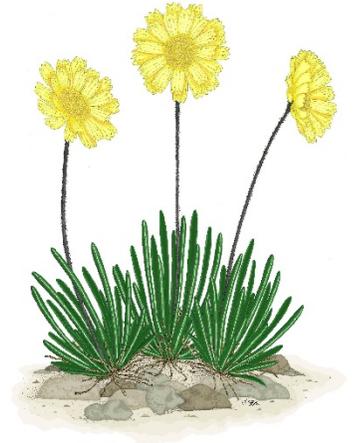


# GREAT LAKES CHAPTER

North American Rock Garden Society (NARGS)

SPRING NEWSLETTER, APRIL 2017



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**CALENDAR OF CHAPTER MEETINGS** \*\*meeting details below\*\*

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**\*\*SATURDAY, MAY 6: SPRING MEETING & PLANT SALE**

**MEETING:** 11:00 AM – ca. 3:00 PM  
**PLACE:** Joan Bolt's  
509 Fendale St SE, Grand Rapids– 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

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## Mark Your Calendars:

**Saturday, September 16, 2016:** Fall Meeting & Plant Sale.

Details about the Fall Meeting & Plant Sale, and other fall meetings will be in the Fall Newsletter.

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## UPCOMING NATIONAL MEETINGS:

**Study Weekend: Wisconsin Spring Garden Gala in Madison, Wisconsin NARGS**

**Study Weekend, Fri. - Sat., May 19–20, 2017.**

The Wisconsin Spring Garden Gala (and NARGS Study Weekend) will be May 19-20, 2017 in Madison, Wisconsin. Registration is filling up for an event with talks, garden tours, and buying trips to two great nurseries. It will make a great spring adventure for you and some of your gardening friends.

**Annual General Meeting, Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina. "Southern Rock Gardening: Past & Present" November 17-19, 2017. Watch the Quarterly for details!**

**From the President  
Jacques Thompson**

I don't know about you, but for myself this has been one long, strange, winter we've gone through. As I recall it started off typically enough. But by the time February rolled around things took a sharp turn from normal. Much of February was so mild and dry, several days in the upper 60's and even a couple of 70-degree days?! I decided to get an early start on my spring cleanup. I had gotten through all of the rockeries and collected all of the blown in leaves and assorted debris, even pulled the odd popper or two. In sunnier exposures *Eranthis* and *Galanthus* were up and starting to open up.

Then March rolled in and rudely put everything on hold for an entire month of colder, wetter weather.

Throw in a day and a half windstorm and all my early clean up went for naught. While Andrea & I were spared and power outages that plagued many parts of the State, nor was the garden to suffer and downed trees that affected so many of our neighbors and throughout the region, our property was completely mulched by truckloads of tiny spruce twiglets and small branches.

So far April has been a seemingly endless clean up event. Just this week I've finished with the last of the deadheading, and still there are rockeries covered with countless dry, noodley, spruce twiglets.

I have had moments to take in the early spring bulbs, do some hand pollenating, (no bees yet), and catch sight of returning migrants (wrens last week and a Fox Sparrow today). Even sleeping locals. have made their debuts i.e., Painted Turtled sunning themselves on the logs in the pond, have joined the toads and Spring Peepers.

So I am getting antsy for a Road Trip and I hope you are as well because that's just what's on the agenda for this year's Chapter Spring Plant Sale & garden Tour.

This year our host will be none other than long time and very active member Joan Bolt at her home & garden in Grand Rapids. Joan's garden is (as I imagine are most of our memberships gardens that we have yet to see), of a more reasonable size, of her own creation, in which she has honed her skills while raising a family and running a household.

Over these past twenty plus years she's joined the rest of us as we repeatedly toured, larger and longer-established gardens. Where horticulture was almost an illness and garden making conducted as a contact sport. Don't get me wrong! The privilege of experiencing those botanical wonderments went way, way beyond eye-opening, they were transformative, Betty Blake's and Leila Bradfield's, Ken Nitschke's and Roberta & Fred Case's, Barb Hoover and Lorna Amsbaugh, Harry & Irene Elkins, Tony & Susan Reznicek's, Dick Punnett. Their creations were of a scale I'd never known and filled with plants I'd never heard of. For many it can be a bit overwhelming if not give pause to considering opening one's own garden for those giants to consider.

In these past ten years or so we have seen that our next wave of passionate gardeners are not wanting for their own gardening ideas or talents. Bev Walters, Don La Fond, Laura & John Serowitz, Esther & Robert Benedict, Rimmer De Vries, Bonnie & Patrick Ion, Patricia Bard, Barb Haman, have all brought forth their own version of each's paradise, and welcomed us to share it with them. And I want to experience them all again and again.

