



POTOMAC VALLEY CHAPTER
 NORTH AMERICAN ROCK GARDEN SOCIETY
PVC BULLETIN

JANUARY 2008

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<http://www.pvcnargs.org/>



CALENDAR

January 12, 2008 US Botanic Garden Conservatory
Allen Bush of Jelitto Seeds “Hither and Yon,
 Louisville to Lijiang”
 Coffee 9:30 A.M. , talk at 10 A.M.
 See note below, page 7

February 9, 2008 Brookside Gardens
Sasha Borkovec “Growing Alpines in Washington,
 D.C.”
 Coffee 9:30 A.M., talk at 10-12:30

March 15, 2008 US Botanic Garden Conservatory
Roy Klehm of Klehm’s Song Sparrow Nursery
 speaking on dwarf peonies.
 Coffee 9:30, talk at 10 A.M.

Cultivated Flora of North America
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Next deadline February 15, 2008

**It’s dues time: send your renewal check for \$15 to Margot Ellis, 2417
 North Taylor Street, Arlington, VA. 22207**

**Minutes
 Potomac Valley Chapter, NARGS
 Brookside Garden
 November 3, 2007**

The Annual Membership Meeting was called to
 order at 9:00 a.m. by President Paul Botting. He

dispensed with the minutes of the last meeting
 and then encouraged members to order seeds so
 that plants could be produced to sell at the 2009
 Eastern Winter Study Weekend.

Nominating Chair Alma Kasulaitis announced
 the following candidates for office for 2008: Paul

Botting for President, Linda Keenan for Vice President, Freddi Hammerschlag for Secretary, Margot Ellis for Treasurer and Elaine Lahn for Historian. All were approved by acclamation.

The Treasurer's report indicated that the total in the checking and CD accounts is \$9,443.14.

President Botting offered Turface, an expanded clay-soil amendment, for sale for troughs.

Program Chair Betty Spar announced that there would be four presentations beginning with a slide show of Northern Switzerland by Alice Nicolson. Alice's slides covered her trip to Zug, Switzerland in May 2007. She photographed plants in three areas: meadow near Zug, the top of a 5,000 ft mountain and a sphagnum nature preserve. Flowers photographed in the meadow included silenes, veronicas, lamiums, and aquilegias. Mountain flowers included gentians, orchids, polygalas, potentillas, *Dryas*, primulas, saxifrages, *Ranunculus*, calthas, and valerians. Flowers of the nature preserve included: *Menyanthes trifoliata*, primulas, orchids, *Pedicularis*, vacciniums, polygalas, *Lathyrus*, *Polygonum*, *Trollius* and *Ranunculus*.

Linda Keenan presented slides on the vegetation and landscape of the Canaan Valley and Dolly Sods in West Virginia in June 2007. Some of the plants included: windblown spruce, sundews, *Dicentra*, *Kalmia*, lycopodiums, *Arisaema* and many fungi.

Bob Faden presented the powerpoint shows of Janis Ruksan's *Fritillaria* and alliums. A handout accompanied the 79 slide *Fritillaria* presentation. Numerous alliums were presented including *A. flavum*, *A. neapolitanum*, *A. oreophilum*, *A. caeruleum*, *A. nevskianum*, and *A. karataviense*.

Last but not least was a presentation by Paul Botting on how to make troughs from Styrofoam boxes. Paul provided step by step instructions including: materials needed, how to prepare sand to cover boxes, how to paint boxes, and what soil mix to use. Detailed instructions will be included on our Website.

The next meeting will be held on January 12, 2008, 9:30 a.m. at US Botanical Garden Conservatory. The speaker will be Allen Bush of Jelitto Seeds.

Respectfully submitted by:

Freddi Hammerschlag

On Growing Dioecious Trees

Robert Faden

The flowers of most plants contain both male and female organs. Such flowers are called bisexual or hermaphroditic. Many plants however contain unisexual flowers. If both male flowers and female flowers occur on the same plant, such plants are called monoecious (from the Greek monos and oikos, literally meaning one-housed). Examples are many wind-pollinated plants such as oaks and some grasses and sedges. If male and female flowers occur on different plants, such plants are called dioecious (two-housed). Some examples are hollies (*Ilex* species), *Aucuba japonica*, and the native persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*).

About 10 years ago, when we were only beginning to expand our gardening activities onto much of the land of the neighboring YMCA, we collected seeds of a number of trees and shrubs and germinated them. Some were very easy to germinate, such as the seeds of the igiri tree (*Idesia polycarpa*) and Osage orange (*Maclura pomifera*), which germinated without treatment, although the seeds of the latter did come from a fruit that had spent the winter outdoors. Others, such as the Kentucky coffeetree (*Gymnocladus dioicus*) required more drastic treatment: four hours in concentrated sulfuric acid. In the end, however, we had lots of seedlings of all three of the above.

