

Newsletter

North American Rock Garden Society
Berkshire Chapter June 2007

Next Meeting

Saturday, June 2, at 10:30 AM

Berkshire Botanical Garden Exhibit Hall

BBG is located 2 miles west of Stockbridge, MA at the junctions of Route 102 and 183

Chapter Business: We will have a Show & Tell, Questions For the Experts, an auction for unusual plants and other horticultural items and a brief overview of the current state of our Chapter. Lunch will follow the program, and we will have our plant sale. Dom Dembowski and Erica Schumacher will be bringing additional plants for sale, so the selection should be outstanding.

Program

Jody Payne

Curator of the Rock Garden

The New York Botanical Garden

Ms. Payne's program will focus on the history of The Rock Garden at the New York Botanical Garden; its design and development from 1932 to 2007. Designed and built by a founding member of NARGS, T. H. Elliot was head of horticulture at The New York Botanical Garden for 40 years. Mr. Elliot, who trained at The Royal Botanic Garden at Kew, also founded the School of Professional Horticulture at NYBG, from which Ms. Payne graduated in 2001. This program was based on the program at Kew.

"Having been trained in fine arts, and then as an horticultural generalist, I have found the gardens to be an incredibly enjoyable and challenging group of rare plants, including trees, shrubs, woodland plants, rock garden, alpine and greenhouse collections. I will share some of my favorites from the Rock Garden collections."



Chairman's Message – 5/15/07

By Peter F. George

Hubris is defined as "Excessive pride displayed by a character and often taking the form of a boastful comparison of the self to the divine, the gods, or other higher powers--often also resulting in harsh punishment." I mention this because for the past several weeks, hubris defines my mindset. I tend to wander around my property during the day and conduct business on my headset while weeding, pruning and just admiring my work as a gardener. Normally I'm not that impressed with my gardening skills, but this year the plants have decided to put on their best. Plants that normally sulk until June are covered with blooms. Brown twigs that in previous years would have become additions to my compost pile have sprouted green shoots and now actually appear to be growing. Even my seeds are sprouting and the plants that are growing in these numerous pots I spent most of December preparing are the real thing. Normally most of my germinations are weeds, but today I noticed that

even my *Trillium undulatum* seeds are sprouting. The question for me is what is the price I will pay for this? I guess I will have to wait and see, but I'm not optimistic. I am certain I will wake up one day to find some kind of previously unknown fungal infection wreaking havoc with my *Primulas*, or an infestation of gophers emptying my garden of *Gentiana acaulis*, or simply a freak hailstorm on July 5 crushing my *Campanula dzaaku* seedlings. But eventually I will pay for my "excessive pride" and the gods will have their payment.



The mention of my *Trillium* germination reminded me that the seeds that I purchased from Gardens

North have, as always, virtually all germinated. Singular among the suppliers from whom I purchase seed, her seed always fulfills the promises she makes when she sells them. I do what she tells me and it works. In my experience, that is quite unusual, and Kristl Walek, the Mistress of Seeds, deserves more credit for her excellent quality and service. I would be interested in your experiences with seed houses and mail order plant suppliers. I have purchased from quite a few of them, but my experiences are anecdotal. It would be useful and interesting to collate your experiences for a late summer issue.

Assuming no broken legs or other natural or unnatural disasters, the rest of this year's programs will be outstanding. I hope to see all of you at some point this year, and am depending on all of you to help out as we come closer to actually finishing the planning stage of the 2008 Winter Study Weekend. I would like to have a short discussion of the 'where' and the 'when' and the 'who' at our meeting, so plan to stay a bit

past the plant sale for about 20 minutes or so. See you next week!

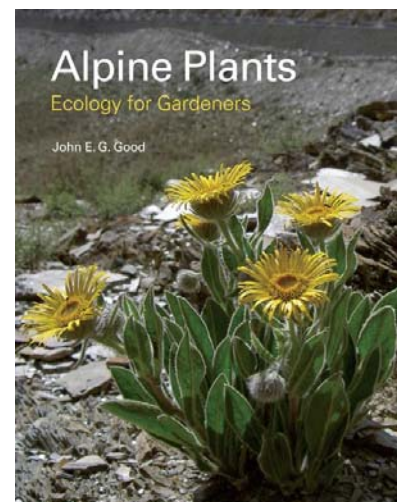
Book Review

Alpine Plants: Ecology for Gardeners, by John E.G. Good & David Millward. Portland, Oregon: Timber Press, 2007. ISBN 978-0-88192-811-2. 176 pages. \$34.95.

