



Helleborus thibetanus A. Nicolson

POTOMAC VALLEY CHAPTER
NORTH AMERICAN ROCK
GARDEN SOCIETY

PVC BULLETIN
March 2010



Hacquetia epipactis J. McKenney

Jim McKenney, Editor jimmckenney@jimmckenney.com
<http://www.pvcnargs.org/>

**You can pay your dues for 2010 by sending your check for \$15 to Margot Ellis, 2417
N Taylor St., Arlington, VA 22207**

Calendar

May 12, 2010 Cliff Booker speaking on plants of the Dolomites; Green Spring Garden Park 6:30P.M.

May 15th, 2010 Plant sale at Green Spring Gardens Park

May 22, 2010, our spring plant exchange, hosted by Tricia Goins
11648 Leehigh Dr
Fairfax VA 22030

Trip to Carl Gehenio's garden north of Pittsburg; date TBD, your input welcome

Index

Madame Chairman's Message	p.2
Snow scenes	p.2
From the coldframes	p.2
Get ready for our plant sales	p.4
Officers, Directors, Committee Chairs	p.4

NARGS EVENTS (NOT LOCAL)
NARGS Annual Meeting Denver, Salida CO July 11-14 "Romancing the Rockies"
Check the NARGS website for info and registration forms.

Deadline for next edition April 15, 2010

Madame President's Message
Greetings from the Snow Bank

I happen to love snow. I think it is a great insulator for plants and the moisture melt is generally just right. However, 28 inches was somewhat over the top where I live. You can imagine my amazement when some of the snow melted and my *Galanthus elwesii* was peeping up at me. Isn't nature wonderful.

We have had three very successful speakers so far: Walt Cullerston, Vic Piatt and Dr. Alice Waegel.

One of my personal charges when I took this responsibility as chairperson is to attract new members; and with the assistance of our members, especially Sarah Strickler, we have added 8 new members so far. This is very exciting and I hope they are enjoying our many benefits.

May is going to be a very serious month for all of us as we have our plant sale on May 15 at Green Spring Gardens Park in our old location on the grounds. We are excited and blessed that Merry Bruns has agreed to be our point person and many of our new members will be participating in this fun event. This

event will be surpassed by our members only plant swap on May 22 (location TBD). Please refer to the rules for the plant exchange which have been revised by Paul Botting and sent out to the membership.

Our speaker from NARGS will be joining us on May 12 to show us wonderful photos of botanizing in the Dolomites of northern Italy. More details to follow.

We are hoping to put together a car pooling trip to Carl Gehenio's magnificent rock garden at his home in northern PA. His son also has a fabulous garden closeby. Carl recently received the Linc and Timmy Foster Award for Rock Garden Excellence. We will be sending more information as soon as plans are solidified.

Remember YOU make this chapter what it is. And so I have another request: who would be willing to take over the book department for us? We usually offer for sale at our meetings a selection of books (obtained from NARGS library). There are books I'm sure some of us would like to see available. Please e:mail me at bettyannespar@aol.com if you can help or need more information to make a decision.

Snow Scenes, some I hope we never see again

Several members have contributed pictures of their gardens in the snow. It was beautiful at first, but as the snow accumulated we began to see the other side of the picture: lots of damage, especially to certain woody plants. White pines and broad leaved evergreens in particular were hit badly. A

neighbor's *Magnolia grandiflora* lost so many branches that after they had been gathered and placed at curbside they formed a hedge in front of the house. In another part of the neighborhood, two adjacent neighbors had four and five inch diameter maple limbs break out.

Several members contributed pictures: go to the Bulletins page on the chapter web site and click on Image Page.

In the Editor's garden, forty-year old dwarf box were thoroughly splayed: they went from over three feet high to nearly flat. When the snow finally began to melt, it was a big relief to see that there was little breakage.

On the N side of the garden there is a row of decades-old narrowly upright junipers now about thirty feet high. Two of these, side by side, came down in the snow.

The biggest heartbreaker in this garden was the loss of the crown of the formerly magnificent *Franklinia alatamaha*.

Editor

From the cold frames

There are several cold frames scattered around the garden. Two are snuggled against the front wall of the house and are thought of as the "protected" cold frames. They do benefit from heat seepage from the house and the warmth of a SW exposure. Two other less well situated frames are given over to seeds and seedlings: these contain over seven hundred little pots of seed planted last November. And there are two more at the far back of the garden: these are used to winter hardy plants not ready for the open garden.

At this time of year the protected cold frames are full of interest. One is given over to marginally hardy plants, most of which are summer dormant. Some of the plants grown in this frame are hardy enough to survive in the open garden, but they are much better off in a frame.

