

GREAT LAKES CHAPTER

North American Rock Garden Society

FALL NEWSLETTER, September 2007



CALENDAR OF CHAPTER MEETINGS

** meeting details below**

****SATURDAY, Sept. 15: Fall Garden Tour and Plant Sale**

MEETING: 11:00 AM – ca. 3:30 PM

PLACE: **Dick Punnett's garden, 41420 Harris, Belleville** (see map)
12:00 noon – **Bag lunch**

PLANT SALE: ca. 1:00 PM

****SATURDAY, Oct. 20: Fall Meeting**

MEETING: 10:30 AM – ca. 2:30 PM

PLACE: **Matthaei Botanical Gardens, Ann Arbor**

PROGRAM: 10:30 AM – brief business meeting

11:00 AM **Jānis Rukšāns**

“Bulb Belt of the Former USSR”

12:30 PM – catered lunch

1:30 PM **Jānis Rukšāns**

“Versatile Fritillarias”

Mark Your Calendars:

****Our annual Winter Meeting and Potluck will be on Saturday, February 9, 2008. Our speaker will be Maria Galletti, owner of Alpines Mont Echo and introducer of many new plants from Newfoundland and eastern North America; location will be the Matthaei Botanical Gardens auditorium.**

We will send out our usual timely postcard reminder

UPCOMING NATIONAL MEETINGS – see below and your Quarterly for details.

Western Winter Study Weekend hosted by Alpine Garden Club of B.C., Richmond, B.C. 28 Feb - 2 March 2008

Eastern Winter Study Weekend hosted by Berkshire Chapter, Farmington, Connecticut 28-30 March 2008

National Meeting hosted by Ottawa Valley Chapter Ottawa, Ontario CANADA 12-15 June 2008

Cooking with Rock Gardeners!

All of us that went to the spring meeting and plant sale were very impressed by the beautiful gardens and nursery run by our generous hosts, Robert & Esther Benedict. The weather was great, the plants were great, and the food, provided by Esther, was spectacular. In fact so many people asked about Esther's delicious taco soup, that we asked her if she would mind us printing her recipe in the newsletter, and here it is:

Esther Benedict's Taco Soup

1 lb. hamburger	1 lg. can tomato sauce
1 onion, chopped	2 cans corn (or 1 qt. frozen)
2 pkg. taco seasoning	2 cans kidney beans
1 can sliced black olives	
2 cans (1 qt.) stewed tomatoes	

Brown hamburger and onion together and drain. Add taco seasoning. Add, but do not drain, the tomatoes, tomato sauce, corn, kidney beans and olives. Heat. Serve bowls topped with Cheddar cheese and corn or nacho chips.

Esther writes: "This is the recipe, but I usually just dump together, adding leftover corn, salsa etc. from the fridge. I can't remember exactly what I might have dumped in!"

Our Fall Garden Tour and Plant Sale

For those of you who have not been to Dick Punnett's garden for a while, you will be amazed by the number of new plants and remarkable new garden beds that Dick has made in the last few years. Since one of Dick's great interest is woody plants, his garden will have a great deal to see in the fall, even when traditional rock gardens are looking rather threadbare. So bring your seedlings and propagated plants and prepare to enjoy a great garden tour and plant sale. Be sure to bring some choice items for the plant sale and auction, because these sales are how the club finances bringing world-renowned speakers to our meetings.

Fall Meeting, October 20

This year, we are lucky to be part of the NARGS speaker tour program, which will bring us **Jānis Rukšāns** from Latvia. Jānis runs a bulb nursery, with a phenomenal selection of *Allium*, *Corydalis*, bulbous *Iris*, and *Fritillaria*, among many other things. Some of us already order bulbs from him – I do and have never been disappointed. We will be having two programs, one in the morning and one right after lunch. The morning talk will be an overview of his explorations for rare bulbous plants in central Asia: "Bulb Belt of the Former USSR", and the second, after lunch, will be on one of his favourite genera: "Versatile Fritillarias"

Jānis has impeccable credentials as a nurseryman and modern day plant explorer, especially in the "bulb belt"

of Asia. He has worked as a gardener, a scientist, a journal editor, and, since 1991, nursery owner. Jānis has done quite a bit of plant breeding associated with his bulbs, including many internationally registered Daffodil and Tulip cultivars and works with many small bulbs, especially *Corydalis*, *Crocus*, *Allium*, bulbous *Iris*, and *Fritillaria*. He grows more than 4000 items in his nursery – about 600 of which rotate through his catalogue every year. His address, to request his catalogue is:

"Pulkas", Rozula,
LV-4150 Cesis distr.,
Latvia

He has organised and taken part in many expeditions searching for new bulbous plants in Central Asia, the Caucasus etc. and has found 3 *Corydalis* new to science, one of which was named in his honour as *Corydalis rukšansii*, as well as new *Allium*, *Iris*, and *Scilla*. He has introduced more than a hundred bulbous plants into cultivation for the first time.

