

GREAT LAKES CHAPTER

North American Rock Garden Society (NARGS)

SPRING NEWSLETTER, September 2017



CALENDAR OF CHAPTER MEETINGS **meeting details below**

****SATURDAY, SEPT. 23: FALL MEETING & PLANT SALE**

(Note this meeting is the 23rd not our usual date of the third Saturday in September)

MEETING: 11:00 AM – ca. 3:00 PM
PLACE: Edward and Colleen Weiss
1005 Fairmount, Ann Arbor, MI 48105– see map insert
11:00-ca. 1:00 tour the garden
BAG LUNCH: While touring the garden
PLANT SALE: 1:30 PM -- See the Plant Sale insert for details

****SUNDAY, SEPT. 24: Trough Workshop**

MEETING: 1:00 PM
PLACE: Matthaei Botanical Gardens, 1800 N Dixboro Rd.
Ann Arbor, MI 48105 – 734-647-7600
See their website (<http://www.lsa.umich.edu/mbg/plan/hours.asp>) for a map and directions

Don LaFond will show people how he makes his wonderful troughs, and also include some tips on planting them.

Upcoming Chapter meetings – we'll keep you informed with our usual early winter postcard.

UPCOMING NATIONAL MEETINGS: 2017 NARGS Annual General Meeting Rock Gardening in the Southeastern U.S. – Past, Present, and Future November 17-19, 2017

The 2017 Annual General Meeting (AGM) of NARGS will be held in Durham, North Carolina, and is being hosted by the Piedmont Chapter. The AGM will explore the past, present, and future of rock gardening in the southeastern and mid-Atlantic regions.

The AGM will include a welcome reception and presentation on Friday evening, November 17; a full day of presentations on Saturday, November 18; and tours to three gardens in the Triangle area on Sunday, November 19. Additional activities include an optional pre-conference, two-day guided tour of botanically interesting natural areas in North Carolina's Coastal Plain on November 15 and 16, and visits to several gardens in the Triangle area on November 17. Details on the meeting as well as an on-line registration form are available on the meeting website (www.piedmontnargs.org).

**From the President
Jacques Thompson**

So here we are once more, breathing a collective sigh of relief at having made it through another summer in Michigan. Looking back, this one wasn't as harsh as others I can recall. There were certainly rough spots, such as a 33-day stretch without any rain from mid-July thru mid-August. That had me being grateful just to have a cloudy day! On the plus side I did get to leave the lawnmower in the garage and I didn't have to roll-up the hoses, as I would be needing them again the following day, and the day after, and the day after that, and so on. However the constant need for watering (mostly all woody plants added during the past year), brought an end to the progress I had been making on my once-ambitious list of projects.

Still, I have managed to reduce the time it will take to mow the grass as more turf has given way to more gravel pathways. Two more modest rockeries have been added, and a particularly troublesome patch of sloping lawn has been transformed into two terraced beds of deep, rich sandy loam beneath high filtered sun and shade, ah the possibilities!

Now the rains have returned and the weeds are making up for lost time. Newly gained treasures are in need of planting, and the better part of 40 tons of crushed stone continue sit on my overly-patience neighbor's property, silently mocking my still aching back. Needless to say I am hoping for a long autumnal gardening season.

With fall in mind I want to take a moment to remind everyone to keep an eye out for ripening seed in your gardens. Collect what you can, and what you can spare, clean it and send it in to the NARGS Seed Exchange. Please check out the NARGS Seed Ex on line for instructions and benefits for seed donations.

Another end-of-summer event that too few of our membership know about, and one that I believe many more of you would enjoy is called Bob's Garden Fair. Bob Iames is a dedicated, enthusiastic, full-blown plant nut who is seemingly tireless. He lives in Englewood Ohio, just NW of Dayton. For the past 10 years he has

hosted his own 1-Day gardening extravaganza on the Saturday of Labor Day Weekend. Fifteen vendors from 5 states come to set-up shop in Bob's own plant-collectors dream-filled Garden. So why are you telling us about this NOW I hear you wail? Well the simple answer is because this year a Tour Bus from Indianapolis was there. That my friends is exactly what I think we should do next year. I believe that if you were to ask any of the following; Julie Caroff, Don LaFond, Colleen Mitchell, Esther or Robert Benedict, or Carol or Andy Duvall, they would give a very satisfactory review of the worthwhileness of attending this event. I also believe that if we do this once it will become a much-enjoyed annual event for our Chapter. I look forward to seeing you all at our upcoming events.

