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March 2014

#### IN THIS ISSUE:

- Harvey Wrightman – Crevice Planting
- From the (Vice) Chair
- Plant of the Month
- South Africa Trip
- Adventures in Hardiness
- Carol's Slide Show
- 2014 Programs
- Calendar of garden events
- People

## MARCH 15 : HARVEY WRIGHTMAN-CREVICE PLANTING

*John Gilrein, Program Committee*

The speaker for our March program will be Harvey Wrightman, proprietor of a family run nursery near London, in southern Ontario, Canada, speaking on Crevice Planting. **Wrightman Alpines** was started by Harvey in 1985 and is one of the best nurseries for alpine plants in eastern North America. In addition to selling plants at the nursery and mail order, the nursery has had a presence at many of the NARGS eastern study weekends, and continues to sell plants at Stonecrop on the last Saturday of April.

Wrightman Alpines has approximately 2000 plants in stock, including many unusual and hard to find alpine plants. The Wrightman Alpines website includes short films on crevice gardens, and a link to Harvey's blog. The clay crevice planting technique was developed by Czech rock gardeners, who have been in the forefront of rock gardening in recent years. Harvey is also currently the Vice President for NARGS.

Join us at 1:00 p.m. on March 15<sup>th</sup> in the Whetzel Room (404 Plant Science Building, Cornell University-map at newsletter's end). Optional bring-your-own bag lunch and social time starts at Noon. Drinks provided. Goodies always welcome for sharing.

## FROM THE (VICE) CHAIR

*John Gilrein, Vice Chair*

*(Editor's note: Carol was out of the country when her "From the Chair" piece was due, so John is filling in for her.)*

When I think about the winter we just went through, I know a lot of people did not relish all the cold and snow. The last few weeks were probably good for a lot of alpine plants and hardy perennials, as there was widespread snow cover and not much freezing and thawing. This past weekend was very spring-like, with sun and temperatures in the 40s, so Spring is on its way! This year doesn't look like there will be *Cyclamen coum* or crocus blooming in February, which is just as well; we still have a foot of snow. Maybe weather will be more settled when bloom starts this year.

For 2014, we're having a lot of rock garden-related speakers, with Harvey Wrightman (clay crevice planting) in March, Betsy Knapp (trough planting) in April, and Mike Kintgen (rock gardening and alpines of CO/WY) in October. Maybe someone will be inspired to start a rock garden!

Even if you're not ready for the significant investment in a rock garden, you can make a miniature rock garden in a trough. You can easily make a trough on your own. Come to our upcoming trough demonstration to learn how. We also hope to have a trough workshop this year—details as we know them. And even if you don't anticipate making your own rock garden, it's always interesting to see plants that are unusual. We'll show you what's growing in the mountains, without developing tired legs and shortness of breath.

We're starting up with our Plant of the Month at the March meeting, and the Chapter will subsidize the cost of the first plant for each member. One of many reasons the Adirondack Chapter is a good value: your membership costs less than subsidizing POM for the year! If you ever have questions about the POM, don't hesitate to contact me; I'm only a few clicks away on email. And as a pathological plantaholic, I never tire of talking about plants.

For those of you who did not get an early start (like me) and plan to start seeds, it's time to start any seeds that require cold stratification. You can do your cold stratification in the refrigerator, outside, in an unheated garage, or a cold room. The last Green Dragon included information about seed starting. Though I'm still dreaming about better seed starting facilities, I really enjoy starting seeds. I'm mostly doing it outdoors, so my seedlings are not very far along by mid April, when we have our seedling exchange, and I'm only successful with 50-75% of the seeds I try. It's still a great adventure, and the successes make it worthwhile.

**John** (for Carol)

## PLANT OF THE MONTH: WRIGHTMAN ALPINES

*John Gilrein, POM coordinator*

Our Plant of the Month for this month will be plants from Wrightman Alpines Nursery. Rather than us purchasing plants, Harvey is going to bring some plants for sale. We're working on a way to still provide a discount to members for the first plant purchased. I hope that with him bringing plants, we'll have an even a larger selection than normal and people can purchase more than one plant. Plants will need to be held over in a protected spot until planting time, e.g. cool to cold sunny window, as it will be too early for planting. We can't provide cultural directions since we don't know which plants he is bringing, so if you have questions about growing your plant, you could look in the online [Wrightman Alpines catalog](#), consult a rock gardening book, or email me.