This frame has provided a steady succession of daffodils since last September. Some big, nominally zone 8 Asian *Asarum* are doing well in this frame: their grotesque flowers are opening now. In one of the images on the chapter website you can see the barely visible flowers of the odd asparagus relative *Ruscus hypoglossum*. This has made itself at home in a corner of one of the protected cold frames. It has not yet been tried in the open garden.

Iris lazica, likely to be hardy in the open garden, is blooming now in one of the cold frames. Flowers on this one so far have come in flushes – this promises a long season of bloom. It is very similar to the Algerian iris, *Iris unguicularis*

Another iris, *Iris tuberosa* (aka *Hermodactylus tuberosus*) is blooming in the same frame:

The other protected cold frame is used for plants which require both winter protection and summer water. Those beautiful plants which appear in the grocery stores at this time of year – primroses, florists' cyclamen and gerberas for instance, are hardly suitable for growing in the house (unless your house is much colder and brighter than the typical house around here); most of them probably end up in the trash can a week or two after they are brought home. But keep them in a cold frame and you will get your money's worth

and more. A florists' cyclamen I purchased in November 2009 is still blooming strongly; hybrid primroses purchased in early January are still in full, vibrantly colorful bloom. Some *Helleborus niger* bought in full bloom are still blooming and setting seed. In the open garden the developing seed would probably be killed by the cold in most years without snow.

In this same frame some common snowdrops began to bloom weeks before their congeners in the open garden. My "Christmas snowdrop" was dug on December 18 and placed, in full bloom, in this cold frame. Two months later it was still in bloom. *Daphne odora*, a dubious choice for the open garden here, has been in potently fragrant bloom for two weeks.

The two seed/seedling frames, because they are not so ideally sited, are much slower to show activity. But seeds are starting to germinate now, and for most gardeners there is something very absorbing about poring over the pots looking for signs of germination.

And then there are the ones which are still in the seedling frames but starting, finally, to bloom: a plant of *Hepatica nobilis* produced its first blue flowers this year.

Aim for a congenial mix of color, fragrance and interest and you will look forward to the time you spend with your cold frames. Editor

Time to get ready for our plant exchange and plant sale

The Green Spring plant sale will take place on May 15, 2010. That's about a

month and a half from now. Merry
Bruns is handling the plant sale: let her
know when you will be available to help
out with set up, sales during the day and
breakdown at the end of the event.

Our spring plant exchange will take
place the following weekend on May 22.

Now's the time to survey the garden for
candidates for these events and begin
potting up plants from the garden. As
purveyors of home grown plants, we
have major if benign competition from
both the Four Seasons club and the
Northern Virginia Master Gardeners:
those groups offer a wide and always
intriguing selection of plants which have
made themselves at home in local
gardens. Since we're (nominally) a rock
garden group, why not leave the hardy
begonias, hostas and daylilies to the
other groups and concentrate instead on
easily grown plants suited to troughs:
sedums and sempervivums for instance.

Epimediums disappear in a blink.
Everyone seems to like these.
It would be great if we could put
together a few pre-planted troughs for
the plant sale. Last year we were
besieged with offers for the two which
were on display on the sales table.
Didn't one offer float up into the three
digit range? I think there is an
opportunity waiting there.

Those of you who took advantage of the
NARGS seed exchange offer to non-
members last summer, and who sowed
seed in the fall, should now be seeing
some results. In my seed frames plenty
of things are sprouting. A few of the
most vigorous might be ready for the
plant sale and exchange, but most will
probably still be too small. There is a
good chance that many of these will
appear at the fall plant exchange.

Editor

Officers, Committee Chairs and Board of Directors 2010

President Betty Spar - 206 Wolfe St., Alexandria, VA 22314 -703-549-0214
bettyannespar@aol.com

Vice President Jim Dronenburg - jdronenburg@ssa-i.org

Secretary Anne Mazaitis - jmazaitis@worldnet.att.net

Treasurer Margot Ellis - margotellis1@yahoo.com

Immediate Past President Paul Botting pmbotting@comcast.net

Membership Chair Paul Botting pmbotting@comcast.net

Program Chair Sarah Strickler - sa.strickler@verizon.net

Communications Chair Alice Nicolson taxonomy@verizon.net

Newsletter Editor & Webmaster Jim McKenney - jamesamckenney@verizon.net

Archivist - open

Parliamentarian - open

Hospitality - open

Board of Directors: all officers and committee chairs, Bobbie Lively-Diebold, Sue Hodapp,
Freddie Hammerschlag, Bob and Audrey Faden, Alma Kasulaitis

