

Alpine Line

NEWSLETTER of the ALLEGHENY CHAPTER of the NORTH AMERICAN ROCK GARDEN SOCIETY Oct.-Dec. 2020

OFFICERS

CHAIR

Sandra Ciccone

VICE CHAIR

Nancy Knauss

SECRETARY

Joanne Burzese

TREASURER

Patty McGuire

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

AWARDS

Patty McGuire

BANQUET

Cathy Kaut
Carol Przyborski

FACEBOOK

Lyn Lang
Bobbi Diller

HOSTS

Bonnie & Stephen Plato

LIBRARY

Patty McGuire

MEMBERSHIP & PROOFREADER

Lyn Lang

NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Sandy Ellenberger

PLANT SHOW

David Amrhein

PLANT SALE

Lyn Lang
Debra Meyer

SEED EXCHANGE

Pinky Fredericks

WEBMASTER

Nancy Knauss

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

What a year this has been! Chaotic, bizarre, happy, sad – choose your own adjective as they are all represented. Learning how to navigate life during Covid has become an art form. It is also the universal “get out of jail FREE card” used, both fairly and unfairly, by almost every business and institution we all have to deal with on a daily basis. Being retired and living on two acres containing extensive flower, vegetable, and fruit gardens allowed for less disruption of my life from the virus and kept me very busy as well. No masks in my own backyard!

My own little slice of heaven had very little rainfall at times this year and endured those seemingly unending days of 90-degree temperatures. My rock garden plants seemed to thrive under these conditions with the occasional watering. The vegetable garden was a bit more greedy about its watering needs, but I had a bumper crop of cucumbers, zucchini, and tomatoes which had much less fungal and viral issues. I canned an abundance of tomatoes and pickles and shared from my garden with neighbors and friends. My trees took a real beating this June when a microburst ripped nine or ten huge branches from them and whipped them onto our decks and back porch. We were left with three holes in the back porch roof and one in the roof of our house, deck railings, benches, and steps shattered. We had a solid two-week cleanup of just debris which left us more exhausted than I can ever remember. Friends helped and our son and his girlfriend, now his wife, made a surprise visit home to help us. Happy mixed with sad. My husband’s summer was spent on repairs to our many decks and back porch. I worked at saving damaged plants and bushes. Most were able to be trimmed back and revived themselves throughout the summer. Some thrived with the harsh cutting back, a note to myself for the future.

I miss our club meetings and the camaraderie of all of you. The seed packing will still happen in December. You will all be getting information about that soon. We are planning Zoom meetings for January, February and March. We have reserved meeting rooms from April onward and are hoping for the best as we let things unfold. We will keep you informed via email.

As we put our gardens to bed for the winter, shelter our troughs, and prepare for winter and snow, let's all pray for a better 2021.

Sandy

BEFORE and AFTER



AVIARY ROCK GARDEN 2020

by Lyn Lang



It has been an exceptional year at the Aviary, and the rock garden has flourished and brought pleasure to many visitors. After our spring cleanup on March 12, most of us missed seeing the beautiful spring show in person. Thanks to Jim Bucklad's wonderful photo album, as well as a nearby resident who posted photos and video on Facebook, we were able to see what a colorful show it was. Many North Side residents visit the garden regularly, and this year we received a thank-you note from a couple, "Every year your garden gets more beautiful, and this spring it has been especially colorful, providing a bright spot with all that is going on with the pandemic. We wanted to thank you and let you know how much it is appreciated!" It has been a bright spot for Chapter members as well. The garden is a treasured meeting place to work with friends and enjoy the outdoors.

Sara Showers and the Aviary staff were exceptionally helpful in watching over the garden during our absence, and throughout the summer they provided wheelbarrows, water, etc. while the driveway and parking lot were filled with the activities and noise of major construction.



Enclosed are some photo highlights of our long, hot summer at the rock garden starting with *Draba aizoides* in March--grown from NARGS seed exchange seed. We were excited to return to garden maintenance in June, and this dwarf *Platycodon* planted by Al Deurbrouck provided ongoing color with a little deadheading. *Inula ensifolia*, a little plant offered numerous years at our plant sale, provided cheerful daisy-like blooms for weeks. *Salvia daghestanica*, also grown from seed, offered small spikes of purple blooms in summer and undulating waves of silvery foliage. After waiting all season for a sign of buds, the bright red *Penstemon*, one of Len Lehman's many plant contributions, bloomed in late September. It seems like every plant in this garden has a story we'd like to continue as we consider ways to make the garden even more beautiful in the future.

