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March 2013

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MARCH 16 : KNOW YOUR SOIL

March 16 Program: John Gaunt will be speaking on "**Know Your Soil: Know What Your Plants Want**". John will describe the soil characteristics that different kinds of plants need, particularly with respect to soil amendments, with some attention given to finicky alpine and rock garden plants. He will then introduce the issues around the widespread use of peat moss and discuss alternatives to peat – in terms of their performance and with respect to their environmental and social impacts.

As you can see, this promises to be a very relevant and interesting lecture for our group, so let's have a big turnout! Join us at 1:00 p.m. on March 16th in the Whetzel Room (404 Plant Science Building, Cornell University-map at newsletter's end). Optional bring-your-own bag lunch and social time starts at Noon. Drinks provided. Goodies always welcome for sharing.

John Gaunt is a soil scientist with a wide range of experience in agriculture around the world. He is a champion for sustainable practices in agriculture and gardening and a recognized innovator and leader in "biochar" research and in soil science. With a PhD in Soil Biology from the University of London, John is currently an Adjunct Associate Professor in the Soil Science Dept. at Cornell University and is also a visiting fellow at Edinburgh University, UK.

John moved to the US in 2002 and now calls Ithaca home. He is the CEO of Green Tree Group Inc, which owns **GreenTree Garden Supply LLC** and Carbon Consulting LLC. GreenTree Garden Supply is Ithaca's specialist indoor/outdoor gardening store at 606 Elmira Rd. When in town, John can be found most days out in the Soil Shack at GreenTree tinkering on product development or other less exciting tasks.

Hitch Lyman's snowdrop garden will be open to the public the same day (details p. 5). Why not do both?

FROM THE CHAIR

Carol Eichler

I received many favorable comments about our February Members' Share meeting and I hope you did too. It got me thinking that maybe we should offer a 5-10 minute member share each meeting.

One person commented that the member presentations made our meeting feel more relaxed and therefore had a friendlier feel. Judging by how much conversation it stimulated I'd say it was a huge success and worth considering doing more often. What do you think?

Our March speaker promises to expand our thinking and open new conversations as well. The topic of growing medium is a timely one since the time is at hand to consider starting garden seeds.

For those attending you will have the opportunity to take home something alive and green and maybe even in flower. Ah yes, spring is coming!

See you on March 16th!

Carol

PS – I'm taking the shortcut to England via the Philadelphia Flower Show next week. I'd be happy to share a few photos at the March meeting as my contribution to members' share.

PLANT OF THE MONTH: PRIMULA AURICULA

John Gilrein, POM Coordinator

Our **March 2013 Plant of the Month** is *Primula auricula*. *Primula auricula* cultivars may have been crossed with *Primula hirsuta*, another European mountain wildflower, so it's not clear the plant available commercially are purely auriculas. A common name for *P. auricula* is bear's ears, a reference to the ear shaped leaves. *P. auricula* is native to the Dolomites in the eastern Alps and the wild plant generally had yellow flowers.

APPEARANCE



There is a long history of *P. auricula* being grown for show in Europe. Many years of breeding resulted in a huge number of cultivars and the tremendous variety of colors, most of which have a white or yellow central "eye". Colors available include yellow, orange, rose, red, purple, green, brown, and gray, some are very rich and saturated. The petals may be shaded darker in the center or lighter on the outside. There are a few doubles as well. One section of *P. auricula* includes cultivars grown for showing; these generally have leaves and flowers "dusted" with farina, a white powdery coating, and they are best grown under glass. Garden auriculas are more forgiving, and will tolerate our rainy climate. Some *P. auricula* are

scented, though I had not noticed that with my plants. Height is approximately 6 inches. The leaves are thick, slightly leathery, and evergreen, indicating some tolerance of dryness.

CULTIVATION



P. auricula is hardy to at least zone 4. They may be grown in the ground, in pots, or in a trough. Soil mix recommendations are a little challenging to translate as they're usually based on a particular UK standard 'John Innes' potting mix. Unlike many of the primroses more commonly grown, *Primula vulgaris* and candelabra primroses, *P. auricula* needs a soil with good drainage. potting mix recommendations frequently include adding sand and organic matter. My suggestion would be to create a fairly rich but very well drained potting soil using commercial potting soil, sand, and an organic component, possibly compost or coir (coconut fiber medium, available at many mail order suppliers). If planting in the garden, soil drainage might need to be improved with sand, grit/gravel, or both. This plant doesn't want very fast drainage/screelike conditions, but it would probably not do well in many of our loamy and clay rich garden soils. Mulch with grit or gravel. It should be happy in a 6 to 8 inch pot for several years before repotting, or a similar size trough.