I remember John Good's talk to BNARGS in July 1997 as one of the best presentations I'd ever attended. I've often wished that I had a reference for the information he covered, and now I have it. If you've wondered why plants that grow naturally in hostile high-altitude environments fail in "more hospitable" lowland gardens, this is the book for you.

Good illustrates the complexity and diversity of alpine ecosystems, the challenges they pose to plant life, and the ways in which plants meet these challenges.

The book is a short course in ecology, plant physiology, and reproductive biology. Millward's chapter on geology is an added feature. Good skillfully condenses these broad subjects into a clear, concise text with gardeners in mind. He suggests how knowledge of alpine ecology can guide gardeners in growing alpiners and that knowing the source of a plant or seed is the first step toward successfully growing it. Look here to discover just what it is that that crevice plant needs to survive in your garden.



The final chapter discusses the effects of global warming on alpine plants and the dismal outlook for their future.

Fine photographs of plants and environments as well as figures complement the text. However, the sidebars, which merely restate what is in the main text, are superfluous. A couple of the figures need more detailed captions, while an additional figure or two would clarify the discussion on plate tectonics.

Much of the subject matter covered in this book applies to all plants, not just alpiners. Gardeners of all sorts should find it a welcome addition to their libraries.

Joe Strauch

Edelweiss Perennials

My wife and I started Edelweiss Perennials in 1898 in Kirkland, Washington. We moved there from Switzerland, where I grew up and learned the trade by doing an apprenticeship at the Frei Nursery. Some will recognize this name; a few plants are named after the founder, Max Frei.

From there I went on to the Friedrich Nursery, working in the perennial department. In the 12



years I was there I extended the perennial assortment from about 800 varieties to 3500. Our specialties were Daylilies, Hostas, Peonies, Iris, Hardy Geraniums (over 200 varieties) and I also started working with Helleborus. The rest of the assortment was everything in between.

In 2002 we moved with our two children to our hopefully final destination; Canby, in beautiful Oregon. The climate is ideal for growing most perennials. Winter lows are at 15 degrees Fahrenheit and summer highs at about 103 degrees, mild enough to get by without heated greenhouses but still cold enough to test some tender perennials hardiness.



We decided to go mail order because specialty perennials need a bigger audience than just the local market. We do specialize in several different plant groups but our main aim is to grow good

garden plants. This sounds a bit simple but we think it's important that a plant is not just new or very unusual; it also has to perform in gardens without daily pampering and has to look good more than just a few weeks out of the year. Having said all that, we do like extraordinary plants, given they fall into the criteria just explained.

The plant groups we specialize in are: *Cyclamen*, *Geranium*, *Helleborus*, *Sempervivum*, evergreen grasses and rock garden plants, foremost *Primulas*. We also have several own selections and introductions. Top of that list is *Clematis recta* 'Midnight Masquerade'; upright with very dark, metallic-purple foliage. Others are *Dicentra* 'Hearts Desire', *Geranium maculatum* 'Vickie Lynn', *Geranium malviflorum* 'Sweetheart', *Gypsophila repens* 'Red Neck', *Helleborus x ternii* 'Marvelous Marble', *Hydrophyllum tenuipes* EP *Variegated*, and *Schizostylis occinea* 'Torero' to name a few.

We propagate all our plants ourselves. Most of our plants are grown and shipped in 3 1/2" pots; the plants will establish fast in the garden and shipping costs are still affordable.

Urs Baltensperger

www.edelweissperennials.com

Easy Does It

By Rachel Flowers

Easy Plant of the Month for June is *Erigeron compositus*. This plant is also known as the Dwarf Mountain Daisy or the Cutleaf Daisy and occurs naturally from Greenland to Alaska and in various Midwestern and western states. It is been



found at elevations up to 9000 feet and is usually seen growing on exposed rocky ridges, usually blooming in nature in mid to late spring.