Now, finally, Joan's willing to share with us what she has created. However, those of you willing enough to make the drive to west Michigan are going to see something entirely different. This is alpine gardening whose execution is as unique as Joan is herself.

For the past two decades (I imagine) Joan has amassed a collection of various troughs and worked them amid a grid of narrow paved pathways, while at the same time weaving in choice rocks and chunks of tufa into this pattern, that interrupts the geometry without destroying it. It is a garden of cracks and crannies and pockets with a small mound or two, all laid out on a flat plain that creates a perfect growing environment for growing alpinines and dwarf woody plants. This is such an original concept, I don't recall ever seeing anything like it before, not in our chapter, or at a neither Regional nor National Meeting I've attended nor any blog I've read.

I especially urge our newest members not to be put off by the distance of the drive. Come and experience alpine gardening with a different direction.

Something that can be tried on any scale, no countless tons of rocks, and truckloads of sand. No worn out pick-up trucks, no worn out backs!

**Meeting notes: October 22, 2016:  
Notes by Bonnie Ion**

NARGS meeting was called to order by Jacques Thompson at 1:45 pm at Matthaei Botanical Gardens. About 38 people attended the meeting & lecture.

After the welcome and a brief introduction of the NARGS group for newcomers, Jacques announced that the Spring sale would be at the garden of Joan Bolt in Grand Rapids. Members are encouraged to visit the Meijer Gardens when the sale is over as well as the Blue Horizon conifer nursery as time permits.

Mike Palmer of Matthaei was introduced and Mike thanked NARGS for the group's support and recent financial contribution. He also announced that there will be a work party at the Matthaei rock garden area which NARGS members are encouraged to attend and help. Mike also mentioned that Robert Benedict had donated rock mulch to the rock garden which is located south of the Gateway Garden. A brief discussion about volunteer possibilities at Matthaei finished this portion.

NARGS member Koko donated several packets of seeds for members to pick up. Don spoke about GA3 soaked paper being used for better seed germination. GA3 is a growth powder and too much will harm as well as none at all. Rimmer donated a large single pink peony which was then raffled off and bought by Tony (beating out Bonnie.....). Patrick Ion announced that Mike Greayna will be the new webmaster so members should submit new information to Mike for the website.

The business meeting was adjourned about 2:15 and the speaker was introduced (program on Alpines, by renowned Swedish rock gardener Peter Korn). The lecture and photos were great and the lecture finished about 3:30 pm.

**Meeting notes: Feb. 18, 2017  
Libby Geanya**

We met at the unusually sunny (for February) meeting room at the Matthaei Botanical Gardens, Ann Arbor for a tasty potluck. Twenty-two of our members feasted like kings then retired to the concrete patio to bask in the February sun! The meeting was called to order by President Jacques Thompson at 11:25 AM.

GLC funded a "partial intern" last year (1 day per week for the season for \$2,000.00). Most of the intern's work ended up in the Great Lakes Garden, rather than the Marie Azary Rock Garden. (The director of Matthaei, Mike Palmer, was ill all summer and this may be the source of the misdirection. We wish him a complete recovery.) The GLC pledged financing for three years so we will see how 2017 works out for our flagship rock garden.....

Jacques and Don plan to re-do the tufa bed. Bruce Pollard has been looking at procuring some much-needed by-laws. Cost may be as low as \$25.00. An informal OK to Bruce to pursue this important endeavor and that expenses would be covered.

The NARGS National Meeting will be November in North Carolina. The Winter Study Weekend will be in Wisconsin May 19-20, 2017. Note that Songsparrow Nursery (formerly Klehm Nursery) and the Flower Factory are close by for side trips. GLC NARGS has two stipends (\$300.00) OR whatever the registration costs.

SAVE THE DATE – we will finally be going to Joan Bolts in Grand Rapids! Our Spring Plant Sale will held May 6, 2017 at Joan's fabled garden. She protests that it is small...but admits it is pretty nice...lots of troughs. Don LaFond advised to check out a local nursery near Grand Rapids (Grand Junction) called Blue Horizon. Per Jacques and Don, the bathroom alone is worth the trip. (Spoiler alert – no more information would be revealed about the bathroom.....)

Joyce Fingerhut from the Nationals is compiling a list of the top 20 Rock Garden Plants and requests three names from the GLC Chapter. Send your favorite plant names to Patrick Ion and he will pass

them on to Joyce. Could be a perennial, bulb, annual (seed), hosta or even woodland plant – due by March 1 to make the list. Please also include where it can be purchased.

A NARGS led trip to the Dolomites is reportedly in the future.

Don LaFond is interested in printing Ian Young's bulb log information on erythroniums- about 270 pages. A sign-up sheet was passed around for those wanting to participate in the printing costs. Thank you to Ian for sharing his information with the world, at no cost!

