

The Dodecatheon

NEWSLETTER OF THE DELAWARE VALLEY CHAPTER OF THE NORTH AMERICAN ROCK GARDEN SOCIETY

SATURDAY, MAY 10: DVC-NARGS MEMBERS' SPRING PLANT SALE

...Submitted by Janet Novak, Plant Sale Coordinator

You're invited to the spring members' plant sale on Saturday, May 10. It's at Robbins Park, 1419 East Butler Pike in Ambler. The sale is open to DVC-NARGS members and their guests, so feel free to invite a friend.

As always, we rely on members to donate plants, so please—help us out by bringing your extra plants. You'll then have the satisfaction of knowing that those plants will make another member happy and will help underwrite DVC-NARGS operations. We especially appreciate donations of rock garden plants, but we'll take anything you think will be of interest to members, as long as it isn't outrageously weedy or an invasive species in our region. Since this sale is a month earlier than our typical spring sale, this is a great year to donate spring ephemerals or other plants that look their best in spring.

Plants should have the scientific name written on a white label, with the donor's name on the back.

Sales Period: As usual, the sale will open with a short shopping period for plant donors. Donors are entitled to buy one early-choice plant for every 10 plants donated, up to 5 early choices. Then the sale will open to everyone. Plants sell fast, so don't be late!

...details continued on page 6

FRIDAY, JUNE 20, BOG GARDEN WORKSHOP, AQUASCAPES UNLIMITED, PIPERSVILLE, PA

...submitted by Laura Axel, Program Chair

Registration will open **May 1st**.

Please mail checks for \$50pp payable to "Dvc Nargs" to:

Laura Axel 8206 Douglas Road, Wyndmoor, PA19038.

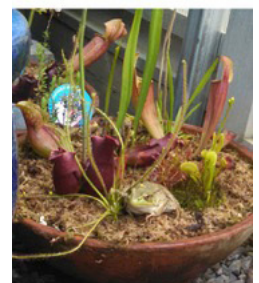
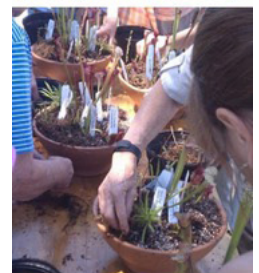
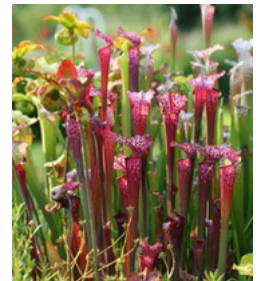
Please include your email address and phone number.

Looking for something new and different to add to your garden? Join us for a hands-on/how-to workshop for creating your own mini bog garden. From the bottom up, the secrets of recreating a bog's natural habitat in containers will be explored. Randy Heffner, owner of Aquascapes Unlimited in Pipersville, PA, will instruct us on container selection, creating the correct compositional mix, preferred plant selection, as well as conditions necessary for long term maintenance of these attractive and captivating container gardens.

<https://www.aquascapesunlimited.com/>

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Aquascapes

THE DODECATHEON

This publication is issued on the first of odd-numbered months. All copy must reach the editor no later than the 15th day of the preceding month. Any text in this newsletter may be used in any other NARGS publication, unless otherwise specified. Please credit the author and *The Dodecatheon*.



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For membership info, the latest program changes and bad weather cancellations check out our web site:

www.dvcnargs.org

We do send out email notices from time to time between issues of *The Dodecatheon* to those who have given us email addresses.



THE CHAIR'S CORNER

...submitted by Louise Clarke, "Former" Chairperson

Welcome spring! Whilst doing a Google search for "rock gardens" I stumbled across Martha Stewart's "16 Rock Garden Ideas for a Beautiful, Low Maintenance Landscape". Immediately suspicious, I was relieved to see that the expert contributor was Vic Piatt, Mt. Cuba Center's Garden Manager. Now being slightly less incredulous, I scrolled down to see the sage advice offered, hoping Vic was the primary contributor.

"Rock gardens are a beautiful and low-maintenance way to bring dimension to your landscape" so the first sentence proclaimed. Adding groundcovers, such as *Phlox*, could contribute to a lower maintenance garden, as established plants do spread to form a low, dense carpet of foliage. OK, Vic, I agree.

