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CHAPTER

*North American Rock Garden Society*

# Green Dragon Tales

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November-December 2015

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## NOVEMBER 14: FROM FRONT YARD TO ROCK GARDEN – STEP BY STEP

*Nari Mistry, Program Chair*



*Sharee's front rock garden as it looked in 2013.*

*Photo by Carol Eichler*

What happens when you have to take your shade garden into full sun and wish it were easier to maintain? Make it into a rock garden. That is what Sharee did and she'll show us every step along the way. She'll offer practical advice for the beginner along with some planting failures and successes for the more experienced gardeners. If you visited her garden a few years ago, there will be plenty of images of new and unusual plants to enjoy as she shows how her urban rock garden has evolved over seasons and years.

One of the Mid-Atlantic region's most respected certified horticulturists, Sharee Solow, PCH, ASLA, blends a lifetime of learning and global experience to offer uniquely sophisticated landscape designs. After growing up in Florida, Sharee came to Philadelphia by way of Manhattan and now teaches Perennial Plant Design at Temple University in addition to her freelance design work. In February 2012, she completed an intensive seminar in Japan where she earned certificates in garden design history, construction, and maintenance. An active member of the horticulture community, Sharee is a popular speaker for professional landscape organizations as well as local garden

societies. Her talks are known for their visionary ideas as well as practical and realistic applications, and often incorporate recent discoveries and trends from her travels. More at [www.SolowHorticulturalDesigns.com](http://www.SolowHorticulturalDesigns.com)

The November meeting begins at noon with a dish-to-pass luncheon. Plan to arrive a bit earlier for set-up. Bring your own service and drinks will be provided. The program begins immediately after lunch at approximately 1:00 p.m. As required in our by-laws this is also our annual meeting, which will be very brief. There is no need to elect Chair or Treasurer (the two offices requiring a vote) as John's and BZ's terms have not expired.

Our meeting will be held in the classroom at Ken Post Lab, Post Circle off Tower Road, Cornell University, same as last month. Plan to allow a little extra travel time to find parking.

Directions if you need them can be located here: To get driving directions, go to [Cornell map](https://www.cornell.edu/about/maps/) (<https://www.cornell.edu/about/maps/>). Tower Road construction has been completed. There is free week-end parking in the parking lot at the corner of Tower and Judd Falls Roads. Do read parking signs carefully as some parking lots require permits even on week-ends.

## FROM THE CHAIR

*John Gilrein, ACNARGS Chair*

We had our first frost in the last week, and it always seems like both a blessing and a curse when it arrives. A lot of tasks needed to be done, bringing the non-hardy plants into the basement or plant room before they got zapped and picking the last of the tender vegetables like zucchini. But then it's pretty much the end of watering outdoor plants and trying to pick the zucchinis before they get baseball bat sized. Now that it's cool and moist, the gardens mostly take care of themselves for the rest of the autumn.

Some of this season's successes for me:

- Modest amounts of tomatoes, beans, and squash;
- Lots of kale, Swiss chard, and kohlrabi to pick until a hard frost;
- Many rock garden plants germinated and grew from NARGS seed (certainly not all!);
- Many rock garden plants planted out in the rock garden are still looking healthy;
- Nearly everything survived our little August/September 2015 drought (I know this pales by Western US standards);
- Lots of *Cyclamen hederifolium* blooming now, which is a treat with little else in bloom;
- The *Acer saccharum* that needed to be cut is finally down (and I didn't drop it on the house!);
- Great dwarf conifers to plant in the rock garden (as soon as I get a chance). These plants look great, spring, summer, fall, and winter, so how can anyone resist them?
- A successful NARGS trip to Michigan for the conference and visiting gardens, among other things, which was a great source of both ideas for gardening and culture of some highly desirable plants, like dwarf Daphnes.

Now that most of our gardening season is over, it's a good time to consider next year's season, culling out plants that are not pulling their weight or are not in a compatible location, what's getting too big for its site, determining new plants to try for 2016, maybe developing a special new garden, or retiring a garden if one has expanded beyond one's available energy for maintaining it (I'm not admitting to that).

Hope you've had lots of successes in 2015, and a few plant experiments to expand your horizons!

John

## PLANT-OF-THE-MONTH: NOT THIS MONTH

After the plethora of POM selections last month, there will be no plant-of-the-month this meeting. It's getting late to plant perennials now anyway, bulbs being one exception. With any luck there will be some door prizes to look forward to though.

## PLANT PROFILE: *HOUSTONIA CAERULEA*

John Gilrein, Chapter Chair

*Houstonia caerulea* has common names including bluets and Quaker ladies. Bluets are in the bedstraw family, Rubiaceae, which includes partridgeberry, *Mitchella repens*, and sweet woodruff, *Galium odoratum*. The flowers of all these plants are similar four-petaled tubes. It is a very low growing plant, 3 to 6 inches high with leaves up to ½ inch long in basal tufts. The flowers are about ½ inch wide with a tubular corolla, general pale blue with yellow centers, though the flowers can be white. The main flush of bloom is in May, with repeat blooming throughout the summer.

