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CHAPTER

North American Rock Garden Society

Green Dragon Tales

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May/June 2012

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August 18: Member Plant Sale and Annual Picnic

Mark your calendar now for our August 18th meeting. After a summer break, we will resume our monthly Chapter meetings starting with our traditional Member-Only Plant Sale and Picnic. This year, this meeting will be held at the home of Carol Eichler and Steve Dell'Orto, 1562 Taughannock Blvd. (Route 89), Ithaca. (No they do not live on the lake, but Taughannock State Park is only 1½ miles away if you care to visit.) Directions will be included in the next newsletter. It's not too early to be thinking about choice plants you may have in sufficient quantity to share a division, knowing your prized plant will be receiving a good home.

From the Chair

Carol Eichler

What a whirlwind this past month has been! I feel like I've been non-stop motion since our April meeting. Besides being prime-time to get our gardens on the homefront in shape, the Chapter scheduled a day trip to Stonecrop, a 2-day trough-making workshop, held a work day at Wurster Garden, potted up plants for the big plant sale, and participated in the plant sale itself on May 19th! No wonder I'm feeling so exhausted. But wait there's more activity coming up before we take our summer break.* We've scheduled one more outing to the Rochester area. If this trip is anything like our journey to Stonecrop, anyone who goes will return plant rich and smiling contentedly.

Many, many thanks in particular to Christina Gomez, Robin Bell and Harold Peachey who became impromptu assistance at the trough workshop. But most especially we thank Bill and Mary Stark for the yeoman's work they put into testing, organizing and feeding us.

In this newsletter you'll find articles providing more details about all of these activities. Have a great summer everyone!

Carol

***Note:** Even the newsletter will be taking a break. The next issue (July/August) will come out in time to alert you to our next meeting – the member-only sale and picnic.

Whatta Sale!

Carol Eichler

I'm going to go out on a limb and call our plant sale on May 19th a big success. Why so? We made a lot of people happy with the new plants they purchased (myself included). And we had no plants left over. Well, actually we did, but the Cayuga Garden Club was more than happy to take our unsold plants (still some quality plants) for their free plant swap the following week-end. We're pleased with the amount of money raised too - \$1,369 a little less than average.

Many thanks to the many contributors...for donations of plants, for helping with set-up and sales, and for purchasing plants too. Everything went smoothly. If I were to change one thing, I'd get some folks committed up-front to help with clean-up. Every year the task seems to fall to David, BZ, and me who have been there from start to finish and we're exhausted.

Additionally at the sale we distributed a number of our brochures, got some membership renewals, and maybe even a few new members.

The Chapter got some nice advance coverage about our sale booth in a recent issue of Lancaster Farming. Here's the link:

http://lfg.live.mediaspanonline.com/assets/8053665/B06LFW-051212_1.pdf.

Trough Workshop Follow-up

For those who participated in the trough-making weekend May 5 and 6, be aware that your new trough(s) should be moist cured under plastic for at least a week and preferably for 3 weeks for ultimate strength. The troughs then need to be conditioned before planting to reduce their alkalinity so that the plants will not be harmed. Condition the troughs by leaving them outside in the rain for a couple months or by submerging them in a pond for at least a week.



Christina Gomez with her work-in-progress!

Once cured, the next issue is what planting medium to use that will provide the two essential ingredients of moisture and air. What mix will allow moisture retention simultaneously with good drainage? While never supplying a specific formula (sorry there is no "one size fits all" answer), Joyce Fingerut and Rex Murfitt who wrote the book *Creating and Planting Garden Troughs* make these suggestions: 1) Keep your ingredients down to 2 or 3 e.g. peat with perlite or coir with sand or humus, sand and grit; 2) Aim for materials of similar particle size to avoid compaction and help maintain critical air pockets; 3) Take into account the needs of the plants you are planting e.g. woodland plants may need more humus, acid-lovers would

prefer a peatier mix; 4) Take into consideration that, with our wet climate, drainage may be the more critical component than moisture retention; 5) Use good size drainage holes, unimpeded by "drainage material" (such as broken clay pots, but a screen placed over the drainage hole is fine) to help keep the area of saturated soil (where soil meets the bottom of the container) away from the roots of the plants.

And from John Gilrein, his words of wisdom on trough soil and plant suggestions:

Thanks to our April Plant-of-the-Month you should have a good start on planting material for your trough. Again Fingerut and Murfitt write this: "A trough environment, with its custom-designed soil plus various means of shelter, permits the growth of certain plants outside their usual zones of hardiness. The flip side of this is that factors such as wetness in winter rule out plants that would otherwise be hardy at the temperatures of a particular climate zone." Trial and error as to what succeeds for you is often the best teacher.