The meeting adjourned at noon and the group swelled to 35 for the lectures. Our speaker, all the way from Grand Junction, Colorado, was Kenton Seth - a young enthusiastic plant nerd and he regaled the group with two talks: Crevice Gardening and From Caucasus to Crevices (an interesting personal story of Kenton's Caucasus adventures).

### **National Update from Don LaFond**

Hello my fellow Great Lakes gardeners. Well unless something unseen happens or I get 0 votes I will be the next Vice President of NARGS. Possibly not the smartest thing I've ever done but it's done. I ran because of the lifelong friendships I have made from being a member of NARGS. I never would have thought I could count friends from so many places, New York, Maryland, Oregon, Washington, Colorado, Arizona and the UK, the Netherlands and Austria. Not to mention my devoted friendships I cherish here in Michigan, truly remarkable to me.

Unfortunately the numbers in our National Organization are declining, like all clubs, garden clubs or not, except the washing machine club, over 3000 strong! We are trying to counteract this trend but the bottom line seems to be that people are fascinated with technology – smart phones, swipe right swipe left watch the cat play the piano. Judging by the number of garden blogs gardening is still popular but people just don't want to go and meet people and see their gardens, hey just send a pick. I'm going to continue to work to find a way to grow more interest in NARGS. I head a new committee called the chapters committee. The reason for its existence is to get more and better communication between

chapters and the national. I'm trying to get us to work together again with the goal being to increase membership. If you have questions or ideas let me hear them.

There are some good encouraging things happening in our club right now. Members continue to donate a lot of money to NARGS. This keeps us afloat. The Rocky Mountain Chapter has authorized what they call the Rocky Mountain challenge. They said for every dollar donated to NARGS by a chapter they will match it dollar for dollar up to \$10,000 for all of 2017. I'm very happy to say that the seed ex worked fabulously this year. Relentless labor by Elisabeth Zander, and our Laura Serowicz finally got it working correctly and on time without any major glitches. Why don't more of us use the seed ex?

So have you all been paying attention to the new varieties of reticulata *Iris* that's coming into commerce? Mostly thru a lot of work by our Canadian friend Alan McMurtrie. Remember he did a talk for us several years ago teasing us with the new colors he was breeding?



*Iris* 'Orange Glow'

I visited him last spring in Toronto. Alan has filled his fairly big suburban yard and a close neighbor's back yard with hundreds of his crosses, all precisely labeled. He has succeeded in enticing the Dutch in increasing the numbers so they can be bought by us greedy gardeners.



*Iris 'Mars Landing'*

He has an article in this issue of the quarterly, you should read it. Also our own (well used to be) Russell Stafford with his nursery Odyssey Bulbs and Brent and Becky's bulbs have several of Alan's selections of Iris available right now. Garden on Wayne. Garden on Garth.



*Iris 'Ice Cream'*

A sad bit of news, we lost Harry Elkins this winter. The first person that my wife and I had lunch with at a spring plant sale and garden visit was with Harry and his wife Irene in Jacques garden. It was

lovely. We talked of many things, at the time I was going to school to be a teacher and they were both teachers but the thing that really got Harry's attention was when he found out I have a place in the UP. He told me that I had to go and find a certain fern found up there that he wanted. For several years after when I would see him he would ask if I found that fern for him. A few years ago I wrote a short piece called *The Death of a Gardener*, I hope you don't mind reading it again.

### **The Death of a Gardener By Don LaFond**

Does this mean the death of the garden? We in our group have witnessed what happens when the gardener dies. The family struggles with what to do with the garden. Do they keep it? And if they do, does it need to be kept the same? We have lost four people from our group in recent time. They were all my friends, and all loved and respected charter members of the GLC. All four of these people were gardeners to their core until the very last. Each garden was a unique garden in every way. Except one, the gardener. The gardeners were not the same because they were all rock gardeners, or charter members, or all respected. They were the same because of something intangible. It was a philosophy. They didn't garden because they needed attention or to make their home exceptional - although it did. They gardened because they couldn't not garden. Did you ever plan a vacation so you could see a place that has the very plant that you covet? Now do that and convince your family that's just where they want to go too. Their lives, like the rest of us, involve jobs, and families and all the commitments that go with them. But, their life revolved around gardening. That's not to say they shirked their responsibilities to work and family, it enhanced it. When something grabs a hold of your imagination with the force of a tornado, time becomes a precious thing. That realization becomes all important. The realization is that she has to keep her divided heart held together. The one side of the heart held ever present in their love and devotion to their family, and the other side to the constant pull or maybe yank of wanting to be in the garden. In other words the gardener becomes aware that he is his own time keeper and must allocate his time carefully, so as not to offend either side of the heart.

When the gardener dies, does the garden die? The garden is mostly in the gardener's mind. Of course the plants and the rocks and the troughs are there physically in the garden. But like words they can be arranged in an infinite order according to how the gardener or the writer wants it to be, and the land or the story dictates.

