



# ALPINE LINE

Allegheny Chapter, North American Rock Garden Society

October–November–December 2015

## Message from the Chair, Len Lehman



The coming of fall always stirs mixed emotions in me. On one hand, the cool mornings, bright blue sky, colored foliage with a mug of mulled cider and cinnamon donuts is to me outright heaven. On the other hand, fall also brings sadness as the life cycle of plants begins its downward spiral into either death of annuals or dormancy in perennials. In short, life winds down and it brings thoughts of one's own life and the frailty of it. But one thing is certain - life is resurgent and fall is the time to renew hope by planting bulbs for spring show!

I am thankful that we have such a close and friendly club, making attending meetings a pleasure, renewing friendships and exchanging information. Such strings become the rope of success for the club. Our wonderful club is probably one of the most active and dynamic clubs in the region, and we can pat ourselves on the back for many wonderful accomplishments.

Thanks to Karen Schmidt, we have had and continue to have a great set of speakers and programs: Starting with seed starting workshops, then on building nook gardens, to shale barren plants, to a great tour of a Japanese garden, a picnic at the Lynches, to a terrarium workshop at DJ's. Now we look forward to ending the year with dynamic speakers Chuck Gleaves in September, John Lonsdale at our October banquet, and Jared Hughes in November. The programs have been diverse and interesting, meeting the needs of many interests. You can view details of our year's event schedule on page 5.

In May, we had one of our best ever show and sales thanks to Lyn Lang, Debbie Meyers, and Carol Przyborski. The number of quality exhibits has increased, and the number of exhibitors has more than doubled. Also thanks to Sue Benn, we had excellent publicity which increased our attendance.

Our rock garden at the National Aviary continues to mature and improve. We always appreciate when local residents stop and compliment us while we work the garden. The aviary staff is also supportive and seems to enjoy the garden as much as visitors. Recently the garden was featured in a long shot of the new condor facility. If you would like to be part of this ongoing creation, feel free to "come on down" on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of every month – April through October!

No one entered the mystery plant contest shown in the last issue, so it will remain the same for this issue. See page 3 for details. Don't be afraid to send me your guess. I look forward to receiving them.

Several months ago Sylvia Lynch advised us that the Chapter's website would no longer be supported, and a new website would need to be developed. Thank you to Sylvia Lynch for maintaining the former website over many years and for helping us to realize the need for a new and improved image on the Web.

The NARGS Allegheny Chapter now has a new presence on the Internet! Click on the link <http://nargspittsburgh.wix.com/rock-garden> to view it, or copy and paste this link in your browser bar. Current issues of *Alpine Line* have been added. Also included are links to Jim Buckland's photos, as well as some photos on Flickr. We have the beginnings of a Facebook page, with a link to it at the top of the home page. An updated library list is coming soon.

Be sure to bookmark the site to access it easily in the future. You can also access our new website via a Google search for NARGS Allegheny Chapter or by visiting the national site at [www.nargs.org](http://www.nargs.org), selecting About Us, Local Chapters, and then Allegheny Chapter. Check out our new website regularly for news and photos of our activities.

Thank you to Susan Benn, Amanda Haney, and new member Alexis Sykrut for their outstanding work in designing and establishing the new site. Webmaster Amanda Haney will maintain the new site with assistance from other members. For example, the Chapter Vice Chair Karen Schmidt will keep the meeting page up to date.

The main purpose of the NARGS Allegheny Chapter website is to inform the public about our organization. Your ideas can help to make this new site interesting and informative for potential new members.

You may contact Amanda with comments and suggestions about content.

The next newsletter will usher in a new Chair with a new message. This is the Bugcatcher signing off, looking forward to hibernating now, and wishing you all good gardening!

