

GREAT LAKES CHAPTER

North American Rock Garden Society (NARGS)
WINTER NEWSLETTER, JANUARY 2020



CALENDAR OF CHAPTER MEETINGS **meeting details below**

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

****SATURDAY, January 18, 2020: Our Annual Winter Potluck!**

MEETING: 11:30 AM – ca. 3:00 PM

PLACE: Matthaei Botanical Gardens Auditorium

–see the map at right

Potluck Lunch: 12:00 NOON

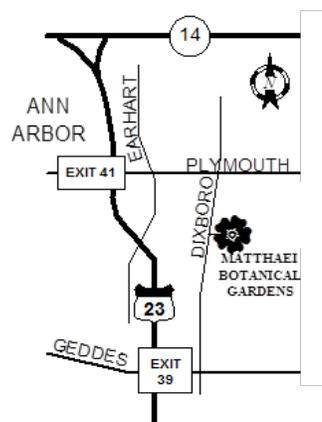
Beverages provided. Please bring a dish to pass!

Brief business Meeting: 1:00 PM

Program 1:30 PM:

Mike Palmer – *History of the Marie Azary Rock garden with updates on the current renovation*

Mike has been a long time member, and is the Greenhouse Research Coordinator and Collections Horticulturist at the Matthaei Botanical Gardens. He has been overseeing the renovation of the Azary Rock garden, and will fill us in on all the happenings and, no doubt, how we can help further.



****SATURDAY, March 7: Winter Meeting: Focus on Steppe Plants For Rock Gardens!**

MEETING: 10:00 AM – ca. 1:30 PM

PLACE: Matthaei Botanical Gardens Auditorium
– see the map above right

PROGRAMS: Mike Bone (We'll send out a reminder to confirm these times)
10:00 AM – *Steppe Plants for Rock Gardens*

11:30 AM – *Middle Asian Steppe and its Mountainous Regions*

CATERED LUNCH: 12:15 PM (RSVP to Holly before February 21, to set up the catering)

Mike Bone. Mike is the Curator of Steppe Collections at the Denver Botanical Gardens, one of the finest gardens for Botanical Diversity in North America. Mike has worked at the Gardens since 2002 where the majority of his tenure is in propagation and production. Mike has a passion for cultivating plants from and appropriate for the steppes of North America, and has traveled widely studying the flora of North America and Central Asia. He is involved in many aspects of their Plant Select program.

We have more great programs coming up--details will be in the Spring Newsletter, but:

April 18th we will have: Jenny Wainwright-Klein from Germany presenting:

‘The Schachen – a Botanic Garden high up in the Bavarian Alps’

‘Alpine Plants of the Drakensberg Mountains of Lesotho and adjacent South Africa’

We are still working up plans for the May meeting – Spring Plant Sale, and expect to have Paul Spriggs, from Victoria, BC next November.

This year's NARGS annual meeting will be in Ithaca, New York, on June 18 – 20, 2020, on the campus of Cornell University – Mark your Calendars, and check the NARGS Quarterly and website.

Sat. Sept. 7, 2019 NARGS GLC Minutes

Libby Greanya

We met at the home of Andy Arbuckle in Dexter. The backyard was “Disney World”... seriously, some places are magical. There was an incredible covered deck with soft touches/curtains as well as a table laden with snack food. The dahlias were at peak, a cactus and rock garden, tropical plants in beautiful hand painted pots and more. (Andy is also an artist- “the winters are long”, he says and he creates interesting/intricate animal heads out of polymer as well as his unique painted pots.) Andy also said that the non-hardy plants brought in for the winter can eventually get overwhelming, crowding out the humans. We profusely thank him and his friend and helper Carla Bayha. The plant sale was set up in a small green space in the “back forty” of the property.

President Holly Pilon called the meeting to order at 12:50 PM.

There was much discussion about the future of the Marie Azury Rock Garden at Matthaei Botanical Gardens. This is a big project – basically starting over – requiring excavation, putting down hardware cloth to keep out the voles, back filling, building a tufa wall, etc. There is adequate money in the treasury to assist Matthaei with this project. There will be a change in leadership at Matthaei -Bob Grese is retiring next spring so this may be a good time. As Jacques Thompson pointed out, gardening with a University (“gardening by committee”) can be difficult and slow and timing may be important.

