



ALPINE LINE

January, February, March 2016

Allegheny Chapter, North American Rock Garden Society

Message from the Chair, Karen Schmidt

As I sit here writing this message in mid-December, I am amazed that the weather has been so nice. Just last week I found several bags of daffodil, tulip and anemone bulbs on clearance and planted a few hundred bulbs. I will have a nice surprise in the spring.

The seed packing went well with over a dozen members helping. Thanks to Trish Abrams for organizing and the helpers for doing a great job! I look forward to getting on the NARGS website (www.nargs.org) to review the list of donated seed and place my order.

We have some great speakers/activities in 2016. In January, Lenny will do a presentation on Rock Gardening 101. This will be a great opportunity for new members to learn the basics and others to brush up. Then in February Lenny will do the very popular activity of seed starting. He has chosen some nice plants to start from seed. The March program has not been finalized.

In April, Al Deurbrouck has been able to get his good friend Mark Schiller, owner of Earth Shanti, who will be talking about hardy cactus. We have Brent Heath from Brent and Becky's Bulbs talking about minor bulbs in May at the National Aviary, when the rock garden should be putting on a beautiful spring show. In June we will have the popular breakfast at DJ's Greenhouse in Transfer, PA. This is an opportunity to get together for good food, a workshop, stroll the beautifully landscaped grounds and, of course, shop. We are going to do a workshop to make Kokedamas. See the event calendar for the remaining meeting dates. Details will be provided once we finalize the arrangements. Due to conflicts we will be meeting on occasion at the church directly across the street from the Northland Public Library: St. John's Lutheran Church, 311 Cumberland Road. Check out the calendar for event locations.

I hope to see you all at the January meeting. May you have a great gardening season in 2016!



Examples of Kokedamas

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The Aviary Rock Garden in *Winter*?

~Lyn Lang

What a surprise it was to find so much color in the rock garden at the aviary on December 5th, the day of our final fall cleanup! The weather was chilly but sunny, and we were greeted with pink, red, gold and yellow flowers from the Dianthus, Delosperma, Iris and Primula, respectively. Bright, multi-colored foliage on the Berberis, Ajuga and Aquilegia added to our delight. As often happens, a visitor stopped by, thanked us for the beautiful garden, and said they visit the garden frequently.

Although the blooms will be gone at some point, the garden will remain attractive all winter.

Watch your email for an announcement of our first late winter/early spring visit.

For those who would like to participate in maintenance visits to our rock garden at the National Aviary in 2016, we will resume our regular schedule of the 2nd and 4th Thursday of each month at 10 a.m. in March or April when the weather warms and early spring bulbs emerge.



Packaging “C” Seeds

Fifteen members of the Allegheny Chapter gathered at our regular meeting room in the Northland Public Library on December 10th to package seeds for the annual NARGS Seed Exchange.

After receiving instructions from Trish Abrams, we spent 3 hours busily sorting and packaging seeds, chatting with fellow members while we worked, and enjoying delicious refreshments. Supplies included paper plates, glue sticks, glassine envelopes and rubber bands—items we fondly remember from elementary school.

Our chapter received numerous envelopes of seed with names beginning with the letter “C”, from *Campanula sartorii* to *Clematis viorna*. Labels indicated plant height and flower color, and sometimes, the part of the world where the seeds were collected. Spreadsheets informed us of the desirability of each variety and the recommended number of packets to fill. Many of the campanula seeds were extremely small and difficult to handle while the much larger clematis seeds were a breeze.

By now, NARGS members are busy placing orders and looking forward to sowing the seeds we so carefully sorted and packaged.



The Allegheny Chapter's meeting on Sunday, February 21st, will include a seed starting workshop presented by Len Lehman. Some seeds, especially those of native woodland plants, require cold stratification to germinate. This can be easily accomplished by sowing seeds in containers and placing them outdoors during the winter months.