## CHAPTER VOLUNTEERS

### Officers

**Chair:** Len Lehman

**Vice Chair:** Karen Schmidt

**Secretary:** Dianne Passoth

**Treasurer:** Patty McGuire

### Committee Chairs

**Awards:** Al Deurbrouck

**Banquet:** Deb Meyer

**Hosts:** Bonnie and Steve Plato

**Library:** Patty McGuire

**Membership & Proofreader:** Lyn Lang

**Newsletter Editor:** Linda Kalcevic

**Plant Show & Sale:** Deb Meyer, Lyn Lang, and

Carol Przyborski

**Seed Exchange:** Patty McGuire

**Webmaster:** Amanda Haney



**This will be my last newsletter as editor. I thank Lyn Lang for her support and excellent proofreading, and I appreciate the kind words I've received during my time as editor.**

## Welcome New Members



Chris Kieda  
Dolores Nypaver  
Nancy Pacella  
Sandy Palumbo  
Dan and Sue Przbylek  
Christine Scelsi  
Alexis Sykut  
Ken and Cris Weber  
Chris and Carol Wyroste



## Banquet News

Allegheny Chapter's annual banquet will be held at 3:00, Saturday, October 17, at Ciao! 2 An Italian Cafe, located at 289 Settlers Ridge Center Drive, Robinson Township, 15205, 412-788-9463.

Buffet - \$30 per person. Cash bar.  
Gluten-free dinners are available.

Ciao! 2 An Italian Café is home of the famous tomato basil sauce, and winner of the "Dinners' Choice 2015" award.

In the sea of chains that dot most suburban areas, Ciao! is definitely unique! Started in Carnegie over 25 years ago by Nick and Sabrina, Ciao! 2 is now the fourth generation of a traditional Italian trattoria in the new Settlers Ridge location. They are a special combination of style and substance; a restaurant known for its craft beers, boutique wines, and classic Italian cuisine. Read more at [CiaoItalianCafe.com](http://CiaoItalianCafe.com).

Reserve your space by **Saturday, October 10, 2014**. Please make checks payable to NARGS Allegheny Chapter, and send to Debra Meyer, 3935 McClure Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15212.

Email questions to [debrasm@aol.com](mailto:debrasm@aol.com) or phone 412-734-2039.



## Mystery Plant Contest

This month's mystery plant belongs to one of the largest genera in the Bean Family - Fabaceae. Found throughout the world, these plants have beautiful flowers and unusual seed pods which are also very attractive. They are notorious among cattlemen and horse-men for causing "blind staggers" in livestock, a potentially deadly condition!

This specific species is an alpine plant with lovely white flowers and intense red pods. Flowers are typically pea or bean like. Despite its notoriety, it is a potent nitrogen fixer and helps improve typically nutrient poor soil and,



in the old world, related species are often used to revitalize old fields. Definitely a group that should have wider use in rock gardens or troughs in our area.

Send as many entries as you like—with botanical and common names—to Len at [lclehman1@verizon.net](mailto:lclehman1@verizon.net). The first person with correct answer wins a prize plant.

Please note, many entries have been incomplete. *Both scientific and species* must be named.

## Allegheny Chapter 2016 Election of Officers

Nomination committee members Jim Adams, Sandy Ciccone, and Bonnie Plato have announced details for the election of Chair and Vice Chair. Voting will be held at our annual banquet October 17. Secretary and Treasurer positions are appointed by the incumbent Chair.

Chapter bylaws state that the current Vice Chair, Karen Schmidt, will ascend to the position of Chair. Bob Dietz was nominated for the position of Vice Chair.

Many thanks to the nominating committee for researching and following up with nominations.



## Allegheny Chapter's Rock Garden at the National Aviary



The National Aviary is located at 700 Arch Street, 15212. Our rock garden is on the grounds outside the Aviary, next to the driveway leading into the visitors' parking lot. Volunteers meet at 10:00 at the rock

garden rain or shine on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday, March

through November. Bring your favorite garden tools, gloves, and a container for debris.

If you feel like getting up a bit earlier, join us at 9:00 at Ye Olde Allegheny Sandwich Shoppe, 822 Western Avenue 15212, for a great breakfast, and usually free parking across the street. Enter the gravel lot from Brighton Road and park at the Western Avenue end.

Contact Al Deurbrouck or Lyn Lang with any questions.

