

# Alpine Line

Newsletter of the Allegheny Chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society

August/September 2018

Thank you  
**Harry T. Meyer**  
for your generous gift of  
**\$5000!**

*At age 87, of South Fayette Twp., Harry died peacefully on March 29, 2018. He was a lifetime farmer and fruit grower of South Fayette Twp. and a retired career conservationist for Southwestern Division State Conservation Commission, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. He was a beloved husband of the late Mary Coslow Meyer and he is survived by his beloved son, Paul Meyer. "The last of many sunsets."*

I, being a responsible individual, or at least I think I'm a responsible individual, check my emails every morning. One morning, in my Juno emails, there was a strange message from a lady and it was being processed through our National NARGS website. She was trying to reach one of our past Chapter Presidents, Larry Hankowitz, and somehow the message was sent to me. She didn't tell me what it was in regards to leaving me her name, email, and telephone number. So, the next day when I had a free minute, I called her from work. She didn't answer but I left a message on her voice mail. She called me the next day and introduced herself as an employee in the legal department of PNC Bank and proceeded to inquire as to the whereabouts of Larry Hankowitz, which I quickly told her that he had passed away and she then inquired as to my involvement in the Allegheny Chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society. I told her and she was very happy that I returned her call and proceeded to inform me that the Chapter had been named in the Last Will of Harry Meyer and that the Chapter was bequeathed a nice amount of money. All I had to do was sign and date the document she was going to mail me and return it. Upon its return, she would then mail me the check payable to the Allegheny Chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society. Of course, I was quite shocked as I never was a recipient of such a generous gift and would gladly complete the documents and do as she instructed. Within a week, I had the check. I immediately deposited the check and informed our members at our June meeting of the good news. Harry was an active and congenial member of our Chapter. We are sorry to learn of his passing but very grateful for remembering our Chapter.

*Patty - Treasurer*



## ANNUAL MEMBERS-ONLY PICNIC SUNDAY, AUGUST 19, 2018 / PINE COMMUNITY PARK

The Allegheny Chapter's annual picnic and members-only plant exchange will be held on Sunday, August 19, at the Pine Township Community Park, beginning at 2 p.m. The Chapter will provide ribs, chicken, drinks, and place settings. Members are asked to bring a covered dish to feed approximately 8 people.

This meeting provides a nice opportunity to socialize and enjoy great food in a beautiful outdoor setting. Growing your own plants from seed is a special activity of the overall garden experience. Packets of extra seeds from the NARGS Seed Exchange will be available.

We will again hold the Trough Show that will be judged by all the attendees. A trough is defined as at our May Show Class 9: A trough of three or more distinct species of rock garden suitable plants arranged for effect. Three nice prizes will be given to the three troughs voted most popular (one prize per member). While it is a bit of a contest, look at it as an opportunity to see what members are growing in troughs this summer.

Members are urged to bring plants for the exchange. As always, members who contribute plants will be allowed to choose and buy plants before the sale officially starts. Now would be a good time to split some overgrown clumps of plants that are starting to intrude on their neighbors. Almost all primulas actually thrive on being split every two or three years. Most sedum are easy to split and transplant. Volunteer seedlings are always choice material for our sale, as well as rock garden plants grown from seed.

Consider donating a special plant, art, or decor for our auction that will again be conducted by Len Lehman, our walking encyclopedia on plants and planting. The auction has been great fun over the years, and with your help it can be even better this year.

RSVP by Sunday, August 12 if you plan to attend.

### DIRECTIONS TO THE PICNIC:

**Traveling north on US 19;** Perry Highway in Wexford, bear left onto Church Road at the Custom Framing Shop and then turn right (east) onto PA 910. Continue on PA 910 for 1.7 miles, then turn left onto Pearce Mill Road for 2.6 miles. Pine Community Park is located on the left, across from the Pine Township Municipal Building. Turn left onto Pine Park Drive. Turn at the next left and then immediately turn right and park at the end pavilion.

**Traveling south on US 19;** Perry Highway in Wexford, bear right onto Church Road at the Goodyear Tire Store and then turn right (east) onto PA 910. Continue on PA 910 for 1.7 miles, then turn left onto Pearce Mill Road for 2.6 miles. Pine Community Park is located on the left, across from the Pine Township Municipal Building. Turn left onto Pine Park Drive. Turn at the next left and then immediately turn right and park at the end pavilion.