Seeds, pots and potting soil will be provided at the February workshop. However, if you would like to place your seeds outdoors, bring one or more clean, gallon-size, plastic milk or water jugs to the workshop with you. Even better, review the step-by-step instructions for this technique at

<http://www.agardenforthehouse.com/2012/11/winter-sowing-101-6/>

and bring your plastic jugs ready to plant. Using a plastic jug will keep your seeds from being lost in the garden while protecting them like a miniature greenhouse.

Penn State Master Gardener, Bill Goff, wrote in the Post-Gazette about using plastic jugs to grow annuals

<http://www.post-gazette.com/life/garden/2013/02/02/winter-seed-sowing-in-plastic-milk-jugs/201302020275>

and other Master Gardeners have used this method to start perennials from seed. This sounds like an easy way to start some alpine seeds this February!

GROWING WITH ARTIFICIAL LIGHTS

Check the bulbs. Even if the bulbs still light (haven't burnt out), if the ends of the tubes are dark they should be replaced. An old bulb's light may be as little as half the strength of a new bulb.

Clean the bulbs. Wipe them down with a damp cloth (make sure the unit is unplugged) or a dry duster to remove dust and grime that would otherwise diminish the light. Remember to do this once a week while your seeds grow.

Artificial light can make growing healthy seedlings as simple as a flick of a switch.

These simple rules bring the best results when starting seeds on a light stand:

Read the seed packet to learn whether the seeds need light to germinate.

Most do not.

After the seeds sprout, run the lights for 14 to 16 hours each day. Longer is not better; seedlings need a period of darkness during which they can rest.

Keep the seedlings' top leaves no more than 3 to 5 inches from the bulbs.

A fluorescent tube is brightest at its center and dimmer at its ends.

Rotate seedlings over the course of each week so that all spend some days in the middle of the tray.



2016 NARGS
Annual Meeting
Steamboat Springs, CO



What Makes Northwest Colorado so Special?

By Mike Kintgen, Rocky Mountain Chapter-NARGS

Some people would say it's the Champagne powder that falls on the ski slopes in the winter, others would say it's the curse the Utes supposedly placed on the Yampa valley, but wildflower lovers would say it's the sheer magnitude of displays and the variety. Whatever the reason, Northwest Colorado has been drawing humans for millennia to partake in its natural beauty and restorative settings.

Northwest Colorado is special since it lies at the meeting point of several biomes: flora from the South Rockies form the backbone of the flora, with a broad stroke of Great Basin flora brushing through the lower valleys and steppes, while the Great Plains flora sweep in from the Northeast and rub up against the Park Range. At higher elevations, flora from the Pacific Northwest and Northern Rockies can be found hundreds of miles south of their normal range. *Trillium ovatum*, *Rhododendron albiflorum* and *Mimulus lewisii* are a few of the flagship plants from the NW biome; mixed into the rest of the landscape is a cast of classic western flowers from bright blue penstemon, to scarlet paintbrush (*Castilleja*), to scarlet gilia (*Ipomopsis*) and yellow composites of infinite variety.

Steamboat Springs and Denver will be the locations of the 2016 NARGS Annual Meeting. The conference opens the afternoon of the 22nd in Denver with lectures by Kenton Seth and Mike Kintgen, two of NARGS's youngest members. On Thursday, participants have the option of driving on their own or taking a van trip to Steamboat Springs. The conference resumes in the evening with plant and book sales, and 2 lectures by internationally-known Johan Nilsson and Nick Courtens. National superstars Kelly Norris and Jim Lochlear will be speaking Friday night, followed by Saturday and Sunday hikes. The Sunday night lecture will be by the very special and heart-warming Marcela Ferreyra from Patagonia. This will be her first lecture to an audience from outside of Colorado in the United States.

Garden tours and visits to Denver Botanic Garden's renowned alpine collection, along with the fabulous Yampa River Botanic Park and several wonderful private gardens in the Steamboat area will round out the conference.

For details and information visit the NARGS website,

<https://www.nargs.org/2016-annual-general-meeting-steamboat-springs-colorado> or the conference Facebook page www.facebook.com/2016NARGSmeeeting. Direct questions to kintgem@botanicgardens.org.