## Allegheny Chapter 2015 Meetings/Events

Next meeting—3:00 Saturday, October 17, Ciao!2

	Time	Speaker	Topic	Location
January 18	2:00	Debra Meyer and Carol Przyborski	NARGS Annual Meeting in Santa Fe	Northland Library
February 15	2:00	Len Lehman	Seed planting workshop	Northland Library
March 15	1:30	Jill M. Nicolaus	Pocket Gardens	National Aviary
April 19	4:00	Dieter Zschummel	One Year in Our Garden in the Middle of Germany	St. John Lutheran Church Cumberland Road
May 17	2:00	Garden tour	Lynch's garden and her neighbor's Japanese garden	184 Spring Grove Road, Penn Hills 15235
June 28	9:30 am	DJ	Breakfast at DJ's and hands-on Terrarium workshop	DJ's Greenhouse
August 16	2:00	Picnic	Fun	Pine Township Community Park
<b>September 20</b>	<b>2:00</b>	<b>Chuck Gleaves*</b>	<b>Gardening for the Fun of It</b>	<b>Northland Library</b>
October 17	3:00	John Lonsdale**	Spring Bulbs	Banquet— Ciao! 2
November 15	2:00	Jared Hughes	Groovy Plant Favorites	Northland Library
December	9 am		Seed packing workshop	Northland Library

\*\*A transplant from the UK, **Dr. John Lonsdale** now gardens in Exton, PA, where he specializes in woodland plants. His extensive plantings include Trillium, Helleborus, Fritillaria, and Erythronium species. He regularly lectures and is an active member of many horticultural groups including NARGS. He holds BS degrees in Biochemistry and Microbiology and a PhD in Microbiology.

## August Meeting Summary

The Allegheny Chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society held its Annual Picnic/Members Only Plant Sale/Trough Show at Pine Township Community Park on August 16, 2015. Thank you to Janet Eck for securing the location. There were 39 members and 2 guests in attendance.

The Chapter provided chicken, pork, drinks and place settings. Members brought a variety of wonderful covered dishes. Following the delicious meal, the meeting was called to order by Chairman Len Lehman.

Len gave a miniature dwarf bearded Iris “Hot Coals” to each member present. The President’s Choice Iris may be entered in the Club’s annual show the first Sunday in May 2016. Members who were unable to attend the picnic, may receive their President’s Choice Iris at the next regular meeting at 2:00, Sunday, September 20, at Northland Public Library. Vice Chair

Karen Schmidt stated Charles Gleaves, Director of Kingwood Center Gardens, will speak about *Gardening for the Fun of It*. The Club will discuss purchasing a new sound system.

Len Lehman asked the audience to consider joining NARGS. One of the many benefits would be the opportunity to become a book reviewer.

After the Members Only Plant Sale came the auction. Many thanks to Len Lehman for conducting the Auction. Every year he makes it such an enjoyable event.

The afternoon ended with a raffle, a Chinese auction and the announcement of the three most popular troughs in the Trough Show, chosen by the picnic attendees: 1<sup>st</sup> Prize – Lyn Lang, 2<sup>nd</sup> Prize – Sandy Ciccone, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Prize – Al Deurbrouck.

~Dianne Passoth, Secretary



## Picnic Fun

This year Patty McGuire brought pulled pork and chicken as our main dish, and it was excellent, as was the food in general. We do have some real gourmet cooks who make the picnic a real gastronomic delight.

The 50-cent plant sale was, as always, a bit of a madhouse as members continue to bring in some choice plants, including a lot of nice semps brought in by both Dennis James and Rodney Lawther.

There was great interest in the Chinese auction, where a number of mature gems were available. Len Lehman managed to bleed just a few more dollars out of many for choice plant materials and other items, including a lovely piece of botanical art done by our resident artist, Alan Peacock.

A significant highlight of the picnic was the trough competition. This year we had only 13 entries - disappointingly low number; however, the quality of the entries was excellent. Please consider bringing in a trough next year.

Lyn Lang won the \$25 gift certificate for Soregels with a container full of shade lovers, mostly choice dwarf ferns. Sandy Ciccone came in second place and won a \$20 gift certificate with a trough containing several varieties of semps, sedums, orostachys, and a cypress 'boulevard'. Al Deurbrouck came in third place and won a \$15 gift certificate with a trough full of orostachys and semps.

An interesting trough entry (I'm sorry I missed the members name????) contained only seedlings from seeds planted in January at the Seed Germination Workshop conducted by Len Lehman.

