

GREAT LAKES CHAPTER

North American Rock Garden Society

SPRING NEWSLETTER, APRIL 2003

CALENDAR OF CHAPTER MEETINGS

** meeting details below**

****SATURDAY, April 12: Spring Meeting**

MEETING: 10:00 am - ca. noon

PLACE: Livingston County Conservation Club, 6060 East M-36,
Hamburg [see map insert]

PROGRAM: 10:00 - Business meeting
10:30 - **David Hale**

'A South American Odyssey'

****SATURDAY, April 26: Spring Meeting and Garden Tour**

MEETING: 11:00 am - ca. 4:00 pm

PLACE: Senior Center, Livonia and John & Laura Serowicz's
[see map insert]

PROGRAM: 11:00 - **Harvey Wrightman**

'Growing Dryland Plants'

noon - Bag lunch

1:30 - Tour John & Laura's Garden

****SATURDAY, May 18: Garden Tour & Plant Sale**

MEETING: 11 am - ca. 4:00 pm

PLACE: Leila Bradfields's Fertile Crescent Nursery
8110 West ML Avenue, Kalamazoo [see map insert]


PROGRAM: 11:00 - 1:00 garden tour & Bag Lunch
1:30 - Plant sale

****SATURDAY, August 9: Picnic at Arrowhead Alpines with the
Ontario Chapter**

**This will be a fun event -- reserve the spot on your Calendar. We'll send out
details with a timely postcard in July.**

UPCOMING NATIONAL MEETINGS — see the ad below and your Quarterly for details.

There are few better places to see alpiners in the wild than in Colorado -- a state with both fabulous gardeners and wonderful mountains -- accessible too, as you can drive right up to many alpine areas. Plus, there is the Denver Botanical Garden not too far away ! Do try to make it to this meeting.

RUSH TO THE ROCKIES!	
SPACE / S L I M I T E D	 <p style="text-align: center;">NARGS ANNUAL MEETING July 10-12, 2003 Breckenridge, Colorado</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Jane Flannery PO Box 792 Parker, CO 80134-9998</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(303) 841-5860 janesgarden@att.net</p> <p style="text-align: center;">www.rmrp.com/r2tr</p>
R E G I S T E R E A R L Y	<p>Our weather is GREAT!</p> <p>Lots of SNOW promises a wonderful wildflower display!</p> <p>Early Registration is greatly appreciated and SAVES you money!</p> <p>Conference Hotel: BEAVER RUN RESORT 1-800-525-2253</p>

Starting from seed

By
Don Lafond

Is 425 seed packets to many? This translates to (in my greenhouse) about 450 seed pots. To most sane people this would be crazy. OK, it's crazy to me too -- well maybe. It's very easy to rationalize this because you know that pretty soon the USDA is going to irradiate all our seeds coming from overseas and somebody in Europe is putting computer chips in cyclamens and other wildflowers to keep track of them. Don't forget that Alan Bradshaw (Alplains) is going out of business too. My God, it seems to me that this could be the last year rock gardeners are going to be able to grow plants legally. Just think, a black market for seeds. Gardeners and the seed police in mortal combat. Seed police checking gardens for horrible weeds, and gardeners hiding plants! Hey does someone have some seeds they don't want?

I love growing plants from seed. A seed pot with seedlings erupting from the mix is better than seeing a pile of money. OK a bit extreme but you know me. I enjoy asking gardeners questions about their gardens and how they acquire plants. I was surprised to find in my very unscientific survey that some people who garden don't sow seed! How could this be, I thought everyone knew the advantages of growing plants from seed, you know, it's cheaper, you have more plants of one species to try in different situations, and of course the knowledge of what that plant looks like from small green seedling to brown and crunchy. In my limited experience I have tried a number of different ways of sowing seeds, and had many different outcomes. I am going to tell a little about my experiences, hopefully to get more people to grow plants from seed, and maybe someone who grows plants from seed will learn something that helps them.