"Use large boulders" is Vic's number two suggestion. Yes, they can add a dramatic focal point or intrigue. But detail is lacking in how to select or move those boulders, or how to nestle them into the earth so they don't look like they've just been plopped there- as the article photo shows. If you attended Vic's presentation several years ago, you'll remember the brute labor, machinery, and skill used to create Mt Cuba's entrance drive-flanking rock gardens.

"Add a water feature, make a Zen garden" may be a stretch, depending on budget or topography. Do we consider Zen gardens to be rock gardens?

"Add steps, add rocks to a hillside". Perhaps these two go together, and Vic does point out that a rock garden on a slope can help slow rainwater runoff; it can even create temporary pools.

"Make a raised bed, use pebbles" could be useful advice for those with mobility issues or truly crappy soil- but don't some rock garden plants like nutrient-poor soils? Pebbles were suggested to make a gravel garden, indeed a subset of rock gardening. However, the accompanying photo showed gravel used as a walkway.

"Plant between rocks". I would expect to do this in a rock garden.

"Make a wall" could have read make a planted wall. Think of Janet Novak's exquisite rock wall planted with a dazzling array of hardscrabble plants. Achieve what the article tells us is "the perfect balance between rustic & whimsical."

"Focus on textures" is sound advice for any garden composition by adding interest in the absence of flowers. The article doesn't mention that rock gardens typically are at their floriferous peaks in spring, so texture contrasts are most useful.

"Use different materials" was illustrated by dry laid stone walled garden beds between rock steps and incorporating a stockade fence of cut branches in the beds. I didn't get it.

"Line your driveway" showed a formal landscape of clipped box bordered by red brick, two parallel strips of paving for vehicle tires, and an in-between space of low green turf. This didn't read rock garden to me, nor did I see any in the photo.

"Create a garden path" is illustrated by a picture of Great Dixter's long border, showing paving stones set in turf. In no way did Dixter's long border suggest rock gardening to me on my visits.

"Welcome pollinators" is easy to achieve by planting flowering plants, natives among them, to offer nectar and pollen. Applicable advice to all garden styles.

And finally "Leave room for annuals" closes the article with a picture of cheery *Dianthus*.

This article was a valiant effort on Vic's part, but the hand of the editor and photo choices dumbed this down for Martha's readers. If you'd like to read the article, here is the address: <https://www.marthastewart.com/8039560/best-rock-garden-ideas>

SATURDAY, MAY 31, 2025, 10-12 NOON, GUIDED TOUR OF THE HENRY FOUNDATION

..submitted by Laura Axel, Program Chair

Henry Botanic Garden - Henry Foundation for Botanical Research
801 Stony Lane, Gladwyne, PA 19035
Led by Henry Ortmeyer

With the Henry Botanic Garden's granite-dominated hillside as a foundation, Mary Gibson Henry created multiple rock gardens to trial and highlight native American plants she collected during her extensive travels throughout the US in the early-mid 1900's. Like many of her plantings at the Henry Botanic Garden, Mary Henry was interested in seeing how plants would survive and populate the garden naturally. Today, the rock garden and gravel garden are populated by seedlings of plants like *Amsonia*, *Baptisia*, *Liatris*, and *Penstemon*, which show a variety of forms, reflective of their unique wild-collected parents. Also, expect to view open vistas of Magnolias, Buckeyes, Azaleas, and more in bloom as we meander uphill through rocks and down our wooded drive.

You are invited to bring your picnic lunch for after the tour in the open-sided, covered barn next to the house. Tables can accommodate about 20 people. I will email registrants a few days before the event to see who is staying for the picnic. Restrooms are available.

Please wear garden-appropriate footwear because of the rough terrain. There is **no rain-date**. Plenty of parking is available, but carpooling is suggested.

From Conshohocken: Drive east on PA Route 23 about two miles. Turn left onto Henry Lane. At the bottom of the hill, turn left onto Stony Lane and then right at 801 Stony Lane and follow the driveway through the gates to the main building.

- This event is free to members and guests are \$5pp paid at the venue
- Please register by emailing:
DvcNargs@gmail.com with the subject line: Henry Botanic Garden.
- Registration opens April 20.



Listen to the Birds, Wednesday

Monday, May 5 at 8 am

Celebrate Cinco de Mayo with an early morning bird walk. Follow avid avian authority Brad Whitman to hear birdsong and identify returning migrators, as well as the resident population. Meet in the circle outside Henry House. Wear appropriate shoes for the uneven terrain and bring your binoculars.