Look for something new next year—a President's Choice plant, a dwarf iris 'Hot Coal' given to members by Len Lehman, our president, and which will be judged next year at our Spring Show & Sale Show. See details below.

~Al Deurbrouck

## President's Choice Plant



Len Lehman, Al Deurbrouck and Lyn Lang were involved in the West Mifflin Garden Club's annual flower show held in August. One of their categories was a President's Choice plant, given to each member to grow and enter in the annual flower show competition. A President's Choice plant is an excellent idea and will be a part of the Allegheny Chapter's annual show on the first Sunday in May 2016.

Len selected and acquired a supply of miniature dwarf bearded iris, 'Hot Coals' which was given to members at the annual picnic on Sunday, August 16. Members who were unable to attend the picnic may receive their President's Choice iris at the next regular meeting at 2:00, Sunday, September 20, at Northland Public Library.

Hot Coals (Aitken '14) - Apricot standards, red-black falls, apricot radiating from coral beards, is a miniature dwarf bearded iris, the smallest and earliest of the bearded iris and grows up to 8 inches tall. Profuse bloom on excellent compact rock garden and border plants. Prefer cold winter climate.

Several articles on how to plant and grow dwarf bearded iris may be found on the Internet. Here are some tips taken from an article by Schreiner's Gardens.

- Plant in July, August or September
- Roots of newly planted Iris should be well-established before the growing season ends
- Plant at least six weeks before the first hard frost
- In extremely hot climates, some shade is beneficial
- At least 6 hours a day of full sun is needed in most climates
- Plant so the tops of the rhizomes are exposed and the roots are spread out facing downward in the soil

Iris can be successfully grown in containers. A 6 - 8" pot will work for Dwarf Iris. Make sure your pot has good drainage. For soil, we recommend 45% fir bark, 20% pumice, and 35% peat moss. Leave at least one inch below the pot's rim, and leave the top of the rhizome exposed. Water only when the top two inches of soil are dry. Overwatering will cause rot. Keep the pot outdoors during the winter. When bloom buds begin to appear in the fans, bring the pot inside and place in a bright sunny window. After bloom, be sure to divide your Iris and replant outside or into more pots.

Advice from Barbara Aitken of Aitken's Salmon Creek Garden, the source of our President's Choice Plant, is to not let potted irises dry out in the heat of summer – you might have to water daily, depending on the size of the pots. For winter in colder areas, she recommends sinking the pots into the ground, then perhaps mulching over them. Roots in small pots are very vulnerable to frost if left out of the ground over winter in cold areas of the country. Just make sure to take the mulch off early in the spring so they don't rot.

~Lyn Lang

In the most simple terms, rock gardening is a naturalistic style of gardening that uses rocks, large or small in some way. A variety of plants from many different habitats can be used in rock gardens. Some plants have origins in the high mountains, while others originated at lower elevations. There are rock garden plants that need to be grown in close proximity to rocks in order to thrive and those that are simply attractive when grown with rock accents. Many rock garden plants are compact in size, making it an ideal style of gardening for those who have limited space.

### **The Ecology of Rock Garden Plants – Habitats and Adaptations**

One of the fun aspects of rock gardening is learning about the ecology of the plants you grow. This information makes you a better gardener by increasing your understanding of your plants' needs. Rock garden plants come from habitats that differ by climate, location and setting. Plants adapt to their habitat through growth habit, form, color, season of growth and bloom, etc. Understanding the ecology of your rock garden plants can help you determine whether to grow them in sun or shade, the best type of soil, and how much water and fertilizer they need.

**Key Issues in Rock Gardening. Drainage** – Proper drainage is the key to successfully growing rock garden plants. This is because many of the plants grown in rock gardens require excellent drainage for healthy growth. They are often grown on a slope or in a raised or mounded bed where irrigation or rainwater flows quickly away from plant crowns and roots. Drainage can be enhanced by adding a combination of rock chips or poultry grit (available from feed stores) and coarse sand, such as river sand, to your soil. We use 1/4"-#10 crushed rock which has fewer of the small particles called fines that cause soil compaction. The amount needed varies with your soil type but a typical formulation for clay soil would be 50% soil, 25% crushed rock and 25% sand.

