



# Newsletter

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## Inside this issue:

Coming Events	1
From the President	2
NARGS Seed Exchange	3
What is NARGS	4
Bill Terry on Blue Poppies	5
Latin for Garden Lovers	5
Plant Profile	6
ARGS Seed Exchange	7

## Coming Events

November 19, 2011: 2:00 p.m. Regular Meeting. Cooperative Extension, Anchorage. Jaime Rodriguez "Penstemons".

December 10, 2011: ARGS Christmas Party at Snowfire. 2:00 p.m. Potluck. Bring a garden type gift valued at around \$10.00 for Chinese Auction.

*Take time during the winter months to write an article for the Newsletter. We'd love to hear about your successes, failures, dreams, places or plants you have seen or give someone who deserves it a pat on the back.*

*The trouble with gardening... is that it does not remain an avocation. It becomes an obsession.*

*Phyllis McGinley*



## From Our President

In fall of 2009 the Alaska Rock Garden Society, ARGGS, had the opportunity to purchase two tons of tufa that was already in Anchorage. Tufa in large quantities is not readily available here in Alaska and the few gardens in the area that include tufa is because the owners made a trip to Bristo, BC, Canada and hauled it back to Alaska. ARGGS had built and maintains a rock garden at the Alaska Botanical Garden in Anchorage and being able to add a garden of tufa excited all of us. The director of the Alaska Botanical Garden, ABG, was approached and with her approval we purchased the tufa. We showed up at the home of the sellers in pick up trucks and by hand moved the tufa to the Botanical Garden. While there we found out that the seller had also mixed up a large quantity of well draining soil that they had planned to use in their tufa garden which had never been build and now that they were moving out of state. They offered us the soil which we gratefully accepted. This happened just before the United Way Day of Caring which the ABG always has volunteers. With the help of the volunteers, staff members of ABG and members of ARGGS we started the process of moving the soil into a garden shape. It was decided to build the garden for viewing purposes along an area that is wooded with access to the garden from the ends and one side. With the help of volunteers we were able to move the soil and rock into a pleasing shape to be fine tuned in the spring.

Since the garden is 12 feet wide at the widest spot and 35 feet long we knew we were going to need a lot of plants which are quite expensive to have shipped to Alaska. We also knew the members would be very generous in providing plants but to propagate enough to fill the garden would take years. We all wanted the garden to look beautiful yesterday. At that point a grant proposal was sent to NARGS which they graciously granted to ARGGS. The grant approval notification arrived in July of 2010 and at that point we all started pouring over book and catalogs picking out everyone's favorites, what we thought would work here and wanted to try. Then the deciding process of what to purchase and where to purchase resulted in more meeting and lots of emails as we wanted the grant to get us the most plants for the money we had received.

Some plants were planted last summer and fall and this summer we were able to purchase and plant enough plants that it looks like a planted garden not a pile of rocks. To date we have planted over 100 plus species which include many that grow very well for us including *Androsace robusta* var. *breviscarpa*, *Daphne arbuscula*, *Dianthus 'Labourboule'*, *Dicentra 'Burning Bush'*, *Draba nivalis*, *Dracocephalum inberbe*, *Dryadantha purpurea*, *Geranium 'Tiny Tot'*, *Jasione crispa*, *Paederota bonarota*, *Picea glauca 'Eagle Rock'*, *Sauseria 'Kang Ding'*, *Saxifraga marie theresiae 'Therese'*, *Silene acaulis 'White Rabbit'*, *Thalictrum kiusianum*, *Veronica oltensis* to name a few.

This fall we completed the garden by applying rock mulch. We wanted the mulch to match the yellowish color of the tufa which our native rock does not. We played with different imported rock and besides being expensive it was not a look we liked. What we finely decide upon was a mixture of aquarium gravel of dull yellow colors and our local pea gravel. We all know there will be ongoing replacement of both plants and rock mulch but as of today we all agree it looks great and is a nice addition to the ABG rock garden area. Since the tufa rock is so different we get lots of questions as we plant and weed the garden from staff, volunteers and visitors. Big thank you to NARGS for helping us complete the project.

Carmel Tysver



## NARGS Seed Exchange

We hope that all members are busily collecting, cleaning, packing, and mailing seeds to our Seed Exchange Intake Manager:

Laura Serowicz:  
15411 Woodring Street  
Livonia, MI 48154-3029

It takes a mere 5 packets (only five different kinds of seed) to attain Donor status, which nets the Donors **10** additional packets of seed, as well as priority in having their orders filled. It would be so lovely to have as many members donating seeds as requesting them - what a rich array we would have on our Seedlist!!

For all who are interested in ordering seeds this year, we will have a new online ordering system available, in addition to the printed lists.