The first thing is utilize the seed exchanges, they are free or almost. Now I know some of

you folks have been growing plants longer than I have been alive. Those folks often say you don't get the right seeds, and yes that happens to me too sometimes, so what. Maybe you could get a cool plant by mistake. I first started planting seeds in 4"x 4" pots and putting them in a cold frame. I sowed them on my kitchen table, usually in January when they came in the mail. My wife hated the mess. Instead of explaining the virtues of what I was doing I said well, if I had a greenhouse this wouldn't happen. I had wonderful germination in the cold frames. I kept the pots 2-4 years and had some germination the following years also. I think it's a good thing to keep seed pots around a while, even though I found the germination rate does go down. I then graduated to a cold greenhouse. This got the seed sowing out of the house and the seeds off the ground. It became much easier to watch the seed pots. The problem I had then was too many seedlings. I was killing them from neglect.

This is when I learned about a new way of sowing seeds. That is instead of planting seeds in pots put them into the ground directly, in a seed box. This is nothing more than a box about 12" deep and of a width you can reach into. The box is outside on the ground in a sunny spot about 2/3 full of your seed mix. Put a top on it, a frame of 2x2 or 1x3 with window screen stapled on it. I had to make mine strong enough for a 2 year old to crawl on, so, I put 1/4" hardware cloth and locks on it also. This keeps leaves, weed seeds and kids from falling into the seed mix and the seedlings. Also put a bottom on it, to keep out moles and weeds. I used heavy landscape cloth but you could use plywood. The mix I used was 1/2 peat 1/2 turface or chick grit. Chick grit is crushed granite and is used to feed to poultry to grind up food in their gizzard and is available from any feed mill. Turface is a baked clay product that is used to condition baseball fields. It is available in South Lyon at Turfgrass, a business on Pontiac Trail. I then learned about gritting the seed pots. This is simply putting on a 1/4" layer of chick grit or Turface directly on the seed mix. This stops moss from growing on the seed pots. Large seeds were sown on the seed mix then grit over top. The small seeds were sown directly on the grit.

The first season was pretty good, germination wise. The real advantage is you don't have to watch the seedlings as closely.

Being outside and not in pots the mix didn't dry out as fast. This was great, so the next year I enlarged the frame. Remember seeds come in the mail usually in winter so cover your frames with something to keep out the snow and ice. I found I was having a problem though, my germination dropped dramatically the longer I used the frames. What was happening? I am still not sure but here is what I think was inhibiting my germination. One is, the mix must be changed. This I learned later from the people that taught me about doing seeds outside. It seems that something happens to the mix that deters germination, virus and fungus maybe? The second is the weather, yes freezing and thawing is beneficial for most seeds and rain is good but could it be to extreme? Hard rains could wash seeds too deep. And some seeds germinate very early, could the seedlings be frozen off? I think so. My seed frames were 6' wide and 20' long but I was not getting many plants. Some people were saying that I should sow seeds in a cold frame or cold greenhouse. Others said it was the gritting of the seed pots, hmmm. I want plants but what was I doing wrong? I really didn't want to spend the money to change out all that seed mix every year. So I went back to the way I used to do it, which is in my cold frames. Only this time I split my seeds. Half of which I gritted and half I didn't. I know this is very unscientific and my seed mix changed, I used a 50-50 mix of peat and perlite. But the seeds that were not gritted did noticeably better.

Time for a new greenhouse. Now how to tell my wife. This year under my new cedar and glass greenhouse/alpine house/seed frame, I sowed way too many seed packets in 4"x 4" pots. The mix was still 50/50 peat and perlite. Most seeds were sown in January and February and only the largest seeds got covered. I water just as much as needed to keep the pots lightly damp not soaked, but not letting them get dry as a bone either. I water very gently with a water can with a fine rose. This washes the seed down into the mix. I think sometimes too vigorous watering will wash the seeds to the edge of the pot, this forces them too deep to germinate. I have witnessed seeds germinating on the surface of the soil so covering seeds is not always necessary. In mid-February *Allium*, *Centaurea*, *Acantholinum*, *Lepidum*, and *Sisyrinchium* germinated. I am convinced that if they were in a frame outside the seedlings