The Cutleaf Daisy is a low growing perennial growing only about 8 inches tall. Its flowers are reminiscent of daisies with the yellow/green center and pink to white petals. This plant is a member of the Asteraceae family, which also includes plants such as asters and sunflowers.

The name *Erigeron* stems from the Greek *eri* "early" and *geron* "old man". Lewis and Clark first collected the plant, and the first information

about it was published between 1774-1820 by a German scientist who received specimens from Lewis and Clark.

Cultivated plants are reported to bloom in June and July, yet at my father's garden they are blooming right now, in mid-May. One of his plants has over a 2 dozen flowers on it and as I spent the day at his gardens we watched the flowers rotate with the sun. The flowers, like several other Asteraceae, are phototropic.



It reportedly grown well in sandy or gravelly ground, and my father planted it into a very gravelly mix 10 years ago, and the original plant is still there and doing well. It does seed around quite freely, and it seems to grow well everywhere as long as it gets a lot of sun.

Announcement

Saturday, July 7, 2007 from 10 AM to 4 PM, The Lenox Garden Club will host its 17th annual tour of gardens and houses, "Hidden Treasures of the Berkshires." Five distinctive properties in Richmond and West Stockbridge in MA and Canaan, NY, will be featured, ranging from the small and whimsical to the grand and magnificent. For ticket information call 413-298-3089 or email: marywh@bcn.net.

Proceeds from the tour support Berkshire County projects dedicated to horticulture, environmental conservation and education, and preservation.



SLEET IN THE GARDEN

Music ripens as I wake to crystal pocks
on glass.

Notes balance on invisible spokes.

Only the unseasonal keeps a pattern.

Illicit snowflake recurrences

Paper the arrivals shed

Where April's standing room only

Alpine plant crowd smolders in trays

Awaiting rock definitions.

The art, one of insertion;

I bury orchestral roots.

Is density, destiny? Every earthstring

Stretched taut, the garden's rockscape

Resonates, sky and wind

Struck into flowers.

Robin Magowan

REMINDER!

NARGS Annual Meeting June 14-17, 2007

The meeting will feature field trips to Dolly Sods Wilderness Area, Blackwater Falls State Park. Dolly Sods, at 4200 feet, is an alpine boreal ecosystem with amazing displays of Kalmia and Rhododendron as well as acid bog flora. Blackwater Falls is at a lower altitude with an Appalachian woodland flora. Both sites are refugia, places where plants remained after the Wisconsin Glacier retreated.

Speakers will include Bill Cullina of The Garden in The Wood, Bill Grafton of West Virginia University, and Bonnie Isaac of The Carnegie Museum. They will discuss the plants we see on the field trips and why they are there.



Bear Rocks fellfield

[The Canaan Valley Resort](#) lies amid the beautiful hills of West Virginia. As well as the wonderful scenery, there is a golf course, swimming pool, tennis courts and many interesting hiking trails. Make reservations directly with the resort, and ask for the special NARGS rate of \$78 single, \$85 double. Call 1-800-622-4121.



INFINITE ARRIVALS

When snow has settled
and spring starts to make its way
out of the retreat's melting momentum

(fecundities removed,
bagged, beaten back),
a sodden insolence bursts forth
along with anxiety: what icy surprises
will the next deluge spring?
Seeds, budding mathematicians,
calculate the sun,
the disposition of dials,
to plot a new order
opening the ground where, settling,
they'll join the confusion of troops
finding home at last.

Robin Magowan

May 5, 2007 Meeting Notes

Our May meeting followed by 7 days the plant sale at Stonecrop in Cold Spring, NY, and the attendance at the Berkshire meeting was much sparser than the day at Stonecrop. It might have been the proximity of the two events, or simply that May 5 was a very busy day for the rock gardening world, but in any case the turnout for the regular meeting was very disappointing. We had about 25 people, of whom 7 were either new members or first time visitors, and these attendees saw and heard one of the best presentations in my 11 years in BNARGS.