This plant should be grown in partial sun/partial shade. They might tolerate full sun for some or our more northerly members or in the UK. Cold or dryness are less likely to pose a problem than too much sun and/or heat. If grown in a pot or trough, it would be good to winter the plant in a site protected from winter rain; snow cover is good. They should not need as much watering attention in Spring/Summer as most potted plants, but should be watered regularly when there's a lack of rain. They are reputed to be tolerant of some variation in soil pH, from slightly acidic to moderately alkaline.



Plants produce offsets, which can be removed and planted to increase your stock or share with friends. I have a few that have tolerated serious neglect for several years, so they are quite tough. Flowering time is April or May.

Plant of the Month is a member benefit, partially subsidized by your dues, to provide additional encouragement to attend meetings and expand the horizons of our members. The goal is to coordinate the plant of the month to the meeting topic, though sometimes that is not possible. Please send suggestions for Plant of the Month to John Gilrein. Source for plants for our March POM: **Sequim Rare Plants**, Sequim, Washington.

WEBSITES FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

A Guide to Growing Auriculas for Beginners

Growing Primulas Auriculas

The History of the Primula Auricula

SPRING TUFA PURCHASE

Bill Stark

If I can negotiate a quarry price of \$400/ton (\$.20/lb), I plan to buy about a ton of tufa this spring. If I can't get that price in Ilion, I'll look elsewhere. If you're interested in purchasing tufa with me, let me know by April 1 how much you plan to buy. Do not send me any money. Chapter members would directly pay the quarry for the tufa that they would select and load at the quarry and unload at their gardens. Depending on which quarry we use, there may be equipment to help with loading large stones. You can move the tufa with your car, trailer, truck or probably with a rental truck that would be shared by members. A 16 foot Budget truck with a capacity of 3,400 lbs would cost \$226 plus gas for the round trip from Ithaca to Ilion. If you have a large truck that we could share or if you know of other non-Ilion tufa sources, please let me know. You can contact me at mes2@cornell.edu. To learn more about tufa, read the **special tufa edition** of this newsletter.

JOHN GRIMSHAW'S DIARY: BLOG OF THE MONTH

Kathy Purdy

John Grimshaw wrote the book on snowdrops. He is one of the authors of *Snowdrops: A Monograph of Cultivated Galanthus*, which is, sadly, not only out of print, but selling for over \$70 used. However, he highlights new varieties on his blog, **John Grimshaw's Garden Diary**. To see everything he's written about snowdrops on his blog, type snowdrops in the search box and hit enter.

He's an extremely knowledgeable plantsman and snowdrops are not the only genus he writes about. Recently he published several photographs of **Hamamelis from Arboretum Kalmthout** and wrote about **unusual plants at Mt. Tomah** (Australia). In January he illustrated **chestnuts roasting on an open fire** and compared them to chestnuts he had in Vancouver. And from more than a year ago, he wrote on **advances he saw in American horticulture**.

If you look in his sidebar you will find a list of other blogs and websites to explore.

PLAN AHEAD FOR APRIL SEEDLING EXCHANGE

This is a reminder that our annual seedling exchange will be held at our April meeting. Now is the time - if you haven't already done so, to start your seeds. Seedlings, free for members with a nominal charge for non-members (bring quarters or better yet join ACNARGS!), can be brought "as is" or potted out individually and need to be labelled. Labels will be available at the March meeting and at the April meeting as well. Potted divisions of established plants will also be accepted and either offered for sale or held over for the May plant sale.

WORLD-CLASS SNOWDROP COLLECTION



The Garden Conservancy's Open Days Program for 2013 begins on Saturday, March 16th in Tompkins County, featuring the garden of **Hitch Lyman, 3441 Krums Corners Road, Trumansburg**, open to the public 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission to the garden is \$5, the Open Day is rain or shine, and no reservations are required. Call **1-888-842-2442**, or visit www.opendaysprogram.org for more information.

Hitch Lyman's garden features a collection of more than 400 snowdrop varieties (*Galanthus*) planted in the woodland as well as other early spring flowers. The 1848 Greek Revival-style farmhouse was moved to the site in 1990, and is now surrounded by lilacs, trilliums, daphnes, camassias, and orchids, which bloom later in the season. Pictured above: *Galanthus nivalis* 'Lady Elphinstone' in Lyman's garden in 2011.

SEE ALSO

Snowdrops Extraordinaires (that's Michael Loos' hand in the photos!)

Not Your Ordinary Snowdrops (links to resources at the bottom)

NY Times article

TIME TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP!

Mary Stauble

SECOND CALL!

First, we want to extend a hearty welcome to new member Rhoda Maurer of Geneva! If you haven't done so already, please fill out a **membership form** for the 2013 calendar year and mail it to the address on the form. Or you can bring it with you to the March 16 meeting. If

you received this newsletter via snail mail, a membership form is attached. You can also download one [here](#). Memberships run the calendar year so all 2012 annual memberships have expired. Not sure if you've renewed? Ask **Mary Stauble**, Membership Coordinator.