Last year we experimented with leaving the leaves for cleanup in the spring, and winter winds kept them from smothering the small alpins. We'll plan to do the same this year, as long as the leaves are not too deep.

Thanks to everyone who came out this year and helped to keep the garden beautiful. New volunteers are always welcome. See you in the garden!





1 — AMEND YOUR SOIL - TILL IN COMPOST FROM YOUR OWN YARD AND KITCHEN WASTE, OR PICK UP A COUPLE OF BAGS AT THE STORE.

2 — CLEAN UP! - PULL OUT DEAD OR DISEASED PLANTS AND DISPOSE OF THEM. CLEAN UP PLANT MATTER AT THE BASE OF PLANTS .

3 — MULCH YOUR TENDERS - MULCH PLANTS THAT ARE BORDERLINE IN YOUR COLD ZONE WITH A LAYER AT LEAST 2-3 INCHES THICK.

4 — ORDER YOUR BULBS - NOW IS THE TIME TO SET UP YOUR OWN LITTLE SPRING SHOW. ORDER YOUR BULBS NOW FOR BEST SELECTION ONLINE, AND PLANT IN LATE FALL BEFORE THE GROUND FREEZES.

5 — DIVIDE PERENNIALS - DIG UP THOSE OVERGROWN PERENNIALS, DIVIDE THEM INTO SMALLER PLANTS, AND REPLANT.

6 — PLANT FALL ANNUALS - MUMS, PANSIES AND KALE WILL FILL THOSE PLANTERS AND POTS WELL INTO FALL, SO GET PLANTING!

ENJOY! — THIS IS THE PERFECT TIME OF YEAR TO ENJOY A CUP OF TEA OR GLASS OF WINE IN THE GARDEN, AND WATCH THE NATURAL WORLD SLOWLY GET SLEEPY. IT'S A CALMING FEELING TO WAIT FOR THE COMING OF WINTER, BECAUSE IT REMINDS US THERE IS A SEASON FOR EVERY THING, AND THINGS DO CHANGE, BUT THAT SPRING WILL RETURN AGAIN!

— THE GARDEN GLOVE

**In Every Gardener, There Is A
Child Who Believes in The
Seed Fairy.**



From Cold Frame to Plunge Bed ~ Lyn Lang

Many years ago my husband Denny constructed a large cold frame as a birthday gift to me. We had a very large vegetable garden at the time and planned to use the cold frame to extend the growing season at both ends. One crop I found particularly challenging in southwestern PA was spinach. First the weather was too cold, and then the temperatures rose too quickly and the spinach bolted. The most vigorous, pristine spinach crop we ever had was grown early inside the cold frame.

As time passed and my interests evolved, the cold frame gradually became a neglected patch of weeds. Windows were blown off and damaged, and the wood frame deteriorated. I had read about using sand beds to sink potted plants over winter and thought a covered plunge bed would work best in our climate with its cold, rainy winters with frequent freeze-thaw cycles and unreliable snow cover.

We started by removing all but the bottom wood frame and topping with a new frame to add more depth. Then we dug out 8 inches of soil. Because we have a huge population of mice and chipmunks, we lined the bottom with landscape fabric and placed 1/4 – inch hardware cloth on the bottom and up all sides to prevent tunneling underneath the frame. Then we filled the bed with course sand. It took forty-five 60-pound bags to fill the 12-foot by 3-foot bed to a depth of 8 inches!



The old cold frame was accessible from only one side making it difficult to reach plants toward the back. The new design has a center peak with Plexiglas windows along both lengths. The ends are hardware cloth triangles to allow air flow and cooling on sunny winter days. It's easy to dig a hole in the sand and sink heavy troughs or pots of spring bulbs. How about all of those perennials you didn't get planted before the ground froze? The plunge bed works well for them, too. For the first time in many years we got to see tulips blooming and planted troughs undisturbed by wildlife.



Our design is not perfect. While chipmunks and mice could not dig underneath, they found their way in through the smallest openings between the windows. I left the pots of bulbs in place after flowering, and a chipmunk dug up and ate every one of them. With a few modifications, we're looking forward to more success in the future.