# IDEAS FOR TROUGHS

by **Harvey Wrightman** former owner of **Wrightman Alpines Nursery**

One of the best “trends” to hit mainstream gardening is container planting - trough gardening for most of us. Adaptable and accessible to most any situation, troughs can be used as accents to an alpine garden or perennial garden; or, they can be the sole feature with a varied number of sub-themes. Each container represents its own particular ecological/horticultural expression. Using the Czech style of narrow clay crevices, it is possible to provide a better growing environment for both the easy alpines and those that we know less about their specific cultural needs.

**Containers** – Almost any sort of container will do for a first effort. Hyper-tufa troughs are readily available and will last about 10 years, or more. For more permanent troughs, look for ones that have a good customer rating.

## Some recommendations for suppliers:

- **HaddonStone** – manufactured stone; but, very well sculpted troughs. They are heavy and permanent. Only 2 styles listed on the website.
- **Betsy Knapp** – sleek, modern looking, these troughs are light and very, very durable. Also, Betsy can make shapes and sizes not normally seen
- **Oliver Nurseries** – Lori Chips is the Alpine Manager, and she creates beautiful and unusual troughs for purchase, as well as providing fully planted troughs and tufa for very competitive prices.
- **Wrightman Alpines** – a variety of natural stone troughs in sandstone, limestone and tufa. The tufa troughs are lighter in weight (~40%) than other stone. Tufa has an earthiness that helps to create the mountain atmosphere of the planting.



**Soil** - We use Spanish River Carbonatite (SRC) in most of our container mixes. The carbonatites are particularly good sources of minerals in a form that feeds at a steady rate and does not over-stimulate growth. A reasonable substitute would be “greensand”, which may be easier to source.

For troughs I use:

- Coarse sand as a base material, ~65%
- SRC, ~20%
- Composted pine bark or some other organic material.

*This is a physically heavy mix, but it provides long-lasting, stable structure and nutrition for the plants. Mixes that use a lot of organic material tend to negatively change in a short time. One could add pumice or Perlite to lighten the mix.*

**Planting** – Now comes the part where you must ditch all the poisonous cultural teaching of agrarian-derived societies; i.e., the rock formation that you will create will be elevated and not appear to be stable. For the chasmophytic plants, what they desire is a place without the competition of those aggressive flatland grasses and forbs – the basis of agricultural crops. When you think about it, the narrow crevices where the special ones grow will have thin veins of soil that have been brought in by wind and water. The soils that will stick are mainly the smaller particles of silt and clay which also provide more nutrition for the plants though the actual volume may not be very much at all. For the basic formation in a trough, you can use any type of stone that has flat surfaces that you then align to form a narrow crevice. It may be vertical or tilted. There may be one or two parallel lines in the formation for the trough. Don't make it too complicated or you will be lost in the details. This crevice line presents a significant space for a good number of plants to grow. One side of the crevice is plastered with a sticky clay. The plants, rooted cuttings or seedlings (minus most of their potting mix) are laid out on the clay with their roots suitably spread out. You can see now the advantages:

- 1) A greater choice of plants as larger, potted specimens can be used
- 2) Immediate contact with a growing medium (clay), and less damage to the roots.

3) "Perfect drainage." I love those words used to describe the right site for a plant: "...rich soil, moist, but well-drained." How is that possible after a huge rain and the air turns steamy? An elevated position means the crevice will provide a more constant moisture level and allow the area around the crown to dry quickly. The crown is where most disease problems occur.

4) The drama of vertical plantings, cascades falling over a cliff are obvious and appealing. This is the best way to improve the beauty of a planting. Although the technique is simple, I am always amazed at the variety of compositions that I see in the workshops we run.

5) It is important to keep the crevice to less than 1/2" wide. Capillary movement of water is better in a narrow column. Also, some erosion of clay will occur until the plants cover the line. This is less of a problem in a thinner line. You can always dress-up the line with more planting mix. Adding some small gravel bits helps too.

6) Almost any plant in our catalogue can be used. The decision then lies in what the combinations will be. Ever wonder how confusing that can be? The great thing about this method is it intuitively directs you to place things. To make the verticals work, you need small mat-formers such as spreading clay on "bread" - roots laid in clay. For the tiny sort. These plants spread quickly enough to stop erosion. They are small enough that other, showier plants can grow through the mats. Semps, which are so easy to establish, are especially good. Once they outgrow their usefulness, they can be removed with little disruption. The mats provide a good foil to set off the choicer plants - these are myriad in number, tight growing plants such as *Androsace* spp., kabschias, tiny *Campanulas* like *C. zoysii*, *Arenaria tetraquetra*, *Draba bryoides*, *Silene acaulis*, *Gypsophila aretioides*, *Asperula* spp. and the ultimate plugger, *Sempervivum*. The method used does take a little nerve and daring, but that's why you're here, right? I'm sure as more people employ the technique and the results are seen, that it will become a valuable tool.