INTERESTING NURSERIES

John Gilrein

The following nurseries have a selection of plants worth checking out. Please note I did not include a complete description of the plants available at each nursery, I only included highlights. By "alpines" I mean plants suitable for a rock garden, not all would necessarily be from alpine habitats. The mail order nurseries below have an online catalog, so you can enjoy window shopping for plants at home.

LOCAL NURSERIES

Cayuga Landscape
2712 N Triphammer Road, Ithaca
<http://cayugalandscape.com/>
Shrubs, alpines

Watson Greenhouse
2980 Sentinel Heights Road, Lafayette
<http://www.carolwatsongreenhouse.com/>
Greenhouse to visit in winter, annuals, alpines

Bristol's Garden Center
7454 Victor Pittsford Road
Victor, NY
<http://www.bristolsgardencenters.com/>
Alpines

Oriental Garden Supply
448 W Bloomfield Road
Pittsford, NY
<http://www.orientalgardensupply.com/>
Japanese Maples and dwarf conifers

MAIL ORDER NURSERIES

Annie's Annuals
Richmond, CA
<http://www.anniesannuals.com/>
Exotic annuals

Arrowhead Alpines
Fowlerville, MI
<http://www.arrowheadalpines.com/>
Alpines and conifers

Earthly Pursuits
Windsor Mill, MD
<http://www.earthlypursuits.net/>
Grasses and ferns

Evermay Nursery
Orono, ME
<http://www.evermaynursery.com/store/index.asp>
Primulas, dwarf conifers, & alpines

Fancy Fronds
Gold Bar, WI
<http://www.fancyfronds.com/>
Ferns galore

Wrightman Alpines
Kerwood, Ontario, CANADA
<http://www.wrightmanalpines.com/>
Alpines

Laporte Avenue Nursery
Fort Collins, CO
<http://www.laporteavenuenuresery.com>
Alpines and western US plants

Sequim Rare Plants
Sequim, WA
<http://www.sequimrareplants.com/plant%20list.html#p1>
Primula auricula and Kniphofias

Prairie Moon Nursery
Winona, WI
<http://www.prairiemoon.com/>
Native plants and seeds

Siskiyou Rare Plant Nursery
Talent, OR
<http://siskiyourareplantnursery.com/>
Alpines

Is your favorite nursery missing? Send an email to **John** or the **Kathy** and we will add it to the list. This list will be maintained on the ACNARGS blog and Facebook page.

Snowdrops provide the intermezzo between winter and spring.
~Brian Bixley, *Essays on Gardening in a Cold Climate*

2013 PROGRAM PLANS

Mark your calendars! Unless otherwise specified, all local events start with a brown bag lunch at noon with the program following at 1 pm, and take place at the Whetzel Room, 404 Plant Science Building, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY (see map on the last page).

March 16: John Gaunt of Greentree Garden Supply (<http://www.greentreegardensupply.com/>), speaking on "Rock Garden Soils" and "A Future in the Garden without Peat" Plant of the month: Auricula primrose

April 20: Tom Stuart (<http://hardyfernlibrary.com/ferns/>) will speak on "Ferns in the Garden, from *Adiantum* to *Woodsia*". We will also have a seedling swap which is free to members; a charge will apply to non-members. This meeting will be in the Kenneth Post Lab on Tower Rd on the Cornell University campus. As usual, brown bag lunch at noon; program starts at 1pm. Plant of the month: Ferns.

May 18: look for us at the Ithaca Garden Fair and Plant Sale at the Ithaca High School. Members get a 25% discount! Plan on volunteering for part of your visit.

August 17: Members-only plant sale and picnic.

September 21: Matt Mattus (<http://www.growingwithplants.com/>) on non-hardy bulbs.

October 19: Harvey Wrightman (<http://www.wrightmanalpines.com/>)

November 9: Don Leopold (<http://www.timberpress.com/speakers/author?id=61>)

Details as we learn them will be included in future newsletters, our blog, acnargs.blogspot.com, and our Facebook page, <http://www.facebook.com/acnargs>.