Beware the Jumping Crazy Worm

Pat Curran

Adirondack Chapter Green Dragon Tales North American Rock Garden Society

April 2020

Some gardeners are still not acquainted with the invasive jumping crazy worm, but it is important that we take steps to avoid spreading it around when we share plants.

A little background first: none of the earthworms in central NYS are native. The native earthworms were obliterated by the latest glaciation. Since their dispersal from more southern, unglaciated areas was so slow, they didn't reappear in our area before the colonists brought in European earthworms. Most of us grew up thinking of those earthworms as beneficial to our soils, and this may be true in some garden settings or when we are making topsoil from subsoil (as I had to do in my home landscape where the builder hired by the previous owners almost certainly sold off the topsoil).



However, in the native environment, especially in our climax vegetation which is forest, the flora and fauna evolved in the absence of earthworms for the last 10,000 or so years. Other organisms recycle the forest duff (fungi, etc.), but much slower, and leave a nice cushion on the forest floor to nourish and protect plant roots and small vertebrates such as salamanders. So even the European earthworm is not beneficial in the forest.

Back to the jumping crazy worm: I won't spend a lot of time giving you the back story because you can google that. Here's a link from CCE: <http://cctompkins.org/resources/jumping-worm-fact-sheet>

The practical aspect is that this worm reduces organic matter, whether it be forest leaf duff, or your mulch, to deep, dryish, large granules quite unlike the moist earthworm castings of European earthworms – and often within one growing season. The result in a garden situation is no mulch left – if you apply more, you are feeding more jumping worms! Your beloved plants may heave more readily among other drawbacks.

In the forest, wildflowers adapted to forest leaf duff are left high and dry. Native snails (that may provide calcium to native birds' eggshells) have nothing left to eat, salamanders nowhere to hide either. Seedlings dry out and die before their roots go deep enough... I could go on.

How can we gardeners slow down this disaster and prevent it from spreading?

Currently there is no cure, but we can use practices so that we are not spreading the jumping worms further.

Some biology: there are about three similar species, and there is still a lot that is not known. But we think, or know, that this is an annual worm. It overwinters in the egg stage in little parcels called cocoons, which are basically too small to detect with the naked eye for all practical purposes. So you won't detect jumping worms early in the growing season when they are very small.

As the season progresses, they grow fast, often getting to 5 or 6 inches long. The easiest way to distinguish them from European earthworms is their behavior – they move very fast like snakes, hence the jumping crazy worm nickname. They feel more muscular too. Their clitellum is slightly different: see the factsheet above for details. Of course, if it's chilly out, they won't be moving as fast. We think the adults die when winter comes, but in warmer climates, there might be more than one generation.

COMPARISON: JUMPING WORM VS. EUROPEAN NIGHTCRAWLER



Brown/ gray

Bodies are sleek, dry, smooth and firm

Thrash violently when disturbed; snake-like movement

Mature worm 4-5 inches long

Light colored, smooth clitellum that is flush with body, relatively close to head. Completely encircles body.



Pink/reddish

Bodies are thick, slimy, floppy

Wiggle and stretch when disturbed.

Mature worm 6-8 inches long

Reddish or pink clitellum slightly raised from rest of body. Partially encircles body (like a saddle).

WHEN TO LOOK FOR JUMPING WORMS

Jumping worms are most noticeable
in late summer/early autumn
when most of them are fully mature.

Time of year

Activity

April -May

Tiny jumping worms hatch from cocoon-encased eggs.

Summer months

Worms feed and grow.

August – September

Mature worms reproduce, depositing egg-filled cocoons into surroundings. Jumping worms are parthenogenic; each worm can reproduce on its own without a mate.

First freeze

Adult worms die.

Winter months

Eggs spend cold months protected in cocoons (about the size of mustard seeds!)

It takes only 60 days between hatching and reproduction. Jumping worms, unlike European earthworms, can easily complete two generations per year in Wisconsin.

THE REAL PROBLEM: COCOONS

Unlike most other kinds of earthworms, jumping worms are parthenogenic - they self-fertilize and do not need mates to reproduce. Each new generation begins with the production of hardened egg capsules, known as cocoons, that overwinter in the soil to hatch the following spring. Jumping worm cocoons are resistant to cold and drought and are as tiny as mustard seeds. Since they greatly resemble small bits of dirt, they are hard to see and so are often unknowingly moved in soil, mulch, potted plants, etc.