The question was how many of each species to plant out. As lovers of diversity our first impulse was to grow one of a kind, especially because they were all trees and the available space was not infinite. But the species name of the Kentucky coffeetree ('*dioicus*'), plus a little research led us to discover that all three species were dioecious, so we would need both male and female trees in order to get fruits. The seedlings were of course of unknown gender.

How much did we want fruits was the next matter to consider. Personally, I like the fruits of all these species. Indeed, *Idesia* is not especially ornamental except for the winter display of its long-lasting sprays of small red berries. One might argue that the thick pods of the Kentucky coffeetree are a nuisance for mowers, but I have

a soft spot for them, and we had no intention of mowing the grass on the YMCA. The tennis-ball sized, green mulberry-like fruits of the Osage orange can also be messy. Dirr writes that they usually end up as ammo, but I like them too, except for the stickiness they exude when they are bruised or cut. And they are fun to heave at squirrels. Because our desire for fruits (in decreasing order) was Idesia, Kentucky coffeetree and Osage orange, we planted five Idesia, three Kentucky coffeetrees and two Osage oranges on the north side of the YMCA parking lot.

Now a good 10 years later, the results have been mixed. The first tree to flower was an Osage orange and it was a male. We had hoped that an Osage orange might serve as a pollinator for the Chinese species *Maclura tricuspidata* (also known as *Cudrania tricuspidata*), which we had growing nearby. That species is supposed to produce a small edible fruit, but like the native Osage orange, it too is dioecious. By the time the male Osage orange had revealed its gender, so had the *M. tricuspidata*. It too was male, so we were never going to get fruits on either of these trees. A few years ago, the second Osage orange blew over in a strong wind. It was still attached at the base and we could have staked it back up, but it was always the weaker plant of the two, and we decided that we really didn't want a large spiny plant in that spot after all, so we had it removed instead. The roots were bright orange.

Unlike the other trees, the Idesias were planted in a row near the blacktop parking lot. Not having grown them before we were unaware that their growth was somewhat stunted, but we did recognize that they did not handle the summer heat and drought very well. Premature leaf drop, wilt and dead branches occurred frequently. Last winter one of the trees was vandalized. It showed signs of recovery this past growing season, but the best of the five trees died in the prolonged drought and we had to cut it down. Needless to say, none of the trees has flowered. They are too large to move, so we plan to cut them down. If the timing works out we may try to propagate them vegetatively, but then we would have to find new homes for those plants. Basically, this was an experiment that failed. The three Kentucky coffeetrees were planted on the far side of the large ditch at the end of the parking lot. The one planted in the roots of a large black cherry (*Prunus serotina*) has been

slow, but it had a good growing season this year. The other two are tall and gangly, like awkward teenagers. They seem to recognize that they are trees, but they haven't figured out yet how to develop crowns. They almost look like they are trying to blend in with the utility poles along the street. We have never seen flowers on any of these trees. This morning (Nov. 27, 2007) I took a stroll through the gardens before walking to the Metro. The cool weather and strong winds have assisted the normal defoliation processes. As I gazed up at the top of the now nearly bare middle Kentucky coffeetree I was shocked to see clusters of pods on it. It looks like our teenagers have gone through puberty and that the two larger trees have turned out to be a male and a female. How sneaky of them!

If there is any moral to this tale, I would say that growing trees from seed can be fun. It requires patience and the results will often be disappointing. If you really want the end products, such as persimmons, buy sexed trees. If you want to avoid particular sexes, such as female ginkgos, buy known males. If, however, you have unlimited room and just like to grow trees, raising them from seed can be enjoyable, and they help to reduce atmospheric carbon dioxide.

Addendum

Whatever the cause, we have had the best fall color in the gardens this year. The Chinese pistachio (*Pistacia chinensis*), a consistent disappointment every year, has looked really good, with its red foliage, and even the small *Disanthus cercidifolius* shrub in our back yard has made an effort to produce multicolored leaves. How has the color been in your garden and neighborhood compared with other years? Finally, I previously wrote about a deer that had appeared on the YMCA and in Simpson Park one morning last June. Fortunately, it hasn't come back, but a wild rabbit has taken up residence on the large berm in the park. So far it has been munching the leaves of the bulbs *Scilla peruviana* and grape hyacinths. It has also eaten all of the late-flowering fall crocuses (just the flowers so far). Any suggestions, gruesome ones included, for getting rid of this pest would be most welcome. If you would like to come and do the job yourself, you would have our eternal gratitude.

Cultivated Flora of North America

Bob Faden

I attended a meeting at the Missouri Botanical Garden, St. Louis, December 3-4 on a proposed Cultivated Flora of North America. I represented the Smithsonian's Department of Botany. Approximately 20 people representing 15 institutions from 10 states and the District of Columbia and one retail nursery (Behnke's Nursery to be precise) were present. Although little was decided per se, there was a great deal of enthusiasm expressed for the project, which would be an on-line resource that could have many different kinds of users. A steering committee of eight was self selected and was planning to meet in Washington, DC early in 2008. A larger meeting that would include more representatives from the Green Industry will likely take place after that. The lead institutions for this project, which is anticipated to take up to 10 years to complete, will be the U. S. National Arboretum and Cornell University.

