



# Newsletter

Jaime Rodriguez, President; (907) 357-2747, email: [Jaime@matnet.com](mailto:Jaime@matnet.com)  
 Verna Pratt, Vice Pres/Program Chair; (907) 333-8212; email [akrafts@alaskakrafts.com](mailto:akrafts@alaskakrafts.com)  
 Jamie Smith, Secretary, HC 34 Box 2131, Wasilla, AK 99654  
 Florene Carney, Newsletter Ed; (907) 376-5390; email: [snowfire@mtaonline.net](mailto:snowfire@mtaonline.net)  
 Madge Oswald, Treasurer/Membership 12001 Audubon Dr., Anchorage, AK 99516

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### Coming Events—Mark Your Calendar

- April 4:** ABG Garden Conference at UAA Library
- April 11:** Sears Mall Garden Show. Bring Plants, Books, Magazines to sell
- April 18:** ARGs Monthly Meeting. At the Cooperative Extension in Anchorage. Mark White will present "Consider Conifers." This is a make-up program for January when the program was cancelled due to the blizzard conditions.
- April 24, 25, 26:** Today's Woman Show. Menard Multi-Use Complex, Wasilla.
- May 16:** Plant Sale at Sally K's. Old Harbor Rd. off Muldoon. The best plants go fast. Come EARLY. Hours are 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- May 17:** Rock Garden Clean up at Alaska Botanical Garden. 2:00 p.m. Bring tools, gloves and be ready to work.
- May 23:** Plant Sale and Open Garden at Snowfire. 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Garden Tours, all day. Best plants go early.
- June 20 & 21:** ABG Fair. Bring plants on the 19th. Call Verna for time and sign up to work a few hours at our booth.
- July 11:** Garden and Arts Festival at the State Fairgrounds in Palmer.
- July 18 & 19:** Coyote Gardens Open. Les is donating a portion of the proceeds to ARGs. Call Verna to sign up to help out one of the days. 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Saturday, 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Sunday.

*Think Spring*



## Hobby for a Lifetime

Karin Covey

*Karin is an accomplished Gardener. She assists at Jaime's Alpine Garden Nursery, is a Docent at the Snowfire Open Garden, and at Les Brake's Coyote Gardens Open*

I have always been a perennial plant lover. How any plant can make it through our cold climate and howling winds is truly a wonder. One can't help noticing that plants grow better next to large rocks.

I became a rock gardener when I got a piece of property with a large gravel bank. It was barren, big and very rocky. The excavator had left behind several large rocks. My son arranged a path out of large slate rocks and I began thinking how much fun this project could be.

The native silverberry (*Alaëagnus angustifolia*) was a favorite of mine so I planted a four-footer in the top center of my hill. I also had two small blue spruce seedlings. I planted those higher up on the hill as well, keeping in mind they could be very tall someday. The silverberry has traveled all around those spruce saplings



*Pulsatilla vulgaris rubra*

that are 4ft tall now. It frames the garden with silver and helps with erosion control. Others might call it invasive.

Colorado gardener, Lauren Springer, came to talk at an ARGS meeting one summer. She suggested Alaska rock gardeners were not using enough evergreens. So I deliberately sought out some evergreens to try. I found a 'Calgary' juniper that does well with my windy conditions and even a creeping

thuja. Now I keep my eyes out for smaller evergreens. I'm looking for Zone 2 plants because of the wind and my open location.

I have planted polemoniums, columbines, primulas and shooting stars. I had a lot of pulsatilla seeds from my fringed red pulsatilla. I was pleased that so many germinated the following year, some were fringed, some not..there was predominantly purple but I also got white and pink from that seed. Jaime gave me a white arenaria that took several seasons to make masses, but I love it now because it blooms so early. Les Brake turned me on to *Androsace carnea* another early and hardy miniature and not to forget the tiny yellow *Iris flavissima*, the flowers last only a day. And last season I got that tiny lavender thalictrum from Florene, I wonder how these two would fare together?

And so the collection moves on. Long ago I found it impossible to maintain a list of every plant that I have collected. Every summer I seem to find a plant group or two to focus on. It is a hobby that can last an entire lifetime.



## Celebrating NARGS 75th Anniversary

Bobby J. Ward

In 1934, North Americans were listening to Paul Whiteman and Duke Ellington on the radio and were watching Clark Cable and Claudette Colbert on the silver screen. In March of that year, 250 American garden enthusiasts gathered in the Commodore Hotel in New York City to formally launch the American Rock Garden Society. The organization grew to over 30 chapters by its 60th anniversary in 1994, the year it changed its name to the North American Rock Garden Society (NARGS) to recognize its large Canadian membership. Now with 35 chapters, the society celebrates its 75th anniversary in 2009.

