



Gravel garden, Chanticleer, Wayne, PA. June 2021. Photo: S Strickler

## 2021 Fall Calendar of Events

**All meetings are Saturdays at 10am except where noted.**

**September 25, Fall Festival & Plant Sale, 9am to 3pm,** Greenspring Gardens, Alexandria, VA  
Members: don't forget to prep your plants for this fall sale.

**October 2, Plant Exchange, 10am,** at home of Ed Aldrich, 7820 Yorktown Dr., Alexandria, VA 22308. Ed is a 'zone-pusher' and grows some tropical and subtropical plants and other specialties. So save time to tour his garden. Please wear a mask and bring your lunch. No food other than what you bring for yourself.

**Wednesday, October 13<sup>th</sup>, 7pm (via zoom) Paulette Royt on "Gardening with Ferns"** Paulette is a master gardener and taught in the biology department at George Mason University for more than 30 years.

**October 23-24, 2-day Trough Workshop,** Susannah Farm Nursery, Boyds, MD. <https://susannahfarmnursery.com/> **Watch for more details.** Once again Rob Gimpel, who learned his trough-making craft at Stonecrop Gardens in Cold Spring, NY, as an intern, will lead this popular workshop. Members can make two troughs: one to take home and one to be sold to benefit PVC. cholla cactus, Ed's Garden



**November Members' Meeting:** Election, and members share images of their own gardens or others they have visited near and far.

**December 3, (DATE to be confirmed) (via Zoom)**  
**Andrew Bunting on his “Gravel Garden.”** Find out how this garden is doing almost two years after Andrew installed it in his front yard in Swarthmore, PA, in the spring of 2020. Andrew is VP of Horticulture at the Pennsylvania Horticulture Society.



Andrew's garden, Photo: Jared Barnes

**December (DTBD) SeedEx,** Members help sort seeds for NARGS seed exchange. Details to come.

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## President's Message *from Barbara Rose*

### Greetings PVC-NARGS,

During the past year I have had the good fortune to work in Green Spring's rock garden many times alongside great PVC gardeners. (You know who you are!) They have shared both their horticultural knowledge and their gardening skills, all lending to a greater appreciation of this mature rock garden. The blooms appear steadily and often surprise us with how successfully plants have naturalized through the years.

This amazing feature of the rock garden, that something is always blooming, can be attributed to the steady plantings over forty or so years of hundreds of plant specimens. Whether it be Kramer's Red Heath in the winter, or the progression of perennials through the spring and summer-- especially the Pulsatilla, Spigelia, and all the lilies-- a person can always find a beautiful flower. The conifers look fantastic now after being pruned and additional dwarf cultivars added. Most recently, there's been talk of adding a gravel garden as well. I urge everyone, the next time you are at Green Springs spend some time walking around this garden and discovering your own surprises.

So much is happening over the next few weeks. Please check the PVC calendar closely! First off is the Fall Festival & Plant Sale at Green Spring Gardens, followed by our plant exchange at Ed Aldrich's house in Alexandria. Hope everyone can heed my advice after our previous exchange and will bring their rock garden plants and other interesting specialty plants to the sale and exchange, i.e., no weeds and thugs. Thank you!

A Zoom talk on Ferns happens Wednesday evening October 13<sup>th</sup>, and there will be a trough workshop the weekend of October 23<sup>rd</sup>. On November 6<sup>th</sup>, we'll have our annual general membership meeting and election. Since none of us traveled this year, we're asking members to please share highlights from their own gardens this time. Please limit your presentation to 10 to 15 minutes. And, please let me know if you are sharing.

In early December (date to be confirmed), Andrew Bunting, whom many remember from his years at Scott Arboretum, will talk about his new home gravel garden.

A big thank you to John Willis for our **new PVC-NARGS website**. Check it out at [www.pvc-narg.org](http://www.pvc-narg.org). (More fine-tuning to come.) Also, thank you to Margot Ellis on her work at getting us a PayPal account, coming soon, which will allow members to join online with a credit card, in addition to mailing a check.

Finally, in case you haven't heard, congratulations to Judy Zatsick on her new job as Site Manager at Green Spring Gardens!

Everyone, please stay safe and hope to see you soon!