We hope to see you in Colorado in June 2016; it promises to be a wonderful and memorable conference.

Direct questions to kintgem@botanicgardens.org

Date, Event, and Location for Chapter Activities for 2016

- * **Jan 17 - St John's Lutheran Church**, 311 Cumberland Road, 412-364-1606, 2:30 PM. Note change in time.

Speaker: Len Lehman - **Rock Gardening 101** We will meet at the church since the library is not available.

Members to bring snacks, A-H.

- * **Feb 21 - Northland Library, 2:00 PM**, 300 Cumberland Road, 412-366-8100.

Speaker: Len Lehman - **Seed Starting Workshop**. Members to bring snacks, I-P.

- * **Mar 13 - Northland Library, 2:00 PM** Speaker: Keith McNeish Topic: **Soil, the gardener's most precious asset**

Members to bring snacks, Q-Z.

- * **Apr 17 - Northland Library, 2:00 PM**

Speaker: Mark Schiller, owner Earth Shanti Cactus Nursery . Topic: **Cactus**.

Members to bring snacks, A-H.

- * **May 1 - Soergel's Nursery, Show and Sale, 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM**

Chairs: Debra Meyer, Carol Przyborski and Lyn Lang.

- * **May 15 - National Aviary, 2:00 PM**

Speaker: Brent Heath, owner Brent and Becky's Bulbs, Topic: **Lovely Little Bulbs Minor Bulbs with Major Impact**

Members to bring snacks, I-P.

- * **June 26 - Breakfast at DJs Greenhouse**

Speaker: Kokedamas Workshop.

- July - No meeting

- * **Aug. 21 -Member's Only Picnic . TBD**

- * **Sept. 11 - Northland Library, 2:00 PM**

Speaker: JosephTychonievich. Topic TBD.

Members to bring snacks, Q-Z.

- * **Oct. 15 - Banquet at St John's Lutheran Church**

- * **Nov. 20 - Northland Library, 2:00 PM**

Speaker: To be determined

Members to bring snacks, I - P

- * **Dec. 8- Seed Packing, at Northland Library**

Save the date!



Penn State Extension's

2016 Garden and Landscape Symposium and Marketplace

Saturday, April 23, 2016

Shady Side Academy, Fox Chapel

The ***Garden and Landscape Symposium*** features presentations by expert horticulturists. This year's speakers are: Claudia West, author, North Creek Nursery; Thomas Rainer, author, Landscape Architect; Laura Deeter, Ph.D., Ohio State University; Kelly Norris, author, Horticulture Manager.

Further information: [412-263-1000](tel:412-263-1000) or Extension.psu.edu/Allegheny

The ***Garden Marketplace*** features new plants and garden accessories from more than 20 vendors, including the annual plant sale of the Penn State Master Gardeners of Allegheny County.

Parking and admission are free to the visit the Garden Marketplace and the annual Daffodil Show of the Daffodil and Hosta Society of Western PA.

PREVENTING DAMPING OFF

As appeared in Dave's Garden, February 11, 2011

Submitted by Megan Shinn

Have you ever sown seeds indoors and no seedlings appeared, or seedlings appeared only to suddenly collapse and die? The culprit may have been damping-off. Damping-off is a term that describes the death of seedlings due to rot. There are several species of fungi that may attack seedlings and lead to damping off. Rot can occur soon after germination--so soon that the roots are killed and no stem appears.

Damping-off may also occur just after the stem appears, or after seedlings have put on some healthy-looking growth. The seedling may suddenly wilt, or it may keel over from its base.

The best protection against damping-off is an ounce of prevention.

Here are some easy-to-follow measures:

Ensure good drainage in seedlings' pots and trays.

Set up a small fan to keep air moving.

Ensure good light to promote strong growth, whether seedlings are in a window or on a light stand.

Use clean seed-starting equipment, including containers and sterile seed-starting mix.

Water from below by placing the pots or trays in a container of water or on a capillary mat. The water will soak up through the drainage holes. Once the top of the soil looks moist, remove the pots or trays from the water.