+According to Jim Borland, author of "Soils for Troughs," Handbook on Troughs, "Sharp" sand is *not* the superior sand type. ...The best sand, is marble-shaped or spherical. Sand of this shape is ...wind-deposited (aeolian) sand....The sand that most closely approximates aeolian sand's shape is usually that discarded by the construction trades because it does *not* fit together.

A Great Opportunity at ESW – Focus on Troughs

Carol Eichler



The prairie at Jennings Environmental Center, one of the field trip choices

It seems like we have a theme going here. This Eastern Study Weekend "A T(October 12-14) in Pittsburgh provides near perfect timing for our Chapter. With no less than eight terrific speakers scheduled for presentations, this ESW is packing a lot into a few days. Evenings are for talks, daytime for your choice of field trips. But there's even more on the agenda - a trough show/competition, plant sales, and a dinner banquet. Maybe one of the best parts of attending is getting to meet and make face-to-face connections with fellow gardeners from all over the East and beyond. Registration until September 1st is \$300. Discounted hotel accommodations are at Four Points by Sheraton

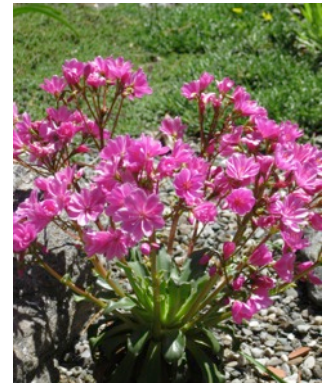
Pittsburgh North (actually located in Mars, PA) for \$115 per night, double occupancy, including full breakfast. Generally, programs begin Friday evening and end early afternoon Sunday making a two-night stay possible if a little exhausting. Often there are optional pre- or post-conference add-ons to visit private gardens – sorry no details on that yet – but they are certainly worthwhile if you have the time.

Ask anyone who has attended an ESW in the past (John Gilrein, Billie Jean, Harold Peachey, Robin Bell, Bill Plummer, me and probably others) and I'm almost certain you'll get the same answer – they're terrific and a real value! For purposes of cutting costs by sharing driving or rooms, I'm happy to coordinate this. It will be good to have our Chapter represented, if possible.

On the Road Again...to NYBG and Other Gardens

Carol Eichler

Come one, come all as we travel to downstate New York to visit several public gardens. Departing August 30th our first stop will be at Wave Hill, a 28-acre public garden and cultural center in the Bronx overlooking the Hudson River and Palisades. Highlights of the gardens are its Aquatic and Monocot Collection which are in their prime in late summer, the Wild Garden described as "select wild species from around the world ...combined to achieve the ...planted-by-nature effect," and the Alpine House, which is always worth seeing at any time of year. We will stay overnight both nights in Elmsford just a short drive away. After in-house continental breakfast we will depart the next morning (Friday, August 31st)





An inviting overlook, The Point, at Innisfree Cup Garden

for NY Botanical Garden, approximately a 30-minute drive.

We will volunteer our time in the 3-acre Rock Garden from 10 a.m. to noon, and 1 to 3 p.m., allowing a break for lunch and free time to explore the gardens on your own before they close at 6 p.m. Saturday morning we will visit Innisfree Cup Garden, described on their website as “a 150-acre public garden in which the ancient art of Chinese landscape design has been reinterpreted to create, without recourse to imitation, a unique American garden.” Before heading back home, there may be time for a quick visit to the Storm King Art Center or a nearby nursery, highly recommended by Judy

Fogel, depending on your preferences.

Interested in joining this trip? Please contact Carol Eichler, 607-269-7070, carolithaca@gmail.com for full details including hotel arrangements and costs. Deadline date to sign-up for this trip is August 18th (our August meeting). Drivers wanted.

Now's the Time to Visit the Wurster Memorial Rock Garden

The Wurster Garden always puts on a spectacular spring display. Don't miss it – plan to take a moment to visit the garden. The garden is easy to overlook, tucked away as it is, just beyond the parking lot behind the Cooperative Extension offices at 615 Willow Avenue (or one can approach the garden via Dey Street).