Bark dust or clean compost can be added to improve the structure, retain moisture, and provide additional nutrients as they break down. Raised beds can be filled with a mixture of sand, crushed rock or grit and compost or bark dust to create a low fertility soil for growing alpinists. We use a combination of equal parts river sand and ¼-10 crushed rock along with 10-30% compost for our raised beds with good results. Containers can be filled with cactus mix or other potting medium further amended with fine grit or pumice. We add 20% grit to our free draining potting medium when we grow alpinists.

Rock Garden Soil should be very free draining, consisting of a variety of particle sizes and breaking apart easily when pressed in your hand. A rock chip mulch is often used. This inorganic mulch allows water to drain quickly away from the crown of the plant, allowing the crown to dry quickly and reducing the risk of disease.

**Soil Fertility** – Many rock garden plants thrive in low fertility soils. Providing rock plants with infertile soil will help them grow better, stay healthier, and live longer. The addition of inorganic materials, such as grit, sand and pumice, decreases soil fertility. The use of *small* amounts of organic additives that break down over time, such as bark dust or compost, can offer most plants all they need. In some situations, such as in a container garden, additional fertilizer will eventually be needed. Fertilizer should be added at a rate of ¼ to ½ that needed by other perennials.

**Moisture Needs** – The water requirements of rock plants vary depending on factors such as how deeply their roots system extend and whether they are from a dry summer environment such as those found in Mediterranean regions. Well established, deeply rooted plants often require very little water. Plants grown in containers will always require regular watering. There are no hard and fast guidelines for watering intervals. You must take your cues from the plants you grow.

### **Role of Rocks in the Rock Garden**

Rocks play an important role in the growth and health of plants both in their natural habitats and in the garden. Rocks modify the environment in a number of ways allowing plants to flourish: Rocks shelter seeds, allowing them to lodge and germinate; runoff from rocks provides supplemental water and nutrients that help the plant become established; rocks shade the soil, keeping plants from drying out and keeping the roots cool; rocks limit crowding and allow plants to achieve their true form in a competition-free environment.



### **TYPES OF ROCK GARDENS. Containers, including Troughs-**

Containers are an ideal way to enjoy many rock garden plants. A major advantage is that the planting medium can be easily adapted for rock garden plants. In addition, plants that are sensitive to cold or wet can easily be moved to a more sheltered location during the winter months. Many rock garden enthusiasts grow smaller alpine species in troughs or other containers, creating miniature landscapes with plants and rocks.

**Raised Beds** - Raised beds are an easy place to create a rock garden in just about any available space, large or small. A variety of edging materials can be used including rocks, concrete block, brick, or wood. There are a number of advantages to raised beds including that the soil can be easily adapted to meet the needs of the plants; they are easier to tend than ground level gardens; and plants are easy to view and study.

*(Continued on next page.)*

## Rock Gardening and Rock Plants (Reprinted from Wild Ginger Farms 2015)

**Berms** – A berm is a type of raised garden with informal edges. This style of rock garden is often used on a relatively level site. Freely draining rock garden soil is mounded at least 12" above grade. Rocks of different sizes are then placed and partially buried along the berm at varying heights.

**Hillsides, sloped or terraced** - Sloped sites are naturally more freely draining than level sites. If additional drainage is required, the native soil can be amended. Large scale rock accents can create a sense of drama. Slopes can be terraced, if desired, to create relatively level planting areas.

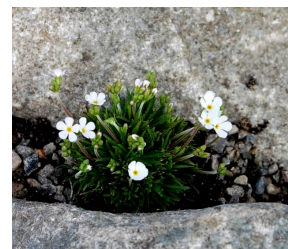
**Water Features** - Water features provide focal points in a rock garden. They enhance the naturalistic feel and the sound of running water adds another element of interest. Rock garden plants can be tucked along water's edge as well as along the slopes and niches created.

**Alpine Frames** - The alpine frame is a structure built to provide plants with extra protection from winter wet and cold. Alpine frames are essentially a type of coldframe with provisions for extra ventilation and shading. Plants can be

grown in pots set into the frame or plunged into sand. Plants can also be grown directly in the bed in a soil mixture or in sand.