When sowing seeds cover them only to the depth recommended on the packet, and no deeper. Instead of covering them with your seed-starting mix, cover them instead with sphagnum moss, coarse sand or chicken grit. These materials are less likely to host fungi.

Once seedlings appear, mist them daily with weak chamomile or clove tea, and/or dust the soil surface (one time only) with ground cinnamon or powdered charcoal.

BRUSH YOUR SEEDLINGS

Seedlings started indoors tend to be weaker than those that sprout outside in the garden. Indoor seedlings tend to be taller and more tender, even if grown in strong light. The difference is the absence of wind---as wind shakes outdoor seedlings, their stems become stronger and their growth remains stocky.

Indoors, you can re-create the effect of the blowing wind by "brushing" your seedlings. Brush a folded piece of paper across the tops of small seedlings, quickly but gently bending them to horizontal and letting them pop up again. Do this twice a day for about a minute. As seedlings get larger, you can use your hand instead of the paper.

In studies, seedlings that were brushed had smaller, darker leaves that grew closer together than those of seedlings that were not brushed.

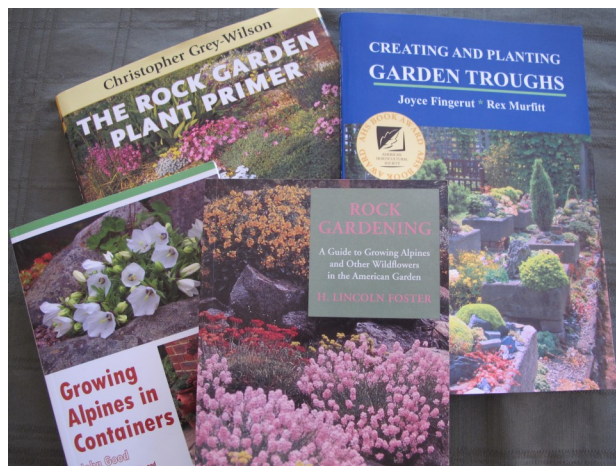
Allegheny Chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society
The Ruth Young Library 2015 Book List

Patty McGuire, Librarian

MEMBERS ONLY SERVICE

The list of books available for loan to Allegheny Chapter members has been updated and placed on the Chapter's website for your review. If you would like to borrow one or more books from our Ruth Young Library, visit the website at

<http://nargspittsburgh.wix.com/rock-garden> . From there you can make your selection and then click the on-screen envelope to send Patty McGuire your request via email.



NOTE - To request a book, please email Patty McGuire . Patty is our librarian and treasurer. She has all of the books contained in the Chapter's library. We periodically publish the list of available books that members can check out.

She will bring your specific book request to the requested meeting you will be attending.

Please make the job of librarian easier by returning borrowed books promptly.

Thank you.

The Cultivation of Primula allionii

By PAM EVELEIGH

Presented at the NARGS Tri-State Meeting, New York Botanical Garden

Primula allionii is native to a small area (just over 200 sq. km) of the Maritime Alps on the French-Italian border. The main habitat is centered on the Roya Valley in France which runs in a north-south direction and is subject to strong winds and snow in winter.

The plants have a specific growing preference for calcareous cliffs, composed of rock which is similar to hard tufa but which still allows for the percolation of water. This creates pockets and crevices in which the plants grow. Sometimes they also grow in small caves, but never in the soil at the base of these cliffs.

The plants flower March to April in the wild and as early as January in cultivation. The flower buds form in the fall and, like many *Primula*, the plants can start and stop blooming, holding their buds during cold weather. Seed is late ripening, usually October to November.

The real joy of *Primula allionii* is its enormous variability and the potential for generating new hybrids. Wild plants deviate in size and shape of both flowers and leaves and the color ranges from pink-magenta through to blue-purple. White forms are rare though the breeder Ken Wooster was known for his white seedlings including the popular "Snowflake". *P. allionii* has been hybridized with at least seven other species, however only one natural hybrid has been found in the wild.