Jim Locklear gave two presentations, the first of which was 'Phlox on Fire,' focusing on the



beautiful genus which resides almost entirely in North America. His slides not only showed the plants, but also gave us a comprehensive overview of where the plants originate, and how they grow in their natural habitats. Jim is not really a gardener, but rather a

botanist, and his interest in Phlox is relatively recent. Over the past 15 years he's been traveling around the U.S. locating various Phlox species, photographing them, and building a reservoir of knowledge that he will eventually turn into a book for Timber Press.

His afternoon presentation, much briefer than the morning program, was titled 'Garden Treasures of the Great Plains.' Here he introduced us to a few of his favorite plants endemic to the Great Plains, which are growable here in New England. As the Curator of the Nebraska State Arboretum, he is involved in selecting, propagating and distributing outstanding plants that he feels are suited to horticulture. Among those that he discussed are *Calylophus serrulatus*, *Townsendia incana* and *Oenothera macrocarpa*.

We had our plant sale, a *Lewisia tweedyi*



contributed by Elliot Jessen was auctioned, and the guests and new members introduced themselves.

An excellent meeting, albeit poorly attended. Let's hope the attendance was an anomaly.

And by the way, I don't want this job. Tom Clark did it so well that even if I wanted and needed another job, this is not one I'd volunteer to do. So PLEASE let me know before the next meeting that YOU will offer your services as Meeting Recorder, whoever you are.

PFG



NOVEMBER SPEECHLESSNESS

I wake from a chill and it's settled

A million fists have spoken.

The dark sings in its quality of rain.

An articulate drizzle occupies the lawn.

We take the ground for granted.

We embrace each other's debris.

I pluck each last leaf

As if it were sky I'm wheeling away

Rather than the real adversary, zero,

Who needs no wind to issue blunt remarks.

What small district of the universe

Holds the sun?

Robin Magowan

Letters To The Editor:

Hi Peter,

We have all read the BNARGS newsletter and send along kudos for the way it is laid out. The use of colour is most effective. I would think this helps with the solicitation of articles.

I broadly agree with Robin's comments re: the Greek campanula - especially *C. oreadum* that is one of my favourites. The attached slide shows a plant I had in the dry wall for some years. It faces east and avoids the mid-day sun. Any that I put into full sun did perish. The one in the wall bloomed several years and I took cuttings from it until (the fatal error of the nurseryman), I took a slice too close and decapitated it. Often, a good plant will resprout from the caudex. Not this time, I was duly punished.

I find that sometimes it will germinate in a flush, or not. 2 pots sown at the same time can give very different results. Cuttings strike very slowly and must be carefully watered, as the caudex is susceptible to rot. Both cuttings and seedlings

grow on slowly, but transplant reasonably well. It will also grow on tufa, but doesn't particularly like this treatment. We have it listed again in the catalogue, mostly from cuttings. I also bought extra seed ad have a good lot of seedlings to grow on. I buy extra seed of it as the collections from



Greece are less regular than those from Turkey. Old seed germinates equally well. Holubec's notes on his 2005 collection state, "2600m, limestone scree, fragile, caespitose plant, 8x10cm high, light green leaves, flowers are long light blue trumpets." - enough to drop garden writers to their knees!

The second photo is *Campanula bornmuelleri* / *C. hakkiarica* (if you think the Greek campanula are poorly described, Halda says the Turkish species are hopelessly confused - and he isn't going to take it on). This one is a real chasmophyte and grows very well on tufa. It also strikes roots well.

You can print any of this and the photos. You might even get me to submit an article on a few Greek / Balkan endemics - but not now - for next winter. It's a great newsletter!

Harvey Wrightman

info@wrightmanalpines.com

buy online at www.wrightmanalpines.com

Editor's Notes

This is apparently the issue where I appear in several guises, at least one of which I'd prefer to avoid in the future. As Editor of the newsletter, I do have some thoughts to share and some questions to ask, and I'd like to use this space for those purposes.

Over the past few months we've transformed the newsletter to a larger publication, and we are printing in full color. Costs are actually quite modest as technology advances in the neighborhood printing business, but I really need feedback from as many of you as possible regarding these changes. I think of them as improvements, but that is MY opinion, and I need yours. PLEASE email me @petergeorge@verizon.net with your views.