*Barbara*



# How to Create a Simple Winter Tent for Your Rock Garden

Kevin McIntosh

So you want to grow xeric plants from the American west or South Africa in the mid-Atlantic, but every spring you find leaf soup?

Unfortunately, cacti and succulents melt if they are cold and wet. One way to get them through our winters with less moisture is to cover them. Many of these plants can take Denver cold (USDA zone 5) if they are kept dry. Yes, you can put out sawhorses and place sliding glass doors on them, but I think I have found a better way that will save your back.

This article describes the construction of an inexpensive, removable, durable, plastic-covered tent using PVC tubing as ribs. The tent looks like this (picture right) when assembled.



## Getting Started on the Skeleton – Materials List

I will describe the construction of a 12- foot tent, but you can make a tent any length you want, from three feet to the length of your yard.

You need five 10-foot sections of ½ inch diameter PVC pipe. Each section is enough to make one rib. Placing the five ribs at three- foot intervals, you can make a 12- foot tent that is 54 inches wide and 30 inches high.

You also need five 90-degree elbow joints and 10 elbow 45-degree elbow joints. You will need pipe primer and cement to hold the PVC pieces together, ten 12-inch rebar pieces for anchoring the ribs, two six to eight-foot bamboo poles, 12 to 18 inches of heavy-duty rubber tubing that fits over the ends of bamboo; zip ties to lash the ribs together, and some rope and tent stakes to tie down the ribs. I purchased all these items at my local Home Depot.



## Making the Ribs

Take one 10-foot section of PVC tubing and, using a hacksaw, cut two 36-inch pieces and two six-inch pieces. Assemble the rib as shown **left**, using one 90-degree elbow joint at the top and two 45- degree elbow joints at the shoulders. Use the primer and glue to attach all pieces.

Assemble the pieces on a flat surface so the rib stays in one plane (not bent). Repeat the process to create the other four ribs. Allow the glue and primer to dry for at least an hour before further assembly.

**Note:** the rebar shown in the photo is *NOT glued*, as it needs to be removable!





### Assembling the Skeleton

Space the ribs at approximately 3-foot intervals. Start by using a hammer to pound 12-inch pieces of rebar into the soil (3 feet apart), leaving about 6 inches above grade. Slip the hollow PVC pipe at the bottom of either side of the rib over the rebar and the rib should stand in place. Your completed assembly should look like the picture left when you are done.

It is important to tie the ribs together with bamboo poles and zip ties to give the structure rigidity (picture below right) and prevent collapse under heavy snowfall. I also used heavy duty rubber tubing to link the bamboo poles together. Since the rubber tubing is flexible, you can bend the skeleton to accommodate a non-linear shaped bed.

### Covering the Skeleton with Plastic

Once the skeleton is up, you can cover it with a plastic sheet--but just to the 45-degree shoulder joints. It is important to leave a gap at the bottom (about six inches between the bottom of the sheeting and the soil surface) to allow air circulation within the tent. I also left a gap at either end.



I chose Solar Max Reinforced Poly Film, a 3-ply laminate combining two layers of linear, low-density polyethylene reinforced with cord, as it combines light weight with strength and durability. You may elect to use a less expensive plastic sheeting. I attached the sheeting with clips (two clips on each side of each rib for a total of 20 clips). I bought the sheeting and clips from Greenhouse Megastore.

### Anchoring the Tent to the Ground

As a final step, anchor the tent at the ends and in the middle to prevent it from blowing away. I drilled a hole in the PVC to run a zip tie through the pipe and anchored it with rope and a tent stake. (Picture right )







covered the opening with nylon mesh, using clips and some galvanized pins to anchor the mesh to the ground.

I have had great success in overwintering cacti and succulents (including Agaves) under these tents for the past two years. However, keep in mind the past two winters have also been way above average in temperature so I'm not sure whether my success is due to mild weather or protection from my tents.

## Results and Lesson Learned

What I can say for certainty is the tents have held up in snow and wind for the past two winters. As an experiment, I didn't use the bamboo poles in one set up and it partially collapsed under minimal snowfall. So, use the poles!

The first year I put up a tent, either rabbits or squirrels got under it and ate the leaves off succulents. The second year, I



## O the Word

Jim Dronenburg

Gardens come, gardens go. Most of our gardens won't survive us; mine certainly won't, as only I know what is where in it. Even so, there are plants that remind me of the family or the friends they originally came from. Stones mark the resting places of pets. But today, I'd like to tell you about a garden down the hill from us, in Knoxville (a sub-suburb of Brunswick, MD).

