

GREAT LAKES CHAPTER

North American Rock Garden Society (NARGS)
WINTER NEWSLETTER, JANUARY 2024



CALENDAR OF CHAPTER MEETINGS **meeting details below**

You can always check our website for information: <http://glcnargs.com/>

****SATURDAY, Jan. 27: Annual Winter Potluck**

PLACE: Matthaei Botanical Gardens Auditorium

Our traditional Winter Potluck! Please do come. It's a great way to make the winter shorter!

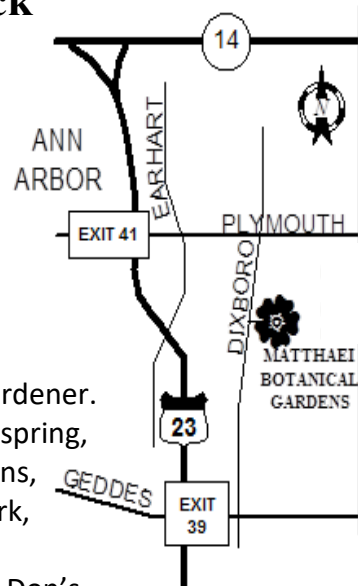
12:00 Noon: Potluck Lunch

1:00: Brief membership business meeting

1:30: Program:

Don LaFond – "Vapor Locked"

Don is one of our steadfast long-time members and an adventurous gardener. He will be presenting specifically on his adventures in Europe this past spring, ranging from sleet at the Edinburgh Botanical Garden, to visiting gardens, both public and private, in Scotland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, and finally ending at the International Rock Garden Meeting in the Czech Republic! It was a monumental "garden crawl" so be sure to see Don's Program so you can plan your own trip! And you have to come to find out the meaning of Don's title!



****SATURDAY, May 18: Spring meeting, Plant Sale, & Garden tour**

We've not been to Bev Walter's garden in quite a while, and she has made a great many improvements, so make sure to come to our spring meeting!

All the details will be in our spring newsletter!

NARGS 2024 Winter Study weekend – Thursday, March 7, 2024 to Sunday, March 10, 2024 San Francisco, California, put on by the Western (San Francisco Bay area) Chapter.

Check the Quarterly or the NARGS website: (<https://www.nargs.org/nargs-san-francisco-study-weekend>) for details.

**Letter from the President
Julie Caroff**

Hello and Happy New Year!

Although an unusually mild winter has brought a few flowers into bloom, January is a dull month for Michigan gardeners. The nursery catalogs filling our inboxes and mailboxes provide for dreamy, fireside moments, reminding us that spring will arrive and our gardens will be filled with blooms again provided that we send in plant orders. The best antidote to January for our Chapter is the Winter potluck, to be held Saturday January 27, at the Matthaei Botanical Garden Auditorium. Bring your favorite dish to pass and then settle in to hear Don LaFond recount his trip with Tony Reznicek and Lisa Quiggle to the botanical gardens of Western Europe this spring. You will be left feeling both wonder and, yes, just a bit of envy.

May 18 is the date of our Spring Sale, to be held in Bev and Bob Walters exquisite and varied garden. This date also marks the end of the officers and Board members three year terms. Sean Zera will be our Chapter Chair as I move on to ex officio status, leaving open the Vice-Chair position.

After years of outstanding service to our chapter in so many ways - as Chapter Chair, creator of our website, and Chapter Secretary, not to mention countless Chapter projects that he and Bonnie graciously took on - Patrick is stepping down as Chapter Secretary. Colleen Mitchell, our Treasurer extraordinaire, is also stepping down, not only having kept accurate books and records, but also having made possible our very popular bus trips. And, our Board is turning over, opening up many spots for new leadership. Thanks for the effort of past Chairs and Boards, our Chapter is in very good shape organizationally and financially. We have almost 140 members and a healthy balance sheet.

This year should see the completion of the Azary Rock Garden renovation and expansion. Please consider volunteering for either an officer or a Board position. Those of us who are stepping down from our formal positions will remain involved and supportive of the new officers and Board members. We need your ideas and energy to keep our Chapter thriving and growing.

If you are interested in either an Officer or a Board position please send me an email: julia.caroff@me.com. I hope to hear from many of you!