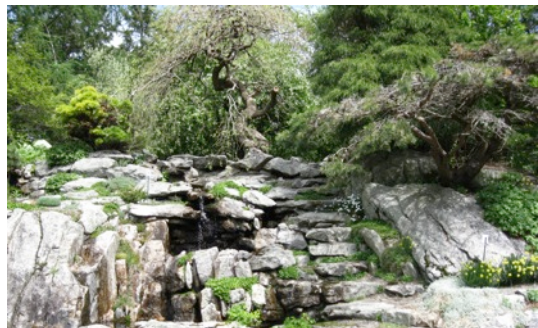
On May 3rd we did some badly needed weeding and cleanup and planted nearly 2 dozen newly acquired plants purchased from vendors at the alpine plant sale at Stonecrop. Note the garden will be included in the Fall Creek Garden Tour running 11a.m.–3 p.m. June 10th.

If you want to help with upkeep on the garden – and learn a lot about rock garden plants in the process, be sure to contact David Mitchell dwm23@cornell.edu to be notified when work sessions are scheduled (often on Thursdays after 5 p.m.).

Visiting Stonecrop: a Wow Experience

11 of us made the trip, joining lots of other gardeners. Do you think we travelled the farthest? Some of the vendors had us beat, traveling from Vermont and Ontario Province Canada.

The rock gardens were spectacular too. Not so much happening in the veggie or perennial beds, as was to be expected. Pictures tell the story much better than words.





Photos: The Waterfall, green roof doghouse, *Gentian acaulis* 'Trotters Variety', a trough inspiration

2012 Program Plans

June 2: Day Trip to Rochester area gardens and nurseries (Contact Billie Jean, bjj1@cornell.edu to sign-up and for details)

June 10: Wurster Garden included in Fall Creek Garden Tour, 11 a.m. – 3 p.m. Maps available at Thompson Park (N. Cayuga and Marshall Streets). Free.

Aug. 18: Member Plant Sale and Dish-to-Pass Picnic at Carol Eichler & Steve Dell'Orto's home, 1562 Taughannock Blvd., Ithaca (details, next issue)

August 30-Sept. 1: 2-night overnight trip including working trip to New York Botanical Garden Rock Garden (See article, this issue)

Sept. 16: [Nick Turland](#), NARGS Speaker, Associate Curator in the Division of Science and Conservation at the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis, Missouri since 1993, Co-Director of the Flora of China Project; he will give 2 talks yet to be selected.

October 12-14: Autumn in the Garden: A Time for Troughs, NARGS Eastern Study Weekend in Pittsburgh, PA, hosted by the Allegheny Chapter. See article or visit the website for more info (<http://home.comcast.net/~sylvialynch/Study%20Weekend%20Information.htm>)

October 20: **David Fernandez**, owner of Cayuga Landscape in Ithaca: gardening with deer

November 10: **Jerry Kral**, Rochester gardener *extraordinaire*

Details as we learn them will be included in future newsletters and acnargs.blogspot.com.
When in question, visit our blog.

Recollections of Les Quatre Vents, Journey 2007

David Mitchell (Reprinted from July/August 2007 Issue of Green Dragon)

Editor's Note: After viewing the narrated DVD-tour of Les Quatre Vents at our April meeting, I thought we'd all enjoy reading this article about our visit there, as well as other gardens, 5 years ago.

A lucky thirteen: Mary Stauble, Bill Stark, Billie Jean Isbel, David Mitchell, Jerry Weiland, Joy Coletta, Carolyn Yaeger, Pat Curran, Carol Eichler, Colette Menassian, Donna Kraft, Barb Hamlin, and John Gilrein, made the 554 mile journey north to Frank Cabot's garden, *Les Quatre Vents*, on June 14, 2007. Along the way, some of us stopped at the Montreal Botanical Garden and made a bee line to the alpine garden. I was especially struck by the tall rock formations and the use of weathered pines at the top, effectively simulating an alpine environment.

Onward, passing Quebec City and finally to the tiny town of LaMalbaie, to our hotel, Auberge au Petit Berger, nestled on a hill overlooking the St. Lawrence River. To our delight we discovered dinner and breakfast were included. We had the restaurant all to ourselves as we were one of the very first tourists to visit the area for the season. A friendly chef came out and talked to us about what he could prepare. The dinner was great, but not to be our best on the trip.

The next morning we drove over to Frank Cabot's, a five-minute drive. Billie Jean had the security code to open the gate and we drove in. We eventually obeyed the signs and parked our cars in a field, then walked down a long road lined with tall Lombardy poplars to the main house where Frank was waiting.

Frank's book, *The Greater Perfection*, is the story about the gardens and is a must read before and after visiting. It is an incredible place, made even more so by having been guided by the garden designer himself. Frank carried a note pad and a camera, stopping to write and to photograph moments he liked. It was nice to see the gardener enjoying his work. The tour lasted over two hours and then we had lunch near the terrace just opposite the white garden. With the entire place to ourselves for the day we were free to revisit areas. Later several of us bought Frank's book and he happily wrote a personal note and signed each one.

