



ALPINE LINE

Jan/Feb 2018 - our 50th Year!

NEWSLETTER OF THE ALLEGHENY CHAPTER of
NARGS



Message from the Chair

David Amrhein

Hello and welcome to our 50th year as the Allegheny Chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society. At this time I think it is fitting to reflect on that person or situation that brought you to the club. With this in mind I included in the text a quote from a gentleman who was one of the early pioneers of the club and will be donating a collection of writings from the original quarterly journal of the national, *The Bulletin*. Though some of this information

may seem dated, for the most part it still has relevance to our special garden niche.

As we go into another winter I hope you were able to complete all your garden projects before our winter officially arrived. It has been a great autumn season for tucking in some late bulbs and trees or shrubs. I enjoyed making home improvements after my home insurance threatened to drop me from coverage...but then that has nothing to do with NARGS. I was heartened by our last meeting that Karen and company put together with one of the best speakers and meetings I have experienced.

My vision for the next two years is of course your own since our chapter is an assimilation of all the members and their ideas. Please feel free to either contact me at meetings or over the phone to let me know what is working or not and how to continue making this a fulfilling and entertaining experience for you. With that in mind I would like to thank everyone who participated in our seed packing workshop with kudos to Trish Abrams for the time and energy she spent making it a success.

She has agreed to chair a committee in the future to manage all things seed which will be the first motion I'll make in January at our next meeting. I hope you all have mailed to Len or Sandy plants you have grown successfully in our challenging S.W. PA conditions. Our roundtable discussion looks like it should be a lot of fun in getting all the feedback about those gardening trials and tribulations. In thinking about our next meeting I wanted to include a quote from an article in

the Bulletin by Dr. James P. Burlingham who had lectured on “A Gardener’s Jewel Box”.

“In this great big world, filled with big things, there are those who see and react only to big objects like sky scrapers, big ships, big trees, big plants, big mountains, big animals, anything built on massive lines appeals to them, but consciously or unconsciously, almost everyone reacts agreeably to miniature things, whether they be animate or inanimate. I have tried to define just what it is that moves us this way, and the conclusion I have reached is that it is the parental instinct in us that causes us to respond to tiny things or the miniatures. Picture, if you will, how you feel towards a baby, a kitten, a puppy, a little bird or even a little pig. If someone took in shorthand all of your conversation including the endearing terms with which you address helpless little creatures, you would be amazed and possibly embarrassed at the things you say. Nevertheless, it would prove one thing, and that is that your reaction to miniature things comes from the heart rather than the head.”

“This, in a way, is how I feel about my rock garden with its miniature plants.”

I’m on board with his thoughts. Are you?

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Secretary’s Report October 21, 2017

Joanne Burzese

The Allegheny Chapter of NARGS annual banquet was held at St. John's Lutheran Church. After dinner the election of officers was held. Len Lehman asked if there were any nominations in addition to those announced at last meeting. There weren't any, and so the nominations were closed. The secretary cast a white ballot signifying unanimous approval of Dave Amrhein as Chair and Sandy Ciccone as Vice Chair. Joanne Burzese will serve as Secretary, and Patty McGuire will continue as Treasurer.

Al Deurbrouck presented plaques to the 2017 award winners.

Permanent Award Winners:

Madeline Modic Chapter Service Award - to Dianne Passoth who has been our outstanding secretary for the last five years.

Madeline Modic Chapter Service Award - Karen Schmidt who has served our Chapter for the last four years as Vice-Chair and Chair.

Traveling Awards Winners:

Clare Williamson Award - Best Plant in Show Award went to Trish Abrams for her *Arisaema sikokianum*. This is presented for the best entry in Classes 1 through 6.

Audrey Rauch Award - Best trough in show went to Lyn Lang.

Chair's Choice Award - Best plant selected and distributed to the members by the Chair to Lyn Lang for her *Corydalis solida* 'Purple Bird'.

Daffodil & Hosta Society of WPA Award to Trish Abrams for her *Trillium luteum*.