Bluets are native to most of the eastern US and Canada, and are sometimes found in large patches. I recently had an opportunity to rescue some bluets from my in-laws lawn, which was soon to be regraded. I have seen bluets in many areas in New York and Massachusetts, though never in Onondaga County.



My previous attempts at growing bluets in South Onondaga, NY were very unsuccessful, doubtless due to the slightly alkaline soil (pH of 7.5). References are fairly consistent that this plant wants an acidic growing medium. A pot of bluets (buried in soil to the rim) survived the winter and bloomed well this spring, increasing in size over the summer. Another pot of bluets I transplanted into a trough as an experiment. These bluets in containers have bloomed on and off all summer and look healthy. One of the reasons to grow plants in troughs is that it's a great opportunity to provide a specific soil to match the needs of the plant, in this case the soil is quartz sand mixed with coir (coconut husk fiber) and peat moss, to get a mix compatible with this plant's needs.

Recently in the wild (Wells, Hamilton County, NY) I saw many plants growing along the Sacandaga River. The basal tufts of foliage are not too obvious, being only an inch or two high, but were very common in sunny and partly sunny areas on the north (south facing) bank of the river. Plants were growing in niches in rock with little soil and in other areas with competition from grasses and other herbaceous plants. It seems like bluets would grow well in well-drained soil in sun or partial shade without excessive pampering. Such a small plant would not need as much attention with watering as a large plant transpiring away a lot of moisture. Based on my experience and seeing the plant in the wild, I believe it would succeed in a trough or pot with a few inches of not-too-rich soil, or in a rock garden that's not too sunny and dry if its pH needs could be met. It's a worthwhile plant that remains attractive through the entire growing season.

## **OLD QUARTERLIES: DESERVE A LOOK**

*Carol Eichler, Newsletter Editor*

As luck would have it, at last month's meeting I sat next to the pile of old Quarterlies we are offering "free for the taking." I picked up one and casually thumbed through it and wouldn't you know there were several articles I wanted to read. So of course I put it aside to take with me and picked up another Quarterly. Wouldn't you know, that issue also had some articles I was interested in. In the end I took home 4 or 5 which is about all I had to browse before our program began.

My suggestion to everyone is that you spend a little time browsing these periodicals and I'll bet you'll find some issues you'll want to take home to read over the winter. I picked up issues from 1994 that were still timely and included some great photos. I especially liked the plant profiles and think it would be great if we could offer regular in-depth articles profiling plants in our own newsletter (thank you, John, for your contribution!). I know these issues are on-line but there's something special about holding the issue in my hand. Call me old-fashioned.

## **NARGS SEED EXCHANGE: CALL FOR HELP**

Our Chapter will be participating in seed packaging for the NARGS seed exchange. That means we will be scheduling two weekend sessions in December to package donated seed from Phase I into individual glassine envelopes. This is a fun but labor-intensive task and we will need many hands. John Gilrein and Carol Eichler are co-coordinating this year. We will circulate a sign-up sheet at the November meeting. Hopefully by then we will have been able to schedule work dates in early December (dependent on when the seeds arrive) and a location (most likely the Ken Post Lab classroom) and can announce that information. If not, we will make sure to contact all volunteers once the schedule has been set. Please consider helping out with this endeavor, whether you can offer an hour or several hours.

By helping with the seed exchange you will be participating in something that is truly remarkable – thousands of species of seed grown or collected by gardeners throughout the world and touched by hundreds of hands before finally arriving in NARGS members' mailboxes, planted out, and perhaps ending up in your own garden by way of our own seedling exchange.

## **NEWS FROM NATIONAL: NOVEMBER BOOK REVIEW**

*Carol Eichler, Newsletter Editor*

NARGS October Book Review is written by me and is now posted here for you to read: <https://www.nargs.org/book-of-the-month/nov-2015>. The book reviewed is *The Pacific Northwest Garden Tour: The 60 Best Gardens to Visit in Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia* by Donald Olson and it has now been added to the ACNARGS book library. It's a perfect companion for anyone whose plans to travel to the Pacific Northwest include at least a garden or two. It seems that regardless of what time of year brings you to that region of the country there will be gardens offering something of interest.

## **LOOKING FORWARD TO FEBRUARY: MEMBERS SHARE**

*Nari Mistry, Program Chair*

For several years we been opening our program year by asking our members for short photo presentations which can be anything from gardens, specimen plants, planting methods or hypertufa construction; or perhaps travel highlights of notable gardens, alpine/subalpine environments, or scenery that you have visited. One never knows what's in store but it's sure to be interesting. All are invited to share. Details about presentation format, etc. will be in the January/February newsletter. Resuming our meetings after a 3-month break always feels like an early sign that spring is coming.

