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February 2011

In this issue:

- Feb. 19 'Members Share' meeting: Ferns
- Program plans
- Ferns from spore
- Volunteers needed for seed exchange
- From the chair
- Other events
- News from National
- People

February 19 'Members Share' meeting: Ferns

We'll kick off the program year February 19 with our annual 'Members Share' meeting featuring several chapter pteridophiles sharing their love of ferns, including propagation, identification and uses in the garden. Those fern-lovers include Harold Peachey, Bill Plummer and possibly Jerry Yeager. To get a taste, see Harold's article on fern propagation below. We'll meet in 404 Plant Science Building (Whetzel Room) on the Cornell University campus. Brown bag lunch at noon. Program begins at 1:00 p.m.

2011 program plans

Our **tentative** program line up for 2011. Details in future newsletters or acnargs.blogspot.com:

- February 19: 'Members Share' meeting – **Ferns**. 404 Plant Science Building, Cornell. See details above
- March 19: Dan Segal, The Plantsmen Nursery – **Meadow gardens**. Plant Science Building, Cornell. Plant of the Month will be meadow plants from The Plantsmen.
- April 16: Carol Eichler – **The Tame and Wild Alpine Flora of Colorado**. Cornell Cooperative Extension, 615 Willow Ave., Ithaca. Plant of the Month will be plants growable in the East from Laporte Avenue Nursery, Fort Collins, Colorado.
- May 14 (tentative): Ithaca Plant Sale, location to be determined.
- June (date to be announced) – Work weekend at White Pine Camp.
- July (date to be announced) – Member garden tour, Syracuse area.
- August (date to be announced) – Member plant sale and picnic.
- September (date to be announced) – Work weekend at White Pine Camp.
- Fall programs to be announced: September 17, October 15, November 12 (note November meeting is on the second Saturday).
- Other plans in the works include propagation and trough-building workshops. Details coming soon.

Ferns from Spore

From Chapter secretary Harold Peachey, who will speak at our February 'Members Share' meeting. Originally published in the September, 2007 Berkshire Chapter newsletter.



*Ferns in a woodland setting in the author's garden: Oak Fern (*Gymnocarpium dryopteris*), Himalayan Maidenhair (*Adiantum venustum*) and Christmas Fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*) with *Gentiana scabra var. saxatilis*.*

For beauty, grace and elegance, nothing beats the ferns for the woodland garden, border, or rock garden. Predating angiosperms by hundreds of millions of years, ferns have evolved to fill any niche or artificial environment you may find or provide. We are fortunate in the Northeast to have over 100 species of ferns growing naturally, most of which are readily adaptable to average garden conditions, and a few equal to the challenge of the most intransigent alpine plant.

Woodland gardeners will find a vast array of Pteridophytes available for any situation. The Victorian fern craze of 19th century England produced endless varieties and forms of *Adiantum*, *Dryopteris* and *Polystichum* species with permutations and new forms being released regularly to the present. Plant explorers and adventurers are describing more new ferns from alpine and sub-alpine sites providing material and intrigue for rock gardeners and other esoteric types.

More ferns are becoming available on the market. But the best for rock gardeners and the more adventurous eclectic gardeners are best obtained through propagation from spore. Collection of ferns from wild populations is discouraged, but collection of a few spores from healthy populations provides the best chances of successful addition to your garden or alpine house.

Spores are generally found on the undersides of the leafy part of the frond, although some ferns are dimorphic. (Their fertile fronds are significantly different from sterile fronds.) Look for sori (little bundles of sporangia) whose indusium (thin layer of cells covering the spore during development) have started to open. Carefully collect spore and store in the refrigerator. "Everyone should have a propagation refrigerator," said William Cullina at a seminar in Garden in the Woods.

Growing ferns from spore requires one main skill: **Patience!** Here is a step-by-step guide to growing ferns from spore, an addictive and rewarding experience:

1. Use sterilized containers, I prefer new 4-inch plastic pots, but any container will do.
2. Moisten a peat-based soilless mix, fill the pots to ¼ inch from the top after firming, and place in the microwave for 3 to 4 minutes. Be careful not to melt the plastic pot.
3. Once the medium has cooled, sprinkle a few spores on the surface. (Hint: If you can see the spore on the surface you have planted them too densely.)
4. Place the pot in a plastic 'ziplock' bag. The cheap kind are best, not the freezer grade.
5. Place the bag in a well-lighted spot (but not in direct sunlight) with moderate temperature.
6. Wait! Do not open the bag!
7. Wait some more!
8. In 2 to 4 weeks you will see a green film forming on the surface of the medium.
9. In another 2 to 4 months, typically, you will see the formation of prothalli – heart-shaped leafy-looking material about the size of your little fingernail.
10. Wait some more! Ah ah ah, don't open up yet!
11. If the prothalli appear too crowded, prepare a new pot as before and transplant clumps of prothalli to the new pot. It will look like one of those bad hair implants from the men's hair club.
12. Once true fronds begin to appear and reach an inch or two, begin opening the baggie for successively longer periods to harden off the new sporangia.
13. Transplant to a protected nursery bed or containers for growing on.