Back to those dreamy plant catalogs...

**What Is NARGS?
Peter George**

[Below is an essay from then President of NARGS, Peter George, eloquently expressing what the North American Rock Garden Society means to him as a gardener. It's nicely done and still worth reading]

Ever since I joined NARGS in 1996, I have observed that many members (and even more non-members) have an extremely narrow, and therefore fundamentally mistaken, concept of what the organization represents. A lot of people think of NARGS as an "alpine plant" society. Others believe that if something grows more than a foot tall, it's "not a NARGS plant." I have heard that chapters in the South and the Midwest are convinced that their members cannot grow "rock garden" plants, so they increasingly view themselves as garden clubs focused on hardy "perennials." Of course, this leads to fewer and fewer chapter members joining NARGS or, having joined in the past, keeping their memberships active.

So, what's the truth about NARGS and rock gardening?

Our Web site describes NARGS as an organization "for gardening enthusiasts interested in alpine, saxatile, and low-growing

perennials. It encourages the study and cultivation of wildflowers that grow well among rocks, whether such plants originate above tree line or at lower elevations.” I looked up “saxatile” and found that it means “growing on or living among rocks.” We all know what alpine means, and no one can misunderstand “low-growing.” Thus, we are an organization of people interested in perennial plants that grow well among rocks and that are relatively short. That sounds pretty inclusive to me, and it certainly doesn’t in any way imply that the plants must be alpine, or tiny, or even particularly rare. It certainly does include plants that are native to every region of the world. For example, I grow townsendias native to Kansas, campanulas native to Turkey, epimediums native to China, a *Calceolaria* native to South America, and alpine plants from the Alps, the Rockies, the Caucasus, and the Adirondacks among others. I have lime lovers, ericaceous plants, and plants that ask only for some sun, some water, and a bit of soil. I also grow all over my property tall plants, such as *Echinacea* and asters and bushy plants like *Buddleja*. So what am I? Well, my major interest is growing plants that like to live among rocks, which makes me a rock gardener as far as I’m concerned. Why are so many people convinced that drabas are *real* rock garden plants and that epimediums are not? Or that salvias and hellebores are forbidden because they are not included in some mythical list of approved “rock garden plants”? Far too many of us seem to think that, because the British named *their* organization the Alpine Garden Society, this limitation somehow applies to us. It does not. We are the North American Rock Garden Society, and our approach to what we love and what we grow is inclusive, not exclusive. We understand with absolute clarity that many gardeners cannot

grow *Astragalus utahensis*, but that almost all of us can grow *Gentiana acaulis*, or *Penstemon ovatus*, or *Sedum kamtschaticum*. And those, among literally thousands of rock garden plants, can be grown in all climates, at almost all altitudes, and on virtually every continent. Furthermore, for most of its history, NARGS has published a journal that has focused on plants that far too many of us may have considered inappropriate for rock gardens. Before sitting down to write this, I pulled out two old issues of the NARGS publication at random, just to see what they contained. The spring 1991 issue was dedicated to primulas, and the lead article is entitled “Primulas for the Southeast,” by Nancy Goodwin. Nancy is from Hillsborough, North Carolina, a part of the United States not commonly associated with rock gardening. The second issue I selected was the fall 1985 issue, which featured an article called “Native Plants of Vermont.” Anyone who is not familiar with the botanical wealth of New England, and who subscribes to the narrow view of what a “rock garden plant” is, will be surprised to learn that the article focused on what we call “woodland” plants, including *Claytonia caroliniana*, *Erythronium americanum*, *Trillium erectum*, *Asarum canadense*, and *Asplenium ruta-muraria*. Are these rock garden plants? Some would say they are not, but I vigorously disagree, and – more to the point – so does the NARGS journal. So please, let’s keep NARGS as inclusive as possible. To be sure, we are not simply a garden club (we are not interested in growing vegetables, annuals, roses, etc.); but neither are we an elite group of the wealthy and powerful who want to keep their organization small and exclusive. We are a large, geographically diverse body of people who simply love gardening with rocks. Let’s focus on that, and work a bit harder to find

commonality in purpose; by doing so, we will strengthen our organization and enhance its ability to provide valuable services to rock gardeners.