As Chair of the chapter, I have worked closely with Robin on our programming. I have always been impressed by Robin's judgment, and he and I seem to work together seamlessly in this area. However I have not really reached out to you, the members, for your views on our programs. Again, I really want and need feedback. Rather than sending out a form with a list of questions, please take a minute or two and let me know what you think about the programming in general, and please comment on those programs you've attended in specific.

As all of you must be aware, the Post Office just increased the cost of mailing to 41 cents an issue. We currently are sending out 115 each month, and I would like to reduce that number significantly. If you are willing to receive an electronic version INSTEAD of a paper copy, please email me and I will put you on the email list. I can send the newsletter as a PDF file or a Word file, so you should give me your

preference. Pam Johnson does have each newsletter linked on our own website, which she maintains for us in a most wonderful way. So everyone can access not only the current issue, but past issues as well. The web address for our website is: www.bnargs.org and the newsletters are posted on the 'News' link.

Since I've been involved in rock gardening I've never fully mastered the problem of identifying weed seedlings. Therefore each year I plant 60 or more seed pots, and each spring I am confronted by a variety of seedlings which I'm reasonably sure are NOT what I expected, but I am not really certain. So I grow them on, and only when the plant is literally too big to make sense to me do I pull it out. Often that is too late for the smaller, more delicate seedlings that I really wanted, so I lose the whole thing. Are any of you sufficiently experienced and sufficiently motivated to provide us with a 'seedling review' at our late spring and

summer meetings? Our members could bring in their mystery pots and some of our members could help identify the weeds, and help our growers find more success. Again, please let me know your thoughts.

As my 2nd year as Chair comes to a close, we still are without a Nominating Committee. If you are willing to serve on this Committee, please let me know. This is not a Committee with a lot to do most of

the year, so the meetings are infrequent and relatively brief. Again, email me if you are willing to serve.

Finally, I want to implore everyone to bring plants to our plant sales this summer. Not only am I bored with nothing to plant, but also we need the money. Keep growing, and always set aside a plant or two for the rest of us. I look forward to seeing you all at the next meeting.

PFG



Berkshire Botanical Garden Items of Interest For June

Liz Toffey (former member who has rejoined)
92 West Parsons Drive
Conway, MA 01341

The Global Garden

Join Expert Plantsmen **David Burdick & Rob Genneri**

In Depth Look at Unusual Tender Plants

Saturday, June 16, 10 a.m.--1 p.m.

Slide-illustrated lecture, demonstration and spectacular plant sale

Members \$25; Non-members \$30

All levels

Right Plant, Right Pot

How to Successfully Grow Plants in Pots

Saturday, June 30

10 a.m.—noon

Rustic Trellis Building

Saturday, June 9

9:30 a.m.--12:30 p.m.

Garden Ornament: Completing the Picture

June 9 - August 31

10 am - 5 pm daily



Special exhibition of vintage and antique garden ornaments, carefully selected and sited in our display gardens by noted dealer and specialist Tracey Young of The Elemental Garden in Woodbury, CT.

<http://www.berkshirebotanical.org/events/gardenornament.html> for details.

New Members:

Steve Schimpff
290 Chanterwood Road
Lee, MA 01264

Katherine (Kathie) Jones
40 Berkshire Drive
Williamstown MA 01267



Page 1, *Lewisia tweedyi*, photo by Magnar Aspaker,
<http://magnar.aspaker.no/Lewisia%20tweedyi.jpg>

Page 2, *Trillium undulatum*, photo by Tom Govus,
<http://www.gafw.org/Page%2010,%20Trillium%20undulatum.htm>

Page 3, *Gentiana asclepiadea*,
<http://www.edelweissperennials.com/largeview.asp?id=102> &

Geranium macrorrhizum 'Ingwersen',
<http://www.edelweissperennials.com/largeview.asp?id=407>

Page 4, *Erigeron compositus 'Rocky'*, photos by Rachel Flowers from Peter George's garden

Page 5, *Snowbound*,
<http://www.empowerment4women.org/community/blogs/inanebraskagarden/?p=68>

Page 6, *Sweetgum Seedpod in Melting Snow*, photo by Michael Botos,

http://www.botos.com/weekly/imgp3360a2_800.jpg
Page 7, *Phlox condensata* photo by Michael Charters,
<http://www.calflora.net/bloomingplants/condensedphlox.html>

