



Newsletter

North American Rock Garden Society
Berkshire Chapter February 2008

Next Meeting

Saturday, March 1, at 10:30 AM

Berkshire Botanical Garden Exhibit Hall
BBG is located 2 miles west of Stockbridge
MA at the junction of Routes 102 & 183

Chapter Business: Show & Tell, Ask The
Expert, and any other relevant or irrelevant
activities, as long as they are interesting.

AM: Sally Perkins from Salem, NH

Sally will be speaking on 'Small
Rhododendrons and Other Ericaceous Plants
For The Rock Garden.'

She will be talking mostly about choices of
plants and growing conditions that create
microclimates that will improve their
chances of surviving. Site selection and soil
preparation will also be featured.

Her slides are drawn from both gardens and
the wild, giving us a broader understanding
of how these plants differ under the care of
both Mother Nature and the peculiar species
known as 'The Private Gardener.'

Sally will not ignore propagation from seed
and will discuss the process of taking
cuttings as well. Her program will touch on
gardens here in the United States, and her
experiences and advice regarding growing
with an unreliable snow cover is not only
appropriate, but fits perfectly with our
EWSW theme.

Lunch — BYO. We welcome dessert
contributions. This will be followed by a
discussion of the EWSW, so please plan
on staying for about 1 hour to help the
Committee in its final planning phase.



www.foodcrushblog.com

From the Chair – 2/15/08

By Harold Peachey

Greetings from upstate New York. I have
received seed from NARGS, 35 packs of a
wide-ranging variety of seeds from alpine
buns to ferns and woodlanders. Following
the advice of Norman C. Deno and Jim
Swayne, I started the process of warm moist
stratification of *Penstemon brevicaulis* only
to witness germination in about two weeks
at 70° without having to return to a period of
cold moist stratification. This makes it
difficult to produce healthy plants that will
make the transition outdoors in the spring,
so much for the pundits! I do really love the
process of propagation including softwood,
semi-hardwood and herbaceous cuttings as
well as seed and spore propagation. It never
ceases to amaze me that a tiny seed will
actually turn into a plant or that I can
actually successfully bring to maturity
various cuttings and scions.

Planning for the Eastern Winter Study
Workshop seems to be coming together

nicely thanks to the tireless efforts of the committee and NARGS. At last count, we had fulfilled our obligation to the hotel and after initial concerns that enough people would sign up to fill the lecture rooms, we now have concerns that enough space will be available for all events. It is possible that we may break even financially or, heaven forbid, realize a small profit on this venture.

I am eagerly looking forward to our first regular club meeting in a couple of weeks. I have been wrestling with my role as Chairman and have been challenged to provide some direction for this year. I have been thinking about why folks form this type of club to begin with, and have decided that looking at my reasons for joining may give some clues for direction. Personally, I believe that what I like about gardening is the solitude and communion with nature. Joining together with others of similar interests, although most likely motivated by disparate perceived functions of the act of gardening, in a spirit of friendship and cooperation seems to be the common ground. To this concept I suggest we adhere in our journey forward as a club.

I have received communication from NARGS expressing concern about declining membership, both locally and nationally. I believe that a focus by this chapter on promotion of friendship and cooperation will fit nicely with efforts to recruit and retain active membership. I propose that programs be developed within our chapter that will attract outsiders and stimulate current members to actively participate in club meetings. Specifically, I envision members stepping forward to give hands on demonstration on subjects such as propagation, trough construction and planting, rock garden basics and advanced programs of this nature. These could be scheduled in the afternoons on months in

which only a morning speaker is scheduled, or scheduled as the main program. We are a club with immense wealth of information and experience and hopefully some members would like to step up and share some expertise or experience with others in the spirit of friendship and cooperation that I believe makes membership in a club worthwhile and interesting.

The 2008 Eastern Winter Study Weekend



This winter is scooting by quite rapidly, and the EWSW is approaching with even greater speed and urgency. The efforts of the committee to make this event a success have been remarkable, and have created something significant out of virtually nothing in just a few months. Elisabeth Zander has created a fantastic website at <https://nargs.org/meet/EWSW2008.html>. Visit it for a complete breakdown of the incredible events we have planned, and register if you haven't already. The rooms will remain \$99/per night through February 29, as will the lower registration fee.

We will be discussing the event after our March 1 meeting, so please plan on attending. There are still some jobs that need volunteers, and we hope to get these spots filled allowing us to go into the weekend event confident that we will be in position to deliver the programs on time and make the event a complete success.

If you have any questions or concerns, bring them with you to our meeting, or call me at 978-724-3277.

PFG

Mysteries Without Any Clues

I have just developed a lust for western lupines, Penstemon, and Oxytropis and Astragalus. Well, I live in zone 6 (mostly) with very erratic winter conditions and very irregular snow cover. So hardy on Denver, Oswego, or Ottawa may mean next to nothing for me. I find zone ranges very helpful for the general range of nursery plants. Zone 7 is impossible here, Zone 6 worth trying, and zone 5 – no problems anticipated.



Oxytropis besseyi
v. salmonensis

www.alplains.com

How easy is it to find out which Astragalus, Lupine or Penstemon might be worth attempting? I can pull out Linc Foster's book and he probably lists a few species. Seems I remember his garden was fairly wooded and possibly with relatively more constant snow cover. I'm much more likely to try a plant from Utah than from California, Arizona or Colorado. Think I'd be also more likely to try a plant from Washington and Wyoming.

Then there are the considerations of siting, soil preparation and watering. Wrightman says for Penstemon, dry gravelly soil with good drainage and good fertilizer and lots of wind. Wind in summer or winter or?

I so wish that there were zone maps for a limited number of highly desirable alpine/rock plants. At least several factors

would seem to come into play. Minimum and maximum temperature at ground level, climate instability, rainfall and humidity. I doubt that one could draw up alpine plant zones based on compilations of weather data. How about choosing 100 plants and attempting to survey the NARGS membership (and others?). Plant survived and grew? Yes or no, and location. In many instances the survivors may have received an inordinate amount of TLC, but it would seem to be difficult to quantify that.

On another thought, my friendly sand purveyor has two huge piles of "recycled" building materials. One contains chunks of brick and concrete chopped into 8 inch pieces and the other about 4 inches. Tufa it ain't; but I wonder . . .

Charles Swanson

Random Notes:

Maria Galletti is closing her mail order operation as of 2008. She will continue to sell her wonderful plants at select venues, and the next two opportunities will be at the EWSW at the Farmington (CT) Marriott March 28-30 and at Stonecrop on April 26. The latter event includes as well Harvey Wrightman and Richard May, and is a reprise of last year's sale, which was a huge success for the vendors and for the buyers. I will be bringing information on the Stonecrop Sale to the March meeting.

The March newsletter will be much more like what we have produced for the past two years, but we do need material to keep our quality and interest up. Please contact me if you have an idea or two, and don't be surprised if I contact you as well.

Peter George

Positions of Responsibility

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

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Membership is open to all members of
NARGS

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Deadline for Next Newsletter is March 15,
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Please contact Editor before
reprinting articles

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