would suffer. In March I have *Lewisia*, *Erigeron*, *Phlox*, *Lupinus*, *Penstemon*, *Eriogonum*, and *Lomatium* up. In this new green house I do have a heater. I have it set just to keep the house from freezing. I am not sure how much this has to do with my germination rates; I suspect it has some effect on it. But don't let this stop you from sowing seeds; I have proven to myself that just a cold frame does a good job as long as your spouse doesn't mind dirt on the table! On some nights though it still gets down to 26-28 degrees. Which is good, I think. This is a gentler way to stratify the seeds. In May, I will put all the seed pots outside in a covered frame. This makes room for next year's onslaught of seeds pots. I have noticed that pots outside grow moss more quickly so I will put grit on them in the fall. I think that not putting grit on the pots the first year in the greenhouse does make a difference but I have no scientific evidence for it. I hope this puts the bug in some of you to start sowing some seeds. But now to my next problem, too many seedlings. Does anybody have some pots I could have?

Fall Program —2002
by
Laura Serowicz

The October 19, 2002 meeting featured Phyllis Gustafson from Rogue House Seed in Oregon. Her talk was on Gardens of the Pacific Northwest and Crevice Gardens. Phyllis started her tour of PNW gardens with the Bellevue Botanical Garden (www.bellevuebotanical.org) in Bellevue, Washington, which has a wonderful Alpine Rock Garden designed by Michael Moshier. We then moved on to the gardens at Heronswood Nursery (www.héronswood.com) in Kingston, Washington. Among the great ideas shown was a broken jug tipped on its side and planted with *Lysimachia japonica* 'Aureola'; the idea being, if something breaks, find a new way to use it. A good plant combination for a shady spot is the clump-forming *Ajuga genevensis* and the Japanese Forest Grass, *Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola'. Another idea for different use of plants at Heronswood is the hedge of *Carpinus betulus fastigiata*, which takes well to hard pruning and has good fall color. Phyllis then showed how Sean Hogan and Parker Sanderson

in Portland, Oregon have transformed their street. Once they ran out of room on their own lot, they started gardening the parking strip, then went on to garden their neighbors, so that now they garden the whole block—except for the neighbor across the street from them (there's always one in a crowd). Next, we moved on to the Eugene, Oregon garden of Maxine Rowan, who has a quirky collection of birdhouses, including a driftwood house set on top of a dead Douglas Fir, *Pseudotsuga menziesii*, which was left instead of cutting it to the ground. Because they get 40-60" of winter rain Maxine had a drainage problem which she fixed by re-grading her lawn to drain into a stream of stones, which is used as a walkway the rest of the year. Phyllis next showed pictures of members of the Emerald Chapter of NARGS

(www.peak.org/~parsont/emerald/Halda.htm)

and Josef Halda constructing a crevice garden at Hendrick's Park

(www.ci.eugene.or.us/PW/PARKS/Hendricks)

in Eugene. Crushed gravel was poured under the big rocks as they were set in place, then more gravel and sand was tamped into the gaps with a digging bar, so that the rocks were steady enough to walk on when done. A lot of dwarf conifers were originally planted in the crevices, but many have since been taken out as they grew too large. The wonderful garden of Marietta and Ernie O'Byrne of Northwest Garden Nursery in Eugene was the next stop on the tour of PNW gardens. They have a slab garden done by Zdenek Zvolanek, with plantings that include a variety of *Sempervivum* to hold in the edges. The O'Byrnes have done some strong color combinations, including: a dark red *Helleborus* with orange and yellow *Primula*; deep purple leaves of the smoke bush, *Cotinus* with pink *Primula*; *Lysimachia ciliata*, with its dark foliage and yellow flowers paired with the red flowers of *Crocasmia* 'Lucifer'; and *Sedum telephium* ssp. *maximum* 'Atropurpureum' with the peachy-pink flowers of *Diascia* 'Elliott's Variety'. They also have a white border to provide some relief from all the hot colors. We then moved on to Jeanne Mehl's garden in Glendale, Oregon. Among the special plants Jeanne grows is the rhododendron relative, *Kalmiopsis fragrans* (syn. *K. leachiana*) either LePinec or Umpqua form, which has foliage that smells like oranges. This rare Oregon native is easy to grow. Another fragrant Oregon native that grows well there is