## 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](http://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](http://www.nargs.org/rock-garden-quarterly).



## Message from the Chair *David Amrhein*

I hope you are all bearing up under this summer of extreme heat and humidity. At least I didn't have too much watering which is always good as I am dependent on well water. I think this has been quite a good year for rock plants since the Aviary Garden seems to be really thriving. Having Kathie Davis and her husband watering alternate weeks from our usual visit is probably a big cause for the success of the garden. Even the Chair's choice plant, Belarina primrose, which we should have ready for judging at next year's show, has been growing surprisingly well since it should not be doing much this time of the year. I have had the good fortune to go on a number of garden tours for the first time in years which has motivated me to try some of those great plants I've seen in other gardens.



If you think you might like to open up your garden next year for a visit by members of NARGS, please let Sandy or I know and we can include this in plans for programs for next year. For that matter, if you have read an interesting article or heard about a speaker you think the club would enjoy, let us know. Your input is valuable. I am not sure if you had a chance to visit the Master Gardener trial gardens at North and South Park this year, but this is a great way to see plants you might want to try on your own.

Because it is free publicity for our club we will probably be participating once again at *Garden in the Parks* which is a celebration of home gardening sponsored by Master Gardeners and supported by groups such as ours. Aside from being a good way to draw attention to the club, an added benefit is that it is free to participating organizations like NARGS. *Garden in the Parks* will be held from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturday, August 18.

We are looking forward to our annual picnic - always a great time for renewing friendships and discussing our garden highs and lows for the season. Plus, of course, great food and the opportunity to get some choice new plants for your garden at bargain-basement prices. Bring a friend or relative. The Chapter supplies the main meat dish and beverages, and you are asked to bring a side dish to feed eight. More details on the picnic are found elsewhere in this newsletter.

Enjoy the rest of the summer,

*Dave*

## Upcoming Meetings

**August 19 @ 2:00 PM - Annual Members Only Picnic - again at the Pine Township Community Park.**

**September 16 @ 2:00 PM** - The speaker will be Cindy Tibbetts, owner of Hummingbird Farm, a strictly clematis-growing operation, specializing in "Clematis for the Frozen North". The web site, <http://HummingbirdFarm.net> is full of information on choosing and growing clematis, including "The Frozen North Pruning System."

**October 20 @ 1:00 pm** - Banquet at BRAVO Cucina Italiana, 20001 Rte. 19, Cranberry Township., PA. Speaker: Janet Novak

**November 18 @ 2:00 pm** - The speaker is Robert Mulvihill of the National Aviary Ornithologist on "What's good for Birds is Good for Your Backyard."

**December** - No meeting

**December 9 @ 9:00 am** - Seed Packaging

# Mystery Plant for August/September



This issue's mystery plant is not really a rock garden plant but a must if you have a water feature in your rock garden. Members of the Amaryllis family, the flowers are ethereal and at any time add a dimension of other worldly quality to the garden. A bulbous plant, it is a genus of some 60 species found in southeastern US, Mexico, Central America and into northern South America. They are found naturally along stream banks and in swamps, and almost every southern river has its own species. The pure white flowers give a glow to the night garden, and I have seen them used as floral arrangements in several Star Trek Voyager shows. The Latin name means membrane beautiful.

Most flowers are pure white, but a related genus has yellow flowers. Not winter hardy in our area, they are best grown in pots that can be set in water during summer and then

brought in for dormancy in winter. Many species are extremely fragrant for night flying pollinators, and there are 2 dwarf or miniature species ideal for rock garden water features. Its common name honors an arthropod for which early botanists as Mark Catesby thought it resembled.

A unique and beautiful plant.

Email answers to Len Lehman. Only genus name needs to be given.



## DJ's Greenhouse & Gardens

1004 East Lake Road \* Transfer, PA 16154 \* 724-962-1230 \* [www.djsgreenhouse.com](http://www.djsgreenhouse.com)

### 2018 Schedule of Events

This schedule is not complete. Please check the web-site during the year for additional classes.