All in attendance received daffodil, allium and iris bulbs from the club. Dennis James donated dwarf iris bulbs to everyone, and Trish Abrams made beautiful sedum centerpieces for all to take home. Len Lehman gave planting instructions for the bulbs. The evening closed with a raffle and gift exchange.

Secretary's Report November 18, 2017

Joanne Burzese

The November NARGS meeting featured Michael Szesze speaking on the topic of carnivorous plants. He discussed the 5 types of plants available, their habitats and gave instructions on how to grow them. He also brought plants from his nursery and other items for members to purchase.

Dave Amrhein opened the business portion of the meeting by thanking officers and committee heads for their service. He announced that a business card for the club is being developed and would be available soon. Lyn Lang reminded members that dues for 2018 need to be paid by March at the latest. Amanda Haney discussed the website and requested photos from members. Someone is needed to take over the Facebook page. Trish Abrams asked for volunteers to help with the seed packing to be held at the library on Dec. 7 from 9:00 to 3:00.

Oct. minutes were read and approved. Patty McGuire gave the treasurer's report which was approved.

Len Lehman presented Lyn Lang with her plaques that had been awarded at the banquet which she missed due to illness. She also was the winner of the mystery plant contest for correctly identifying the Fire Flame Tulip.

Members were reminded to submit a list of their 5 most liked rock garden plants for the round table discussion at the January meeting. Sandy Ciccone announced topics for 2018 meetings. Details will be in Jan/Feb newsletter and on the website. Lyn Lang suggested possibly changing aviary clean-up days and times next year so more members might be available to participate. She also made a motion to change the refreshment groupings for the meetings to A-E, F-O, and P-Z. Amanda Haney seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. The meeting adjourned at 4:45PM. Twenty-one members were present.

HEY If you would like to share an interesting/informative article about rock gardening, send it to the *Alpine Line*. The deadline for contributions is the **20th of Feb., Apr., Jul., Sep., and Dec.**

Please email your article to Len Lehman <lcleman1@verizon.net> or Al Deurbrouck <adeurbrouck@verizon.net>

Thank you for your interest and support of *Alpine Line*.

2018 MEETING NOTICES

ALLEGHENY CHAPTER ROCK GARDEN SOCIETY

Date/Time/ Refreshment Group	Location	Speaker	Activity
Jan 21, 2:00 PM F - O	Northland Library	Membership led by Len Lehman	Roundtable Discussion of Favorite Plants
Feb 18, 2:00 PM P - Z	Northland Library	Sandy Feather	Seed Starting Workshop
Mar 18, 2:00 PM A - E	Northland Library	Martha and Charles Oliver	The Small Phlox Charles is Hybridizing
Apr 15, 2:00 PM F - O	Aviary	Mark Langan, Mulberry Creek Herb Farm	Companion Plants for Mini Hostas
May 6, 9:00 AM	Soergel's Garden Cen- ter	Show & Sale	Show & Sale
May 20	Garden Visits TBA	Garden Visits	Garden Visits
Jun 10	DJ's Nursery	Dennis James	New Outstanding Plants
Jul	No Meeting	No Meeting	No Meeting
Aug 19, 2:00 PM	Pine Township Community Park	Picnic	Raffle, Trough Show, Plant Sale, Auction
Sept 16, 2:00 PM P - Z	Northland Library	TBA	
Oct 20	TBA	Janet Novak	Awards Banquet
Nov 18, 2:00 PM A - E	Northland Library	TBA	
Dec	No Meeting	No Meeting	No Meeting
Dec 6, 9:00 AM	Northland Library	Trish Abrams	Seed Packaging

AVIARY GARDEN

Alan Peacock

Most of you are probably aware that our chapter of NARGS regularly tends a rock garden outside the National Aviary on the Northside of Pittsburgh on a twice-monthly basis. I have previously written on the genesis of this garden in the Mar/Apr 2017 issue of our Alpine Line newsletter, which you can use to refresh your memory if so inclined. Needless to say, as a result of the regular enthusiastic and expert attention by some of our members, the garden, which was originally populated with plants in the spring of 2012, is now well established and flourishing. Even as late as Nov 9th when this intrepid band of members showed up on the usual Thursday morning to clean up the ever present leaves that have fallen from adjacent trees there were still some flowers reluctant to accept the inevitability of the oncoming winter, as this *Gentiana acaulis* attests.



