

GREAT LAKES CHAPTER

North American Rock Garden Society

SPRING NEWSLETTER, March 2001

CALENDAR OF CHAPTER MEETINGS

** meeting details below**

**SATURDAY, March 10, 2001

PLACE: Concordia College, Krieger Hall, Room 109 (see map)
TIME: 1:00 - 2:30 pm – lecture
Speaker: Stephanie Ferguson – A Cirque Garden

**SATURDAY, April 14, 2001

PLACE: Ann Arbor Public Library, multi-purpose room (downstairs) (see map)
TIME: 11:00 am - 2:30 pm
11:00 am – business meeting
12:00 – **Bag lunch, (we will provide some beverages)**
1:00 – Lecture
Speaker: Sharon Illingworth A Trip Through The Garden

COMING EVENTS -- MARK THE DATES ON YOUR CALENDAR

** Saturday, May 5-6, 2001: – Spring meeting and plant sale

Ernie O'Byrne – title to be announced

For this two day meeting, we will be hosting members of the Wisconsin – Illinois chapter of NARGS as our guests. We'll have the plant sale and lecture on Saturday May 5th, with a catered dinner. There will be garden tours both Saturday and Sunday. This will be a gala event, so be sure not to miss it.

We will have a special mailing about this event later in the spring, but be sure to keep the dates open on your calendar, and get plants ready for the sale.

UPCOMING NATIONAL MEETINGS:

2001 Annual Meeting, Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. April 25-28. Wildflower Gems of the Allegheny Region. See your NARGS Quarterly or the NARGS website (www.nargs.org) for details.

Additional Late Summer Bulbs

By James K. Langhammer

In the September 2000 issue of the GLC newsletter, Tony Reznicek mentioned several fall-blooming small bulbs suitable for alpine garden use. There are several more that I'd like to mention.

I haven't grown *Colchicum alpinum* which Tony recommended so I am uncertain how its size compares to *Colchicum atropurpureum* and *C. agrippinum*. For me these latter two species *Colchicum* are of a stature comparable to the species *Crocus*. The foliage is only 3 to 4 inches tall and the flowers (about one inch in diameter) are so small as to be "lost" among taller plants. *C. atropurpureum* is the darkest flower color I have ever seen in colchicum – it approaches the blackest of tulips. As the bud emerges from the ground it is nearly white but over several days it darkens steadily. *C. agrippinum* is another choice "little bulb". Its foliage is a little wider than *C. atropurpureum* but is less than four inches tall. The flowers are

heavily checkered (tessellated is the term commonly used) with reddish veins isolating patches of paler purple; additionally the anther capsules are dark brown or purple. Both have been hardy for me in metropolitan Detroit without any winter protection of any kind.

Another group of bulbs I like add the welcome dimension of bright yellow to the Fall bulb bed. I have grown both *Sternbergia lutea* and *S. sicula* for many years. They perform reliably but seem never to reproduce by seed and only very slowly by offsets. The foliage is grass-like and less than six inches tall. The yellow flowers are brightly noticeable in a bed of shorter plants.

Although I have not developed a fondness for the Fall-blooming *Crocus*, they have to be considered for rock garden usage because of their delicate, diminutive nature. I find the VIVIDLY RED enlarged stigmas of *Crocus sativus* remarkable and would recommend everyone try growing at least this one representative species for its beauty – if not for the chance to harvest your own saffron.

Plants Don't Read The Books

By Jacques Thompson

It has been a little over ten years since I received my first Daphnes. They were rooted cuttings from several *Daphne cneorum*. As with most of the plants in our young garden, these new additions were gifts from a fellow gardener. Being Daphnes that means that they came from Dick Punnett; generous gardener, talented propagator, and patient teacher.

The first time that I experienced a *Daphne* in full bloom, it was a *D. cneorum*, and I was instantly won over. In the garden this *Daphne*'s heavenly fragrance is often encountered before the plant is seen. Not that it takes long to spot the source of this heady perfume. Few shrubs can match the floral display of a happily growing *Daphne cneorum*. The very mass of this *Daphne*'s flowers, (usually a rich pink), completely smother the foliage. I would later learn that not all Daphnes are such heavy

bloomers, and there are even Daphnes that are unscented, but that's another story.