- August 4** Breakfast with DJ, 9:00 Reservation Required You Did What to Your Plant?
- August 14** Vegetable Gardening Class, 6:30. Yes you can still plant a Fall Garden!
- August 16** To Be Announced
- August 18** Customer Appreciation Day, 9-5. Refreshments and Specials
- September 1** Breakfast with DJ, 9:00. Reservations Required. It's Not Over Yet!
- September 11** Create your own Fairy Garden, \$35. All Materials Included, 6:30. Reservations required
- September 18** Hyper-Tufa Class \$ 25 Create your own Planter. Reservations Required! 6:30
- September 22** Fall Garden Walk, 10:00. Getting your garden ready for winter! A tour of the gardens.
- October 7** Fundraiser Dinner for the Community Food Warehouse. Details later this Summer.

We are open until mid-late October. Our hours of business are listed on the website.

# Soergel's Garden Center - Educational Series

2573 Brandt School Road, Wexford, PA 15090 724-935-2090

Date / Time	Speaker	Activity
May 17 / 7:00 PM	Jessica Walliser	New Anuals
June 21 / 7:00 PM		Perrennials (Probably)
July 19 / 7:00 PM	Anita Difonte	Cocktails from the Garden
August 16 / 7:00 PM		Fair Gardening (Probably)
September 20 / 7:00 PM		Airplants & Terrariums (Probably)
October 18 / 7:00 PM	Randy Soergel	All About Apples
November 15 / 7:00 PM	Aspen Song Wild Bird Feed	Bird Feeding



## June 10, 2018 Minutes *Joanne Burzese, Secretary*

The June 10, 2018 meeting of the Allegheny Chapter of NARGS was held at DJ's Greenhouse at 9:30am. Thirty-five members braved the rain to enjoy a delicious breakfast provided by DJ. Breakfast was followed by a presentation by DJ on new varieties of perennials.

Dave Amrhein opened the business portion of the meeting by reporting that the Cedar of Lebanon at the Aviary garden died and was removed. He again requested volunteers to water the Aviary garden on the 1st and 3rd Sundays of the month. He thanked members for their entries in the Rock Garden show. He also thanked Trish and Joe Abrams for opening their gardens for members to visit.

Sandy Ciccone announced that the annual banquet will be a luncheon at Bravo Italiano in Cranberry on Oct. 20th from 1-5pm. The cost has not been finalized. Further information will be forthcoming.

Lyn Lang reviewed the winners at this year's rock garden show. There are plans to have Sandy Feather give a presentation on what the judges look for in deciding the winners. The talk will be given at next April's meeting. Next year's show will take place on April 28th instead of in May due to the National's meeting that week-end in Philadelphia.

Deb Meyer suggested creating an award for class 8 (cut flowers) in the show since it is the only class that doesn't have one. Suggestions will be considered for the naming of the award. A motion to create the award for class 8 was made by Cathy Kaut, seconded by Len Lehman and unanimously approved.

Len Lehman proposed having a photography category at the show similar to those at the Daffodil show and the Hosta show. He stated that John Powell helped with both of those shows and would be willing to help with ours even though he is not a member. Len Lehman made a motion to offer a photography section at the NARGS show depending on John Powell's availability to help. Patty McGuire seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved. Since the National NARGS sponsors a photo contest our show should follow National's rules.

Patty McGuire gave the Treasurer's report. She also announced that Harry Meyer, a former member, died recently and left a \$5000 donation to our chapter in his will.

Jim and Sandy Ellenberger invited members to visit their gardens following the meeting. The meeting adjourned following the raffle.



# THE NARGS ROCK GARDEN ADJACENT TO THE NATIONAL AVIARY

by Alan Peacock

Once again, the weather is a major factor since my last Aviary garden report a few months ago. Then I was bemoaning the failure of spring weather to arrive long after it was expected and being replaced by low temperatures and snow. Now the weather can't make up its mind. During June we had a high of 65 at the beginning of the month and two weeks later 95. So far in July it's been consistently above 80 with a high of 97 - and combined with the high humidity it felt a lot hotter. And then there was the rain; over 10 inches for the month of June when 4 inches is normal. So far in July its just over an inch.



*Stachys monieri*

*Allium Thunbergii*

*Campanula* "Bavarian China White"

*Inula ensifolia*

As a result of this wet and hot weather many plants in the Aviary garden are spreading beyond their preferred boundaries and will need to be drastically pruned back during the next few maintenance visits. Otherwise the garden has not noticeably suffered as a result of the hot, humid and wet weather inflicted on it and during our visit last week to check it out there were many plants in bloom.



Those plants in the shadier locations were doing well.



Our Chair's Choice Award for last year--Standard Dwarf Bearded Iris "Hot Coals"--has been awarded an Award of Merit by the American Iris Society, the next to last step before being awarded the highest honor for a dwarf Iris, the Caparne-Welch Award.