My introduction to NARGS was in 1989 when I joined my local Piedmont Chapter, which was organizing its first Winter Study Weekend. I attended that meeting and made the acquaintance of long-time NARGS members, many becoming fast friends over the years. Expert speakers there sparked my abiding interest in bulbs and hellebores.

I soon discovered that there is much diversity in gardening styles and plant interests among the NARGS members across North America, reaching from Alaska through the Canadian provinces to all corners of the U.S. Regional differences in climate, rainfall, and temperature, push gardeners to adapt. Verna Pratt in Alaska does not garden the same way that Ev Whittemore does in North Carolina. Todd Boland in Newfoundland may not fully appreciate the gardening challenges that Marion Jarvie faces in Ontario. Larry Thomas's admirable eleventh-floor terrace garden in New York City is far different in space and concept from the rock gardens at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver or the Denver Botanic Gardens.

I learned that dryland steppe plants of the Colorado inter-mountain basin won't last a minute in the warm nights, high humidity, and the summer heat of Delaware or Maryland without amended soil or raised beds. But we seldom give up if we fail the first time, often relying on pass-along information from more experienced rock gardeners. With better understanding of a plant's requirements, such as drainage, soil type, the right amount of shade (and a bit of a green thumb), we usually can have success.

NARGS members freely interchange the terms "alpine plants" and "rock garden plants," and we don't always agree on what constitutes a rock garden or how to define it. Thus, we grow plants in small troughs, rock walls, raised beds, on a large mounds (berms), in woodland settings, in alpine meadows, or among natural rock formations. For the neophyte or would-be rock gardener, placing native plants in scale among local rock is often the first, tentative beginning of "rock gardening fever."

North American rock gardeners can grow an extremely wide range of plants. Jane McGary, an Oregon bulb grower and editor of the NARGS publication, *The Rock Garden Quarterly*, notes that "Rock garden plants comprise both evergreen and herbaceous perennials and shrubs, and bulbous plants; a few annuals or biennials may be admitted, such as alpine poppies. In addition to flowering plants, rock gardens may include dwarf conifers, small ferns, and small-scale, non-spreading ornamental grasses."

*Cont'd Page 4*



## Celebrating NARGS 75th Anniversary

Cont'd

There are many styles of rock gardening practiced by NARGS members. Pamela Harper, who gardens in coastal Virginia, has pointed out that the great woodland forests of North America have provided a backdrop for "a distinctive American style [of rock gardening] that has evolved naturally in regions of rocky woods rich in wildflowers." These include spring ephemerals, such as Trillium, Claytonia, and Erythronium. Tom Stuart of New York, says, "what North America has contributed more than methods is in the extension of plant materials." He notes the presence of cactus and mosses in NARGS members' rock gardens.

Our members often develop specialty gardens for their interests in a certain genus (perhaps Penstemon) or in bulbs (such as Crocus). Many rock gardeners grow plants from seed, planting dozens--even hundreds--of pots each year. Some foreign members join NARGS specifically to acquire seed from the annual seed list, which generally consists of about 4,000 selections.

Panayoti Kelaidis, of the Denver Botanic Gardens, has said that North American rock gardening is a vibrant, community of plant enthusiasts who share not only a complex and fascinating art, but also great bonds of friendship. "It fosters enthusiasm and excellence and honors biodiversity and human diversity: a tall order indeed!"

North Carolina gardener Elizabeth Lawrence wrote that "the cultivation of rock plants is the highest form of the art of gardening . . . Gardening is an art, and the rock garden is its purist form. All gardeners become rock gardeners if they garden long enough."

As NARGS heads towards its centenary, I look forward to its continual inspiration and support for its members in this most rewarding of pastimes.

*[This article originally appeared in the Scottish Rock Garden Club's The Rock Garden 31 (122): 6-7 (January 2009), Anton Edwards, editor. Bobby J. Ward lives in Raleigh, North Carolina. He is a past president of NARGS and is currently its Executive Secretary.]*

## Add Your Garden to the Summer Tour

Verna is putting together the venue for the ARGGS Summer Garden Tour. The Garden Tour schedule is to be in the Valley one year and Anchorage the next. Last year we were lucky to have three inspirational gardens in the Valley. We hope to do the same or better in Anchorage this year. Call Verna and schedule your garden NOW.

