



ADIRONDACK
CHAPTER

North American Rock Garden Society

Green Dragon Tales

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March 2008

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'Woodland Treasures' topic of March 15 meeting

Our March 15 meeting will feature John Lonsdale, Edgewood Gardens, Exton, Pa., speaking on Woodland Treasures in the Whetzel Room, 404 Plant Science Building, Cornell University. Brown bag lunch at noon. Program starts at 1 p.m.

Lonsdale's garden has been evolving since moving to the U.S. from England in 1995, and is now home to several thousand woodland and hardy bulbous plants, in a variety of raised beds and natural woodland settings. His website (<http://www.edgewoodgardens.net>) features more than 3,500 images for you to explore.

Janis Ruksans bulb order

If you are considering joining the group bulb order from Janis Ruksans' bulb nursery in Latvia, please contact John Gilrein ASAP: base_camp@verizon.net or 315-492-0844.

Find details about the group order in the February newsletter or this blog post:
<http://acnargs.blogspot.com/2008/01/bulk-bulb-order-from-janis-ruksans.html>

Carol Eichler commented on that post:

Here's a great resource for finding images of bulbs from Ruksans catalog (image pages from the Pacific Bulb Society): <http://www.pacificbulbsociety.org/pbswiki/index.php/PhotographsAndInformation/> You'll still have to do additional homework to figure out hardiness (Ruksans book, a good map, etc.). Then there's trying to determine if our summers work for a particular bulb cultivar considering it may be too wet here. That might be a little hit and miss. Have fun everyone!

You can view Ruksans' catalog here: <http://www.remarc.com/craig/images/2008ruksans.pdf>

2008 program plans

Here are the plans for 2008. More details coming as they are available:

March 15: John Lonsdale, Edgewood Gardens, Exton, Pa on Woodland Treasures. Whetzel Room, 404 Plant Science Building, Cornell University. Brown bag lunch at noon. Program starts at 1 p.m.

April 5: Hypertufa Grow Stone Workshop, Taught by Art Friedl, Watson Greenhouse, LaFayette, NY.

April 19: Hitch Lyman, Trumansburg, N.Y., Snowdrops. Seedling exchange. Location TBD. Brown bag lunch at noon. Program starts at 1 p.m.

Spring and summer garden tours and workshops are still in the planning stages.

May 17: Plant Sale, Ithaca High School, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Midsummer date TBD: Picnic and Member Plant Sale, Judy Fogel's in Lansing.

September 20: Durand Van Doran, Trumansburg, N.Y. metal artist, Wrought Iron in the Garden. Whetzel Room, 404 Plant Science Building, Cornell University. Brown bag lunch at noon. Program starts at 1 p.m.

October 18: Jody Payne, rock garden curator, New York Botanical Garden, topic TBD. Brown bag lunch at noon. Program starts at 1 p.m. Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County, 615 Willow Ave., Ithaca, N.Y. (where Dey St., Willow Ave. and Rte. 13 meet). If you need directions, visit: counties.cce.cornell.edu/Tompkins or call the CCE office (during regular business hours): (607) 272-2292.

November 15: Annual meeting and dish-to-pass. **New:** Tony Reznicek, curator of the University of Michigan Herbarium will speak on a topic TBD. Location TBD.

On the ACNARGS blog:

Extras on the ACNARGS blog this month include pictures of primulas that did do well in Nari Mistry's garden, a link to Carol Eichler's online photo album, and comments from Bill Plummer about additional ferns that do well for him. Stop by for a visit: acnargs.blogspot.com/

From the Chair

The calendar plays cruel tricks with my mind. Here we are, just days away from March which psychologically at least signals the beginning of spring. Yet winter seems to have a relentless hold on me. My rational side tells me that we still have a good three months of nasty weather ahead – clouds, snow, cold, followed by clouds rain, mud - before I'm anywhere near content with my choice of homestead. Ugh! That doesn't mean I don't complain about summer weather – after all, that's the stuff that Iowa-born-and-bred folks, like myself, thrive on, But in summer, there's no better place on earth I want to be.