[I'll parenthetically note that with hosting the Annual Meeting in 2015, and the second round seed exchange for three years 2020 – 2022, our Chapter has done well contributing to the success of NARG – but you need to volunteer to be an officer to keep this up.]

**An update on the Azary Rock Garden
Tony Reznicek**

As you all know, from the messages about workdays, our chapter has been rebuilding the Azary Rock Garden at Matthaei. We volunteered to spearhead the rebuilding and pay for the materials (at this point, the cost of the tufa, and some plants). We had a number of workdays this summer and fall, organized by Holly Pilon, and we have kept the garden weeded and got a good start on planting, with some rock garden plants purchased from Benedict's Nursery and Wrightman Alpines, plus generous donations from members. So we're well on the way. We have some dwarf conifers integrated into the garden already, some also planted in the display area on top of the garden, where we'll showcase dwarf forms of conifers native to Michigan (with a few exceptions) and we have obtained a Norman Singer grant from NARGS to purchase rock for a "patio" area that will be used to display troughs. It should be fantastic – and we should finish it in 2024! So make sure you volunteer when called upon. We'll fill people in more at the Winter Potluck meeting.



winter jasmine – see next note.



Here is a picture from December. It looks impressive.



Newly planted Daphne settling in

Daphnes and other newly planted things are off to a good start. And the concept of differing microclimates seems to be working – see the moss below.



Moss in a moist, shady microclimate

We have even gotten a start on planting the conifers.



Dwarf white pine – the beginnings of our dwarf conifer display area

To mulch and cover or not...

Tony Reznicek

That is a tumultuous question for me as I write this in Late December. Usually in late fall/early winter, I cover or mulch freshly planted things, and some more delicate evergreen items to get them through the first winter or two and sometimes to keep evergreen foliage looking fresh for the spring. But this year, it has been sooo mild – and I’m leaving for most of January. There is a strong "El Niño" weather pattern holding forth, which should mean an unusually mild winter. We’ve already seen that! It’s been too wet and mild to mulch and cover without risk of fungus. Some of you will have seen the worrisome New York Times article where there is some (modest) evidence that warming seems to be accelerating. However, don’t start buying palms and figs quite yet. Plants are sensitive to extremes, much more than averages – so a very mild winter, on average can be undone by one brief cold snap of -20!

However, our changing climate starts to offer new dilemmas. What to do – cover or not? These are the adventures of gardening in Michigan. I like to tell people (joking, of course) that we’re limited in what we can

grow because most plants that can survive our hot humid summers die in winter and most plants that can survive our winters die in our summer heat – leaving us with weeds. (I only tell people this when they are visiting and I’ve not had a chance to weed the garden). But in any event, my decision was to mulch and cover – some things at least – and hope for a drier winter.

I do have some final thoughts here. While palms are going to be beyond us for a while, some winter blooming plants might be easier in the future. At least when they bloom, it’s still nice enough to go outside and look at them!

Here are four suggestions for January bloom if these mild temperatures become more typical: *Galanthus elwesii* subsp. *monostichus*, *Hamamelis* ‘Orange Peel,’ late fall blooming clones of *Helleborus niger*, and the winter jasmine, *Jasminum nudiflorum*. The is a picture of the jasmine taken today on the previous page.

These four are all in bloom as I write this, but many years, they are barely worth the garden space, because the flowers are messed up by bad weather (especially the jasmine which is a sprawling, undisciplined shrub). But maybe in the future?

Remember:

Please send address changes to:

**Colleen Mitchell,
3995 Monks Road,
Pinckney, MI 48169, USA**

Do include your up-to-date email address.

Thank You.

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION:

Great Lakes Chapter:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

email: _____

Send \$20.00 per year (check payable to Chapter) to:
Colleen Mitchell
Treasurer, Great Lakes Chapter, NARGS
3995 Monks Road
Pinckney, MI 48169, USA

OR pay in person at the next GLC meeting
or pay by Zelle

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

National Organization:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

email: _____

Send \$40.00 dues (check payable to NARGS) to:
Bobby Ward
Executive Secretary
North American Rock Garden Society
P.O. Box 18604, Raleigh, NC 27619

OR pay through the NARGS website:
<https://www.nargs.org/join>

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