### Crevice Gardens

Crevices are those intriguing gaps between rocks where plants can grow while seeming to defy all odds. They can be found in horizontal and vertical spaces such as the rock wall in the photo above or in the gaps between pavers on a pathway. In rock gardens, we often intentionally create small spaces between rocks in which to tuck our plant treasures. Alpines and other rock garden plants are ideally suited to grow in these spaces as they often do in nature.



The small *Androsace darvasica* which might be easily overrun by larger plants and is instead featured when planted in this narrow crevice. Photo courtesy of E. Drcar

[Wildgingerfarms.com](http://Wildgingerfarms.com)

## NARQS New Membership Rates

On May 7 the NARQS Board of Directors approved a new membership fee structure. (Amended May 30, 2015.)

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.

Join NARQS

[www.narqs.org](http://www.narqs.org)

## Allegheny Chapter's Top 10 Rock Garden Plants

Members who regularly maintain the Aviary garden picked their favorite 10 plants in the garden: 34 plants were selected by six members - Lyn Lang, Sandy Ciccone, Len Lehman, Amanda Haney, Lorraine Duffola, and myself.

Seven plants were favorites of three or more members. An additional seven plants were selected by two members, and 21 plants received one vote each. Following is a brief look at the most popular plants and a bit on their cultural requirements



*Cyclamen hederifolium* (5 votes). Often considered rather difficult in our area, it is doing surprisingly well in full sun in the small crevice section where it is getting a cool root run and good drainage.

*Bolax glebaria* 'Nana' (4 votes). Has really taken off, forming a hard gleaming mat. This is easy to grow if it gets a lot of sun and good drainage, something we have. It likes a pea gravel mulch.



*Delosperma* 'Red Mountain' (4 votes). A long blooming, lovely ice plant. Now we need to see how well it winters over. Many reportedly winter hardy delospermas do not handle our freeze/thaw cycles. However, *Delosperma* 'Gold Nugget' has wintered over for us.

*Daphne arbuscula* x *velotii* (3 votes). A "wow" plant in our garden, showing no sign of damage from our winter freeze/thaw cycles or the high summer heat and humidity. A couple other daphne varieties are doing okay, but this one has been the real show stopper.



*Gentiana acaulis* (3 votes) Wintered over well and put on a good display of blue flowers. It is growing in a protected area where a couple of large rocks provide shelter from extreme elements. It can be difficult to grow, but member Jim Adams grows this plant perfectly.

*Penstemon eatonii* 'Firecracker' (3 votes). A bit tall for our garden. However, it is easy to grow and is a long-lasting perennial that provides a color highlight to the garden.



*Pulsatilla vulgaris* (3 votes). Recommended for every garden. Relatively easy to grow, it will self-sow a bit. If you want to transplant the youngster, do it quickly as it has a tap root and is easy to kill. An established plant may wilt if it gets too dry but perks up quickly after a good rain.

Soil in our garden is perfect for the majority of rock garden plants. For the sunny exposures: 2 parts coarse sand, 1 part loam, 1 part leaf compost. For the shady exposures: 1 part coarse sand, 2 parts loam, 2 parts leaf compost.

Due to the lay of the garden the two largest beds receive a lot of sun with many of the choice plants receiving sunlight from what Norm Deno, Professor Emeritus of Chemistry at Penn State and author of *Seed Germination Theory and Practice*, called the *magic angle*, where only the upper portion of the plant is exposed to full sunshine.

None of the plants received protection from the elements - heat, humidity or cold - and we have lost a few desirable species. I suspect we will follow the accepted approach to writing off a species by planting where it is recommended, then where it is not recommended, and finally in some random third place.

I was very surprised that *Campanula carpatica* "Bavarian China" was not selected as a favorite by everyone! This marvelous campanula has had large white blooms for at least four to six weeks in two locations in our garden with very nice foliage.

~Al Deurbrouck



# Garden of Audrey and Clarence Rauch

Here is a look at their garden earlier this year, before peak blooms. You can see the whimsy of Audrey's creative personality in her extensive garden—from the fairy garden, to the cow and bountiful pots and yard decorations she crafted.