Meanwhile I must content myself with the little hints of what's to come – a flock of migrating robins arriving in my neighborhood this week (February 19th – what were they thinking?), ordering then planting my NARGS seeds (and awaiting the miracle of sprouting), looking forward to attending a garden show (despite vowing to get to the Philly show it will be lower-budget Rochester again in mid-March), and, last but not least, enjoying our Chapter's programs.

Last month we enjoyed wonderful remembrances of Ithaca gardens (Nari Mistry's rock garden), a historic Adirondack work-in-progress rock garden (Mary and Dick George's White Pine Camp), the forbidding but exotic environment of South Dakota's Badlands (Suzanne Lipari), and David Mitchell's quick glance through Les Quatre Vents, Montreal Botanic Gardens, Alpine Mt. Echo in Quebec and Cady's Falls Nursery in Vermont – over 300 breathtaking slides in 20 minutes (retracing the Chapter's trip last June enjoyed by 13 of us). Thank you all for sharing and, for me at least, bringing me hope and renewal.*

Our March program promises to be plant-filled as well. Jon Lonsdale of Edgewood Gardens and a true plant collector will be sharing not only his expertise but plants for sale (our plant-of-the-month) from his nursery as well. Come join us and bask in the plush world of green. If you can't wait, I invite you to enjoy the 4,000+ photos he has posted of his gardens on his website – no doubt a good way to chase away the doldrums when the need arises.

See you at the March meeting!

Carol

* I also want to thank Craig Cramer many times over for his seamless (to us anyway) technical expertise enabling the computer interface of these presentations and for presenting, in his own right, information about navigating our exciting new way of getting information out to you all through blog (something he designed and set-up as well). It's very cool - check it out!

Congrats to Stipend Recipients

Via Carol Eichler, chair:

Our Chapter will be well-represented at this year's Eastern Winter Study Weekend this March in Connecticut thanks to "a little help from [their] friends." The Grants Committee announces that Susanne Lipari has received a one-time stipend from the Chapter to attend and David Mitchell has received a stipend from NARGS National. Both promise to report back to us about all the wonderful presentations they will see. You can check out the line up of speakers, vendors and more here <http://nargs.org/meet/EWSW2008.html>.

David will be representing the Chapter at the NARGS Board meeting while Susanne is planning to assemble an exhibit illustrating some of our Chapter activities and highlighting our new blog site.

A True Adirondack Garden

Via Carol Eichler, chair:

Dick and Mary George reported at our February meeting that they are involved with a huge rock garden restoration project at White Pine Camp, near Paul Smiths in the Adirondack high peak region. Located on Osgood Lake, the history of this great camp includes having served as the summer White House for President Calvin Coolidge. The restoration effort, described more accurately as an archeological excavation, is moving along, with still much to do before the dedication scheduled for Sunday August 10th at 11:00 a.m., which includes a formal tour of the property, music and refreshments. They will be sending a formal invitation to the Adirondack Chapter and would be delighted to have a delegation or the entire membership attend!

Mary and Dick report they are still willing to put some of our members up for a couple of nights at White Pine Camp in exchange for some consulting advice on plantings. Be sure to check out their well-designed web site www.whitepinecamp.com for a look at the camp, guest quarters and more. If you're interested, you would need to work out a date with them, probably mid-June would work best since it is after snow melt but still before the high season begins. They state they are novices and could use the advice of experience. The man who designed and built the rock garden was Frederic Heutte, a French immigrant who received a presidential commendation from Calvin Coolidge for the garden. Heutte went on to achieve national acclaim and The Frederic Heutte Center in Norfolk Va. was named for him. Unfortunately Heutte did not keep good plant records. Fortunately, Mary does and is!

Of course they would be very grateful for any plant specimens (remember they are Zone 3 there but do get good snow cover) our members are willing to share too. The garden is comprised of several stone mounds covering an area 100 feet by 100 feet with a tall canopy of trees and mostly likely a highly acidic soil. To contact Dick and Mary email them at DickNMary@clarityconnect.com

Want to get serious about helping out? Contact Carol Eichler carol_eichler@excite.com or 607-387-5823. She will coordinate a working week-end to the camp in June.