To use this new, fast, easy system in December, you must first register your preferred email address with our Executive Secretary, Bobby Ward. That way, the system will automatically recognize you as being eligible to order from the seedex. It couldn't be simpler:

As soon as possible, send an email to: [nargs@nc.rr.com](mailto:nargs@nc.rr.com)  
In the Subject line, write (or copy-and-paste): NARGS seedex email address



## What is NARGS

by Peter George

Ever since I joined NARGS in 1996, I have observed that many members (and even more non-members) have an extremely narrow, and therefore fundamentally mistaken, concept of what the organization represents. A lot of people think of NARGS as an "alpine plant" society. Others believe that if something grows more than a foot tall, it's "not a NARGS plant." I have heard that chapters in the South and the Midwest are convinced that their members cannot grow "rock garden" plants, so they increasingly view themselves as garden clubs focused on hardy "perennials." Of course, this leads to fewer and fewer chapter members joining NARGS or, having joined in the past, keeping their memberships active. So, what's the truth about NARGS and rock gardening?

Our Web site describes NARGS as an organization "for gardening enthusiasts interested in alpine, saxatile, and low-growing perennials. It encourages the study and cultivation of wildflowers that grow well among rocks, whether such plants originate above tree line or at lower elevations." I looked up "saxatile" and found that it means "growing on or living among rocks." We all know what alpine means, and no one can misunderstand "low-growing." Thus, we are an organization of people interested in perennial plants that grow well among rocks and that are relatively short. That sounds pretty inclusive to me, and it certainly doesn't in any way imply that the plants must be alpine, or tiny, or even particularly rare. It certainly *does* include plants that are native to every region of the world. For example, I grow townsendias native to Kansas, campanulas native to Turkey, epimediums native to China, a *Calceolaria* native to South America, and alpine plants from the Alps, the Rockies, the Caucasus, and the Adirondacks among others. I have lime lovers, ericaceous plants, and plants that ask only for some sun, some water, and a bit of soil. I also grow all over my property tall plants, such as *Echinacea* and asters and bushy plants like *Buddleja*. So what am I? Well, my major interest is growing plants that like to live among rocks, which makes me a rock gardener as far as I'm concerned.

Why are so many people convinced that drabas are *real* rock garden plants and that epimediums are not? Or that salvias and hellebores are forbidden because they are not included in some mythical list of approved "rock garden plants"? Far too many of us seem to think that, because the British named *their* organization the Alpine Garden Society, this limitation somehow applies to us. It does not. We are the North American Rock Garden Society, and our approach to what we love and what we grow is inclusive, not exclusive. We understand with absolute clarity that many gardeners cannot grow *Astragalus utahensis*, but that almost all of us can grow *Gentiana acaulis*, or *Penstemon ovatus*, or *Sedum kamschaticum*. And those, among literally thousands of rock garden plants, can be grown in all climates, at almost all altitudes, and on virtually every continent.

Furthermore, for most of its history, NARGS has published a journal that has focused on plants that far too many of us may have considered inappropriate for rock gardens. Before sitting down to write this, I pulled out two old issues of the NARGS publication at random, just to see what they contained. The spring 1991 issue was dedicated to primulas, and the lead article is entitled "Primulas for the Southeast," by Nancy Goodwin. Nancy is from Hillsborough, North Carolina, a part of the United States not commonly associated with rock gardening. The second issue I selected was the fall 1985 issue, which featured an article called "Native Plants of Vermont." Anyone who is not familiar with the botanical wealth of New England, and who subscribes to the narrow view of what a "rock garden plant" is, will be surprised to learn that the article focused on what we call "woodland" plants, including *Claytonia caroliniana*, *Erythronium americanum*,



## What is NARGS cont'd

by Peter George

*Trillium erectum*, *Asarum canadense*, and *Asplenium ruta-muraria*. Are these rock garden plants? Some would say they are not, but I vigorously disagree, and – more to the point – so does the NARGS journal. So please, let's keep NARGS as inclusive as possible. To be sure, we are not simply a garden club (we are not interested in growing vegetables, annuals, roses, etc.); but neither are we an elite group of the wealthy and powerful who want to keep their organization small and exclusive. We are a large, geographically diverse body of people who simply love gardening with rocks. Let's focus on that, and work a bit harder to find commonality in purpose; by doing so, we will strengthen our organization and enhance its ability to provide valuable services to rock gardeners.

[Peter George, the current NARGS president, lives and gardens in Massachusetts.]