Plant of the Month is a member benefit, partially subsidized by your dues, to provide additional encouragement to attend meetings and expand the horizons of our members. The goal is to coordinate the plant of the month to the meeting topic, though sometimes that is not possible. Please send suggestions for Plant of the Month to John Gilrein.

It's Human Nature, or at least a gardener's nature (which is not quite the same thing), to want to live at least one and preferably two climatic zones warmer than where he gardens.

**One Man's Garden**, p. 91 Henry Mitchell

## SOUTH AFRICA TRIP WITH PANAYOTI KELAIDIS

Panayoti Kelaidis, Senior Curator of Denver Botanic Gardens, is planning a trip to the high Drakensberg Mountains in January of 2015.

Not nearly as well known to American tourists as it is to Europeans and native South Africans, the Drakensberg feature a host of elegant resort hotels and accessible trails—and unparalleled natural beauty. January is peak month for color in the montane, subalpine and alpine meadows here. This trip features the most spectacular spots: Sani Pass, Sentinel, Naude's Nek and more!

The flora of Southern Africa comprises 10% of the flora of Planet Earth: Although the mild subtropical "Fynbos" flora of the Western Cape and the subtropical succulent flora of the Karoo are well known to many, the high mountain flora is extraordinarily rich and especially showy in the depths of North Temperate Winter. This trip is designed to visit the key locations from Lesotho, throughout the Southern Drakensberg where Panayoti has found so many plants on his previous six expeditions!

More details available at his blog, [Prairie Break](#).

## ADVENTURES IN HARDINESS

*John Gilrein*

As a pathological plant lover, I have to admit I have a good case of "zone envy", feeling envious of those who live in a milder climate like Virginia or Portland, Oregon, where figs and rosemary are fully hardy and Christmas roses might actually bloom at Christmas. Years ago, I subscribed to a journal titled *Hardy Enough*, about the planting adventures of the authors growing plants in the Connecticut River valley of Massachusetts. The authors were growing things like hardy palms, *Magnolia grandiflora* (evergreen southern magnolia), and other plants that were not considered growable in their zone. (This would now be considered zone 6.) Some of their experimental plants survived, and others perished.

Hardiness is a complicated factor to determine growability, and the standard variable taken into account for hardiness (minimum winter temperature) does not work for all plants. Site variables like consistent snow cover (or lack thereof), minimum temperature, wind, air drainage, shelter and proximity to a buildings, winter rainfall and humidity, winter sun, and slope all contribute to whether a plant will survive the winter. It's less challenging for a hardy perennial that dies to the ground to survive the winter than a tree that can't be protected by the warmth in the soil and the snow cover.

Some rock garden plants can survive cold and wind but can't cope with the winter rain and humidity. I'm in USDA hardiness zone 5b, the City of Ithaca and Cayuga lakeshore areas are zone 6, and some of the higher elevation areas of Tompkins, Onondaga, and Oneida Counties are zone 5a or 4.

Looking through plants catalogs, hardiness zone ratings for plants are inconsistent, so it's not always an accurate predictor for a plant that could survive (or thrive) in your site. For example, Forestfarm, an Oregon mail order nursery, tends to have very conservative hardiness zone ratings. Their stock is grown in zone 8, but ultimately the provenance (origin of the plant) of the stock plants would determine hardiness.

One can push the hardiness of a plant by strategically choosing the site. The Plant Science Building at Cornell has a perfect example of this, with a *Magnolia grandiflora* planted in a south facing courtyard like space. The tree benefits from the building for wind protection and a

little extra warmth. To push the hardiness for an herbaceous perennial, you could plant it in a spot where more snow accumulates/persists. To push the hardiness of a woody plant, choose a site out of the wind and protected by a building, ideally the East or South side. Or the protection could be a fence or a dense evergreen hedge.

It's always helpful to consider a plant's provenance and its habitat, both for choosing the planting site, and modifying the soil to keep the plant happy. A Mediterranean native, like rosemary or lavender would be happy in a parched site next to a hot concrete wall, but would likely perish at the bottom of the downspout.

Fertilizing, especially with chemical fertilizer applied too late in the season, encourages soft growth that might not have a chance to harden off sufficiently before frost, so it's best to be conservative with fertilizing marginally hardy plants. Soil mulching is beneficial, for insulating the soil from the cold and minimizing heaving.