Display Boards and a Bulletin Board - Something old/Something new

Via Carol Eichler, chair:

We hope to engage your continuing participation in sharing garden photos – your garden or others – at our meetings. Contact either Craig Cramer (cdcramer@twcny.rr.com) or myself (carol_eichler@excite.com 607-387-5823) to pick up one of the display boards so that you may mount and display your pictures at one of our meetings. Begun a few years ago, the display boards are a way for us to share highlights of the gardening season.

New for this year – we now offer a bulletin board (resembling the display boards but without the photos) for you to post information about upcoming garden programs, events, tours, etc. While we try to offer time at the meetings for announcements, the bulletin board is another means for sharing information about great garden happenings that others might want to know about.

News from National: Building a Lasting Membership Base

Via Carol Eichler, chair:

How do we recruit new members to our Chapter? How can the Chapter play a part in recruiting new members to NARGS National? How can we retain our members?

NARGS National's Membership Committee met to address these issues and their report was sent to me by Dick Bartlett, NARGS President. The national organization has well-documented statistics that show a steady and significant decline in its membership. At one time or another, we have implemented virtually every idea that was listed in the report. Our own membership has seen its ups and downs but seems to be holding steady and it is no doubt the synergy of all these membership strategies that makes a difference.

Here are several things that I sense have been key for our chapter. First and foremost we offer great programs on a wide range of topics – often found nowhere else in our community. We make sure press releases are sent out about our programs to attract the greater community. This adds to the visibility of the May plant sale which is another strong and dependable recruiting tool.

Additionally, our meetings include time for people to talk to each other. More than any other thing we do, we try to be inclusive and engaging. A few years ago we began our February “members share” meeting to kick-off the program year. Beginning with a few brave people who modestly shared photos or garden stories, it has grown to our fullest program yet this year with several presenters offering some fantastic slide shows. Even more recently we began asking members to make up posters of garden photos (simpler than a slide show and something that can be shared year round). Plus we now have a bulletin board for posting other garden activities such as sales, tours, and programs. We want our members to take some responsibility for “owning” the Chapter.

One last member incentive is that we get people growing rock garden plants. Our plant-of-the-month sale (buy one, get one free for members) has been enormously successful in making rock garden plants more affordable and getting into people's gardens while expanding their knowledge base and their interest.

I might boldly suggest that more important than looking at “dues paying members” to assess how we are doing, we should examine our attendance numbers at meetings and the number of active, contributing participants. From this perspective our Chapter is looking very strong! Our plant sales, which are dependent on contributors and buyers, have been steadily increasing over time. And this year, 2008, we have more members serving in leadership roles than we've had in a long time. We have had to work at both of these accomplishments.

Go to nargs.org/bulletin.html to stay in touch with news from our parent organization.

News from National: Time to Apply for Norman Singer Grants

Via Carol Eichler, chair:

National NARGS is now soliciting applicants for the coming year for Norman Singer grants. The application deadline is April 1, 2008 so the Committee review and decision can be made before the NARGS Annual Meeting, June 12-15, 2008. Applications should be sent electronically to Phyllis Gustafson dgusgus@charter.net.

In past years, NARGS National has funded rock garden projects at botanic gardens, expeditions in search of seed suitable for rock garden culture, internships requested by botanic gardens, and help with publications pertinent to alpine plants. The funds are not unlimited - most grants are in the range of \$1,500 to a high of \$5,000. The "Guidelines" can be found on the NARGS website here: www.nargs.org/info/endowmentguide.html.

For further questions you may contact Phyllis at the following address: 250 Maple St. Central Point, OR 97502 or by email: dgusgus@charter.net.

Rock garden primulas

Editor's note: This article by the late Ken Girard was originally published in 1999 in the CRAGS Newsletter, "The Voice of the Calgary Rock and Alpine Garden Society" (www.crag.ca), and republished in that group's Feb. 2008 newsletter. Ken was also president of the Calgary Horticultural Society. Keep in mind that Calgary is not Upstate New York. According to Wikipedia, "Calgary has a semi-arid, highland continental climate with long, dry, but highly variable, winters and short, moderately warm summers (Koppen climate classification BSk, USDA Plant Hardiness Zone 3b)."