Motion passed for the Great Lakes Chapter (GLC) to be involved in the Marie Azury Rock Garden. In addition, it was proposed that there be a plaque indicating GLC NARGS sponsorship.

Libby Greanya has been a secretary for many years and has requested to step down from this position. President Pilon requested a volunteer to step forward to replace her. At this time, no one volunteered, but I am sure there will eventually

be fierce competition for the job, once people find out how easy it is!

The bylaws were previously distributed via email to the group. There was a motion to accept the bylaws by Susan Haddock, second by Sue Miller. The bylaws are dynamic and already a motion to change the bylaws so that the membership list is maintained by the Treasurer, not the Secretary, which has been the way the group has functioned. (Since the Treasurer collects the dues, it makes sense that the Treasurer would maintain the membership list.) There was a motion and second to approve and this passed. (Your Secretary was daydreaming and missed the names of the people – see this job IS easy!)

Future events:

Sat. January 18, 2020, Winter potluck at Matthaei.

Sat. March 7, 2020 - Mike Bone - Curator of the Steppe Gardens at the Denver Botanical Gardens, topic TBD

Sat. April 18, 2020 (**tentative**) - Jennie Wainwright-Klein - curator of the Schachen Gardens in Germany – topic TBD.

Early May -Diane Clement AGS (Alpine Garden Society) Executive Seed Exchange director, lives in England. Topics will probably be hepaticas and growing hardy cyclamens.

December 12, 2020 – Ann Spiegel from the New York chapter talking about rock gardens.

We need hosts for the four speakers from the NARGS speakers tour, which entails housing and transportation, but not necessarily “day tours.”

Discussion on the date of the 2020 spring meeting and plant sale to push it into June due to a possible conflict with the May speaker and Memorial Day Weekend. June is a busy month also. Date of spring plant sale undecided.

The Great Lakes Chapter has again agreed to participate in seed sorting for the Seed Exchange in early December 2019, again probably at the Ann Arbor Public Library. In 2018, this poten-

tially tedious job was actually fun and there was good participation, making sorting 58 types of *Penstemon* tolerable and relatively quick. Meeting adjourned at 1:20 pm.

By the end of the meeting and the start of the plant sale, the crowd had swelled to 45 people! A small but lively plant auction ensued and another box of donated garden books from Joan Bolt preceded the always-interesting plant sale. The Fall GLC-NARGS sale made \$900.00 between the auction and plant sales.

Our next scheduled meeting is the Winter Potluck Sat. Jan. 18, 2020 at Matthaei.

Notes from the President

Holly Pilon

Marie Azary Rock Garden Renovation

At our September open garden meeting (thanks again Andy for opening up your beautiful yard for us!), the chapter approved using our funds and providing labor for a long discussed renovation. It finally started in October when twelve members showed up on a beautiful afternoon to remove all the plants currently in the ground to let the renovation start. We ended up with four more workdays, with chapter members contributing over 80 hours to dig out the shape of the new garden and start moving tufa, including some very large pieces, into the new positions. One workday was cancelled because of too much snow, dropped by the Veteran's day storm and cold weather that followed, but we worked until the beginning of December. The outline of the inner curve is done, and come spring we will finish outlining and positioning the remaining stones. Then the fun of planting will begin. Thanks to all the members who came out. If you could not make it this fall, there will be more chances come spring.

Seed Packaging for the NARGS Sale

On December 14, chapter members again helped package seed for the annual NARGS sale. Tony Reznicek was able to get us a room out at the Herbarium on Varsity Drive, which meant

easy access and free parking for everyone. Sixteen members showed up this year and we had it all finished by 5pm. Thanks to all who came out to perform a necessary job, and get ten more packets of seeds for their efforts.

Winter Blooms in Michigan

Tony Reznicek

Sometimes filling gaps in the newsletter to make the pages come out is fun, especially in off seasons, when not so much is going on. It offers an opportunity to reflect – in this case, I was reflecting on an annoying thing about especially British gardening books. Of course, their benign climate allows jumbling together things with radically different ecologies like alpinas, palms, woodland plants, etc., which is always strange to us. However, in January, most disheartening are gardening books with titles like “Winter Flowering Shrubs.” Nothing brings home our difficult climate more than the fact that in places like the British Isles they can plant for winter flowers!