### **SOME OF MY SUCCESSES AND FAILURES:**

***Agapanthus campanulatus*** (lily of the Nile). This plant is a perfect example of the foolishness of some common names; it's from South Africa--thousands of miles from the Nile! Variety 'Midnight Blue' returned after multiple winters; variety 'Back in Black' returned after 1 winter (and still testing). Hardiness zone ratings for *Agapanthus* found in catalogs may be either reasonably accurate or very conservative. The species *A. campanulatus* is reputedly the hardiest. When choosing a growable *Agapanthus*, choose one with a hardiness rating close to yours, and avoid those that are evergreen. An evergreen *Agapanthus* is likely from a non-hardy species, like *A. africanus*.

***Buxus sempervirens* 'Graham Blandy'** (boxwood). This fastigiated cultivar overwintered 1 winter with no issues, though hardiness rating was zone 6.

***Ficus carica*** (edible fig). This Mediterranean plant survives the winter very reliably, usually dying back to the ground and resprouting; in some winters it has not died all the way back to the soil level. I've heaped snow and leaf bags on it to protect it, which is not as aggressive (or successful) as some of the standard treatments, like wrapping the plant, or digging up the roots on one side and burying the plant in the soil. My fig tree is in a site that's not sunny enough, so it has not been fruitful. Varieties 'Brown Turkey' and 'Chicago Hardy' are 2 of the hardiest varieties.

***Gladiolus grandiflorus*** (standard garden glads). I've had these overwinter multiple years, sometimes just due to not getting all the corms dug up in time.

***Phygelius rectus*** (cape fuschia). This is reputedly hardy to only zone 7. David Mitchell reported success overwintering this in his garden. I've had it return after 2 winters so far, and hoping it makes it through this more challenging winter.

***Ribes sanguineum*** (a native western currant). Hardiness rating zone 6. Seems to survive winter well.

***Zantedeschia aethiopica*** – calla lilly. Ellen Hornig grew a hardy variety that was from a higher elevation in South Africa than the standard plants in the trade. This overwinters well (thanks Harold).

***Berberis stenophylla*** 'nana corallina'. This is an evergreen barberry hybrid. It was a very nice dwarf shrub. It overwintered well the first winter, with very little dieback, and perished the next.

***Pyracantha lalandei*** (firethorn). I tried this and killed it, but I may try it again.

***Rosmarinus officinale*** (rosemary). This dies every time I plant it outside, even in a protected spot. The variety 'Arp' is supposedly hardy to zone 6. It survives easily in pot in the basement, mostly neglected for the winter.

I'm hoping to test out some of these plants in the near future: *Poncirus trifolia* (hardy orange Z6 or 7), *Lagerstromia indica* (crepe myrtle Z6), *Vitex rotundifolia* (chaste tree Z6), *Viburnum tinus* (evergreen viburnum Z7).

How about you, reader? Tell us of your successes with supposedly non-hardy plants.

## NEARBY GARDENS YOU MUST SEE

Our own chair, Carol Eichler, is giving a talk entitled "Nearby Gardens You Must See" Saturday, March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2:00-3:30 pm at the Tompkins County Cooperative Extension. Take a journey with our speaker to some fantastic gardens within a day's drive of Ithaca. She will include gardens from the Philadelphia/Delaware Valley area such as Winterthur, Chanticleer, and Mt. Cuba, as well as Stonecrop, White Pine Camp Heutte Rock Garden, and New York Botanical Gardens in New York State. Free and open to the public. *The suggested donation of \$3 helps to support the Horticulture Program.*

Why not combine it with a visit to Hitch Lyman's snowdrops, which is happening the same day? Details in our Calendar of Garden Events, which is compiled every month by Pat Curran. Thank you, Pat!

## 2014 PROGRAM PLANS

*Mark your calendars! Unless otherwise specified, all local events start with a brown bag lunch at noon with the program following at 1 pm, and take place at the Whetzel Room, 404 Plant Science Building, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY (see map on the last page).*

**March 15:** Harvey Wrightman, Crevice Planting

**April 19:** Betsy Knapp, Trough Planting Demystified

**May 17:** look for us at the Ithaca Garden Fair and Plant Sale at the Ithaca High School.

Members get a 25% discount! Plan on volunteering for part of your visit.