**NARGS GLC Minutes May 6, 2017
Libby Greanya**

We made the trek to Joan Bolts garden in Grand Rapids for our Spring Plant Sale. Her backyard rock garden was incredible. I also walked through her lovely "woodland" garden at the back of the property.

There was a large turn-out - 50 people. About 12:30 pm, the meeting was called to order by President Jacques Thompson, who presented some updates.

Harry Elkins, a long-time member, recently passed away. His niece generously invited people to come dig plants from his garden in Grosse Pointe. Her phone number is 248-320-8711.

The Fall Plant Sale in September will be at the home of Ed Weiss in Ann Arbor. The Spring Plant Sale will be at the home of Pat Byler in Jackson. Her next door neighbors, and gardener partners, are Mike and Libby Greanya. The date has tentatively been set for Sat. May 5, 2018, which is the week before Mother's Day.

Andy Duvall's Nursery will hold an open House July 22, 2017. He will also be "privately" open on Mother's Day weekend. Please contact Andy for exact times.

The Auction was lively. This secretary was taking notes but got distracted a couple of times and

missed recording a couple of prices, but the auction total was at least \$630.00. The total for the Spring Plant Sale, including the Plant Auction, was \$1716.

Afterwards, many of the members made the additional one hour drive west to Blue Horizon Nursery in Grand Junction (near South Haven). Many left with conifers, Japanese maples, magnolias, etc. And the bathroom at Blue Horizon lived up to its hype – just lovely.

Their Bark Is Nicer Than Their Bite **Tony Reznicek**

Rock garden in this area are often framed by woody plants, and rock gardeners are often very interested in woody plants generally, especially smaller ones. I'm no exception, but I'm especially a sucker for bark – particularly peeling, flaking, or striped bark. Even non-gardeners love the peeling white back of a paper birch! Bark is also visible the entire year – in fact, for woody plants, attractive bark is essential for a species to be a true “four season” ornamental. So here are some notes on plants whose bark I especially like.

It's always enjoyable to see the flaky, mottled bark of a Sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*) – in our southern Michigan woods – it's much too big for a garden!



Platanus occidentalis in the forest

In gardens, the highly patterned flaky bark of *Clethra barbinervis*, *Cornus kousa*, *Parrotia persica*, *Pinus bungeana*, and some *Stewartias*, of course, is spectacular.



Cornus kousa

Parrotia in Harry Elkins yard



Stewartia pseudocamellia

Ulmus parvifolia

But for this kind of bark to show well, trees need to achieve some age. A huge specimen of any one of these with lovely flaky bark is a monument in itself. Other species that show patterned bark like this to varying degrees are the Chinese quince, *Pseudocydonia sinensis* and certain selections of the true Chinese elm, *Ulmus parvifolia*. From my perspective, colorful peeling and striped bark is especially desirable, partly because you don't need to wait for a tree to mature to see it; even some shrubs show it. Striped bark especially typically shows up better on younger stems – especially in striped maples – and typically intensi-

fies in fall and winter. Check out the spectacular *Acer ×conspicuum* 'Phoenix,' much nicer than any red twig dogwood.



Acer ×conspicuum 'Phoenix' winter color

So what are my favorite barks? Well, people in general love birches – but though nice, they are overused. I'm holding out for a good, really dwarf form! From my perspective, it's hard to beat *Acer griseum*, the legendary paperbark maple from central China. The light shining through the bark when the sun is low in late fall or winter is spectacular. It's much better than any birch! But this becomes a sizable tree, as do the showy barked Chinese cherries, *Prunus maackii* and *P. serrula*. Is there anything that has this bark that is smaller? The answer is yes – sort of. Not quite the copper tones of the maple, but close is a plant rare in cultivation and relatively new to me, the Chinese *Abies squamata*. This is a tree to 40 m tall in the wild – but mine is so slow growing that it would be fine near a rock garden for decades! Even small trees a few years begin to show nice peeling bark. Another little known plant with quite similar bark is a rare Chinese hazel, *Corylus fargesii*, also a tree to 40 m tall according to the flora of China, but much faster growing than the fir – this may not be in the slow growing category; plant accordingly!