Trillium albidum, which has the scent of a rose. Our next visit is with Boyd Kline, co-founder of Siskiyou Rare Plant Nursery (SRPN) who at age 82 years, is in the process of rebuilding his garden. Among the plants he is known for are *Trillium* hybrids of *T. ovatum* X *rivale* and *T. rivale* X *ovatum*, as well as a pure white *Trillium rivale*. Phyllis also showed slides of the late Lawrence Crocker, co-founder of SRPN. Among the plants Crocker grew are a couple of California natives, *Erythronium helenae*, which has white flowers with a yellow throat, and the trillium relative, *Scoliopus bigelovii*, which is a Redwoods native with purple-spotted leaves and purple-striped flowers. We then viewed the evolution of the crevice garden at SRPN that Josef Halda built for Baldassare Mineo, the current owner of SRPN. The look of the garden has changed as the plants have filled in or grown too big and had to be trimmed back or pulled out. One group of plants that has done well in the crevice garden is the *Sempervivum* which are planted in cracks in the rock and cascade down. The final garden we visited was Phyllis' own at Rogue House in Central Point, Oregon. The crevice garden that Josef Halda built for her was the first one he did in granite in the US. When planning the garden, one of the things she says to remember is that alpinists like to have air moving through them so do not have flat tiers that block the air flow. She uses silver stone as mulch which matches the granite, so it looks more natural. A lot of the plants she grows like the dry summers of Oregon, such as the yellow flowered *Verbascum dumulosum*, or the blue-gray spiny cushion of *Acantholimon hohenakeri* with pink flowers or *Onosma tauricum* with drooping yellow flowers, all from Turkey. A couple of the native buckwheat also do well for her in a dry-land area, *Eriogonum ovalifolium* and *E. kennedyi*, which is a tiny plant that does well in a trough. It was amazing to see how quickly the various plants filled out in her garden. Matching plants from parts of the world with similar type of conditions or choosing those that are native to her area, helps Phyllis to ensure that they will grow well in her garden. If you wish to receive a seed list from Rogue House Seed, write to Phyllis at 250 Maple Street, Central Point, OR 97502, or email at dgusgus@charter.net. She specializes in wild-collected seed of North American natives.

Featured plant: *Iris winogradowii*
By
Tony Reznicek

Among early spring plants, reticulata irises are special. They are very early - blooming with the crocuses - and have vivid colors; the blues (and purples and even near white) of *Iris reticulata* itself, and the bright yellow of *Iris danfordiae*. And then there are the large, blue and speckled (and with broad falls) flowers of the less commonly grown *Iris histrioides*. What is so special about these *Iris*? Perhaps my favorite thing is that they don't close in nasty weather. They are as bright on a foggy, dank day as in brilliant sunshine. And they are cheap and relatively easy to grow in well drained, sunny soil. (though *Iris danfordiae* can be hard to keep flowering). The leaves die down in late spring and the bulbs seem happy with a bit of a "baking" in the summer.

If you grow some of the newer hybrids, such as 'Katharine Hodgkin' and 'Frank Elder,' you will have had an indirect taste of one of the less familiar species. For these hybrids are crosses of *Iris histrioides* with perhaps the most striking (and least pronounceable) of all the reticulata Irises - *Iris winogradowii*. After I planted a few bulbs of 'Katharine Hodgkin' and became intrigued by their unusual color (how do you described a cross between blue and yellow??), my curiosity was piqued. Though some books suggest that these hybrids are crosses of *Iris histrioides* and *Iris danfordiae*, most authorities agree that the yellow parent actually must be *Iris winogradowii*. So I decided to try to grow this out of curiosity and botanical interest. Easier said than done! It is really quite an uncommon plant both in nature (restricted to a small area of alpine meadow in the Transcaucasus of Georgia) and in the garden. But finally, I tracked down some sources of this in Europe (but it's not cheap!), and I had my plant. Reading up on it suggested that this was an unusual reticulata iris. It was not supposed to like full, hot sun, and also allegedly needed to stay somewhat moist all summer long, even when dormant. Hmm. Well, I put it in a moister part of the rock garden -- with a little light shade - and it seemed to like it. After a couple years, my small bulb bloomed - and I think there are a couple offsets too. The wait and effort were worth it. The flowers were

large, with broad falls, and a rich soft, yellow with limited speckling - not the bright, hard yellow of *Iris danfordiae*. The flower has much more vertical substance to it than those of *Iris danfordiae*, as the standards are quite large and upright (those of *Iris danfordiae* are just little bristles). It's really quite spectacular -- perhaps the most beautiful of all the reticulata irises. So far, it has flowered several times, but not set seed -- so where do you get yours?