**August 16:** Members-only plant sale and picnic.

**September 20:** Judy Glattstein, topic to be determined

**October 18:** Mike Kintgen, Rock Gardening, and Alpines of Colorado and Wyoming

**November 8:** John Gilrein, A Tour of Newfoundland

Details as we learn them will be included in future newsletters, our blog, [acnargs.blogspot.com](http://acnargs.blogspot.com), and our Facebook page, <http://www.facebook.com/acnargs>.

## CALENDAR OF GARDEN EVENTS

### MARCH:

**Plants of South Africa, Sat. March 1, 1pm, Louis Jordaan, Adirondack Chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society, Wetzel Rm., Plant Sci. Bldg., Cornell**

**Community Beautification Training, Mon. March 3, 6-8:30 pm, TCCE (Tompkins County)**

**Native Plants Conference, March 7-8, Ithaca, see Plantsmen Nursery website for details**

**For the Birds! Garden Design to Create Bird-Friendly Habitats, Fri. March 7, 5-8 pm, Borg Warner Room at Tompkins County Public Library**

**Community Supported Agriculture Fair, Sat. March 8, 12-3 pm, Boynton Middle School cafeteria**

**Introduction to Seed Saving, Tues. March 11, 6:30-8:30 pm, Chrys Gardener, TCCE**

**Getting Started with Vegetable Gardening, Wed. March 12, 7-9 pm, Groton Public Library, 112 E. Cortland St., Groton**

**Intro to Maple Sugaring with Sapsquatch, Thurs. March 13, 6-8 pm, TCCE**



**Clay Crevice Planting**, Sat. March 15, 1pm, Harvey Wrightman, Adirondack Chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society, Wetzel Rm., Plant Sci. Bldg., Cornell

**Community Beautification Training**, Tues March 18, 6-8:30 pm at TCCE

**Botanical Travels from Coast to Coast**, Wed. March 19, 7 pm, David Brandenburg of the Dawes Arboretum in Ohio, Finger Lakes Native Plant Society, Unitarian Church Annex, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor

**Garden Conservancy Open Gardens**, Hitch Lyman's Snowdrops March 22, 10-4, See Garden Conservancy website for details.

**Nearby Gardens You Must See! Travel Slide Show**, Sat. March 22, 2:00-3:30 pm, Carol Eichler of the Adirondack Chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society TCCE

**High Tunnel Hoophouse Tours**, Sun. March 23, two sessions, either 11am-12 noon, or 12:45-1:45 pm, Lansing area. Contact Pat Curran for details.

**Community Beautification Training**, Thurs. March 27, 6-8:30pm at TCCE

**Spring Into Gardening**, Sat. March 29, 9am-4pm, TCCE, one day-event on the theme of Gardening and Climate Change: complete schedule coming soon

**Worm Composting Class**, Sat. March 29, time TBA, TCCE

**Restoring Neglected Apple Trees**, Sun. March 30, 1-4 pm, Akiva Silver, Twisted Tree Farm, register at [akivasilver@yahoo.com](mailto:akivasilver@yahoo.com)

#### APRIL:

**Great Trees for Your Landscape**, Wed. April 2, 6:30-8:30 pm, Pat Curran, TCCE

**Citizen Pruner Training**, Mon. April 7, 21, and 28, 7-8:30 pm, TCCE, see Earthkeeper for details

**High-Density Crops for Your Garden**, Tues. April 8, 6:30-8:30 pm, TCCE

**AgStravaganza!** Sat. April 12, 10-3, see Earthkeeper for details

**Insect Pests in the Home, and How to Cope!** Tues. April 15, 6:30-8:30 pm, Carolyn Klass, TCCE

**"Giving" Trees**, Akiva Silver, Wed. April 16, 7pm, Finger Lakes Native Plant Society, Unitarian Church Annex, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor

**Trough Planting Demystified**, Betsy Knapp, Sat. April 19, 1 pm, Adirondack Chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society, Wetzel Rm., Plant Sci. Bldg., Cornell