The number of Daphnes that were readily available a decade ago was quite limited, and those labeled as hardy to zone 5 made the list a short one indeed. By 1994, I had already acquired every kind of Daphne listed to zone 5 in the Siskiyou Rare Plant Nursery's catalog, along with several others, most all of which had come by way of Dick Punnett (sorry Baldassare). So when I sent out my spring '94' order to Siskiyou Rare Plant Nursery, it included a request for *Daphne jasminea*. I thought I was pushing things a bit as it was listed as hardy to zones 6-9. I had thought that if I could find a protected enough spot for this *Daphne* perhaps it would survive our nasty winters, here in southeastern Michigan.

By comparing notes with more experienced members of our local NARGS chapter (Great Lakes), we agree that most of our losses with marginally hardy plants seem to stem from the wetness of our winters, rather than cold. The catalog suggested growing *Daphne jasminea* in a gritty pocket or trough. As I was

enlarging the limestone bed, I prepared a specific spot in which to try out this plant. I had on hand a large piece of limestone that had split in two. So as I placed the two halves into the new part of the garden, I left a two inch crack between them, running east to west. The stone on the south side of this crack was positioned so that it was approximately 12 inches taller than its northern half. It was my hope that this would keep the winter sun off this evergreen *Daphne*, and it does. The crack between these two halves is roughly 20 inches in length and about 18 inches deep. The limestone bed itself is set on an eight inch bed of sharp sand over our clay soil.

When I planted the *Daphne jasmineea*, I first barerooted it by taking it out of the pot and plunged it into a pail of water, gently shaking most of the mix off the roots, and then using a pencil I teased the roots apart so as to hang down their full length. I do this to just about every plant (no matter its source), that's going into any of the rockeries or troughs. Holding the plant so that its crown was flush to top surface of the lower stone and roots hanging down into the crack between them, I filled the crack with 1/4 inch crushed limestone into which a small amount of compost was mixed, up to the crown of the plant.

This limestone bed receives full sun most of the day. It is quite typical of our summers here to experience a week or so of temperatures in the 90's and even a few 100°F days. The temperature within this bed gets mercilessly hot, so extra shading is needed to establish new plants. On top of the taller stone to the south of the crack I placed another good sized chunk of limestone, which in effect made a sheer cliff of about twenty four inches tall, and at the base of this (on the north side) sat the *Daphne jasmineea*. Visually the *Daphne* grew very little that first summer. Due to the openness of the mix in which this tiny *Daphne* was planted, it was watered on a weekly basis at first, incorporating a diluted fertilizer. By August that was reduced to every other week unless it rained, also no fertilization was added after July.

It turned out the winter of '94-'95' was the coldest that anyone around here could remember. As I recall there was a two week period when the thermometer never climbed up to 0° F, and the coldest reading was -29° F! Luckily there was a good snow cover and I'm sure that made all the difference. In the spring I removed the extra stone shielding the *Daphne jasmineea* and it has been growing that way ever since.

I do continue to give all the rockeries and troughs a diluted fertilizing in the spring and early summer, along with supplemental water when I think its needed. By now I'm sure this *Daphne*'s roots have grown down through the sand and have reached the clay beneath.

Many gardeners are surprised to see *Daphne jasmineea* growing so well in the garden. Comments usually range from; "you must protect it" that's not supposed to be hardy here" or "isn't that plant from Greece"! I used to confess that it was no talent of mine, the plant was doing all the work, but I recently heard something I like much better. Last fall, John Bieber and Darrell Trout were out to give a talk to our chapter, which was enjoyed by all in attendance. Later while touring the garden and commenting on this *D. jasmineea*'s hardiness, Darrell replied "that plant doesn't know its not supposed to be hardy here, plants don't read the books".

In closing I would urge giving this plant a try, its really a first rate *Daphne*. I should also mention that this is the Delphi form of *D. jasmineea* as listed in the Siskiyou catalog. It is completely prostrate and is getting to be gnarled as it ages, which I find most attractive. While it does not smother itself with flowers as does *D. cneorum*, it does put on a generous flush of white, sweetly scented, and very pointed four petaled flowers. There is also a smattering of flowers several times through the summer as well. Try it!