Some of my very first experiences with gardening in the great outdoors were with primulas, known to me then as hardy African violets – at least that's what I called them. I wasn't familiar with the proper names of many perennials at eight years old, but I had always admired plants lining the walkway to my piano teacher's door. She grew African violets inside, so these must have been outside ones. One spring these plants had been, in my estimation, decimated, hardly anything left. I asked what had happened and was told that they had been thinned and the leftovers were behind the fence if I wanted any. Did I and how? So began my love affair with Auricula or Dusty Miller primulas.

Nothing says spring to me like a clump of *Primula auricula* in full bloom. The foliage is succulent with varying degrees of grey, white, gold or silver farina and the flowers are held above the foliage on stems which are also covered in farina. Flower colour ranges from palest yellow to rich gold; violet purple to mauve, as well as pink, cerise and red. Including novelty colours such as brown, tan and green, there are auriculas for everyone's taste. Auriculas have been such favourite plants for many years in England that there are whole societies dedicated to them and the hybridization that is taking place is absolutely amazing.

I have found it easiest to grow auriculas in semi-shade to full sun as long as the soil does not bake for extended periods of time. In fact too much shade will weaken a clump of *Auricula* primulas faster than anything else, followed closely by soggy soil. Most of the plants in my garden grow in areas where the tops are in sun most of the day but the roots are carefully tucked behind rock. The soil is composed of 50% grit, 25% compost and 25% of a manure/loam mix. Many of these primulas will actually grow in Calgary gumbo but do far better in a rock garden mix. They flower more profusely and tend to grow in tighter clumps.

The species that comprise this group of primulas are definitely garden worthy as are many of their hybrids and most of them are hardy for us if given a little winter protection. The earliest plants in this group of primulas to flower for me is *Primula marginata*, a species with lavender flowers and beautifully serrated leaves. The flowers appear in mid-April and last for a few weeks. The plants themselves are rather small when compared to others of the clan and fit well in troughs and dish gardens as well as smaller rock gardens. The foliage stays fresh for most of the summer but eventually goes yellow and dries off by September, leaving behind the large winter bud which contains next years leaves and flowers. There are

many selections of *P. marginata* worth obtaining and growing as well as its many hybrids. One of the most popular hybrids is *P. 'Linda Pope'*, a fantastic plant with large lavender flowers held well above the beautifully serrated leaves. Some hybrids lose the intensity of the serration on the leaves.

A species which needs to be more popular is *Primula hirsuta*. It is a mid-sized plant, grows about four inches across in tight clumps, mid-green in colour with a light farina. The flowers are hot pink to cerise depending on the plant. I purchased *Primula hirsuta* at a nursery on the west coast, planted it, it survived beautifully and bloomed the next year. It was so spectacular, I promptly went back to that nursery the next spring and purchased five more. Hopefully we will see more of them in the near future.

The main species of the *Primula auricula* group are medium- to large-growing plants that have beautiful fragrant flowers held above the foliage. The original species have small delicate flowers covered in white farina and come in yellow and purple. Plants can range from four to over eight inches in diameter and grow into rather large clumps. The leaves are succulent and usually covered in either silver or gold farina. With the extensive hybridization and selection that has taken place these primulas can now be had in almost any colour except true black, but there are such dark purple ones out there that from a distance they look black. The flowers can come in several colour patterns: selfs (one colour throughout), goldbands, white-eyed, yellow-eyed, completely covered in farina. The possibilities are endless. There are now double-flowering selections, but I have found these to be less hardy and definitely less vigorous than the single forms. They are definitely for the collector and need a little extra coaxing to do well.

Hybrids between the various species of plants in this group of primulas are popular with gardeners and deservedly so. With hybridization, a wide range of plant sizes, growth habits and flowering seasons and colours has been produced. *Primula x pubescens* (*Primula auricula* x *P. hirsuta*) is a desirable grouping of plants giving rise to many of the best garden cultivars. *Primula 'Beverly White'*, *P. 'Rufus'*, *P. 'Boothman's Variety'* are all selections of *Primula x pubescens*. There are many more out there to be had and tried.