For those of you who are unable to join our group on Thursday mornings or visit the garden due to other pressing matters, such as going to work, I was asked to



give a periodic report on the progress of the garden throughout the coming year. Unable to rack my brain quick enough to come up with a plausible excuse not to do so, I found myself agreeing. And so, with Len Lehman's invaluable assistance on the nomenclature of the plants as they appear I will endeavor to keep you abreast of what is growing, which might tempt you to also try the same plants in your own garden.

Allegheny Chapter Membership – Time to Renew!

Membership renewals are due for 2018. Annual dues remain \$10 for individuals and \$15 for family membership. The Chapter depends on dues to help fund the great line-up of workshops, presentations, and field trips. Also, membership provides access to the Chapter's extensive lending library of rock gardening books as well as rare and choice rock garden plants and seeds.

Please make your check payable to NARGS Allegheny Chapter and mail to: Lyn Lang, 4042 Valleyvue Drive, Gibsonia, PA 15044-9501. If there has been any change in your address, phone number, or e-mail, please complete the enclosed membership form and send it with your payment.

2018 MEMBERSHIP

NARGS Allegheny Chapter (changes only)
Name

Address

Phone

E-mail

Individual - \$10 Family - \$15

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JOIN NARGS TODAY - NARGS is for gardening enthusiasts interested in alpine, saxatile, and low-growing perennials and woody plants. Annual dues in the US and Canada are \$40, payable in US funds. VISA/Mastercard accepted.



Benefits of membership include: *Rock Garden Quarterly* with articles on alpines and North American wildflowers, illustrated in color photographs and pen and ink drawings; annual Seed Exchange with thousands of plant species; study weekends and annual meetings in either US or Canada; and book service.

Join online at www.nargs.org or write: Bobby J. Ward, Executive Secretary NARGS, P.O. Box 18604, Raleigh, NC 27619-8604, USA. The NARGS *Quarterly* is now online and members have free access at www.nargs.org/rock-garden-quarterly.

FROM THE BUGCATCHER'S BOOKSHELF

Leonard Lehman

This will be a new addition to our Chapter newsletter where choice books from our Chapter's library will be reviewed. It is hoped that this will stimulate some of you to read these available books.

SEED GERMINATION THEORY AND PRACTICE

Norman C. Deno, Copyright 1991

A new year dawns with new wishes, new dreams and new plans. Add to that new desires for new plants and new garden designs. Catalogs are rolling in and if you are like me, I want one of each new species, form or variety. Often the original forms are very expensive so I will always try to find seed of it and save money. But frequently the new seed will have little information on how to germinate it. Enter the best resource for germinating seeds of all kinds. Norm Deno was a chemistry professor at Penn State (and a local member of our chapter for a while) who loved rock gardening and put his science skills to work documenting how to germinate many kinds of alpine seeds. I constantly use it having dismal luck germinating iris seed (particularly species iris). After I consulted his book, I found that most iris require 2 years to germinate; requiring first a cold damp winter, then a hot dry summer and then a repeat with germination the following spring. As germination requires the breakdown of seed chemical barriers to germination, this treatment made a huge impact on what I was doing to the seeds. Now I have much more success in growing these delightful iris. Deno also has a remarkable list of what he calls "DOA"- seed that you are wasting your time with as they are dead on arrival, having a short shelf life. He also gives good advice for difficult species such as growing certain primroses which require sand bed treatment as they grow naturally in sand islands of streams. The book is easy reading and instructions are very clearly understandable. This book is a must read for any serious seed grower who wants to increase their collection by growing normally unavailable plants from seed lists such as NARGS, Scottish Rock Garden Society and The Alpine Garden Society of England.