[This article was also sent to the *Daphne* Society Newsletter – thanks Jacques, for sharing it with us]

Meeting notes for the fall meetings, September & November, 2000

By Tony Reznicek

Our **September 23** meeting was one of those days that keeps your officers on their toes. We had visits to John & Lea Ann Hargrove's excellent specialty Nursery, H&H Botanicals, and also Jim and Elena Briggs' garden, where we had a super plant sale. Our thanks to Jim and Elena and John & Lea Ann. However, as it turned out, our speakers were not going to arrive until next weekend. I was volunteered to give a brief presentation; a short talk on successes and failures in growing several favorite groups of plants: hardy gesneriads, shortias, and fritillarias – in southern Michigan.

September 29th then, we had our speakers at the Ann Arbor Public Library, John Bieber and Darrell Trout, presenting on Daphnes. John and Darrell were founding members of the Daphne Society, and presented a detailed program focusing on diversity in hardy Daphnes, as well as history, propagation, culture, and sources. Many of us grow Daphnes, but I think everyone saw some plants that were new to them and would make great additions to the rock garden.

Quite a number of cultivars of *both Daphne cneorum* and *D. xburkwoodii* were shown and discussed, most of which are available locally and all of which are hardy and fairly easy. Not one of them is a bad plant. The form of *D. caucasica* that many of us grow because of its habit of flowering virtually anytime the plant is not solidly frozen was thought to be of hybrid origin, not the true species. New to me was the procumbent form of *D. genkwa*. They also sang the praises of the "Hackenberry form" of *D. genkwa*, as a superior growth form.

Then there were also spectacular hybrids which I am eager to try to find. *Daphne xrollsдорфii* 'Wilhelm Schacht' and *D. xnapolitana* were particularly nice, as was *D. xrossettii*.

If you have problems with sudden death of Daphnes, they suggested keeping them on the dry side. The use of the beneficial fungus marketed as Root Shield® (1/4 ounce to 2 gal) was also noted to be helpful.

For our **November 11** meeting, held at the Matthaei Botanical Gardens, we had Dan Hinkley, from Heronswood Nursery speak on exceptional woodland species, including

perennials and woody plants. The meeting had spectacular attendance, with participation by other societies. As we have come to expect, Dan presented us with a sumptuous feast of new and gorgeous plants, as well as how to use these plants in garden compositions.

Dan gave us a brief history of the garden at Heronswood, and the extensive bed and soil preparation that preceded planting. And then came the plants, the layering of the smaller trees and shrubs under their large conifers. We saw the magnificent variegated *Cornus controversa*, and the equally delightful native *C. alternifolia* in a variegated form, these two alternate leaved dogwoods being an Asian and North American species pair. A similar species pair, and also terrifically ornamental were the Asian *Acer tegmentosum* and the native *A. pensylvanicum*. A large number of exciting smaller shrubs were part of the palette. While *Stachyurus praecox*, in the forms presently available, is not flower bud hardy for most of us, the early *Hamamelis* cultivars are, and are even more spectacular for early bloom. Little used, but elegant shrubs are some of the Asian spicebushes, *Lindera praecox* and *L. obtusiloba* and the very rare *Alangium platanifolium*. There was also *Disanthus cercidifolius*, a redbud look-alike (but without pea flowers) known for developing, under the right conditions, fabulous fall color. A special focus was on the exotic *Hydrangea* species and cultivars from Asia, some very fragrant, others with spectacular form to the flower heads. Wonderful plants galore were in the shrub category: *Weigela middendorffiana* (hard to keep for me), the rare and beautiful *Sinocalycanthus sinensis*, and even the new hybrid between *Sinocalycanthus* and our eastern North American spice shrub, *Calycanthus*, with pink flowers!

But herbaceous plants also were shown extensively. *Deinantha caerulea* is spectacular and on my list to try again, as was the huge *Epimedium wushuense*, and I can't forget the Asian *Podophyllum* relatives, or *Lilium nepalense* or the *Paris* or the *Disporum*! We finally had breathing room with *Helleborus* – breathtaking but more familiar, and *Anemone* and *Anemonella*, only to forge on through *Cimicifuga* into *Meconopsis*, which few of us indeed in the southern Great Lakes region can grow. But the ending was hard to beat – a survey of *Arisaema* of increasing beauty, finally ending in the spectacular *A. taiwanense*. Thank you again Dan.

OUR NEXT TWO PROGRAMS

(see enclosed map sheet)

Stephanie Ferguson, an artist and alpine gardener from Calgary, Alberta, will give a talk and slide presentation on **Saturday, March 10** at 1:00 at Concordia College's Krieger Hall (room 109) in Ann Arbor.