## UPCOMING ACNARGS PROGRAMS

*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. The Whetzel Room has been undergoing renovations including improved audio-visual equipment, new chairs to allow for more seating, and lightweight folding tables.*

November 14: Sharee Solow, horticulturist, landscape designer and garden writer from Philadelphia: "From Front Yard to Rock Garden - Step by Step." Dish-to-pass luncheon at noon followed by a brief annual meeting and speaker presentation beginning 1:00 p.m. Bring your own table service, drinks provided. Note 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday meeting date. Note location is Ken Post Lab classroom.

Looking ahead for 2016:

February 20: Members Share

March 19: Elizabeth Lawson: "Primroses"

April 16: Elisabeth Zander, NARGS Recording Secretary and Officer, Berkshire Chapter. Topic to be announced

June 23-27: "Steppe to Alpines: A Higher State," NARGS National Conference and Annual Meeting in Denver and Steamboat Springs; sponsored by Rocky Mountain Chapter. Registration for the meeting will commence early in 2016, possibly as early as January. Go to [nargs.org](http://nargs.org) for more info as soon as it's available.

As we learn more details of these meetings they will be included in future newsletters, our blog, [acnargs.blogspot.com](http://acnargs.blogspot.com), and our Facebook page, <http://www.facebook.com/acnargs>.

## CALENDAR OF SELECT GARDEN EVENTS

*To have a garden event in your area listed send all pertinent information to Carol Eichler at [carolithaca@gmail.com](mailto:carolithaca@gmail.com)*

Nov. 7: 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Nut Bonanza, 12 noon – 6 pm, Twisted Tree Farm, 279 Washburn Rd., Spencer

Nov. 9 - 21: 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Leaf Swap and Compost Giveaway, Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County

Nov. 18: Topic TBA, Finger Lakes Native Plant Society meeting, 7 pm, Unitarian Church Annex, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, enter from Buffalo St.

Dec. 4: Evergreen Wreath-Making Workshop (for experienced wreath makers), 6:30-8:30 pm, Ann Rider and MG volunteers,

Dec. 5: Evergreen Wreath-Making Workshop (for beginners), 10 am-12 noon, Ann Rider and MG volunteers, Cornell Cooperative Extension. Pre-registration required. Fee.



Dec. 7: Mark Whitmore of Cornell's Natural Resources Dept., Emerald Ash Borer and Hemlock Woolly Adelgid Update, 6:30-8:30 pm, Cooperative Extension Education Center, 615 Willow Ave., Ithaca. Fee

Dec. 16: Solstice Party, Finger Lakes Native Plant Society, 7 pm, Unitarian Church Annex, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, enter from Buffalo St.

## ABOUT US – ACNARGS

We are an all-volunteer organization and one of thirty-eight NARGS affiliated chapters active in North America. Our annual Chapter activities include 6 program-speaker meetings, the Green Dragon newsletter, web and Facebook pages, garden visits, overnight garden trips, hands-on workshops, and 3 plant sales a year. Our meetings are informal, friendly gatherings that provide a wealth of information and offer a source for unusual plants, plus the opportunity to be inspired by other gardeners. The public is always welcome.

Chapter membership starts at \$10 a year based on the calendar year. Membership includes these benefits: newsletter sent to you electronically (or option by mail for an extra fee), opportunity to travel on our planned overnight garden trips, and plant sale discounts and member only sales, including Plant-of-the-Month sales.

## ABOUT NARGS NATIONAL

NARGS National is our parent organization: We encourage you to join (online at [www.nargs.org](http://www.nargs.org)) for only \$40 a year. Benefits include a seed exchange, a quarterly publication, and an on-line web site featuring an archive of past publications, a chat forum and a horticultural encyclopedia. NARGS National also conducts winter study weekends and holds its Annual Meeting in interesting places where attendees have the opportunity to visit gardens, and take field trips, often to alpine areas, as well as hear talks by outstanding plants people from around the world.

## RESPONSIBLE PEOPLE/2014 BOARD MEMBERS

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

Chair: John Gilrein, [basecamp@alum.syracuse.edu](mailto:basecamp@alum.syracuse.edu)

Program: Nari Mistry, [nbm2@cornell.edu](mailto:nbm2@cornell.edu)

Program Committee Members: Could this be you?

Secretary: Mary Stauble, [mes2@cornell.edu](mailto:mes2@cornell.edu)

Treasurer: BZ Marranca, [mmm10@cornell.edu](mailto:mmm10@cornell.edu)

Plant Sales Chair: David Mitchell, [dwm23@cornell.edu](mailto:dwm23@cornell.edu). Seeking a Co-Chair for 2016 to work alongside David...Why not you?