To register email susan@henrybotanic-garden.org or call 610-525-2037. Walks are for members only. There is no charge.

RECAP: ROCK GARDENING IN THE MIDWEST AT MISSOURI BOTANICAL GARDEN

...submitted by Tracy Constantine, Co-Recording Secretary

Mariel Tribby, Senior Horticulturist at Missouri Botanical Garden, graciously agreed to speak on short notice, when our previously scheduled speaker was unable to attend. She covered her work over the past decade in the challenging heat and humidity of St. Louis.

The Bavarian Garden, finished in 2013 and built-out in 2019, features weathered sandstone and limestone boulders. Tribby looks for plants that grow at lower elevations and are more adaptable to the location, for their reliability. She added a stepping stone path and some height to this garden.

Over the years, she's experimented with different soil mixtures to improve drainage. So far, the winner is a base layer of 50% topsoil and 50% haydite, topped with a mixture of coarse sand and haydite. This arrangement keeps the crowns of plants dry and encourages roots to grow deep for moisture.

A renovation of the large Heckman Rock Garden was completed last year. Part of the garden is on top of a tunnel to the boiler room; irrigation and a drain pipe were added. Mariel prefers the emphasis on plants rather than on rocks in this garden, and it is easy to see why.

Asperula gussonii (covered with small pink flowers in April), *Ephedra chilensis*, *Chesneya ternata* (an adorable little pea with yellow flowers), *Sida elliottii*, *Oenothera macrocarpa*, and *Veronica surculosa* are just some plants that Mariel highlighted in a delightful and engaging overview of her work at Missouri Botanical Garden.

SUNDAY, JUNE 8, 11AM TO 3PM: MEMBERS GARDENS TOURS

...submitted by *Linda Marcucci, Tour Coordinator*

Andy Schenk

I began gardening here over 22 years ago. It has been fun to watch trees grow and mature, as almost everything you see was planted by me. It is a true collectors garden full of one of a kind plants and also a test garden to see how much “zone busting” can be done. My good friend, David Culp, dubbed the garden as Look Again Garden and I feel that is a fitting name for the collection of plants that live here. With each tour of the garden, you’ll see something different. The garden is in constant ebb and flow – edits and additions happen annually as well as much seed sowing and propagation of plants. My partner, Carol Verhake, has been a great help in the garden and we recently constructed a new chicken coop and installed a really cool rock garden and we are constantly pruning, weeding and collecting new plants. I look forward to the visit and showing off my little paradise!

Carol Verhake’s Garden – Boulder Haven

I began work on the garden 25 years ago when I bought the house. Over the years I have transformed the 1.3 acre space in many ways. I added multiple beds, a woodland trail, a water feature, new sitting areas and a stone moon gate.

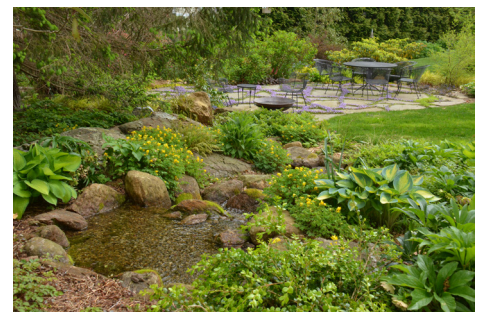
The garden includes full sun, full shade and everything in between. I strive to keep my mature tree canopy healthy, but have proactively removed a number of ash trees and addressed significant storm damage over the years. I’m currently treating 8 ash trees and have my fingers crossed that they will survive. I have also planted a diverse selection of trees, shrubs and perennials to help ensure a vibrant and healthy ecosystem for the future.

My landscape includes more common plants like hostas, astilbes, alliums, peonies and others along with some very rare and unusual plants that are dotted around the garden. I like to think there is something for everyone to enjoy and look forward to your visit.

Penelope Malish

As with most gardens, this one is personal. A relatively young garden, it draws from life experience, friends and passion. As a designer, I approached the garden from a “top down perspective,” as you can see in the photo. A Barnes graduate, I was greatly influence by my time there. I am obsessed with plants — and many different types. Diversity—to satisfy my passions, feed my honeybees and nurture the environment. Within the 10 years that I have been gardening here, I have completely changed the biosphere. Starting with virtually a clean grass-and-mulch-filled slate, I have planted more than 50 trees, installed a 50’ diameter yin/yang meadow and small pond. The bird population has gone from about 10 species to more than 40. Growing unusual food, like callicarpa, jujube, goji berry, and filling the air with fragrant plants. That’s what it’s all about.