Other primula species that I have grown are *P. glaucescens* which is a small plant for the trough or crevice garden with lavender-pink flowers in small clusters. *Primula belluensis* is a bit larger than *P. glaucescens* and has rose to pink coloured flowers. Both of these species require soil with good drainage to do their best. A very choice species in this group is *Primula allionii*. A rock gardener's dream! It is a diminutive plant well worth growing. Many people grow it in troughs or pans and everyone says, do not get the leaves wet, especially in winter. Those growing it here say that the trick is to make sure it has perfect drainage; grow it sideways or upside down in a crevice with no direct sun. Because we do not have the same problem with winter wet here as many people on the coast do, this worry may be unfounded. There are hybrids of *P. allionii* available that are definitely worth trying such as *P. x miniera* (*P. allionii* x *P. marginata*). Hopefully through hybridization the exacting requirements of *P. allionii* can be alleviated a bit.

By late summer all of these plants are beginning to get ready for winter. This year's leaves will begin to yellow, eventually drying out. These leaves should be left for winter protection as next year's leaves and flowers will already be produced in a resting winter bud. Do not let the plants ice over or stay too soggy during the winter, this can lead to stem or root rot which is very unfavourable. Some of the more delicate species and hybrids may need some winter protection from sun and wind so a light covering of straw would be best. A mulch which absorbs moisture and keeps the plants wet can be detrimental to the plants.

Fertilizing is best done in the spring with a surface dusting of bone meal applied around the plants. I try to keep the nitrogen to a minimum as this promotes large lush leaf growth, reduces flowering and may make the plants too soft for wintering properly. Dividing is best done either after flowering or in early fall as the plants *Primula x pubescens* Windrush are going dormant. I prefer division after flowering but can't always get to it. As the clumps grow the stems become rather unsightly, especially on the larger plants. Clumps are best lifted removing the soil from around the roots and with a sharp knife cut through the plant. Try to get a few roots with each piece and replant where you want them setting the plant a bit deeper than it originally was so that the buried stem can root out. Cuttings can also be taken, these are best done in late spring and kept in a cool moist area until rooting has taken place and planted out in the garden in the fall or for really tender or rare plants next spring, wintering in a cold frame.

I have had very few pest problems with primulas but occasionally see aphids on the soft tender growth or flower stalks. Gently removing aphids either by hand or a gentle stream of water usually works during the

growing season. Watch for black aphids in and around the winter crowns in late summer and be prepared to use an insecticide to eradicate them. Slugs may feast on the leaves especially in spring so be on the lookout for their tell tale trails and leaf damage.

As you can see there are many species and varieties of rock garden primulas just in this group that are worth trying. All garden centres carry the regular *P. auricula* type hybrids but you need to go early if you want to select and purchase them in flower. Seed from seed exchanges is another way to obtain these treasures but one needs to be patient when growing primulas from seed, and sometimes the seed can be mislabeled or possibly of hybrid origin. Named varieties and true alpine treasures need to be ordered from specialty nurseries and shared amongst your friends through trading and selling at plant sales; Go ahead try a few, I know you will enjoy these early spring jewels of the alpine garden.

My sad experience with tiny alpine primulas

Editor's note: This is from ACNARGS member Nari Mistry. Visit the ACNARGS blog to share your primula experiences: acnargs.blogspot.com.

In November 2004 I decided to try starting some alpiners from seed. Among others, I had seeds of *Primula auricula* and *P. marginata*. I wanted to grow some tiny primulas like I had seen growing at high altitudes in Nepal in 1995. I knew nothing about the careful culture needed by these alpine primulas.

I did not want to fuss with indoor lights, etc. So I started them in little 4-inch pots filled with a mixture of equal parts leafmold, sand, PRO seedstarter, and Profile (similar to Turface). I plunged all these pots into a semi-shady scree, covered the whole area with wire mesh to protect from animals and wished them well for the winter!