This meeting is particularly timely, because Jānis has just (June 2007) written a book on his exploits in the world of cultivating and exploring for bulbs. The book is titled *Buried Treasures: Finding and Growing the World's Choicest Bulbs*. This is a wonderful book, and I can do no better to introduce it than to quote the Timber Press write-up for it: "Take a few chapters from a John le Carré spy thriller, add a hefty dose of exotic travelogue, blend with one of the best books on bulb growing ever written, and you've got *Buried Treasures*. For decades, Rukšāns has been scouring remote and dangerous regions of Europe and Asia to bring back the botanical treasures that he offers through his nursery, often contending with corrupt government agents, armed rebels, drunken drivers, and even (before the fall of the Soviet Union) the KGB. Packed with accounts of his extensive travels, *Buried Treasures* also offers an abundance of trustworthy information about the care and cultivation of every major and minor genus of bulb-forming plant."

If you have the book already, bring it. I am sure Jānis will be pleased to sign it. If not, we are arranging with the NARGS bookstore to have a number of copies available to sell at the meeting at a very reasonable price.

Even better, we will have a catered lunch for this meeting, so please make a point to come.

Featured Plant: *Allium beesianum* by Tony Reznicek

Onions are the workhorses of the garden, whether it is a perennial bed, rock garden or wildflower garden. They come in all sizes and most especially all colors: pink, purple, near red, yellow, almost orange, decent blue, and, perhaps best of all, clean white. There are onions that bloom in early spring, late spring, summer,

and one species, *Allium thunbergii* is one of the latest species to bloom in my yard, lasting until November. But perhaps the most valuable contribution of onions is bloom in mid to late summer when the rock garden is looking tired and green. The most familiar summer blooming onions are species like *A. flavum*, in a range of yellow and even orange colors, and *A. carinatum* subsp. *pulchellum* (*A. pulchellum*), in a rather flat pink-purple (though with a nice white form). These all have flower heads with flowers radiating out like fireworks, and are very attractive – though they are rather aggressive spreaders. Later, there is *A. senescens*, with its twisted, blue green leaves and, unfortunately, somewhat undistinguished lavender flowers in most forms.



Allium beesianum 'Album' in bloom Aug. 25, 2007

But my vote for the best late summer onion goes to *Allium beesianum*. This is an exquisite, small (10 inches or so) species that is very showy, with respectably blue flowers with a darker midvein on each sepal and petal. It is certainly one of the best *Allium* species. It is short enough for the rock garden, well behaved, never becoming weedy, and is relatively easy to grow. Blooming in late August to September here, it really fills a gap, and I definitely need to get more of it. Unfortunately, it is not uncommonly represented in the trade by imposters. In addition to the flowers, which are a good blue, the true species can be recognized by its compact head of fairly large, tubular or funnel-shaped flowers with the stamens shorter than the petals and sepals so that they do not protrude. This gives the head a distinctive look, unlike the “starry” aspect that some of the imposters have, with their spreading petals and

protruding stamens. See the picture (which, however, is of the rare white form, *A. beesianum* ‘Album’ with pure white flowers with a green midvein).

The species has an excellent pedigree, starting off with the name commemorating the famous nursery and seed firm, Bees Ltd., founded by the wealthy British supporter of plant exploration, Arthur K. Bulley (1861-1942). Through Bees, Bulley paid botanical explorers like George Forrest to search the mountains of China, as well as many other parts of the world, for hardy plants. *Allium beesianum* is one of these, described in 1914, and first introduced, in fact, by Forrest. It also comes from one of the richest sources of alpinists in the world, western China where it is a rather local species, occurring in meadows in southwest Sichuan and northwest Yunnan at ca. 3000-4000 m elevation.

This is a great plant that is worth the effort to obtain. It is available from some local nurseries, and the white form is occasionally offered as well. It is also relatively easy to grow from seed, but the same caveat applies to seed as to purchased plants – seed is sometimes misnamed.

Chapter Officers 2007

Please feel free to contact your officers if you have any questions or comments

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or pay in person at the next GLC meeting

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Send \$30.00 dues (check payable to NARGS)

to:

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We strongly encourage people to join both the Great Lakes Chapter and the National Organization.

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