...parking details continued on page 5



Our guest vendor: Gary Spock, *Rabbit Hole Plants*

...details continued from page 1

SATURDAY, MAY 10: DVC-NARGS MEMBERS' SPRING PLANT SALE

Schedule:

8:45-9:45: Plant donations accepted

9:15-10 AM: View the items for sale

10 AM: Sale opens

What's for sale? The selection varies every time, but you can count on finding rock garden plants, woodland plants, garden perennials, woody plants, and more. We will also have some rarely-offered plants donated by Rabbit Hole Plants. (I'm excited about their *Bergenia emeiensis*, a small, elegant version of bergenia.) We will also have some bog plants, including pitcher plants and the rare bog asphodel (*Narthecium americanum*). Our sales are legendary for bargains: prices start at just \$2 a pot. There's also a silent auction that may include sought-after items such as hyper-tufa troughs, natural tufa, hardy orchids, and dwarf shrubs.

Plant Pricing: We are asking you to price the items you donate yourself. We'll provide color-coded price markers and a pricing guide. If you want help with pricing, a volunteer will be available.

Plant Preview: You can look over the plants on sale as we're setting up. Once the sale opens, plants will go fast, so I highly recommend using the preview period to decide which plants you want.

Payment: Checks or cash are preferred, but we will also accept credit cards if our technology cooperates.

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE REPORT

...submitted by Erin Anne Van Yahres & Leslie Morris-Smith, Co-DVC-NARGS Membership Secretaries

Our participation at the Philadelphia Flower Show was a study in low effort - high rewards this year. Invited by the Del-Val Fern & Wildflower Society's exhibit chair, the NARGS trough with spring flowers was a show stopper in a sea of green ferns. People took pictures and just stared at it for extended periods. Many asked how they could learn to make one of their own trough, and asked about the tiny hellebore and crocus.

Janet Novak forced the flowers and Eric Sternfels planted them in the trough just right. Janet also created a membership flyer with a list of 2025 events on the back.

We got our first new member in time for that Saturday's speaker March 8th.

We received 8 new members in the 6 new memberships since the Flower Show. In total, we have 17 new members in the 13 new memberships in the first quarter, since December:

Cesario Gene Tobia
Denise Axsmith
Paul Browne
Carla Gauger
Edward Lyon
Donna & David Steltz
Susan & Michael Cannon
Mary Jo Stricker & David Molofsky
Althea Wagman-Bolster & Paul Bolster
Jay Frank
Michele Hall
Garnet Spagrud
Adam Banks



Plants by Janet Novak, photographed and styled by Eric Sternfels.

RECAP: MEMBERS' PLANT SHOW AND GUEST SPEAKER BILL BARNES

...submitted by Tracy Constantine, Co-Recording Secretary

Where can you find fabulously designed troughs, spectacular miniature arrangements, a superlative speaker, an alluring array of plants for sale, and an astounding concentration of friendly plant geeks? At the Members' Plant Show, of course!

Plant sale coordinator, Janet Novak, arranged to have southern red trillium (*Trillium sulcatum*), a special assortment of dwarf daphnes sourced from Arrowhead Alpines, bog plants, and other select rock garden plants. Gary Spock, Rabbit Hole Plants, offered an exceptional selection of epimediums, anemones, and other rare perennials.

As people and plants arrived, Rad MacFarlane, Gwynne Ormsby, and Michele Hall helped to register each entry. Members delighted in studying the entries and voted for their favorites in each category. Ann Rosenberg earned best in show for her lovely trough of columbines and dianthus.

Our speaker, Bill Barnes, shared his expertise in seed germination, providing many rules-of-thumb that become apparent after years of hands-on practice. Ideal seed moisture for storage is about 5%. Dried seed can be moved to a ziplock bag in the refrigerator for long-term storage. The more complex the hybrid, the less likely its seed will germinate. As a survival mechanism, some plants are self-sterile and only cross with other similar plants. Annual hot pepper seeds may last merely one year, while tomato seeds can last several years with proper storage.