Here are some sources:

Janis Rukšans,
The Bulb Nursery
Rozula LV-4150
Cezu LATVIA

Christies Alpine Nursery
Downfield, Westmuir,
Kirriemuir, Angus.
DD8 5LP UK
<http://www.christiealpines.co.uk>

Paul Christian Rare Plants
P.O. Box 468, Wrexham
LL13 9XR UK
<http://rareplants.co.uk>

Last year, Odyssey Bulbs offered it.
ODYSSEY BULBS
8984 Meadow Lane
Berrien Springs, Michigan 49103
<http://www.odysseybulbs.com>

Middle Ground *by* **Bev Walters**

With winter winding down my thoughts are turning to the green of spring. These musings are being fueled by a flood of seed and plant catalogues coming to my house. As I pore over the pages, I search for plants that are botanically interesting, hardy in Michigan, and unlikely to become invasive. Since Ann Arbor's Natural Areas Preservation Division, where I work, supports using native plants in landscaping, at times I've felt twinges of guilt for pursuing my passion to grow unusual plant species. Upon further thought, I realized the vast majority of plants in the nursery trade behave decently and will only grow well if pampered in a garden setting. Because a few can jump the fence and

threaten the plant diversity in our natural areas is not an adequate reason to ban *all* alien species from cultivation. Nevertheless, I was dismayed recently when I came across a seed exchange that was offering dame's rocket (*Hesperis matronalis*) seed that had been wild collected in Michigan! This species is a garden escapee that is highly competitive with native woodland wildflowers, so it was disturbing to find it being trafficked among gardeners -- with total disregard to its invasive qualities. In contrast, I've encountered native plant enthusiasts who seem to think it's immoral to cultivate a non-native plant. There needs to be a balance between the two extremes in landscaping attitudes because neither camp is going away soon. Gardeners and plant nursery folks should learn more about invasive species and not introduce or propagate them. And native plant enthusiasts need to be aware that the vast majority of alien species are not invasive and can safely be grown in a garden setting -- and do not need to be banned by draconian government rules.

Of course, for most people it's best and easiest to just use native plant species in landscaping, since they tend to thrive with no fuss and won't adversely impact the environment. But for those committed gardeners who get a thrill from growing more exotic plants despite their higher demands, here are a few tips that should be used to avoid introducing a new invasive species:

- Avoid alien plants whose fruits are avidly eaten and dispersed by birds.
- If your garden is near a natural area, check to see if any non-natives from your garden are escaping, especially if they are prolific seeders. If so, get rid of that species from both the natural area and your garden.
- Learn about and avoid species that are known to be invasive -- the Internet has lots of information.
- Avoid plants that are promoted as "easy to grow in any soil" and instead select plants that are more challenging to keep in cultivation.
- Keep plants that spread vegetatively away from natural areas and don't throw any clippings "over the fence."

[This article was adapted from one first published in the Spring 2003 Natural Areas Preservation Newsletter]

Our Eastern Winter Study Weekend -- just past

**By
Susan Reznicek**

The EWSW2003 Planning Committee would like to congratulate and thank our Great Lakes Chapter for the success you helped to make happen with our 'Lost in the Woods' meeting this January. We had good attendance, with 208 people attending. Comments were exceptionally favorable with some people even commenting that it was the best Winter Study Weekend that they had been to in a long time. Our speakers (and their audience) all seemed to have enjoyed themselves and we hope most of our vendors went home with a satisfactory sum in their pockets. The Sheraton Hotel provided us with good facilities and food that was enjoyed by almost everyone -- though unfortunately for one of the attendees the Hotel did not serve cappuccino. We were especially pleased with the response of gardeners in Michigan generally, and we also got some new chapter members from the weekend. The few changes we might have made in retrospect we will pass on to future meeting planners so that the Winter Study Weekends can keep improving.