**Beautiful Shrubs & Vines**, Mon. April 21, 6:30-8:30 pm, Pat Curran, TCCE

**Grow Your Own Spuds**, Thurs. April 24, 6:30-8:30 pm, 4H Acres

**Earth Day**, Sun. April 27, location TBA

**Compost Fair & 4-H Duck Race**, Sun. April 27, 12-4pm, TCCE

#### MAY:

**Keeping Critters out of Your Garden**, Thurs. May 1, 6:30-8:30 pm, 4H Acres

**Gorgeous Perennials for Your Garden**, Tues. May 6, 6:30-8:30 pm, Pat Curran, TCCE

**Dividing Daylilies & Other Perennials**, Wed. May 7, 6:00-8:00 pm, Pat Curran, TCCE

>>**Garden Fair Plant Sale, Sat. May 17, 9am-2pm – SAVE THE DATE!!!**<<

**Discovering New Life in Great Smoky Mountains National Park**, Wed. May 21, 7pm, Finger Lakes Native Plant Society, Unitarian Church Annex, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor

#### GARDEN SHOWS/EVENTS in 2014:

**CNY in Bloom**, Syracuse, no show in 2014

**Philadelphia Flower Show**, March 2-9, 2014

**Gardenscape Flower Show**, Rochester: No show again this year; sale of the Henrietta Dome dragged on long enough that no show could be planned for 2014

**Plantasia Garden & Landscape Show**, March 20-23, 2014, Fairgrounds Event & Expo Center in Hamburg, NY

**Lilac Festival**, Rochester NY, May 9-18, 2014

**Southern Cayuga Garden Club Garden Tour** (King Ferry area), Sun. June 8, 2014, 1-5 pm (starts at King Ferry Winery with a free tasting with ticket)

**Dryden Open Gate Garden & Art Tour**, Sat. Aug. 16, 9am-2pm (5 gardens for \$5)

**Gathering of Gardeners**, Sat. Sept. 13, 2014, David Culp and Elizabeth Licata, speakers

### RESPONSIBLE PEOPLE/2014 BOARD MEMBERS

*If you want to volunteer, we'd love to hear from you!*

Chair: Carol Eichler, [carolithaca@gmail.com](mailto:carolithaca@gmail.com)

Program: John Gilrein, [basecamp@alum.syracuse.edu](mailto:basecamp@alum.syracuse.edu)

Program Committee Members: Nari Mistry, [nbm2@cornell.edu](mailto:nbm2@cornell.edu)

Secretary: Mary Stauble, [mes2@cornell.edu](mailto:mes2@cornell.edu)

Treasurer: BZ Marranca, [mmm10@cornell.edu](mailto:mmm10@cornell.edu)

Plant Sales Chair: David Mitchell, [dwm23@cornell.edu](mailto:dwm23@cornell.edu)

Plant Sales Committee Members: Michael Loos, BZ Marranca

Plant of the Month: John Gilrein, [basecamp@alum.syracuse.edu](mailto:basecamp@alum.syracuse.edu), Karen Hansen

Membership: Mary Stauble, [mes2@cornell.edu](mailto:mes2@cornell.edu)

New Member Hospitality: Terry Humphries, [terryh@workingsolutionsrome.org](mailto:terryh@workingsolutionsrome.org)

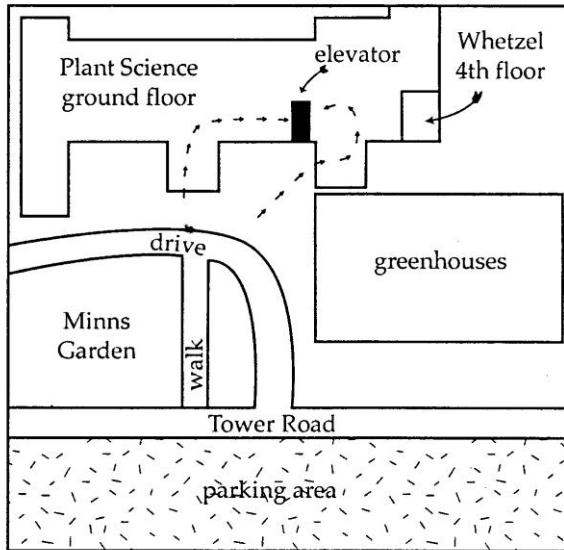
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### HOW TO GET THERE: MEETING ROOM MAP

The Plant Science Building is located at 236 Tower Road on the Cornell University Campus.



### GREEN DRAGON TALES

Published eight times a year (Feb., March, April, May/June, July/Aug., Sept., Oct. Nov./Dec.). Submit articles by the fourth Friday of the month preceding publication to Kathy Purdy, [kopurdy@gmail.com](mailto:kopurdy@gmail.com). Note: The next issue of *The Green Dragon* will be in April 2014.