Now, to be honest, if you look at the plants listed in books like this, many are hardy in our area – but they bloom in April, not February! Even so, we still do really have quite a number of winter flowering plants. In most years, spring witch hazels, and, of course, snowdrops, winter aconite, and a few other things, start to bloom before March 21– officially yet winter. However, we do not think of things starting to bloom on March 20 as winter bloomers – they represent the first stirrings of spring for us. Our winter blank period is the last two weeks of December, January, of course, and at least the first three weeks of February. Often, in Ann Arbor, snowdrops in the warmest sites are out by the last few days of February.

So can we ever expect anything to bloom in January? Well, yes, this January anyway. As I finished writing this Jan. 5, I went out and took pictures of three things in bloom (just before it started snowing!) None has big shows, but they were in bloom – or just about. One is a nice snowdrop that I bought by accident (I was sent

the wrong bulb) that I have tentatively identified as *Galanthus elwesii* var. *monostichus*. This could be a show, if I had hundreds, as it routinely blooms in December and may continue, weather permitting, well into January. Unlike the fall blooming snowdrops, which are occasionally available, this seems immune to cold, and is a consistent bloomer. It is quite nice. I wish I had more.



Galanthus elwesii var. *monostichus* Jan 5, 2020

Another item is a *Helleborus niger* clone that I got from Ellen Hornig's Seneca Hill Perennial years ago that she noted was a consistent Thanksgiving time bloomer. This must be somewhat site specific. For me, in many years, it lives up to the old European common name of "Christmas rose," blooming in December. Nevertheless, it is the only fall blooming hellebore I know of. This year, however, perhaps because of our cold, snowy November, my plant is starting to bloom now.



Helleborus niger flower opening Jan. 5, 2020

The last plant I have in bloom now is interesting, as it is a fall witch hazel cultivar called *Hamamelis virginiana* 'Harvest Moon.' This cultivar is moderately showy, compared to the wild type, as unlike most plants of our native witch hazel, it flowers after the leaves fall, mostly in November, and sometimes into December. This year, it just kept going, and the last flowers are still fresh this weekend! I went to look at the early spring witch hazels, and they are starting to stir just a bit already – see the buds on *Hamamelis vernalis* and *Hamamelis intermedia* 'Orange Peel.'



Hamamelis virginiana 'Harvest Moon' Jan. 5

We will doubtless never have big shows of flower in January – no matter how much global



Hamamelis vernalis (right) and *H. xintermedia* 'Orange Peel' showing buds cracking open on Jan. 5, 2020

warming affects us – but we can sometimes get something showing.

Now, an interesting sidelight of all this is that many plants that bloom very early in spring – many bulbs, witch hazels, *Cyclamen*, even willows and *Narcissus* – have species that also bloom in fall. There are spring and fall *Crocus*, spring and fall (or late summer) squills, spring and fall *Colchicum*, and so forth. Many evolutionary biologists think that this is because these plants were originally winter blooming, but as the climates where they occurred became too cold for winter blooming to be practical, rather than migrating to a warmer climate (the obvious solution!), or dying out, they shifted their bloom time, some choosing spring, some choosing fall.

Please Volunteer:

Libby Greanya has been a secretary for many years and has requested to step down from this position, so we need someone to take over. Libby says it is easy....

Also, we need someone to take over the drinks supplies – Holly has two bins of stuff plus the urn at her house. Storage and bringing the supplies to meetings are all that's involved, but we need somebody that attends meetings regularly – maybe with a designated “alternate.”

Thanks!

**Please send address changes to our Treasurer,
and please include your up-to-date email**

Thank You.

Bonnie Ion
1456 Kensington Drive
Ann Arbor, MI 48104
bion@umich.edu

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION:

Great Lakes Chapter:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

email/FAX: _____

Send \$10.00 per year (check payable to Chapter) to:
Bonnie Ion
Treasurer, Great Lakes Chapter, NARGS
1456 Kensington Drive
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104

OR pay in person at the next GLC meeting

National Organization:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

email/FAX: _____

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>

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

GREAT LAKES CHAPTER FIRST CLASS
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