We especially want to thank all our volunteers, without whom we couldn't have made it such a wonderful 'Happening.'

Our Chapter came out with a nice net gain and we will discuss to what use we will put this use this at our Spring meetings. If you want to get your two cents worth of ideas in, please plan to attend the meetings 12 & 26 April and Plant Sale 18 May.

Our Speakers for the Spring Meetings

April 12: David Hale

David is from Portland, Oregon and has traveled extensively throughout South America for many years -- including Peru, Ecuador, Chile, Argentina, and Bolivia. These countries have a fantastic alpine flora in the high Andes mountains, a flora that is an eye-opener to even experienced gardeners. For many of us, this program will be one of our best chances to see some of these fabulous areas and plants. And some of the plants, from the southern parts of the continent, are even hardy!

Chapter Officers 2001-2002

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

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Please send address changes to our Treasurer, Meroë Kaericher

April 26: Harvey Wrightman

Harvey owns Wrightman Alpines, in Kerwood, Ontario, and is a great proponent of crevice gardening and using tufa in the garden to grow difficult plants, including western American and Asian dryland plants. Those of us that have been to his display gardens know that he really has been very successful in growing these plants in character. Some of these are among the most beautiful plants for the rock garden, so come and hear how to grow them better and in character.

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION:

Great Lakes Chapter:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

email/FAX: _____

Send \$10.00 per year (check payable to Chapter)

to:

Meroë Kaericher
Treasurer, Great Lakes Chapter, NARGS
8171 Brookville Road
Plymouth, MI 48170-5005

or pay in person at the next GLC meeting

National Organization:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

email/FAX: _____

Send \$25.00 dues (check payable to NARGS)

to:

Jacques Mommens
Executive Secretary
North American Rock Garden Society
P.O. Box 67
Millwood, NY 10546

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

GREAT LAKES CHAPTER
North American Rock Garden Society
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FIRST CLASS

PLANT SALE PREPARATIONS for May 18: If you are a newcomer to our group, you will be surprised at the diversity, number of rarities, and size of our two yearly plant sales. They are one of the best things about being a chapter member, and offer the opportunity to get wonderful and unusual plants at very reasonable prices. Also, the sale is very important to the chapter, as it raises the funds for our excellent speaker program. But because of the size of the sale, we do need to have people try to follow certain rules to make the sale run smoothly and quickly.

At home:

- 1). Please pot or repot plants at least ten days before the sale. Otherwise, the plants may look ragged.
- 2). Please select appropriate plants for the sale. Interesting and unusual alpiners, woodland plants and small woody plants are ideal. No large, common woody plants, annuals, common perennials, and tropicals, please.
- 3). Before you bring the plants, label each pot, with the name of the plant [scientific name, if known, and cultivar or variety, if known]. On the back of the label put your name and the year. This allows people both at the sale or later to ask you about the plant. It also helps us when setting up the sale to talk to you if, for example, you have missed putting a price on the plant.
- 4). We ask people to price their own plants. You can price your plants at home, if you like, but please use a separate price label. The price labels are pulled out of the pots by the cashier to expedite adding up the total.

At the sale:

- 1) If you have not priced your plants at home, please use the chapter price labels provided to price each pot. Prices range from \$2 to \$6.50, but mostly are within the \$2 to \$4 range. Set your plants as close together as possible on the selling tables. You should try to get your plants to the sale a half-hour or so before the sale starts to get them set up and priced, if necessary.
- 2) Ask Rosalie Meiland to look at your plants. For every 10 plants you bring, you are given one Red Label. Each Red Label entitles you to one "First Pick." This means that those who did not bring plants must stand back and wait for those with Red Labels to make their First Picks. The time for First Pickers to make their choices is limited to 3-5 minutes depending upon the number of First Pick labels given out. Keep in mind that you still have to pay for the plants.
- 3) Tell Rosalie if you have brought plants that you think might be of "Auction Quality." These are normally either exceptionally rare and desirable plants not available commercially, plants available only at a very high cost, or large, well-grown specimens of highly desirable plants. She will inform our almighty auctioneers who pass judgement as to which and how many plants to auction. For each of your plants chosen for auction, you will get an additional Red Label.