Acer griseum



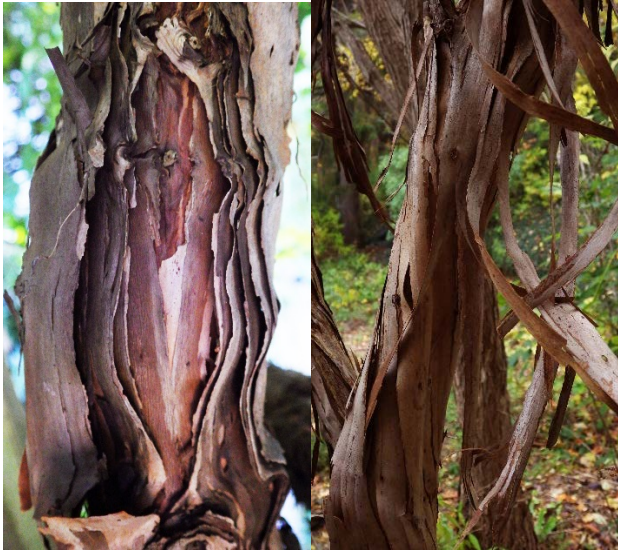
Abies squamata

Corylus fargesii

You might even consider the orange younger bark of the otherwise ugly Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) in this category – though it does not really peel. There are a few dwarf selections that are

good for a rock garden plants, and these can be pruned to show the bark. It's interesting that so many Chinese trees have this peeling bark. No idea why.

So how about shrubs and vines – smaller plants more in line with rock gardening – that show cool bark. Several plants come to mind immediately, the most well-known being the climbing hydrangea, *Hydrangea anomala* subsp. *petiolaris*. Mature trunks of the adult stage develop thick peeling bark, mostly peeling lengthwise, rather than around the trunk, but still attractive. But this is a hard to use plant in a rock garden setting, being a sprawling vine. Also peeling lengthwise is the Chinese shrub *Prinsepia sinensis*, and somewhat similarly, *Clethra acuminata*, though this requires moist acid soil in part shade, like rhododendrons.



Hydrangea anomala

Prinsepia sinensis

Among my favorites are the small shrubby *Hypericum* species – in particular our native *Hypericum kalmianum*, which is small, up to maybe a meter tall, and has blue green leaves in the best forms, plus yellow flowers in late spring.

Several other shrubby *Hypericum* species have generally similar bark, especially *H. frondosum*, and the Michigan natives *H. prolificum* and *H. swinkianum*. Here you have the best of all worlds – a small plant and nice bark. Disadvantages? They can be short-lived in stressed conditions, and a bit “twiggy,” so pruning is helpful. There is also a lot of variability, so selections need to be made that are superior.



Hypericum kalmianum – bark on a shrub ca. 0.5 m tall

The Chapter on the National Scene

Our chapter has always had a presence on the national stage, but this year we are especially well represented. Serving as vice president is Don LaFond, and on the Board of Directors we have Julie Caroff. Thanks to everyone for voting early and often.

We also have local people serving on appointed committees, including Laura Serowicz, the seed intake manager for the seed exchange, who also serves on the website committee, and Joseph Tychonievich, our new Quarterly Editor.

The strength of our Chapter and the National Organization depends on people being willing to

step up, so please don't be afraid of doing so if asked!

Late summer South African Bulbs Tony Reznicek

Many of you will recall fondly Ellen Hornig's Seneca Hill Perennials. Though Ellen closed her business some years ago, she contributed tremendously to our gardens and also our thinking about hardy plants from South Africa. Interestingly, these are largely bulbous – not sure why – and valuable as they are among the few bulbous plants to bloom in the summer.