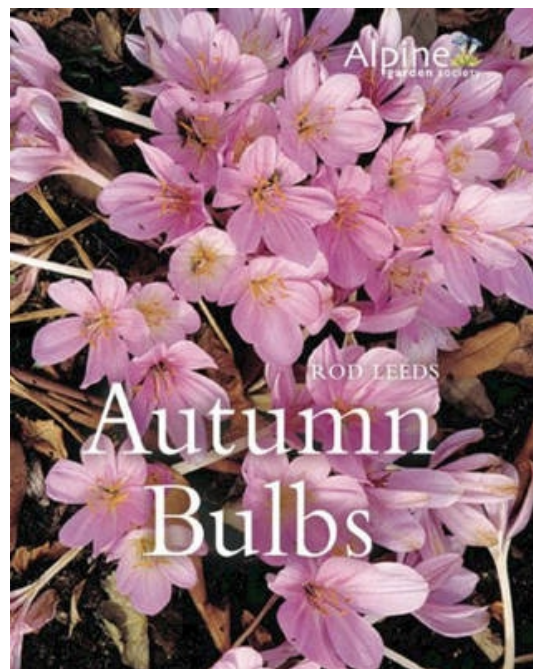
# FROM THE BUGCATCHER'S BOOKSHELF

## Autumn Bulbs by Rod Leeds

Reviewed by Len Lehman

By fall, most people are tired of gardens and just want the season to be over so one can look forward to the holidays. Fall is the time of asters and chrysanthemums to give color to the garden, and most gardens include them to brighten the landscape. I am again going off target to recommend another book that our club library does not have but should. **Autumn Bulbs by Rod Leeds (Alpine Garden Society, Batsford House, London, 005)** is a treasure since it addresses a rather neglected subject. Gardeners thrill at the first Eranthis, Galanthus, Crocus, Hyacinths and other spring bulbs such as daffodils (ranked the most favorite of spring bulbs) and tulips. Leeds is a noted British gardener who has published many books on bulbs such as **“Growing Bulbs in Containers”** - a treasure that addresses several genera and how to grow in pots and other containers. It is priceless in its information on forcing.

**Autumn Bulbs** deals with those priceless treasures that add color and diversity to the fall gardens. Leeds takes us down a wandering path in discussing various bulbs which bloom in the fall such as Colchicum, Sternbergia, fall blooming Crocus and even Narcissus. Who even suspected that there were fall blooming daffodils? Over 300 species are discussed. Leeds' book gives excellent care and culture information, and I use it regularly when planting my new treasures. Certainly, it is invaluable as a reference book for purchasing bulbs for fall color. It should be on every rock gardener's shelf and purchased for our library!



## 2018 MEETING NOTICES ALLEGHENY NARGS

Date/Time/ Refreshment Group	Location	Speaker	Activity
JAN 21 / 2:00 PM / F-O	Northland Public Library	Membership led by Len Lehman	Roundtable Discussion of Favorite Plants
FEB 18 / 2:00 PM / P-Z	Northland Public Library	Sandy Feather	Seed Starting Workshop
MAR 18 / 2:00 PM / A-E	Northland Public Library	Martha & Charles Oliver	The Small Phlox Charles is Hybridizing
APR 15 / 2:00 PM / F-O	National Aviary	Mark Langan Mulberry Creek Herb Farm	Companion Plants for Mini Hostas
MAY 6 / 9:00 AM	Soergel's Garden Center	Show & Sale	Show & Sale
MAY 19-20 / 10:00AM-6:00PM	Trish & Joe Abram's Gardens	Open Garden	Open Garden
JUN 10 / 9:30 AM	DJ's Greenhouse	Dennis James	New Outstanding Plants
JULY	NO MEETING	NO MEETING	NO MEETING
AUG 19 / 2:00 PM	Pine Township Community Park	Picnic	Raffle, Trough Show, Plant Sale, Auction
SEP 16 / 2:00 PM / P-Z	Northland Public Library	Cindy Tibbets Hummingbird Farm	Rambling Through the Rock Garden
OCT 20 / 1:00 PM	BRAVO Cucina Italiana	Janet Novak	Plants of Newfoundland, Awards Banquet
NOV 18 / 2:00 PM / A-E	Northland Public Library	Robert Mulvihill National Aviary Ornithologist	What's Good for Birds is Good for Your Backyard
DECEMBER	NO MEETING	NO MEETING	NO MEETING
DEC 6 / 9:00 AM	Northland Public Library	Trish Abrams	Seed Packaging