Unfortunately, the book is no longer in print so we are lucky to have it in our library. However Deno's second edition of Seed Germination Theory and Practice (all 248 pages) can be downloaded on line at:

<https://naldc.nal.usda.gov/download/41278/PDF>. Considering we will be having our annual seed starting meeting in February, it would behoove you to peruse this excellent book for tips. Contact Patty McGuire so she can bring it to a meeting!

JUST WHAT IS AN ALPINE PLANT?

Leonard Lehman

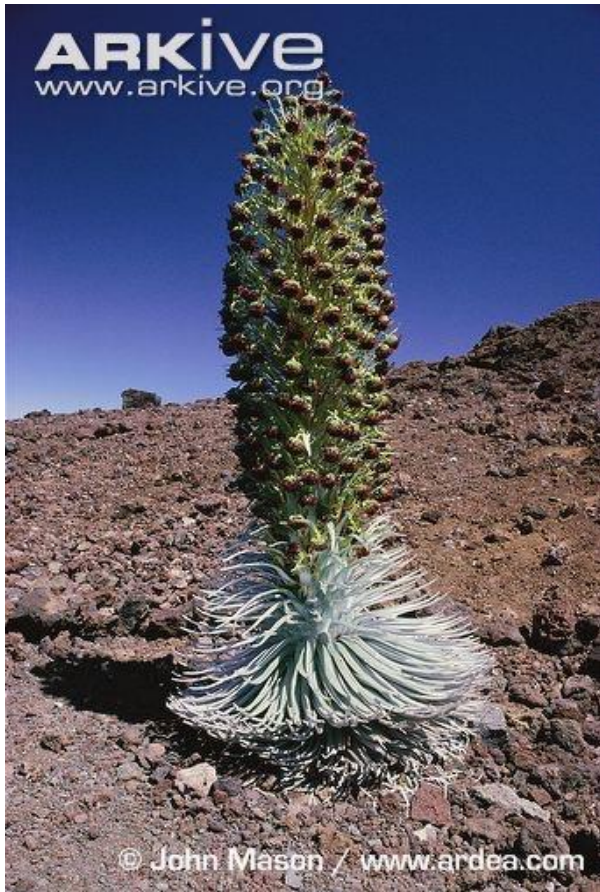
All of us that belong to rock gardening societies for the love of these botanical gems tend to be one sided in thinking what an alpine plant is. This lopsided thinking leads to the omission of many wonderful plants. By definition, an alpine plant is one that grows above the tree line in mountainous areas or in the Arctic tundra. When we talk about alpiners, we tend to focus on plants from European mountain ranges, i.e. Alps, Caucasus and Dolomites, the Himalayas and the Southern Alps of New Zealand. Forgotten and very rarely discussed are tropical alpiners from areas such as Mt. Kenya (which hosts unique alpine lobelias and bromeliads), New Guinea (the only glacier on the equator is found in New Guinea, and one the most poorly documented botanical areas, with the discovery of new species of rhododendrons, orchids and carnivorous plants every year) and even our own state of Hawaii (Mount Kilauea) and others.



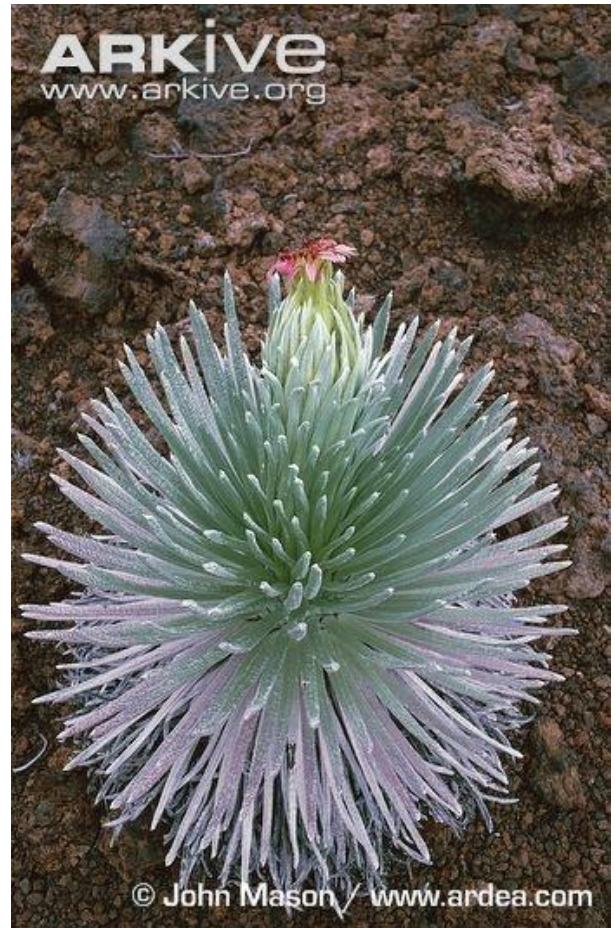
I would like to call attention to two unique alpiners from Hawaii and ask "If these were to be shown in an alpine plant show, would they be disqualified?"