This is *P. x meridionalis*, a cross between *P. allionii* and *P. marginata* found in the Miniera Valley and first collected by Mr. C. C. Mountfort in 1927. This collection is still in cultivation under the name 'Miniera'. Later collections of this natural hybrid show that it is as variable as its parents. All this variation adds up to a breathtaking sight when a show bench is filled with perfect domes of *Primula allionii*!

After many seasons of killing this species, what is the secret to its cultivation?

I tried growing plants in clay pots plunged into sand (with limited success), in holes drilled into tufa, even in a trough filled with a tufa grit mixture. They all eventually died. The key to success for me was realizing that Calgary is a relatively dry climate and that these *Primula* required more moisture than provided by the methods I had been trying.

Eventually, I stopped babying this species and planted them directly into gritty soil; tucked in beside the North-East face of large rocks and mulched with large stone chips. This worked! For those in a more humid and wetter climate, growing *P. allionii* in tufa may be your answer as more than one rock gardener has been successful doing this.

Certainly keeping the crown of the plant from contacting the soil and removing dying leaves and flowers immediately with tweezers will prevent botrytis problems. Also good ventilation and protection from direct contact of moisture on the leaves will keep your plants healthy.

Now that you have *P. allionii* growing successfully, you can't rest on your laurels. As with all plants in the Auricula Section, older leaves die back and new leaves form at the top of the stem effectively elongating the stems as the plant matures. This produces a progressively untidy cushion but these stems are perfect for cuttings that can be taken any time from after flowering through to the fall.

Remove dead leaves from the stem, make a nice clean cut at the bottom, and insert into damp pure sand (slightly coarse) ensuring the sand is well firmed around the base. The fresh leaves should not be in contact with the sand and the cuttings must be well ventilated, not closed in. I do this in the fall and by spring the cuttings have rooted.

It is highly recommended you continually rejuvenate your plants because older cushions may die suddenly of root rot and may be more prone to botrytis. And don't forget to pass on your cuttings to others so they may discover how best to grow them in their garden.

These gems should be enjoyed by every rock gardener!

Primula allionii





Name that Mystery Plant !

This mystery plant is a primrose relative found in high alpine meadows, woods, and rocky outcrops.

It is considered a choice alpine for rock gardens, but is somewhat difficult to grow.

Most people grow it in pots or troughs because of the delicate fringed pink purple flowers. The plant emerges with rounded evergreen leaves followed by a flush of several single flowered stems.

A genus of 15 species they are found in the Pyrenees, Alps, Apennines, Carpathian and Balkan Mount chains.

Their name is derived from Italian meaning little coins, a reference to their leaves.

Some avid gardeners consider it to be the national flower of Switzerland and Germany instead of Edelweiss!



Mystery Plant





Allegheny Chapter Membership Renewals Due

January 1, 2016

The annual fees are \$10 for individuals and \$15 for a family membership.

Annual dues are used to fund workshops, speakers and field trips.

If you have not already renewed your membership, you may do so by mailing your check to:

Lyn Lang,

4042 Valleyvue Drive, Gibsonia, PA 15044-9501.

You may also deliver your payment to the membership chair, Lyn Lang, at the January meeting.

Checks should be made payable to: ***NARGS Allegheny Chapter***

If you want to join the national NARGS, go to www.nargs.org

You do not have to be join the national NARGS to be a member of the Allegheny Chapter of NARGS.

Here is the national NARGS membership fee structure.

U.S. and Canada Regular Membership	\$40
Other Countries Regular Membership	\$45
Lifetime Membership, Under 60	\$750
Lifetime Membership, Over 60	\$675

Student (\$15), Additional Household (\$10 each), and Patron (\$75)

membership levels will remain unchanged.