With the highlight of our trip now behind us, we headed straight for Quebec City and checked into the Hotel Chateau Bellevue, located in the shadow of the famous Chateau Quebec. We all had the evening and following afternoon free to explore the walled city. Then on the road again, heading toward Maria Galletti's well-known nursery, Alpine Mont Echo, in Sutton. On the way we stopped at Parc Marie-Victorin in Kingsey Falls about 100 miles southwest of Quebec City.

Parc Marie-Victorin was nothing like Frank's and it took some adjustment of attitude to appreciate. The garden is more public and makes use of whimsical sculptures throughout, some being planted topiaries. Hours later we arrived in Sutton and checked into our bed and breakfasts, Pinorama and Chevalier Mont Echo. Dinner was at Il Duetto, an Italian restaurant housed in a converted barn. Again, we had a wonderful chef who came out and chatted with us. It was the best dinner most of us had during the four-day trip.

The next morning, the final day of our trip, Maria Galletti gave us a tour of her fabulous gardens, ranging from alpine to woodland. She has recently been collecting plants in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, adding even more interesting plants you won't find in gardens or in the trade. In her nursery we devoured plants with our eyes and bought wildlv without any regard as to what

to do with them later. The plants had to be shipped because we could not get a government plant inspector. After prying ourselves away from the gems we discovered, we drove to Cady's Falls, a nursery in Morrisville, Vermont. Owner Don Avery is an avid plant collector and his display gardens are amazing. There was so much to see including alpine, woodland, perennial beds, and dwarf conifers. We once again devoured plants and this time we were able to take them back with us on our long drive home.

Round 2 Seed Exchange Stats

In case you were wondering. We filled 260 orders in the 2nd Round, sometimes called the Surplus Round, slightly down from last year. Total number of packets ordered: 15,992, while 30% of the requests were for 100 seed packets. Ahh, each of those dreaded 100-packet orders took a lot of time to fill! Thanks again everyone who helped. We are passing this task off to another Chapter next year.

Lessons learned at the trough workshop

Bill Stark

Technical:

- 1) Gravity isn't your friend. I've seen many successful troughs built over inverted bowls, but there are limits to this method that we exceeded at the workshop. We built a standard trough over an inverted fishbox that had about 16" high vertical walls. As the walls were built up, the hypertufa began to sag, thickening the walls. Pushing or pounding on one wall moved or vibrated the other 3 walls and they sagged even more. Using a dryer mix didn't help. Finally, we cut 4 wood boards to loosely fit around the outside of the trough and then wrapped a chain and come-along around the boards. We used the come-along to squeeze the boards together with 100's of pounds of force. This stopped the sagging and we were able to finish the trough. An inner + outer mold would have prevented the sagging, sloping or shorter walls would have reduced the sagging and applying the hypertufa to the inside of the fishbox instead of the outside would have probably worked better.
- 2) One mix fits all. We had offered to provide 5 different hypertufa mixes but we ended up using only the Hi Sand mix because it's stronger and all the mixes look the same. The Hi Sand mix is a bit heavier, but members chose to build foam core troughs to reduce weight.
- 3) All the foam cores that members brought to the workshop were not sanded enough for the surface bonding cement to properly adhere. This has to be emphasized at any future workshop.

Organizational:

- 1) We had too many options. Building both standard and foam core troughs at the same workshop didn't work out very well. I became tied to the cement mixer making hypertufa for standard troughs and I couldn't help members building the new foam core troughs. Christina, BZ and Harold stepped in and helped others - but as a result, they weren't able to finish all of their projects. One solution would be to hire someone to operate the cement mixer.
- 2) Charge a nonrefundable fee when members sign up for a workshop. After you buy the materials, members cancel.

Responsible People/2012 Board Members

- Chair: Carol Eichler, carolithaca@gmail.com
- Program: John Gilrein, basecamp@alum.syracuse.edu
- Program Committee Members: Nari Mistry
- Secretary: Mary Stauble, mes2@cornell.edu
- Treasurer: BZ Marranca, mmm10@cornell.edu

- Plant Sales Chair: David Mitchell, dwm23@cornell.edu
- Plant Sales Committee Members: Michael Loos, BZ Marranta
- Plant of the Month: John Gilrein, basecamp@alum.syracuse.edu, [Karen Hansen](#)
- Membership: Mary Stauble, mes2@cornell.edu
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Next Issue: NY Botanical Garden in Spring, Some Suggested Plants for Troughs, New Books for our library



Campanula chamissonis
in a trough 5/14/12