Page 7, *Oenothera macrocarpa*, photo by Paul L. Redfern, Jr.

http://biology.missouristate.edu/Herbarium/Plants%20of%20the%20Interior%20Highlands/photographs_of_flowering_plants_O.htm

Page 7, *Rain*,
http://lennthompson.typepad.com/lenndevours/miscellaneous_sips/index.html

Page 11,
<http://homepage1.nifty.com/kikou/hanagoyomi0501a.htm>

Page 11, *Penstemon newberryi*, photo by James Reveal

<http://www.life.umd.edu/emeritus/reveal/pbio/slides0/0409a.jpg>

Discoveries Make The Difference

John Spain

I planted 100 big fat tulip bulbs. They all came up in unison. The blooms were beautiful. Even the neighbors commented. But when a tiny ½ inch corm of cyclamen sent up it's little inch high pink blossom through the snow, THAT was something special. The occurrence of the unexpected; a tiny surprise. Now I'm hooked. I'm growing hardy cyclamen.



Surprises and discoveries are the sparks that keep gardeners going. And they take on many forms. Growing rock garden plants from seed was a real disappointment to me. The failure rate was too high. It didn't seem worth the effort. They didn't all come up and what did come up I lost in large numbers. Then I read (or heard) something from Geoffrey Charlesworth, whom I much admire as a seed grower. He expounded on his 60/60/60 theory. In effect he said that we shouldn't get too up tight. Only 60% of the seed that germinates will survive in the seed pot, and only 60% of the seedlings that you prick out of the pot will live. Now I've discovered something. If that's what one of the best can expect, then success can take on a new meaning. Satisfaction now comes to me even with my failures.

Think of the first time a rare little jewel was found to self-sow in your garden, or the surprise to find that a wonderful 'greenhouse' cactus could survive and bloom outdoors in our snowy

climate. Remember the plant that you purchased and planted a half dozen times only to have it die every time. Then you planted it behind that big rock and it lived!! What a discovery. You point out that little plant to every visitor that will stop long enough to admire it.

Failure plays a real part in the joy of gardening. It's when we anticipate failure or have had many failures that the surprise of success in the sweetest. Can you recall being given a tiny piece of some rare and difficult plant? You really didn't expect to keep it alive yet it survived. It even bloomed. Now you want to know about all the other species of this genus. New fuel for the fire. It seems that the more failure we anticipate the more gratifying success can be.

It might also be noted that with every failure we discover something that is not to be repeated. In his article on Gardening Goals, Geoffrey Charlesworth wrote, "they (gardening goals) are constantly changing to accommodate the self-confidence born of success and the wisdom born of failure."

We discover that the 'books' don't have all the answers and that some plants will not grow in certain places. We find out that not all Penstemons grow tall and leggy. We find out that soap hanging from strings does not always keep the deer away. It goes on and on.



Someone once said the God does not count the time we spend in the garden

against our fixed allotment of time on this earth. Perhaps this thought was born of the fact that the serious gardener continues through his or her life to thrive through the discoveries of the garden.

Positions of Responsibility

Chairperson – Peter F. George
Vice-Chairperson – Harold Peachey
Secretary – Carol Hanby
Treasurer – Jeffrey Hurtig
Archivist – James Fichter
Audio Visual Chairperson - Joe Berman
Greeter – Harold Peachey
Independent Director – Elizabeth Zander
Newsletter Editor – Peter F. George
Meeting Recorder – **Open**
Plant Sale Chairperson – Bob Siegel
Program Chairperson – Robin Magowan
Proofreader – Cliff Desch
Refreshments Chairperson – Joyce Hemingson
Speaker Housing – Anne Spiegel

Published 10 times per year (Feb. through Nov.) by the Berkshire Chapter NARGS

Membership is open to all members of NARGS
Dues \$10.00 single, \$12.50 Family
Payable to the Treasurer
Jeffrey Hurtig
33 Jeremy Drive
East Lyme, CT 06333

Deadline for Next Newsletter is June 15, 2007

Please contact editor before reprinting articles

Peter F. George, Editor
Berkshire Chapter NARGS
PO Box 833
Petersham, MA 01366