Plant Sales Committee Members: Michael Loos, BZ Marranca, Carol Eichler

Plant of the Month: Plant of the Month: John Gilrein, [basecamp@alum.syracuse.edu](mailto:basecamp@alum.syracuse.edu)

Membership: Mary Stauble, [mes2@cornell.edu](mailto:mes2@cornell.edu)

New Member Hospitality: Terry Humphries, [terryehumphries@gmail.com](mailto:terryehumphries@gmail.com)

Newsletter Editor: Carol Eichler [carolithaca@gmail.com](mailto:carolithaca@gmail.com)

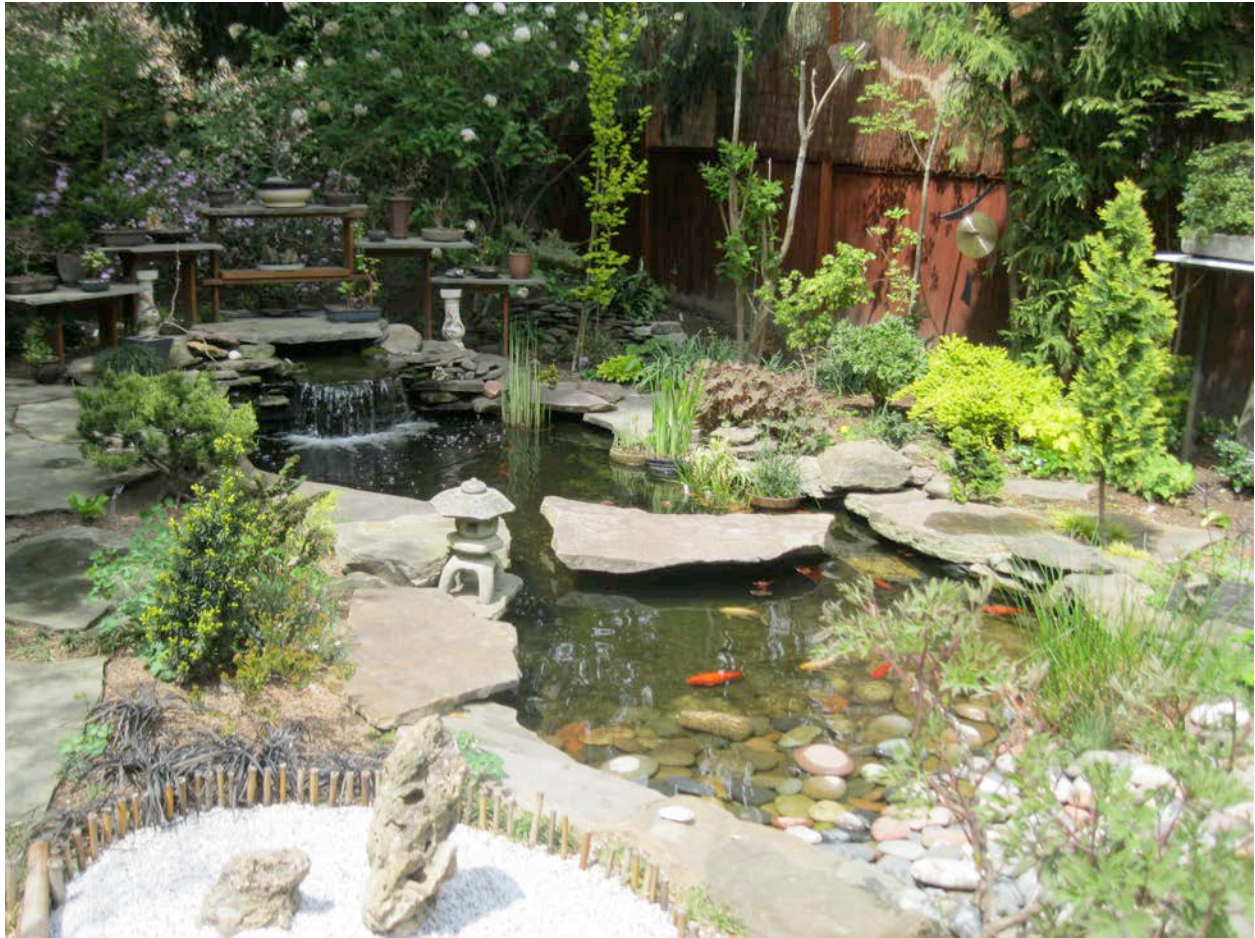
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**GREEN DRAGON TALES**

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**PHOTO OF THE MONTH**



Sharee Solow's backyard garden paradise in 2013. Photo by Carol Eichler