



PVC 2022 Calendar of Events

NARGS Event: Saturday January 15 Webinar: "Succulents on the Rocks"

Not a NARGS member? Join for \$40 and get the webinar for just \$10 (regularly \$25)
Watch for details here: www.nargs.org

Thursday January 27 @6pm via Zoom

Bill Cullina: "What Do you Mean I'm not a Perennial? – Native Shrubs and Small Trees that Play Nice with Perennials" Bill Cullina is the executive director of the Morris Arboretum at the University of Pennsylvania
<https://www.publicgardens.org/news/article/morris-arboretum-announces-new-executive-director> (In cooperation with Four Seasons Garden Club)

February, DTBD,

Rock Collecting at Medford Quarry, Westminster, MD What do rock gardeners do in winter? They collect stone for the coming season. A popular trip with lunch following. Details coming.

Saturday February 5 @10am via Zoom

Adam Black on Texas Natives for the Rock Garden

A freelance plant collector and conservationist, Adam's work is described here:
<https://www.texasmonthly.com/travel/texas-plant-hunter-saving-rare-flowers/>

NARGS Event: Saturday February 19: "Rock Gardening Does Meadows"

Not a NARGS member? Join for \$40 and get the webinar for just \$10 (regularly \$25)
Watch for details here: www.nargs.org

Saturday March 26 at 10am via Zoom

Judy Zatsick on Beatrix Farrand and Ellen Biddle Shipman: Pioneers of Landscape Design Judy is director of Greenspring Gardens, Alexandria, VA and vice president of our chapter.

April Garden Tours- details forthcoming

Saturday May 14, Plant Sale, Greenspring Gardens, Alexandria, VA

Saturday May 21, PVC Plant exchange, location TBD

NARGS Annual Meeting: June 12-14, Ithaca, NY (pre-tour to private gardens in the area) Watch for details: www.nargs.org

PRESIDENT's MESSAGE

Dear PVC-NARGS members,

Sending you all good wishes for the new year after such a roller-coaster year. Chances are some of you are hunkered down trying to stay safe. One of my neighbors has gone to the extreme of setting up a tent inside their garage for a family member in quarantine. Thank goodness the weather has been so lovely.

As of this writing the **NARGS Seed Exchange is open for your orders**. I hope all of you participate in this major event. Extraordinary measures have been taken by many people to offer the seed exchange during these Covid times. Our own chapter participated in preparing 200 taxa and for the second year in a row, for safety's sake, we did the sorting alone in our homes. Once again, this endeavor was all organized by Kevin McKintosh. Thank you, Kevin, and everyone else who contributed their time and efforts.

So, if you haven't done so yet, get your NARGS seed order in! In anticipation of the arrival of my seed order I'm taking stock of all the materials I need to plant and start the seeds, including cell flats and a soil mix. This year my seeds will be planted in a soil mix that's low in organic material, 25 percent organic and 75 percent inorganic and they're going straight outside. Some will be in a cold frame and others covered with screen. I'll let you know the germination rate I get.

If you're wondering what to do with all your extra seedlings, remember we can sell them at the upcoming Green Spring Garden plant sale scheduled for Saturday May 14, 2022.

Also, please notice in the bulletin the ZOOM talks we have scheduled for the coming months, all the speakers should be fantastic. I look forward to seeing all your faces on ZOOM soon.

Hopefully, you've all found joy in being outside, walking in the sunshine and visiting a garden.

Best wishes for the New Year!

Barbara

A Perfect Rock Garden Gem: *Escobaria leei*

Panayoti Kelaidis

There are those who say cacti don't belong in rock gardens. Those who say that have obviously not traveled the North American West where countless outcrops are adorned with cacti. The mountain ball cactus (*Pediocactus simpsonii*) rarely grows below a mile in elevation, and grizzly bear cacti (*Opuntia erinacea* v. *ursina*) hobnob with the oldest Bristlecones in the White Mountains at timberline. And let's not even talk about the legions of alpine cacti that grow so abundantly for thousands of miles along the spine of the Andes in South America. Perhaps the clincher in the deal has to be *Escobaria leei*—surely the most irresistible, utterly charming tiny morsel of a cactus any rock gardener worth their salt ought to covet!

From the photos I've included you can see a black, high-fired ceramic



container that Sandy Snyder (a talented rock gardener in Littleton, Colorado) planted with this cactus in 2014. You can see the “after” picture of the same container six years later in full bloom: it won top honors at a cactus show—and everyone who sees it wants it! I was apparently so unsubtle in my admiration of this that

Sandy gave that container to me in 2019 when she was downsizing and moving to a new house. That container, by the way, resides outside where it's subjected to the full force of Colorado's changeable and pretty vicious climate (occasional highs over 100F in the summer and lows down to -20F in winter) and it coasts through just fine. Full disclosure: once Sandy got settled in her new home, the container and cactus went back to her!

I wrote a blog post about this cactus almost a decade ago that shows another champion specimen you again [you may choose to groan or smirk at this].