333-8212



## Drabas

### March Meeting Plant Profile

At the March meeting, Verna Pratt led the group in a discussion and tutorial on Drabas. Over 300 varieties can be found throughout the world. This small plant has a big impact in the spring rock garden. One of the first plants to bloom in early spring, the *Draba* is sometimes referred to as "a plant only a rock gardener could love." If you are one of the people who is lucky enough to have a *Draba rigida* blooming as the snow leaves in the spring, you are probably hooked. *Draba alpina* is a native to the Brooks Range, it is mat or clump forming with oblong to lanceolate, densely hairy leaves. Bright yellow flowers in June are in racemes 2 – 4in tall. This species may hybridize with *D. macrocarpa*, which grows in the same habitat. *D. densifolia*, *D. dedeana*, *D. norvegica*, *D. polytricha*, and *D. parnasica* have all been reported to be surviving in Alaskan gardens.

In Verna Pratt's "Field Guide to Alaskan Wildflowers" she describes the Whitlow Grass, *D. incerta*, as a small perennial plant with rosettes of small oblong leaves with stellate hairs. Several 4-petaled yellow flowers are clustered at the top on the nearly leafless 2 to 5" stem. Under "Comments" in her book, Verna reports that there are many *Drabas* in Alaska and they are difficult to separate into species. Most are white or yellow and have small rosettes of leaves. *D. hirta*, *D. maxima* and *D. borealis* are all taller, white-flowered varieties that have many stem leaves. *Draba aurea* is a common tall yellow variety. If you are growing a variety that we haven't discussed, let us know so we can all search for it. Everyone should have at least a few in their rock garden.

### Coyote Gardens Open

July 18th & 19th Les Brake's Coyote Gardens will be open to the public. There will be tours, plant sales and vendors. This year for the first time half the proceeds will go to ARGS.

As a founding member of the Alaska Chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society, Les has been a vocal supporter of our Chapter in the past. His famed gardens always draw a big crowd of enthusiastic gardeners.

Help is needed from the ARGS membership for the two days of this event. You CAN help, just call Verna Pratt to schedule a time. (333-8212) Event will run from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Saturday and

### Snowfire Plant Sale

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### Garden Open

The ARGS Spring Plant Sale for the Valley will be held May 23rd at Snowfire Gardens. Come and bring plants or come and buy plants. Take a little time to have a cup of coffee and visit the gardens in the spring.

The rock gardens are always putting on one of their best shows at this time of year.

Times will be 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. with garden tours all day and plant sales as long as they last. The best plants go early!

Call Florene Carney at 376-5390 if you can help out.



## From the President

Jaime Rodriguez

Hello from the shore of the Beaufort Sea at Oliktok Point. The weather here has been steady for the past month with the ambient temperature at -30, and wind-chill between -45 and -70. You might say I am hungry for green growing things and good garden talk with friends. I have been making some contacts with the people at the North Slope Borough and various State of Alaska departments, trying to arrange some plant collecting/plant rescue during future construction projects here on the north slope. I know there are plans for new roads and gravel pads, and I think we will be able to get permission to come collect from areas that will be turned into those new sites. I will keep you posted on my progress. Volcano permitting, I am scheduled to come home on April 20<sup>th</sup>, and am looking forward to the contrast of Arctic winter and an instant spring. If the planes aren't flying, maybe I will get to ride the haul road and can scope out some seed collecting spots in the Brooks Range. Don't forget to check out our website at [www.args.org](http://www.args.org) and vote in the next expedition poll.

*The weather here has been steady for the past month with the ambient temperature at -30, and wind-chill between -45 and -70.*

## NARGS 2010—"Romancing the Rockies" July 11-14 Denver & Salida, Colorado

Join the Rocky Mountain Chapter of NARGS for a trip to the undiscovered Colorado that is every bit as beautiful as—but somehow more pristine and authentic—than the famous resorts that grab headlines.

We will explore how rock and soil govern the growth and distribution of rock plants: what is it about limestone substrates that seem to foster biodiversity? Are plants dependent on nutrients and

other factors from rocks, or are they growing where you find them by accident? Come Explore in Colorado!

This is an exceptional opportunity to see the Denver Botanic Gardens, visit private rock gardens in Denver, take a van or bus drive from Denver over several passes (with stops for botanizing) to Salida. Trips to nearby passes and mountains for several levels of ability.

