



ADIRONDACK  
CHAPTER

*North American Rock Garden Society*

# Green Dragon Tales

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[www.acnargs.org](http://www.acnargs.org)

October 2007

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**Latvian bulb expert Janis Ruksans to speak Sunday October 21**

The Adirondack Chapter is in for a treat **Sunday, October 21**, when we will be visited by Janis Ruksans from Latvia. Janis' claim to fame is that he has developed a mailorder bulb nursery based on his extensive collecting experience in Eurasia. The day's activities include two presentations by Janis, free *Corydalis solida* bulbs for members, and a dish-to-pass supper at Carol Eichler's following the presentations. A limited number of Ruksans' book, *Buried Treasures, Finding and Growing the World's Choicest Bulbs*, will be available at cost at the meeting.

**Note this meeting will be on a Sunday** due to Ruksans' tight speaking schedule. We'll gather in 404 Plant Science. Brown bag as usual at noon, followed by two presentations: "Bulbs of the Former USSR" beginning at 1 p.m., then a short break followed by "Versatile Fritillarias" at about 3 p.m. Donations of refreshments for the break would be appreciated.

After the presentations, everyone is invited to join Ruksans for an informal dish-to-pass supper at the home of Carol Eichler, 1562 Taughannock Blvd. (NYS Route 89). Hors d'oeuvres begin at 6:00 p.m., dinner at 6:30. For help with planning please call Carol, 607-387-5823 if you're coming. Plates, table service, and drinks will be provided. This will be a great opportunity to talk more with Mr. Ruksans while he is in our area.

You won't want to miss Ruksans' talk. His nursery's bulb selection truly differs from what you see in all those catalogues you get every spring and fall. This is not just another listing of hard-to-distinguish narcissi or tulips but truly a connoisseur's lucky dip

of known, named, best varieties of such things as *Colchicums* and *Corydalis*, to name just two genera, as well an extensive listing of species and rarities that you never see anywhere else.

The same can be said for just about any other genus of bulbous plants from the broader reaches of the northern hemisphere. All the plants he sells are nursery grown. And in addition to the rarities, he has developed many new selections and cultivars to stimulate the most jaded of bulb lovers among us. Anyone who has even just one grape hyacinth in their garden should get something out of his talks. Our program coordinator Robin Bell says, "I already have a hole in my back pocket and I haven't even heard him yet. Be warned."

**Here's more on Ruksans:** Janis Ruksans is the owner of Ruksans Bulbs Nursery in Latvia, a world renowned bulb grower and collector, and author of five books on bulbs. Since launching his first international mailorder catalog in 1991, Ruksans has rapidly gained a reputation as one of the world's foremost experts on rare and unusual bulbs: Juno irises striped like exotic birds; gem-like corydalis; dusky, brooding fritillaries. For decades, Ruksans has been scouring remote and dangerous regions of Europe and Asia to bring back the botanical treasures that he offers through his nursery, often contending with corrupt government agents, armed rebels, drunken drivers, and even (before the fall of the Soviet Union) the KGB. He has been growing bulbs since age twelve.

His book *Buried Treasures, Finding and Growing the World's Choicest Bulbs* will be offered for sale at cost. Once you read the accounts of his extensive travels, you'll never look at a flowering bulb in the same way. A crocus will take you to the shores of Lake Abant in northwest Turkey, a tulip to the mountains of Chimgan in Uzbekistan. The flowers meld with the wild and rugged landscapes that nurture them. Although adventure abounds, there's a great deal more for the gardener seeking trustworthy information. As well as being a renowned collector, Ruksans is a grower and propagator of bulbs second to none, and he generously shares his professional knowledge about the care and cultivation of every major and minor genus of bulb-forming plant. If you've tried and failed with a choice specimen, Ruksans will arm you with the knowledge to try again and succeed.