CALENDAR OF GARDEN EVENTS

MARCH:

CNY in Bloom, Feb. 28-March 3, 2013, Onondaga Community College, Syracuse

Native Plants Conference, March 1-2, Ithaca, see Plantsmen Nursery website for details

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Fair, Sat. March 2, 12-3pm, Boynton MS

Winter Worm Composting Class, Sat. March 9, 10am-noon, TCCE

Veggie Gardening Beyond the Basics, Thurs. March 14, 6:30-8:30 pm, Pat Curran, TCCE

Community Beautification Training, Tues March 19, 6-8:30 pm at TCCE

Grow Your Own Spuds – Everything you always wanted to know about potatoes, Wed. March 20, 6-8 pm, Chrys Gardener, TCCE

New York and California Flora: Strangers, or Far-Flung Cousins? Dan Segal, Wed. March 20, 7 pm, Finger Lakes Native Plant Society, Unitarian Church Annex, 2nd floor

Plantasia Garden & Landscape Show, March 21-24, 2013, Fairgrounds in Hamburg, NY

Ireland, Gardeners' Paradise, Sat. March 23, 2:00-3:30 pm, Chrys Gardener, TCCE, travel slide show open to the public (\$3 donation helps support the Horticulture Program)

Fruits for the Home Gardener, Thurs. March 28, 6:30-8:30 pm, Pat Curran, TCCE

APRIL & MAY

Citizen Pruner Training, Mon. April 1, 8, 15, 7-8:30 pm, and Mon. April 22, 5:30-7 pm, at TCCE, see Earthkeeper for details

Spring Into Gardening! Sat. April 6, 9am-5pm, DeWitt Middle School, Ithaca – one day-event: registration includes choice of 5 workshops, box lunch, soil testing, and children's activities

Gardens 4 Humanity Training, April-May, dates and locations TBA. For more info, contact Josh Dolan at sapsquatch7@gmail.com

Getting Started with Vegetable Gardening, Tues. April 16, 6:30-8:30 pm, Pat Curran, TCCE (this is a repeat of the Feb. 28 class)

Prairie Restoration, Hal Gardner, Wed. April 17, 7pm, Finger Lakes Native Plant Society, Unitarian Church Annex, 2nd floor

Earth Day, Sun. April 21, 12-5pm, Ithaca Farmers' Market

Compost Fair & 4-H Duck Race, Sun. April 28, 12-4pm, TCCE

Monthly meeting, topic TBA, Wed. May 15, 7pm, Finger Lakes Native Plant Society, Unitarian Church Annex, 2nd floor

Lilac Festival, Rochester NY, early to mid May, 2013 dates not available yet

Garden Fair Plant Sale, Sat. May 18, 9am-2pm – **SAVE THE DATE!!!** AC-NARGS will have plants for sale, and members get a 25% discount.

RESPONSIBLE PEOPLE/2013 BOARD MEMBERS

If you want to volunteer, we'd love to hear from you!

Chair: Carol Eichler, carolithaca@gmail.com

Program: John Gilrein, basecamp@alum.syracuse.edu

Program Committee Members: Nari Mistry, nbm2@cornell.edu

Secretary: Mary Stauble, mes2@cornell.edu

Treasurer: BZ Marranca, mmm10@cornell.edu

Plant Sales Chair: David Mitchell, dwm23@cornell.edu

Plant Sales Committee Members: Michael Loos, BZ Marranca

Plant of the Month: John Gilrein, basecamp@alum.syracuse.edu, Karen Hansen

Membership: Mary Stauble, mes2@cornell.edu

New Member Hospitality: Terry Humphries, terryh@workingsolutionsrome.org

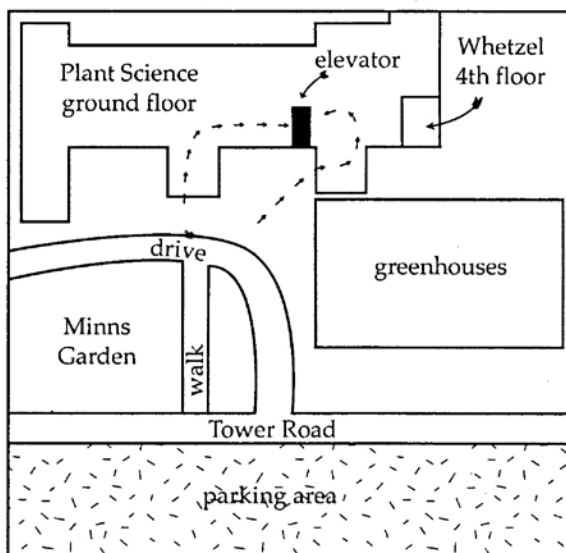
Newsletter Editor: Kathy Purdy, kopurdy@gmail.com

Newsletter Assistant: Pat Curran, pc21@cornell.edu

Webmaster, Program Tech: Craig Cramer, cdcramer@gmail.com

HOW TO GET THERE: MEETING ROOM MAP

This is on the Cornell University Campus.



GREEN DRAGON TALES

Published eight times a year (Feb., March, April, May/June, July/Aug., Sept., Oct. Nov./Dec.). Submit articles to Kathy Purdy, kopurdy@gmail.com. Note: The next issue of *The Green Dragon* will be in April 2013.