## Guest Speaker Bill Terry on Blue Poppies

by Carmel Tysver

In September we had the pleasure of having Bill Terry here to present a talk on Meconopsis. I had met Bill and his wife Rosemary in Sidney-by-the-Sea, BC last February at the WWSW for NARGS. His talk was very interesting as well a treasure of beautiful photographs and I knew he would be someone the gardeners of Alaska would also enjoy. I approached him regarding talking in Anchorage and the answer was yes. With the exchange of email addresses I came home very excited and called the rest of the ARGs board and received a resounding yes. So the emails went back and forth and we were able to have him visit the first part of September.

Bill presented two talks during his visit. The first one was in Palmer with the title of "The Perfect Garden: Plant hunting in Tibet". He presented pictures of the Meconopsis that he saw there in the wild along with pictures of the people and towns in Tibet. Even with the problems with the room the talk was enjoyed by all who attended. This talk is also the subject for his next book.

Then in Anchorage the next day his talk was titled "Poppies from the Roof of the World". This is the talk I first saw in Canada and the eye candy was just as spectacular the second time around. There were several gasps from the audience during the presentation of the photographs.

Bill also has written a book titled "Blue Heaven: Encounters with the Blue Poppy" and has a calendar of Meconopsis pictures. Both eye candy. The book is a great read and Bill knows the subject very well.

I know a speaker is well enjoyed when I have members of the audience thank me for having the speaker here in Alaska and I thank all of you who appreciated his talks.

## Latin for Garden Lovers

by Pliny the Sourdough

This issue we jawed some about Blue Poppies and Gentians so I'm tellin' ya about what ya'll see if yur lookin' fer a particular blue in a flower:

Prussian blue	<i>cyaneus</i> or <i>cyano</i> (a clear bright blue)
Indigo	<i>indigoticus</i> (the deepest blue)
Blue	<i>caeruleus</i> (something lighter and brighter than indigoticus)
Sky Blue	<i>azureus</i> (a light pure lively blue)
Violet	<i>violaceus</i> , <i>ianthimus</i> (pure blue stained with red, - intermediate between blue & red)
Lilac	<i>lilacinus</i> (pale dull violet, mixed a little with white)



## Plant Profile

### *Gentiana sino-ornata*

By Florene Carney

I was first introduced to *Gentiana sino-ornata* by Dr. Susan Lemagie. She extolled its virtues for a couple of years before I finally found the plant itself. The miraculous part of that is Jaime and I were checking out the sales racks at a local box store and found it among a lot of annuals that were priced at just a couple of dollars. Overall I think we found four plants and grabbed them up like they were gold. Little did we know then that they really were! As I write this my Sino-ornata takes up an area about 14 inches square and is covered with the most beautiful 2" upright, piercingly pure blue bells with a black and yellow stripe up the outside of the petal. When the sun peeks out for even a few minutes they open up and will take your breath away. Everything around them has turned brown from frost and they will continue to bloom right through the frost and snow. There have been years when they were sticking up through the snow looking like tropical fish leaping out of the ocean foam.

The growing recommendations are to grow them in acid soil in partial shade. Mine is growing on the southeast side of the rock garden in almost full sun until late afternoon in the regular rock garden soil, which is on the acid side. These won't do for the tufa garden, but definitely like the weather here in South Central Alaska.

When you check them on the internet you will see that it says zone 5, but they have lived here at Snowfire for the last eight or nine years. They never set viable seed because they bloom so late in the summer, but I am experimenting with different ways to propagate them from the mother plant. With luck there will be a few at the Plant Sale in the spring.



*Gentiana sino-ornata* at Snowfire October 2011.  
Check our website at [www.snowfiregardens.com](http://www.snowfiregardens.com) for a better color picture.

## ARGS Seed Exchange

It's time for the annual ARGS Seed Exchange. Package your clean, dry seed in plastic or glassine envelopes. Be sure and write the correct name of the plant on the envelope and the name of the donor. If possible pack all your small packets in a padded envelope. When you have your seeds packaged and ready, fill out the following form, enclose it and mail to:

Mark White  
ARGS Seed Exchange  
35680 Glacier Ave.  
Sterling, AK 99672

Mark, Rosemary Kimball and Kathy Wartinbee will be assisting Mark with sorting and mailing seeds. Thanks to all of you for your hard work to keep the program going.

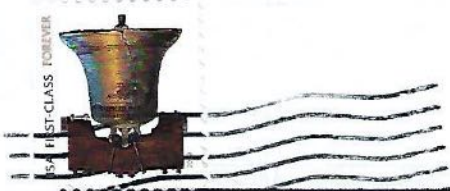




**We're on the Web**  
**www.args.org**

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

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



**Newsletter**

### **Be sure to send in seeds for the ARGs Seed Exchange!**

To join the Alaska Rock Garden Society or renew membership, 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: \_\_\_\_\_

**Membership is for the calendar year**