This was the garden of Peter and Eleanor, in their little cottage set back from the road over a tiny bridge over a creek. They grew many things, but their apparent passion was food- fruits and vegetables. At some time or other they had erected a mini-dam across the creeklet that came down their property to feed the larger creek that went along the road.

They were older than Dan and me, which is saying something. Peter, who was older than Eleanor and somewhat of a hermit because he was deaf as a post, was highly literary—he published our small town paper, now defunct. When he laid their concrete front walk, he inscribed it with Greek letters:

Ο Λ Ο Γ Ο Σ

Peter died, and Eleanor lived there for a few years after, but really couldn't keep things up. The garden went to ruin. I went down to talk to her about something and noticed the letters for the first time.

"Eleanor", I said, "what is the middle letter of that word?"

"That's a 'G'"

And I knew the other letters. "O Logos", I said. "O the Word."

She stared back and smiled. "I don't think there is another person in Brunswick that could have done that."

I'm not a scholar, by the way, but I was assigned to a short stint in Athens in the Navy, and to know where the buses were going you had to read the Greek letters; the street names of each bus's route were printed on the bus's side.

Long story short, Eleanor could not keep up the place, and went out West to be with her daughter. The place was sold. I had always coveted it because of the creek and some mature evergreens down there. Not to live in just yet—perhaps as a “downsize house”. So Dan and I looked it over. The house was too far run-down for Dan, although the price was right. We passed it up.

People bought it, and work was done and done on it before they moved in. Then once they were in, out of the blue came an Email from Carol Warner of Draycott Gardens, north of Baltimore:

*“We had our Iris Society sale today in Frederick at the Dutch Plant Farm. We were talking to one of our customers and she said she was from Knoxville. Of course, we said we know people on Cemetery Circle. She and her husband live in a red house right at the bottom of the hill. They fixed up the house a bit and are attacking an overgrown garden. I told her about ...what a great gardener you are and told her to drive up to the big brick house and say hello. So, if a really nice lady with gray hair shows up one day, I sent her.”*

So, knowing she could never find us from that description--we aren't visible from the road any more—I dropped a note off one day. Hi, welcome, I'm the guy Carol talked about, here's our contact info, oh, and by the way, we knew Peter and Eleanor. I'd like to buy that chunk of your sidewalk if you ever decide to replace it, to remember them.” Subtle, as usual.

We have since communicated, she (Lorene) and her husband (Ron) have been up here a couple of times. They are making headway on the garden. They have already rescued, and harvested, the overgrown asparagus. And have no intention of ripping up the sidewalk.

But they dropped in this past Friday. With a present. Lorene was making cement “name bricks” for her grandchildren, and while she was at it she made one special brick for us. We set it in the main walk of the Courtyard. Now there is a link to Peter and Eleanor and also to our new friends:

They shall grow not old, as we  
that are left grow old:  
Age shall not weary them, nor  
the years condemn.  
At the going down of the sun  
and in the morning  
We will remember them.

(From *For the Fallen*, by  
Laurence Binyon)



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**The North American Rock Garden Society (NARGS) is our parent organization.** The Potomac Valley Chapter is one of about 30 chapters around the country. If you are not already aware, NARGS offers at least two meetings a year—virtually and in-person when possible – with field trips into natural areas, expert speakers, plant sales and the camaraderie of other plants people. Additional membership benefits include *The Rock Garden Quarterly*, a four-color journal of articles on growing plants, building rock gardens, traveling to see plants in the wild, and more; an annual Seed Exchange; and a travel program (Dolomites, China, Patagonia, and Wyoming are a few NARGS destinations). **Consider joining NARGS** <https://www.nargs.org/>

**NEW PVC website (still under construction):** [www.pvc-nargs.org](http://www.pvc-nargs.org) Thank you to member John Willis for his generosity of time and know-how to create this new website. Option to join and renew online coming soon. (Will not eliminate option to pay by check.)

**PVC DUES: \$15 per year. Please send to treasurer Margot Ellis, 2417 N Taylor St., Arlington, VA 22207**

Editor's note: All photographs are by the article authors unless otherwise noted.

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