It's scary how quickly we can forget such things!) Other less tangible rewards include the satisfaction of having this creative project forever in your possession, reminding you of past glories (and disasters), even though the plants themselves may be long gone.

For instance, my sporadic journal entries include one for April 27, 2009, marking the first date that I planted outside at our new place – bloodroot, aquilegia, brunnera, thalictrum, etc., dug out of the last garden. I also noted that it was a rare day of 30° heat in that cold spring, a fact that brings the experience back to me very clearly!

You can do many different kinds of record-keeping, from the shoebox type (labels and receipts thrown into a box) to a very personal fancy journal with dates and pictures for every garden event. I am very good at the shoebox kind of record but aspire to greater things: in particular, taking photos more regularly and integrating these with information about weather conditions to make a more useful garden journal.

Much can be learned from making and later studying these observations and correlations. When can you expect to see the first Japanese beetles appear in your yard? When do specific late-emerging plants show up again, generally? Which are the first alpiners to flower?

The minimum must-have records include **what** you planted, **when** and **where**. Also it is helpful to add the source of the plant material or seeds, and any relevant comments, such as special additives or methods used. For seeds, a simple chart with **type** of seed, **sowing date**, **germination date**, and **outdoor planting date** will be valuable, as well as a space left for **comments**.

For an existing garden, make a rough plan of your property, with a separate one for each section: front yard, side, back, etc., and even for large beds, which are less daunting to tackle one by one. Start with the woody plants, show plants in groupings first, and add details later. If you are a collector of one or more species, you'll want separate pages or sections for each, to augment as your collection grows.

Photographs taken throughout the season are most helpful, with good captions adding value. Some of the many other possibilities to include:

- plant characteristics, descriptions, comparisons
- wish lists, pictures of other gardens
- reference materials from magazines, handouts, etc.
- bills and receipts (this can be a double-edged sword, as the total may dismay or horrify—safer to hide this from a non-gardening spouse!)
- date and type of fertilizing or other applications
- seed packets, recipes, web sites you like, nursery and garden center contact information

If you are a happy computer user, you can access garden journal programs that do interesting things like sort plants in different ways, or you can create and maintain a journal entirely on the internet. However you choose to document your garden activities, try to make it fun, an enjoyable recollection of time spent in your garden and other places. This will most likely happen if you do it somewhat faithfully, so that you miss **not** doing it, as runners say happens when they miss their daily run.

Garden Conservancy Open Days

This year's Garden Conservancy Open Days for Tompkins County will feature:

- May 8: Hitch Lyman's Garden
- June 12: Der Rosenmeister, Lion Garden, Myers Garden
- July 31: Lipari Garden, Bassuk/Trowbridge Gardens, Nancy Ridenour

For more information, visit: gardenconservancy.org/opendays/

Tour Jerry Kral's conifer garden June 11

From Donna Kraft, vice chair/program:

The Kral gardens have been featured in horticultural magazines plus over 250 groups have enjoyed private tours of their intensively planted city landscape. As you recall from his presentation at our April meeting, Jerry has a lot of seriously wonderful plant materials interspersed with some great rocks and interjected with bits of Kral humor. You could not see the artful way he has taken that collection of plants and created a unique integrated design. NARGS members have been invited to join a tour on Friday, June 11:

Gerald and Karen Kral
900 Winton Rd. North
Rochester, NY 14609

Arrange your own carpools, but plan on arriving at 11 a.m. and spending about 2 hours. There are some excellent garden centers in the area that are worthy of a destination drive on their own merit. Contact Donna Kraft after May 13 at Sanibel.tully@gmail.com if you would like names, addresses and specialties of a few places off the beaten path.

Other events

- June 19: **Summer Solstice Celebration**, 11 a.m. To 4 p.m., **Sycamore Hill Gardens**, Marcellus. Tickets \$8 in advance, \$10 at the door, benefit Central New York Land Trust. More info: www.cnylandtrust.org.
 - July 11-14: **NARGS Annual Meeting**, Salida, Colo. More info: www.rmcnargs.org
Carol Eichler and Donna Kraft have registered and are getting psyched to go on some serious/fun alpine hikes. Are others from the Chapter going too? If so, maybe we could share a car rental from Denver to Salida. Contact Carol at ceichler@twcny.rr.com.
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People

- Chair/trips: Billie Jean Isbell, bj1@cornell.edu, 607-539-6484
 - Vice chair/program: Donna Kraft, sanibel.tully@gmail.com, 315 696-8626
 - Secretary: Harold Peachey, hpeachey@gmail.com,
 - Treasurer/plant sales/trips: BZ Marranta, mmm10@cornell.edu
 - Plant sales: David Mitchell, dwm23@cornell.edu, 607-342-3660
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