When the gardener dies, does the garden die? We as gardeners know that a garden is never finished. It continues on and on because a gardener's curiosity never stops until the synapses stop jumping. But can the gardener consciously or unconsciously convey their ideas successfully to someone else; to a son, a daughter, or perhaps another person who watches and learns from them? Does giving plants or giving knowledge to a fellow gardener constitute the continuation of their garden elsewhere? When the gardener dies, does the garden die?

Thank you Dick, Thank you Leila, Thank you Fred, Thank you Betty, Thank you Harry

**Jānis Rukšāns new *Crocus* Book  
By Tony Reznicek**

Many of you know Jānis from his lectures to our Chapter a few years ago, and also his superb nursery, <http://www.rarebulbs.lv/index.php/en/>. Some of you may know that Jānis has a new book on *Crocus* out, more lavishly illustrated and taking into account modern genetic research on *Crocuses*.

Jānis Rukšāns. 2017. *The World of Crocuses*. 568 pages, color photos, color distribution maps. The Latvian Academy of Sciences. Hardcover ISBN-13: 9789934191251 (available from: <http://rarebulbs.lv/index.php/en/catalogue/product/view/1/7495>)

*Crocuses* certainly look like they are all cast from the same mold, and have a very simplified and stereotyped plant body, so you can imagine that telling species apart often is difficult, even for experts. But, as with many difficult plant groups, *Crocus* taxonomy has been revolutionized by access to the genetic material. In *Crocus*, the upshot has been that people have realized that many widespread and variable plants were actually composed of several species. So this new book takes into account this new research, with treatments of 235 species of *Crocus*

now recognized. Almost every species is illustrated in color, usually with several photos, and there are keys and detailed descriptions, so there is a lot of botanical information here. It is a full botanical monograph. But also, with almost every species, there are extensive notes on similar species, and variability, and, most importantly for our group, cultivation and cultivars. There are also sections on *Crocus* hybrids, as well as general chapters on cultivation, propagation, and pests and diseases. All in all a comprehensive volume. Although, of course, it won't be the last word, it still is a lovely and quite helpful book.

This is of course of great interest to rock gardeners, as of all bulbs, *Crocus*, with their low stature and small leaves, are ideal for rock gardens. But now, with well over two hundred species of *Crocus* to choose from, what do you grow? So besides introducing people to this book, let me do a bit of a digest of a few good *Crocus* species, both spring and fall, to start with in our area.

**Spring species:**

Here we gave many choices, and the greatest diversity of color. And here also, especially the Dutch in particular have done a great deal of hybridization and selecting of *Crocus* for the garden – many of us are quite content to grow the many Dutch hybrids and selections. Here are a just few to try that have done well for me. You should be OK with most of these in range of conditions.

*Crocus ancycensis*, especially the selection 'Golden Bunch'

*Crocus chrysanthus* and selections

*Crocus flavus* – a common large species, and parent of commonly grown hybrids

*Crocus fleischeri* – a delicate species especially suited to a prize position in the rock garden

*Crocus gargaricus*

*Crocus hueffelianus* and selections (note especially 'Carpathian Wonder')

*Crocus korolkowii* – one of the earliest



*Crocus korolkowii* February 22, 2017

- Crocus malyi*
- Crocus neapolitanus*
- Crocus tommasinianus* and selections
- Crocus vernus* and selections



*Crocus hueffelianus* 'Carpathian Wonder'

**Fall species:**

In fall species, a crucial element for cultivation in our climate is whether the leaves come out in the spring, with flowers in the fall, or come out starting in the fall with the flowers, and overwintering. Species with overwintering leaves usually suffer dam-

age in our winters, and are generally poor choices. Keep in mind when planting that fall *Crocus* usually have flowers with long tubes, forming a goblet shape, and are better growing up through plants that can support them in bad weather.

*Crocus banaticus* and selections – a most unusual species with vaguely Iris-like flowers ('Snowflake' below)



- Crocus carwrightianus* – the only *Crocus* with overwintering leaves that does OK for me –so far!
- Crocus kotschyanus*
- Crocus pulchellus* and hybrids
- Crocus speciosus* ('Albus'"below)



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

Susan Reznicek  
890 Wickfield Court  
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48105-1227  
(734) 996-0692  
reznicek@umich.edu

**MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION:**

**Great Lakes Chapter:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

email/FAX: \_\_\_\_\_

Send \$10.00 per year (check payable to Chapter) to:  
**Susan Reznicek**  
Treasurer, Great Lakes Chapter, NARGS  
890 Wickfield Court  
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: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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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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North American Rock Garden Society  
Newsletter Editor, Tony Reznicek  
890 Wickfield Court  
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48105-1227