The first of these tropical alpiners (almost an oxymoron like giant shrimp) is the Vulcan Palm, AKA Cabbage on a Stick, *Brighamia insignis*. This unique member of the bellflower family (*Campanulaceae*) was at one time wide spread through the Hawaiian Islands with each island having its own species. However, the introduction of goats to the islands in the early 1800s doomed many species to extinction and reduced the volcano palm to growing on cliffs on the big island of Hawaii. Also due to a decrease in its native pollinators (unique Hawaiian flies and moths) the plant, endangered as it is, must be pollinated by scientists of the Department of Interior rappelling down cliffs to hand pollinate them. Fortunately, the plant is easily vegetatively

propagated and has entered the horticultural trade. It is treated much as a succulent would be and can tolerate temperatures down to 15 degrees F. It is a rather spectacular plant when in bloom showing campanula like white or yellow flowers. Would this beauty have a place on a show table?



The second Hawaiian alpine, and in this case a true alpine, is the silversword (*Argyroxiphium sandwicense*). Silverswords are a composite related to sunflowers and again found only above the tree line in Mauna Kea and other Hawaiian



mountains. In fact, it cannot tolerate the hot temperatures of lower levels. Again, it is endangered due to a decline of its pollinator, a moth. The USDA and USDI propagate this beauty in the national parks in Hawaii. It never does well in propagation and, as an endangered species, it is almost impossible to get seeds. Besides, since there are those purists who believe an alpine show plant cannot be more than 12" high, the two plants described are simply too large for the show table!

So I ask again, are we biased or myopic when discussing alpine plants? Perhaps we should expand our vision to include tropical alpines!



Mystery Plant for Jan/Feb Newsletter

Leonard Lehman

Congratulations to Lyn Lang who correctly identified *Tulipa acuminata*, the Fire-flame Tulip, in the last issue!

Current Mystery Plant

Leonard Lehman

This issue's mystery plant(s) are related to snapdragons and are in the mint family-Lamiaceae. The scientific name comes from the shape of the flower. This genus is sadly neglected in the rock garden, because many species are too tall, invasive or thugs. However, there are many choice alpine forms. The flower has a unique pollinating mechanism that when an insect gets into the flower tube, it snaps shut, forcing the pollinator (mostly bees) to buzz around inside, knocking



pollen all over themselves and the pistils. Once pollination has taken place, the flower relaxes and the bee can escape. Some bee species have learned the trick to cut a hole in the base of the flower and escape without pollinating it. Flower colors are mostly blue, pink, purple and white or combinations of them. There are 60-70 species in the genus with most being circumpolar in the northern

hemisphere with a few adjunct species in Tasmania. An easy plant to grow, they require normal loamy or sandy soil of slightly to neutral pH. If deadheaded they will rebloom into late fall. Jelitto seeds has offered several named selections.

Send entries to Len Lehman.



Thinking of You

If you would like to let Allegheny Chapter members know of a serious illness, death in the family, or help needed by a fellow member, you may send your message to the membership chair for communication to all members.