Now it is true that, like some other people in the Chapter, I spent excessively trying lots of different South African plants from seed and from Nurseries, most of which positively melted in our wet falls and soggy, cold winters. So after all that, are there any conclusions? Yes, unfortunately! Most South African rock garden plants, many of which are hardy in Denver, are not so adaptable to Michigan – at least not without a lot of selection. One exception may be a few *Delosperma* species. In fact, I have relatively few South African plants left that appear to be long-lived and reliable. I can attest to the reliability of survivors – anything that survived the couple of horrible winters a few years ago surely will live forever!

So what do I still have besides *Delospermas*. One group of plants that does live, and that many people grow are the most familiar hardy South African bulbous plants – the *Gladiolus*. Most hardy species are small and from southern Europe and western Asia, especially Turkey, but I was given one of the common pass-along plants in Washington, DC a while back, the *Gladiolus dalenii* hybrid called 'Boone.' This is indeed a hardy plant – so far – and a fast reproducer. It looks just like a tall, apricot-colored garden "glad." Not bad. Another long-known plant encompasses the hardy forms of *Agapanthus campanulatus*, including the old "Wayside clone" as well as the newer "cold hardy white" developed by our own John Hargrove at the former H & H Botanicals.

Another group of plants familiar to everyone that contains hardy species from South Africa are selections of *Crocoshmia ×crocoshmiflora*, the

garden montbretias. Some really seem to be fully hardy, though unless in full sun, can be floppy.

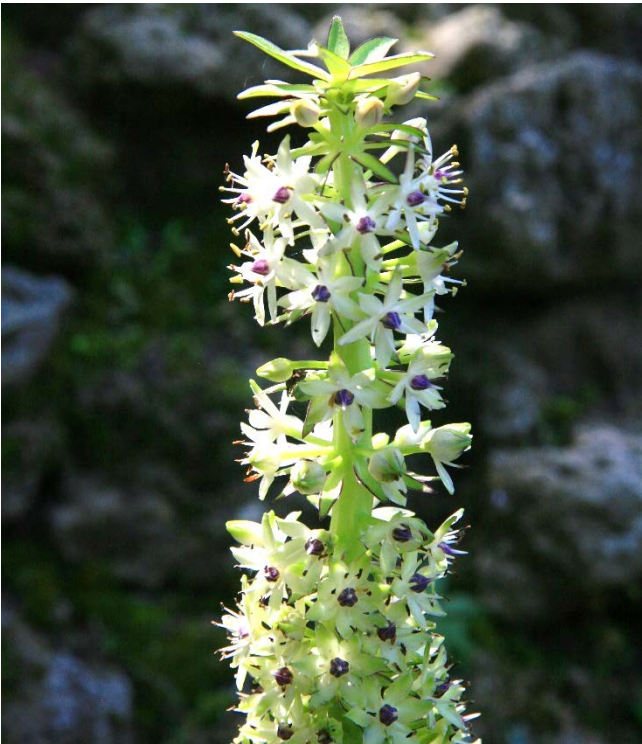
One *Crinum* species has lived – a hardy form of *Crinum bulbispermum*. Too large, floppy, and gawky for most beds, it survives fine against a wall and flowers (and fruits) regularly. The flowers are not as beautiful as the fancy hybrids, but at least interesting. The potential for breeding of more showy forms is there.



Crinum bulbispermum

Another plant that has surprised me has been a *Eucomis* – the house plant popularly known as Pineapple-lilies. Only one has ever lived outdoors for me – a clone from Seneca Hill Perennials

called 'Peace Candles.' Stunning and beautiful, but scarcely a rock garden plant!



Eucomis 'Peace Candles'

Finally, I've had for some years a *Galtonia*, *G. candicans*, which has just finished blooming, and seems hardy – so far. Also like the rest, it is tall, scarcely a rock garden plant, but providing a nice shot of white nodding bells in late summer. I'm not sure if all clones of this are hardy or just one.

Spoiler alert – *Galtonia* species seem to be best classified as *Ornithogalum*, so in time we will see the name appearing in books as *Ornithogalum candicans*.



Galtonia candicans

But anyway, perhaps the money spent on South African plants was not all wasted!

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

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MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION:

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Send \$10.00 per year (check payable to Chapter) to:
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Ann Arbor, Michigan 48105-1227

OR pay in person at the next GLC meeting

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

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>

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