There will be trained guides on trips and hikes.

Evening lectures by leading rock garden experts. Plant sales and camaraderie in a beautiful, historic setting.

**MAKE YOUR PLANS NOW!**  
go to [rmcnargs.org](http://rmcnargs.org) for complete information



## 2009 Western Winter Study Week-end

Carmel Tysver

*Carmel is an ARGS Past President, Board Member and regular contributor to the Newsletter*

This year the WWSW was held in Portland, Oregon at the Double Tree hotel near the Lloyd Center. I heard some griping about the venue as the meeting rooms were not all in close approximation but considering the price break the Columbia-Willamette Chapter received from the hotel it made perfect sense. The rooms were very clean and the staff was helpful and pleasant to deal with.

I am sure everyone has their favorite reason for going but I like it all. The friendships renewed each year, laughing a lot with room mates, hearing speakers and seeing their wonderful pictures and seeing plants in bloom at the gardens on tour, buying plants that have to be packaged to get home and visiting the city where the conference is held.

This year there were 7 members there from Alaska representing Juneau, Anchorage, Sterling, Soldotna and Wasilla. Due to cancellation of the annual meeting in Calgary in July this meeting combined both the WWSW and the Annual meeting. This year we heard about Chaos in the garden from several speakers and how it relates to the rock garden. One title that I am sure had everyone attending was "Simple Exercises for Tighter Buns" by Carlo Balistreri. He had some wonderful photographs and information. Ian Young for Aberdeen, Scotland talked about bulbs, enough to make you want to move from here so could grow all of them. One thing I like about the speakers is that they not only talk about the plants and how to grow them but they also talk about their failures, which we all have, and what they did to change the way they grew the plants. As per usual there are many ideas and plants presented that will not work or grow in our climate but its fun to drool and go AAAH!

Next year the meeting will be in Medford which is in southern Oregon. The list of speakers is impressive including John Watson who is best known for the botanizing he has done in Chile. I heard this man probably about 12 years ago at my first WWSW and just drooled over the pictures he showed. Once you have seen his show you will definitely want to go to Chile. Last time he also offered seeds.

See you in Medford.

*Florene Carney, John Hale, Carmel Tysver, and Donna Hale touring the Hale's Garden in Portland.  
Photo by Kathy Wartinbee*





## *Daphne arbuscula* Alive and Well in Wasilla

The snow is melting off LeEllen Baker's south-facing rock garden and as it does the *Daphne arbuscula* is being revealed little by little. Planted in 2005, this is the third winter it has survived and it is glorious when it blooms. LeEllen has it planted in a spot on the upper side of her beautiful rock garden, by the path down to the lake. It is not particularly well protected and the soil is the regular rock garden mix she has in all the rest of her rock garden. When Harry Jans was here a couple of years ago it was in full bloom and he was on his knees! The A to Z Encyclopedia of Garden Plants says of this lovely plant:

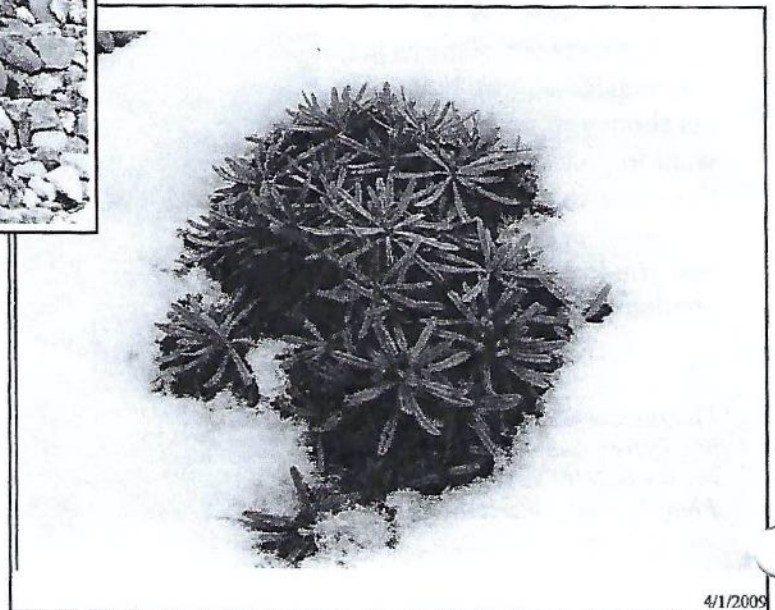
**"D. arbuscula.** Dwarf, semi-prostrate, evergreen shrub with linear to linear-oblong, leathery, glossy, dark green leaves, to 1/4 in. long. In late spring and early summer, produces dense terminal clusters of 3-30 very fragrant, deep pink flowers, to 1/2 in across, followed by dry, ovoid, grayish white fruit. Czech Republic and Slovakia (Carpathian Mountains). Zone 5-7