Starting with dormant seed, several methods may encourage germination. A physical treatment, like scarifying or boiling seed, may help to penetrate hard seed coats. Some seeds break dormancy with stratification—holding them in cold, moist or in warm, moist conditions—and perlite is a good medium for this. (Bill does not recommend vermiculite, since it holds too much water and makes pH more alkaline.) If a seed in warm, moist conditions develops a radicle, move it to cold, moist conditions. If a seed in cold, moist conditions develops a radicle, pot it up; dormancy has been broken. Gibberellic acid may be an alternative to stratification. Seed is soaked in a 500 ppm solution, at most, or stem elongation will result.

Bill is retired, though still involved in plant breeding and development. He fielded various questions from the audience. When asked about getting giant sequoias to survive in our area, he suggested grafting them onto *Cryptomeria* rootstock. This kind of know-how can't be gleaned easily from a book, and the opportunity to share such insights in person is one of the joys of our remarkable group!



Members vote for their favorite plant show entries.



Plant sale tables are loaded with fine rock garden perennials.



Bill Barnes answers questions after his talk.



Ann Rosenberg's trough with columbines and dianthus earned Best in Show.



In the competitive Miniature Arrangement class, Joe Stitt and Eric Sternfels were awarded first and second place, respectively.

The Dodecatheon

Sharee Solow, Editor
7914 Park Avenue
Elkins Park, PA 19027



LOOKING AHEAD

Delaware Valley Chapter NARGS

Saturday, May 10, Members' Plant Sale.

Saturday, May 31, Henry Foundation Guided Tour/Picnic Optional.

Sunday, June 8, Member Garden Tours, Chester County.

Friday, June 20, Bog workshop at Aquascapes Unlimited in Pipersville PA.

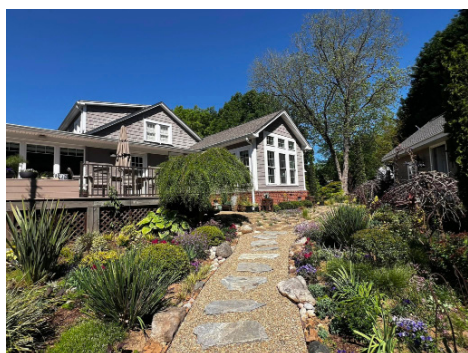
Summer Break....see you in the fall.

Check The Dodecatheon and the DVC/NARGS website (www.dvcnargs.org) for details before each meeting.

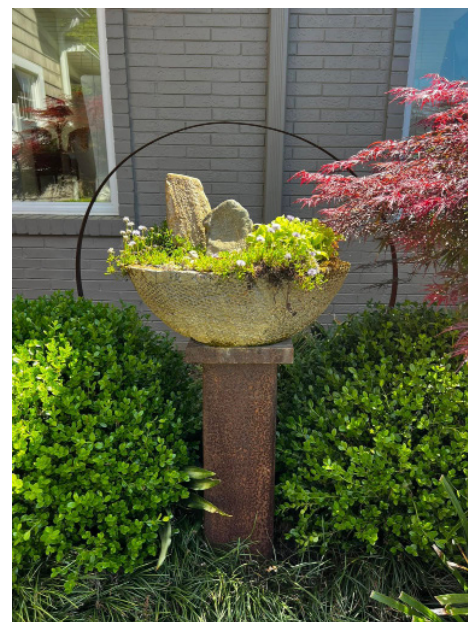
A GLIMPSE OF INTA'S NEW PLACE IN NORTH CAROLINA

...submitted by Sharee Solow, Editor

I asked Brie Gluvna Arthur to share a bit of her visit with Inta Krombolz. Many of us toured her garden as it developed over many years into an artistic display that was included in numerous local and national tours. Now, her new place is equally compelling showcasing rock garden features.



Photos courtesy of Brie Gluvna Arthur.



Delaware Valley Chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society

Join at dvcnargs.org or by using this form

Please print the information as you would like it to appear in our membership directory and is solely for Del Val Rock Garden activities.

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone number: _____ Email Address: _____

☐ Individual \$15.00 ☐ Household \$20.00

Circle the committee(s) in which you might like to participate:

Plant Sales Newsletter Programs Hospitality Annual garden tour: opening your garden to members

Make your check payable to **DVC NARGS** and send it to Erin Anne Van Yahres, 64 Birch Lane, Paoli, PA 19301.