Stephanie and her husband, David, designed and built an urban cirque in Calgary incorporating various types of stone wall construction and crevice beds. The garden design combines formal geometry with stone outcrops inspired by nature. Her talk, entitled "A Cirque Garden," will document the process and methods used in the garden's construction. Selected examples of crevice-dwelling plants, used to soften an otherwise extreme and rocky environment, will be shown.

Sharon Illingworth gardens just south of Thunder Bay Ontario (zone 3 - 4 but with reliable snow cover) and will be speaking **Saturday April 14:** slide presentation at 1:00 at the Ann Arbor District Library, on the corner of Fifth Ave. and William St., in the multi-purpose room downstairs -- preceded by 11:00 business meeting and noon bag lunch.

Her rock gardens are on natural rock outcrops and are spectacular. She gave a very impressive presentation to the Winter Study Weekend in Ontario three years ago. She doesn't specialize in anything in particular – which means she grows everything spectacularly well. If you want to see all you can do in a really northern garden, this talk is a must.

Obituary Notice: Aug. 9th, this past summer, Ruth Hoch, long time member of our chapter, passed away in Frankenmuth.

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Please feel free to contact your officers if you have any questions, comments, or suggestions. No criticism allowed, however.

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February 10 meeting
Lee Raden on Hummock Gardening

Tony Reznicek

Lee Raden is a past president of the North American Rock garden Society and a skilled plantsman who has made excellent use of

hummocks – raised areas of soil – for growing alpines, and other plants that catch his interest. The diversity of his interests was well shown by this program, as no group of worth plants was neglected. Wonderful *Iris* made us eager for spring, including the hybrids *Iris sindpers* and 'Katherine Hodgkin,' as well as the larger *Iris magnifica* and *I. bucharica*. *Fritillaria*

were not neglected, with *Fritillaria crassifolia*, *F. graeca*, *F. sibthorpiana*, and, most beautiful, *F. stenantha*. Bulbs were, in fact, a special focus of the talk, which was appropriate considering the approach of spring. Dwarf *Narcissus* species were prominently featured, with *N. cantabricus petunioides* being an especially spectacular little plant. Nor were small woodland plants neglected. *Primula*

kisoana in various forms were favorites, as were *Arum korolkovii*, and *Erythronium japonicum*. Finally, there were, scattered through the talk, plants which were not rock garden plants nor especially unusual, but were simply too brilliant or beautiful not to have, including *Crocsmia* 'Lucifer,' and *Verbena peruviana*.

Internet gardening:

Here are lists of some internet sites that are useful for Rock Gardeners. The Missouri Botanical Garden database site is definitely worthy of listing, as is the link to Alpine-L. – **Guerin Wilkinson**, Chelsea, Michigan zone 5b.

Nurseries:

www.arrowheadalpines.com (Arrowhead Alpines)

<http://www.handhbotanicals.com> (H&H Botanicals)

www.geefarms.com (Gee Farms, Stockbridge, MI)

www.saguaroplants.com (Saguaro Rare Plant Nursery basic information)

www.héronswood.com (Héronswood Nursery)

www.wave.net/upg/srpn/ (Siskiyou Rare Plant Nursery)

www.rmrp.com (Rocky Mountain Rare Plants (seeds))

www.senecahill.com (Seneca Hill Perennials)

www.plantdelights.com (Plant Delights Nursery)

www.collectorsnursery.com (Collectors Nursery)

<http://web.ukonline.co.uk/alpines/seedlist.htm> (seedlist of Dr Alexandra Berkutenko)

www.rareplants.co.uk (Paul Christian Rare Plants -- bulbs)

www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~pottin/ (Potterton and Martin alpine and dwarf bulb nursery)

Resources:

www.nargs.org (North American Rock Garden Society)

www.srgc.org.uk (Scottish Rock Garden Club)

www.alpinegardensociety.org (Alpine Garden Society, UK)

<http://web.ukonline.co.uk/alpines/alpine-l.htm> (Alpine-L discussion forum)

<http://mobot.mobot.org/W3T/Search/vast.html> This site provides access to the Missouri Botanical Garden's VAST (VAScular Tropicos) nomenclatural database and associated authority files.