<https://prairiebreak.blogspot.com/2012/07/all-american-treasure-for-4th-of.html>). enjoy checking out

The taxonomic status of Lee's cactus is a bit of a botanical game of mirrors: it was long known as *Coryphantha leei*. To the dismay of gardeners, the genus *Escobaria* was segregated from *Coryphantha* based on distinct morphological criteria. Recent DNA studies suggest merging the genera Lee's cactus has been subsumed by the rare, and slightly larger, *Escobaria sneedii* by some botanists—an even rarer taxon that grows on a nearby mountain range in New Mexico: they do have a strong resemblance...so *Escobaria sneedii* var. *leei* is understandably used by some gardeners. There are, however, taxonomists who've lumped both of these with a half dozen or other species together (including *E. duncanii*, *E. orcuttii*, *E. albicolumnaria*). The less said about that the better! For the time being, it's pretty widely known and loved as *Escobaria leei*. Since it has a distinct range and distinct morphology (two criteria that define a species) let's stick with that name for the nonce!



In the wild, *Esobaria leei* is restricted to 15 sites in the Guadalupe mountains on the border of New Mexico and Texas (I believe largely within Carlsbad Caverns National Park). It grows at the edge of shallow limestone outcrops mostly on steep slopes in nature. Large parts of the Park where it grows have suffered forest fires in recent years: I doubt these have affected Lees' cactus—which grows so low in open sites. I could be wrong, there. It may have escaped fires, but how will it cope with climate change?

If you look carefully at the picture of seedlings grown by Kelly Grummons (coldhardycactus.com) you will see the fantastic variation in size and color that exists in cultivation. Kelly has selected more miniature forms as well, which he offers (from time to time) on his website. *E. leei* is grown and sold by many other nurseries across the USA and Europe. I make a point of sending large quantities of its abundantly produced seed to the NARGS seed exchange: it's surprisingly easy to grow from seed under lights at home.

Fortunately, this cactus tolerates much cooler conditions and colder climates—and is being grown by hundreds if not thousands of gardeners around the world. It would be tragic if one day this and so many other plants were to only

persist in gardens, due to destruction of their natural habitat, or other unspeakable agencies.

NARGS will be hosting a series of three Webinars over the next few months. The importance and contribution of succulents to rock gardens will be a focus of the second Webinar this winter on January 15, hosted by Rod Haenni, a long-time member of the Rocky Mountain Chapter of NARGS and vice president of the Cactus and Succulent Society of America. Six speakers will explore the use of succulents from all corners of North America. I will be surprised if this plant doesn't crop up at least once during that Webinar! Do check the NARGS website for more information. One more great reason to join NARGS!

The Rock Garden Meadow: A Contrast and Relief from the Rocky Garden

Panayoti Kelaidis

If you are in a bonsai club, you're expected to have a lot of little trees beautifully trained in pots and not necessarily anything else in your garden. I've visited many a succulent collector in Southern California where the entire garden was bristling with cacti, aloes, agaves—anything succulent and not much else. The same phenomenon occurs with many collectors: dahlia, hosta, conifer, iris—most any specialist collection is often arrayed in rows often surrounded by bare soil. There are “native plant gardens” where any plant from beyond an arbitrary political boundary is eschewed, banished, reviled!



*Pulsatilla at Greenspring
Gardens, photo by S. Strickler*

And then there are rock gardeners. I suppose you have alpine gardeners in Britain who may possess only teeny plants in pots—but in North America rock gardening is truly catholic (not necessarily in the religious sense! I'm Orthodox after all): I don't think I've ever visited a rock gardener in our continent who didn't have some special trees, unique shrubs, a patch of woodland and often a pond, a bog and perhaps even a dry spot with some cacti.

Rock gardens aspire to the peaks, but we are always nestled in reality. Our art exemplifies the Taoist principle expressed in chapter 11 of the *Tao Te Ching* by Lao Tzu:

“Mold clay into a bowl
The empty space makes it useful....
Therefore, the value comes from what is there
But the use comes from what is not there.”

Perhaps the best example of a “not there” of rock gardening would be a meadow.



Liatris ligulistylis photo by PK

The “alpine lawn” has been a feature described in many rock gardens—which can manifest itself in any number of forms. In Colorado many of us have patches of buffalo grass (*Buchloe dactyloides*) or blue gramma grass (*Bouteloua gracilis*) which are the dominant short grasses of the Great Plains. These provide an ideal matrix for spring and fall bulbs—not to mention perennials like *Liatris punctata*, that benefit from the

competition of grass roots. For others a lawn can be a few square feet or yards of thyme or veronica that provide a contrast and relief from the rocky garden presence and venue for social plants.

Anyone who’s designed a meadow knows it’s every bit as tricky as creating a crevice or other rock garden. I’ve noticed a half dozen or more books on the subject published in just the last few years. Midwestern designers like Roy Diblik have raised the tall-grass prairie to new heights (so to speak) and I was transfixed when I visited Great Dixter: the “lawns” there are fantastic anthologies of indigenous orchids and all manner of wildflowers that have become increasingly rare in overpopulated Britain.