Ruksans has also worked at the Latvian National Botanical Garden and was the editor-in-chief of a horticultural magazine for nearly twenty years. He is currently on a NARGS-sponsored speaker's tour. A display copy of his nursery catalog will be available. The Chapter hopes to organize a group bulb order next year if there is sufficient interest

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### **Plant of the Month: *Corydalis solida***

At our October 21 meeting, members will receive a packet of *Corydalis solida* bulbs. (Leftovers will be sold at cost.) Also known as fumewort, this species is native to Europe. It has light purple tubular flowers and gray-green finely divided foliage.

It does best in rich, moist, well-drained soil in part shade, and is reputed to be hardy to at least Zone 5. I expect it might succeed, but spread less, in conditions less than ideal. It's very attractive in flower and will naturalize in areas where it's happy, unlike the pest *C. lutea* (yellow corydalis) that can be a rampant spreader.

*C. solida* blooms in May in our area and goes dormant soon after blooming. It is not a prima donna that will make you endure its dying foliage while it slowly withers. It makes a quick exit in late spring. *C. solida* is also available in named varieties in white, pink, rose, and shades of orange.

Two sources of named varieties are McClure & Zimmerman ([www.mzbulb.com](http://www.mzbulb.com)) and Janis Ruksans (catalog \$5 from Janis Ruksans, Dr. Biol., P.O. Rozula, LV -4150 Cesis dist., Latvia or email me for a catalog via email at [basecamp@alum.syracuse.edu.](mailto:basecamp@alum.syracuse.edu)) McClure & Zimmerman has a few interesting choices. Ruksans has a dizzying array of choices for the collector.

**Cultural instructions:** Plant tubers soon after receipt, 4 inches deep and 4 inches apart in fall. Plants grow 6 inches tall. One catalog suggests soaking tubers for a few hours if they look over dried.

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### **November 10 – Annual meeting and dish-to-pass**

Because November 10 is home football game at Cornell University, our Annual Meeting and Dish-to-Pass will be held in Room A at Tompkins County Cooperative Extension, 615 Willow Ave., Ithaca, N.Y. (where Dey St., Willow Ave. and Rte. 13 meet). Note this is the **second Saturday** of the month, not our usual third. If you need directions, visit: [counties.cce.cornell.edu/Tompkins](http://counties.cce.cornell.edu/Tompkins) or call the CCE office during regular business hours: (607) 272-2292. Set up starts at 11 a.m. with dish-to-pass at noon. (Note there will be no microwave or oven available but plenty of electrical outlets.) Drinks will be provided. The program will begin at 1 p.m., and may include a special guest. Look for details in the November newsletter.

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### **Letter from the Chair**

I'm awaiting our October programs with great anticipation – over a year you might say. Our presenter, Janis Ruksans, qualifies as a true plant explorer, at least in my estimation. He was scheduled to talk to us last fall but he broke his leg on a plant expedition. (My imagination leads me to speculate on the circumstances.) So he was unable to make the trip. Ruksans is a world authority on bulbs and he is brought to us from his native Latvia with thanks to NARGS National for arranging this tour and subsidizing the cost. Please tell your friends not to miss this one!

With our annual meeting coming up in November it's time to start thinking about next year. We are fortunate that all of our Board members are continuing, that is to say, there are no term expirations. However, we are in need of a Treasurer. This is an elected two-year position and includes Board membership. Carolyn Yaeger's term is expiring and the good news is that she is willing to train her replacement. Note the details inside this newsletter.

We are also seeking to add more at-large Board members. If this is something you might be interested in, feel free to contact me.

Coming up in November, we traditionally offer a dish-to-pass and will again this year. We hold our annual meeting at that time as well, a requirement of our by-laws. This year we are planning something a little different however. Rather than oral reports you can read a summary of our year through the newsletter. Instead we will plan to offer a short

program, as yet undetermined at this writing. Note that we will meet on the 2nd Saturday of the month, so mark your calendars now and plan to attend.

**Carol Eichler, chair**

P.S.: **Free to good home: small wooden drafting table** (31 x 23). Folds up for compact storage. It has served me well as a temporary potting table. You come pick it up (or I can bring it to the October meeting). Contact Carol Eichler, [carol\\_eichler@excite.com](mailto:carol_eichler@excite.com) or 607-387-59823.