You have now successfully propagated your first fern from spore. If you ended up with one plant, you have saved yourself about \$12. In all likelihood you will have dozens or even hundreds of plants to give away, trade, sell or just to show off.

For more information about ferns visit the following websites:

- Don Lubin: www.nefern.info/
- Sue Olsen: www.foliagegardens.com/
- The Hardy Fern Foundation: www.hardyferns.org/home.htm
- The American Fern Society: amerfernsoc.org/

Volunteers needed for round two seed exchange

Once again, our chapter will be filling orders for the second round of the NARGS seed exchange in March. It's a chance to get together and talk about plants and gardens, and as a bonus, volunteers get 'donor status' in next year's exchange. So, if you would be willing to come select seeds and stuff envelopes please let BZ Marranca know your preferred work times: mmm10@cornell.edu.

From the Chair

From Billie Jean Isbell, chair.

It's time to pay your dues.

You can download the membership form from our website (www.acnargs.org/join.pdf) and mail it in or pay at the next meeting.

Brrr!! Will spring ever come? Yes, it's really right around the corner and it's time to order your seeds and start planning. We are participating in the seed exchange and BZ Marranca has volunteered to coordinate our efforts. Please put in an hour or two. It is well worth while and fascinating. Seeds are sent around the world. We are so fortunate that the national organization of NARGS provides this service.



Billie Jean's garden in winter.

I'd like to encourage members to consider sitting in on our board meetings and think about serving on the board. We need a volunteer to help with membership payments and Plants of the Month. The more people involved, the more vibrant our chapter will be. None of the positions are burdensome. Talk to me if you are interested.

Volunteers needed. Several members have mentioned that it is difficult to dig and prepare plants for our May plant sale. I'd like to suggest that we organize work parties and dig and pot in members' gardens. It could be fun and would benefit the chapter. The plant sales and membership dues are the sole support our programs.

We have planned great programs, trips and workshops for 2011 that are listed in this newsletter. (See Program plans on page 1.) Remember that programs are open to everyone. Invite friends. Keep the chapter strong – bring new members.

Financial report. Current balances: Checking: \$4107.31. Savings: \$1892.02.

Other events

- **Ithaca's 3rd Annual Designing With Native Plants Conference** - March 4-5, La Tourelle Resort & Spa, Ithaca, N.Y. [More info.](#)
- **Winter Travel Slide Show** - March 12, 2:00 p.m. with Dan Segal, The Plantsmen Nursery. Tompkins County Cooperative Extension, 615 Willow Ave. Ithaca. Dan will highlight some of the most beautiful native species that make this area a travel destination.
- **NARGS 2011 Annual Meeting: Discovering the Flora of New England** - June 17-19, Colby-Sawyer College, New London, N.H. Hosted by The Fells Chapter-NARGS with post conference trip options June 20. More info: fellschapter.wordpress.com/about/

News from National

NARGS online forum has grown into a successful venture during its first year of operation. During that time, anyone could read the forum, but posting was restricted to NARGS members only. Starting January 31, participation was extended to any registrant whose request is validated and approved by the NARGS Forum Team. Visit the forum at: nargs.org/smf/

NARGS is **updating records of members who open their gardens** by invitation/appointment to other NARGS members. They have some listings, but they may not be current. If your garden is open, please email Bobby Ward, NARGS Executive Secretary nargs@nc.rr.com.

NARGS no longer sells books. But you can support its efforts when you buy books at Amazon.com. Visit the [NARGS book page](#), click the title you want to purchase at Amazon and NARGS will receive a small percentage.

The NARGS website has begun **monthly book reviews** in its wiki section, featuring a stellar team of reviewers including our own **Robin Bell**. This month's review is Gardening For a Lifetime, How to Garden Wiser As You Grow Older, by Sydney Eddison. [View the reviews.](#)

"The **NARGS Photo Gallery** has now surpassed the 3000 mark! This achievement would not be possible if not for the generosity of many NARGS members who graciously uploaded their pictures," writes Todd Boland, NARGS Gallery Administrator. "It is amazing the variety of plants you can now view, many of them quite uncommon and difficult to see elsewhere. I know many of you have amazing plants or have travelled to wonderful alpine regions. Please consider sharing your photos to other NARGS members by uploading them to our image gallery." Visit nargs.org/nargswiki and click on Image Galleries. Questions? Email Todd at nfld.todd.boland@gmail.com.

People

- Chair: Billie Jean Isbell, bjj1@cornell.edu, 607-539-6484
 - Vice chair/program: Open
 - Secretary: Harold Peachey, hpeachey@gmail.com,
 - Treasurer/plant sales/trips: BZ Marranta, mmm10@cornell.edu
 - Plant sales: David Mitchell, dwm23@cornell.edu, 607-342-3660
 - Plant of the Month/program: John Gilrein, basecamp@alum.syracuse.edu, 315-492-0844
 - Membership/trips: Susanne Lipari sel3@cornell.edu 607-387-9308
 - New member hospitality: Judy Fogel jfogel@twcny.rr.com 607-275-3332
 - Newsletter editor/Webmaster: Craig Cramer, cdcramer@gmail.com
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Green Dragon Tales

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