I invite you to sign up for NARGS last Webinar of this winter season scheduled for Saturday February 19th. This will be the first time I know of that an entire symposium has been dedicated to the creation of meadows and the use of grasses and graminoids in rock gardens. The talks are being orchestrated by Kenton Seth, better known for his crevice garden creations around the world: Kenton designs all manner of gardens, and meadows are especially near and dear to his heart. I have no doubt this Webinar will be revelatory and great fun: do

check the NARGS website (www.nargs.org) in the coming months for further announcements and a sign up to this seminar!

For some views of a Colorado prairie check out this post:

<http://prairiebreak.blogspot.com/2017/09/prairie-daze-magical-preserve-north-of.html>

A Delightful and Durable Woodlander:

Himalayan Mayapple

Panayoti Kelaidis

Believe it or not, these two images of Himalayan mayapple* were taken a few days apart of the same species (albeit two different plants) in my garden. I think these pictures speak volumes about the enormous impact of light, and especially



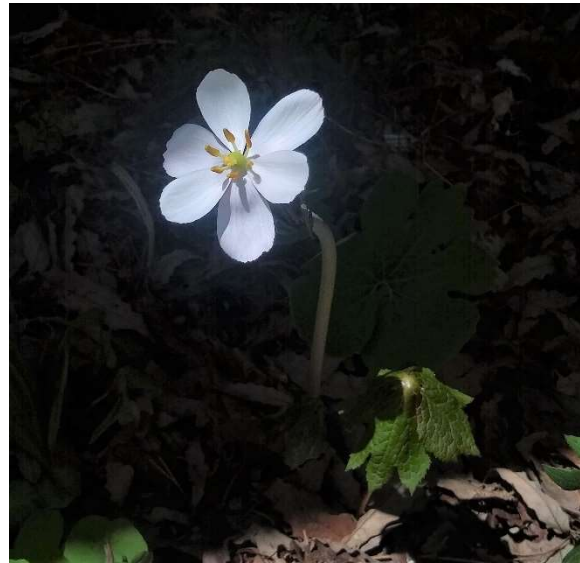
shade not just on our photography, but on the plants in our garden. The intense sunlight and dry air of Colorado (where I garden) amplifies these contrasts: there are canyons in our foothills where you can find yellow lady slippers, wood lilies and oak fern** on cool north slopes, and on the sunny slopes opposite there may be ball cacti (*Pediocactus simpsonii*) and yuccas!

I have grown Himalayan mayapple for thirty years or more: few plants are so varied in their form from the time they emerge (often blooming) out of the ground to their bat-like phase unfurling their wing like leaves, and expanding them like an umbrella until the large, oblong red fruit ripens in early summer: more like a ballet than a mere flowering process! It is a plant that has accrued a lot of lore: it is widely used in Traditional Chinese Medicine and possesses alkaloids utilized in Western Medicine to combat breast cancer. It seems to thrive just anywhere in a garden where you might grow classic woodlanders like wild ginger, dutchman's britches*** or most ferns.

We have found its many East Asian cousins (*P. pleianthum*, *P. versipelle*, *P. delavayi*: all of them also split into microgenera by busy body botanists!) less dependable—often succumbing to our late spring frosts.

I've found this pretty easily grown from seed—which is almost always available on the N.A.R.G.S. seed exchange (it will be this year for sure—I'm donating lots of seed from my plants!). It's also sold by better rare plant nurseries on the two coasts (my plants came from Far Reaches Farm, for instance). This is but one of innumerable woodland treasures that are enriching our shady rock gardens.

Do check out this blog, which features a photo gallery of Himalayan mayapples in the wild and in cultivation:



<http://prairiebreak.blogspot.com/2020/09/sinopodophyllum-hexandrum-var-yunnanense.html>

I have annotated some of the Latin names for plants I've referred to with common names above. I find cluttering text with too many scientific names distracting, especially when there are charming and widely recognized common names we can use. One can be too pedantic, you know!

* I prefer to stick to *Podophyllum hexandrum* to the "*Sinopodophyllum hexandrum*". I'm sure the botanist who split the genus had good reasons. Around 300 B.C. the Chinese Philosopher Gongsun Lung observed 白馬非馬: can one legitimately assert "a white horse is not a horse": I believe white horses ARE horses, and mayapples are mayapples, even if one grows in China and one in Ohio.

** *Cypripedium pubescens*, *Lilium philadelphicum* var. *andinum* and *Gymnocarpium disjunctum* for the rock gardeners who eschew common names.

*** *Asarum* spp., *Dicentra ucellariac*

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/>

PVC DUES are \$15 per year. Pay online with PayPal or a credit card here: www.pvc-nargs.org Or, please send a check payable to PVC-NARGS 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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