P. auricula is expected to take two years to start seed, so I did not expect miracles.

P. marginata showed a few very tiny leaves in May 2005 which I carefully nurtured through the spring and summer, eventually transferring each tiny seedling into its own pot of similar soil. These were left in the scree over winter. The scree is always covered over with wire mesh for protection every winter.

I added a little osmocote in each pot in the spring. *P. marginata* continued to develop very very slowly through 2006, growing barely to one inch in diameter by Fall 2006. Two of the plants each developed a single miniscule flower! I did not take a picture, hoping for better bloom the next year.

In October I transplanted three plants directly into the same scree, tucked next to rocks. These did grow a little bigger in 2007 but the leaves soon began to look pale and finally the wet weather finished them off in 2007. The ones left in pots vanished even earlier. *P. auricula* never germinated, although for 2006 I took the pots indoors and kept hoping.

In 2007 I also tried two tiny seedlings (*P. allionii* and *P. clusiana*) brought by Harvey Wrightman on his March visit. One was planted in a semi-shady trough and one in a flat "alpine bed" next to the scree. Alas, neither of them survived the year. They both looked soggy and finally disappeared by late fall.

Sad story! I guess these little beauties are more suited in our area to an alpine house, or at least need to be in a cold frame or indoors in the winter. Perhaps I will try again after reading Rock garden primulas.

Garden Conservancy Open Days

Mark your calendar:

- Tompkins County: April 5, June 14, July 12
- Syracuse Area: July 13

Look for details as they are available at the Garden Conservancy website: www.gardenconservancy.org

Other Events

Via Carol Eichler (with thanks to Maria Galetti for some of this information):

- March 2-9: Jazz it Up! Philadelphia Flower Show; <http://www.theflowershow.com>
- March 13-16: It's a Garden Life, annual Rochester, NY Flower Show
<http://www.rochesterflowershow.com>
- March 28-30: Rock Gardening for the Future, NARGS Eastern (Winter) Study Week-end Hosted by the Berkshire Chapter NARGS, held in Hartford, CT: <http://www.bnargs.org/WSWMarch08.htm>
- April 26: Stonecrop Gardens Open House and Plant Sale, Cold Spring, NY;
<http://www.stonecrop.org>
- May 11 Rare and Unusual Plant Sale, sponsored by the Friends of the Central Experimental Farm, Ottawa, Canada; <http://www.friendsofthefarm.ca/events.htm>
- May 17 -18: Trade Secrets - A Rare Plant and garden antiques sale and garden tours, Sharon, CT; <http://www.tradesecretsct.com>
- June 12-15: NARGS National Conference and Meeting, Ottawa Canada, sponsored by the Ottawa Valley Chapter, NARGS (more information forthcoming)

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. (This is the slate to be voted on at our Feb. meeting):

- **Chair/Membership:** Carol Eichler, carol_eichler@excite.com, 607-387-5823
- **Vice Chair/Program:** Robin Bell, rgb2@cornell.edu, 607-272-2074
- **Secretary:** Carolyn Yaeger, cao2@cornell.edu, 607-844-9462
- **Treasurer:** Vacant
- **Program Assistants/Garden Trips and Tours:** Billie Jean Isbell, bjj1@cornell.edu, 607-539-6484 and Donna Kraft, dkaft@twcny.rr.com, 315 696-8626
- **Plant sales:** David Mitchell, dwm23@cornell.edu, 607-342-3660 and BZ Marranta mmm10@cornell.edu 607-532-8813
- **Plant of the Month:** John Gilrein, basecamp@alum.syracuse.edu, 315-492-0844
- **Wurster Garden Coordinator:** Tom Myers tom@ithacanhs.org 607-273-2865
- **Membership:** Susanne Lipari sel3@cornell.edu 607-387-9308
- **Annual Picnic Host:** Judy Fogel jfogel@twcny.rr.com 607-275-3332
- **Newsletter editor/Webmaster:** Craig Cramer, cdcramer@twcny.rr.com, 607-539-7233 and Nari Mistry nbm2@cornell.edu, 607-272-7496

Green Dragon Tales

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