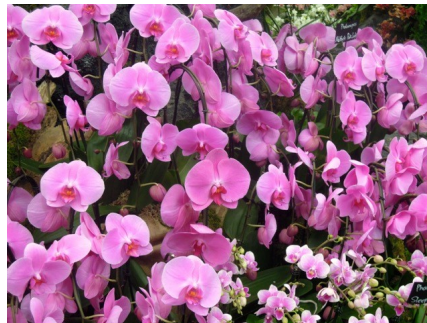
Annual Awards Banquet 2015

Submitted by Dianne Passoth

The **2015 Annual Awards Banquet** of the Allegheny Chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society was held on Saturday, October 17, 2015, at Ciao! Italian Cafe. Over 50 people were present for this special event. Social time began at 3:00 p.m. After which, Chair Len Lehman welcomed everyone and gave the invocation. A delicious buffet dinner followed.

Vice Chair Karen Schmidt introduced the guest speaker Dr. John Lonsdale. John, a transplant from the United Kingdom, now gardens in Exton PA. He regularly lectures, and is an active member of many horticultural groups including the North American Rock Garden Society, Alpine Garden Society, and The Crocus Group. He holds B.S. degrees in Biochemistry and Microbiology and a Ph.D. in Microbiology.

His lecture was entitled “Spring Bulbs”. His slide presentation showcased his garden which included cyclamens, crocus, narcissus, tulips, lewisia, fritillaria and trillium along with many, many other plant varieties. Dr. Lonsdale ended by encouraging everyone to grow plants from seed.



The Business Meeting began with the election of officers.

Karen Schmidt was nominated for the office of Chair and Bob Dietz for Vice Chair. There were no other nominations from the floor. Sandy Ciccone moved and Carol Przyborski seconded, that Karen and Bob be elected by acclamation. The motion passed unanimously.

NARGS Award of Merit

Len Lehman was presented with the **NARGS Award of Merit**. He is only the fourth member of our Chapter to be so honored. Matt Mattus, President, presented his award stating,

“The North American Rock Garden Society presents The Award of Merit to Leonard Lehman for his outstanding contributions to rock and alpine gardening and to the North American Rock Garden Society!”

MADLINE MODIC MERITORIOUS SERVICE AWARD

This award was presented to Jerry Pottmeyer, who has been a man for all seasons for our Chapter. He was a past Chair, Chair of the Show and Sale and the owner of a garden so grown and maintained that it inspired a wag to suggest that visitors to his garden should remove their shoes prior to entering.

CARL GEHENIO PLANTSMAN AWARD

This award was presented to Dennis James, the owner of DJ’s Nursery. Anyone who has visited his nursery/garden will wonder why it took our chapter so long to recognize his unique talent. He has supported our activities such as growing many plants for our Annual Show and Sale. Now if we could only get him to grow a decent rock garden.

Two new “traveling awards” were presented this year for the first time, for winners of specific classes at the annual Show.

AUDREY RAUCH BEST TROUGH AWARD (Class #10)

Lyn Lang was awarded one of the trough awards.

This award is so named due to the extraordinary efforts of Audrey Rauch to promote the building and planting with troughs. Audrey is, by any yardstick, the one person who has brought the building and planting of hypertufa and papertufa troughs to the tri-state area.

The second “traveling award” has been named for recently deceased member Connie McKeever who grew and showed some very choice dwarf conifers, winning the “Best in Show Award” a few years ago. Connie was a member of our chapter for over 30 years. During that time, she headed a committee that wrote our first set of by-laws. She was also Chair of the Awards Committee for a number of years, and as a lawyer was able to obtain our Chapter tax exemption status that has saved us many dollars over the years.

CONNIE McKEEVER BEST DWARF TREE OR SHRUB AWARD (class # 7)

This award was presented to Debra Meyer for her beautiful tree.

Congratulations to Deb and Lyn on receiving these awards that are a testimony to their wonderful ability to grow superior plants - Remember ladies you only get to keep them for one year.

Announcements:

Al Deurbrouck was congratulated on his article Making Styrofoam Troughs which was published in the 2015 Fall issue of National's (NARGS) Rock Garden Quarterly.

The Chapter was approached by the National Aviary asking us to consider building an additional garden. This proposal is on hold at the present time.

Contact Us

Please remember to keep
Lyn up to date with any
changes to your contact
information;

email address,

mailing address,

and/or phone number.



Alpine Gardeners Rock Their World