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### **To the Top of the World: Mount Marcy**

Of the six million acres that make up the Adirondack Park in New York state, a mere eighty-five exhibit alpine habitat. These areas are scattered on the top of high peaks, islands in the sky. Here you will find rare flowering plant species, mosses, and lichens. Jerry Weiland and I hiked top of the highest, Mount Marcy, at 5,344 feet above sea level.



The trail starts at around 2,000 feet and goes vertical in about 7.4 miles from Adirondack Loj to the summit.

The climb is difficult, with some sharp vertical ascents. At around 4,000 feet the forest changes to krummholz or "crooked wood". These are the first signs of nearing the alpine zone. The trees become shorter as we climb, eventually giving way to an area of rock and sky above the trees. The soil is thin, less than a few inches in some places, yet plants find a grip.

Here is what we've come to see: Tiny buns of mountain sandwort (*Minuartia groenlandica*) some blooming, bronzy deer's hair sedges (*Scirpus caespitosus*) moving in the stiff winds, and many other low-lying plants tightly packed in crevices and around rocks. Some trees have made it to the very edge of the alpine zone, no more than eighteen inches tall.

As we experience this alpine habitat, the rocks, plants, wind, light, and water each tell stories of how they got here and what role they play. How can this be recreated in our own gardens? I was reminded of our visit this year to the Montreal Botanic Garden's alpine garden. The rock work is enormous and gives one a sense of climbing a mountain. The trees are shaped and placed to mimic the krummholz forest and the occasional dwarf protected by a rock.

Mount Marcy is one of forty-six high peaks in the Adirondack Park. Whiteface Mountain is an easier climb because it can be done by car and an elevator takes you to the top!

Source for this article: *Adirondack Alpine Summits: An Ecological Field Guide* by Nancy G. Slack and Allison W. Bell.

**David Mitchell, Plant sales coordinator**

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**Treasurer position available**

The Adirondack Chapter of NARGS will need a replacement Treasurer in 2008. The perks are great:

- You get to take in lots of other people's money and then spend it;
- You get to hear all the news first hand and help shape the future direction of the Chapter;
- You get to work with the current treasurer to learn the job.

The only requirement is basic knowledge of computers and Excel spreadsheet software. No bookkeeping experience is necessary and it takes only a few hours a month of your time. Plus, you'll learn a marketable (perhaps even new) skill!

If you are interested, please call me, at (607-844-9462).

**Carolyn Yaeger, treasurer**

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**Need Sand?**

Jerry Yaeger has a truck load of sharp sand. If any members would like a bucket or a pickup truck load please contact him at [jay7@cornell.edu](mailto:jay7@cornell.edu) or call 844-9462 evenings/weekends.

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**People**

Questions? Want to find out how you can help the Chapter? Don't hesitate to contact one of the volunteers who help make everything happen. (This is the slate to be voted on at our Feb. meeting):

- **Chair/Membership:** Carol Eichler, [carol\\_eichler@excite.com](mailto:carol_eichler@excite.com), 607-387-5823
  - **Vice Chair/Program:** Robin Bell, [rgb2@cornell.edu](mailto:rgb2@cornell.edu), 607-272-2074
  - **Treasurer/Secretary:** Carolyn Yaeger, [cao2@cornell.edu](mailto:cao2@cornell.edu), 607-844-9462
  - **Garden trips/tours:** Billie Jean Isbell, [bjj1@cornell.edu](mailto:bjj1@cornell.edu), 607-539-6484
  - **Plant sales:** David Mitchell, [dwm23@cornell.edu](mailto:dwm23@cornell.edu), 607-342-3660
  - **Plant of the Month:** John Gilrein, [basecamp@alum.syracuse.edu](mailto:basecamp@alum.syracuse.edu), 315-492-0844
  - **Newsletter editor/Webmaster:** Craig Cramer, [cdcramer@twcny.rr.com](mailto:cdcramer@twcny.rr.com), 607-539-7233
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**Green Dragon Tales**

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