The plant, thriving in LeEllen's zone three garden came from Beaver Creek, as a substitute, and has been a huge surprise to everyone who has seen it since. This is definitely a plant worth pursuing and trying more than once. It is listed in Wrightman's for \$19.00 ea.(plus postage) Beaver Creek didn't have it listed last year. Let's keep looking and put one of these in every garden!!



Left: Picture of *Daphne arbuscula* taken summer 2008 by LeEllen Baker in her rock garden.

Right: Picture taken April 1, 2009, of same *Daphne arbuscula* coming out from under the snow. Taken by LeEllen Baker in her rock garden.



4/1/2009



## *Plant Sale at Sally K's*

The Annual Spring Plant Sale for the Anchorage area will be on May 16th at Sally Karabelnikoff's home just off Muldoon Rd. on Old Harbor Rd. Hours will be from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. This is one of the premier plant sales of the year for Rock Gardeners! Many choice plants and experts at the sales tables to give advice on how to grow them.

Call Verna Pratt if you can help out at the sale (333-8212)

## **Alaska Science and Engineering Fair** Carmel Tysver

The Alaska Rock Garden Society sponsored \$50.00 awards in the field of Plant Science for Elementary, Middle and High School at the fair again this year. The fair was held March 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> at Begich Middle School in Anchorage. The fair is open to students in grades K through 12 from all schools in Alaska and I am always amazed at the complex variety of projects the students present.

This year we awarded the Elementary School award to Will Deering for his project titled "Warmth and Seed Germination". His experiment was simple but very appropriate for a child in the first grade. His award was mailed to him as he did not attend the awards ceremony.

The Middle School award went to Hannah Xavier of Central Middle School. Her project was titled "CO2 and Plants". The judges say the project was complex but she was able to explain what she did and had suggestions for improvement.

The High School award went to Hannah Atkinson of Kotzebue Middle and High School. Her project was titled "Capillary Contamination" and when we first viewed the awards did not realize that it was an experiment in Plant Science. She did a very thorough job and was able to explain how the experiment was done and the results.

I especially want to thank the members who helped judge the Fair. Unison Hubbard and Madge Oswald judged the Elementary and Middle School exhibits in the morning. In the afternoon Verna Pratt and I judged the High School exhibits. Again this year we only had two entries in the High School to choose from and both of them were from bush communities.

I hate to have to beg for judges every year and would hate to have to drop this activity as I think it is a very worth while project for our club. I am sure the High School award winner will be a keen gardener the rest of her life. Please volunteer a few hours on a Saturday in March to award our states children for their hard work. If you ask the members who have judged they will tell you how awarding it is and I can tell you how happy the children are to receive their awards.



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**We're on the Web**  
**www.args.org**

Dues Paid 2008  
Carmel & Neil Tysver  
2030 Patriot Circle  
Anchorage AK 99515-2503

Alaska Rock Garden Society  
PO Box 244136  
Anchorage, AK 99524-4136



Newsletter

## April Meeting of the Alaska Rock Garden Society

April 18, 1009 2:00 p.m.

Cooperative Extension office in Anchorage (*Carlton Trust Building at the corner of Northern Lights & Lake Otis*) The April Meeting of ARGs will feature Mark White of Soldotna speaking on "Consider Conifers" in a power point program. Mark is an avid gardener, ARGs Seed Exchange Chair and long-time Alaskan. He will discuss conifers for the rock garden as well as the border. (This program was re-

To join the Alaska Rock Garden Society, fill out the form below and send, along with a check payable to ARGs to: Alaska Rock Garden Society, PO Box 244136, Anchorage, AK 99524-4136

ARGs Membership: New \_\_\_; Renewal \_\_\_; w/o Changes \_\_\_; w/change \_\_\_  
Dues: \$15 US—Individual, \$20 US-Family/Canada, \$25 US—Foreign

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

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

City: \_\_\_\_\_, State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

ARGs may share its membership list with like-minded, non-profit organizations. If you DO NOT want to receive these notifications, please check here: \_\_\_\_\_