**Eastern Winter Study Weekend 2001
A Celebration of Pride: American Alpines
from Pole to Pole**

by Susan A. Reznicek

Since our chapter is going to be doing a Winter Study Weekend in less than two years from now, several of the officers attended this weekend, and watched the proceeding with a careful eye. This latest adventure was held at the Ryetown Hilton, in Rye New York, a sprawling maze that made getting to the programs from the rooms an adventure in itself.

As always, besides the programs, there were plant sales, with 4 nurseries, as well as the local chapter, selling choice plants plus a vendor that sold troughs. Competitive classes for plants and plantings made for additional interesting displays of plants in bloom.

Lectures were varied, and did an excellent job of covering the theme. James H. Fox began the program on Friday evening with a talk about The Far North - Alaska/Canada. It is easy to talk about "alpines" in this area, as so much of the terrain is above the trees – even if at sea level. The great Arctic flats, of course, have few species, but still many that would make great garden plants. *Dodecatheon frigidum* and *Gentiana algida* were highlights. Farther south, things get richer. *Cypripedium guttatum* is a great Alaskan specialty, as is *Rhododendron camtchaticum*.

Following this were three "mini presentations," each with three speakers for a few minutes each focused on specific topics: Czech & Italian Odysseys, China and Down Under, and a North American Potpourri. The China and down under program showed especially interesting plants from the New Zealand Antarctic Islands. Saturday, Steve Doonan, talking about the west coast alpines gave us a rapid fire feast, showing 160 slides. He talked a lot on each slide but at break-neck speed, so we had a great cross section of western alpines, from widespread plants like *Cornus canadensis* to local specialties such as *Petrophytum cinerascens*, *Douglasia nivalis* and *Kalmiopsis leacheana*. Sean Hogan walked on the dry side talking about the Great Basin, and the fabulous wealth of *Eriogonum*, and other specialties such as *Townsendia* species, *Erigeron* of various sorts, and *Lewisia*. Panayoti Kelaidis tackled the Rocky Mountains - Canada to Mexico. No shortage of gardenworthy plants of

all sizes here, from the cold desert agaves and yuccas to the great diversity of *Erigeron* and *Penstemon*. Some more difficult and exotic items were the cushion *Astragalus*, the tiny saxifrages, the localized native *Primula* species, and of course, *Aquilegia jonesii*. Joann Knapp ventured into territory more familiar to easterners, and highlighted many of our finest eastern woodland plants – Trilliums, Clintonias, Sarracenias, native orchids, and also gave us an introduction to eastern North American alpines, with views of Mt. Washington and Mt. Mansfield. Todd Boland worked farther north in the east – Baffin Island to the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Here there are many alpines in the mountains – some widely distributed, but some local endemics. A few highlights were *Diapensia lapponica* – so common in eastern alpine areas, and so hard to grow. Also, the endemic dwarf *Juniperus communis* var. *saxatilis* and *Tanacetum huronense* var. *terraenovae*. David Hale reversed the northern trend, and talked about South American alpines. Here is a whole world that is just a dream to most of us. Spectacular alpine mallows like *Nototriche*, and, of course, the red gentians – in a variety of species of *Gentianella*.

Art Kruckeberg gave an after dinner lecture that was especially interesting. He focused on a geological overview- what grows where- and why. The focus was on special habitats – especially the botanically rich serpentine habitats. Knowing about the species habitats not only explains a lot about plant communities, but is a great help to gardeners. Of course, we also saw many interesting plants, ranging from *Shortia soldanelloides* in Japan to some of the spectacular serpentine endemics in the west, such as *Douglasia nivalis* var. *dentata*, *Allium falcifolium*, and *Fritillaria purdyi*.

Sunday, the program ended with a very comprehensive program by Sean Hogan on *Lewisia*s & their Kin- An American Tradition. There was complete coverage of the entire genus, with beautiful photos, and a lot of very helpful habitat information. Very fittingly, Bob Bartolomei ended the program with a talk about growing American alpines in the northeast. The focus was on getting plants established from seeds, and I think everyone came home with some useful information.

The winter study weekends offer a very enjoyable, if sometimes intense, break from winter, and more of us should try to go

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Send \$3.00 per year (check payable to Chapter) to:
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Send \$25.00 dues (checks payable to Society) to:
Jacques Mommens
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or pay in person at the next meeting
of the Great Lakes Chapter

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

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FIRST CLASS