The flora is expected to cover continental U.S. and Canada and perhaps Puerto Rico. It is expected to be totally on-line but to be in a format where parts of it could be downloaded for printed works. Depending upon the funds that may be raised, it may be written entirely by unpaid contributors, as has been done for the ongoing *Flora of North America* that is being produced by the Missouri Botanical Garden. Clearly there are lots of questions to be addressed, such as whether house plants or plants that are grown only in botanical gardens should be included.

The new cultivated flora is intended to supersede a series of works that began with Liberty Hyde Bailey's *Cyclopedia of American Horticulture* (1900-1902) and culminated with *Hortus Third* (1976), all of which were produced at Cornell University.

At the conference I learned an interesting fact that could be useful to some of us. There are only two great collections of nursery and seed catalogs in the U. S., namely at Cornell University and at the National Agriculture Library in Beltsville, MD. The Smithsonian Institution Libraries also have a collection of trade catalogs, including nursery catalogs. Some of us have accumulated large numbers of catalogs over the years and have been looking for appropriate places to send them. I plan to

contact all of the above and will let you know their responses in a future newsletter.

A paean to December blooms

Alice Nicolson

What gave me great pleasure all through the month of December, this year as well as many previous years? Two things:

The humble native witchhazel, *Hamamelis virginiana* - it forms a soft golden cloud beside the front gate all month long. On mild days it exudes a gentle scent, slightly sweet but perhaps a bit skunky; when the temperature is in the '20's, the thready petals are all shriveled up and one is saddened at the prospect of a blooming cut short - but Lo! - as it warms up, the petals uncurl and all is glorious again.

In some years the bright yellow fall foliage obscures the early opening of the blooms; but the leaves soon fall, leaving the flowers to shine alone.

As a cutting plant it is very satisfactory - a single branch in a tall brown Dutch gin jug on the mantle can approximate a Japanese arrangement for a week or more.

If it bloomed in March or April it would be just one more pretty flowering tree - in late fall and early winter it can reign almost unchallenged (Camellias are grand but so susceptible to frosts). In my garden it has pride of place, and I nominate it as the single most satisfying plant of all.

The cluster of early snowdrops, *Galanthus elwesii monostictus* Hiemalis Group, has also been a modest but continuing source of pleasure at the foot of the great white oak. In many years they begin in mid-November, along with the witchhazel, but this year they were 1-2 weeks later and have been glorious in their modest way for all of December. Perhaps their charm comes because they are a small patch of flowers in their glory when no other blooms are around; by the time other snowdrops appear, so much else is happening that they just seem like ho-hum white patches.

A DOZEN PLANTS GOOD FOR WINTER FOLIAGE INTEREST IN OR AROUND THE ROCK GARDEN

When I looked around the garden on New Year's Day to see what might be blooming, I didn't find much in the way of flowers. But the search was hardly disappointing; there is plenty of interest in the garden at this time of year for those with the sensibility to appreciate it. In many respects, this is my favorite time of year in the garden. There is something deeply moving about sturdy little plants which stand up to the weather and provide green and interest throughout the cold months. Not all of the plants in this list are common in gardens, but none is really rare. Or at least in this day of Google and on-line shopping, none is inaccessible. All of the plants mentioned here have been in my garden for years and appear to be relatively care free and easy.

Danaë racemosa and *Ruscus aculeatus* have always been my idea of connoisseur's plants. They are the sort of plants which combine basic good looks with a sort of intellectual appeal. The intellectual appeal comes from their botanical relationships (they're asparagus relatives of all things) and from their seeming leaves (which in fact are not leaves but rather modified stems). Both bear half-inch orange-red or red fruits which will remind you of asparagus fruits or lily of the valley fruits. Those of *Danaë racemosa* quickly acquire a wrinkled surface after a few frosts, but those of the *Ruscus aculeatus* keep their freshness longer. These plants are evergreen, although *Danaë racemosa* tends to splay in snow and the *Ruscus aculeatus* will sometimes show cold damage where whole branches go white.

Little *Sarcococca humilis* is worth having for several reasons. The fragrant mid-winter flowers are reason enough to grow this plant, but the color and texture of the evergreen foliage, the low stature of the plant and the slowly creeping growth which results in densely huddled mounds of winter greenery all contribute to its worth.

Much of the same can be said for the various skimmias. Although the flowers are not noted for fragrance, they are ornamental and the buds, formed as they are in the autumn, are a winter presence of interest in the garden.

Two evergreen ferns are favorites here.

Polystichum polyblepharum is notable for the glossy finish of the fronds. The look as if they had been lacquered. Our coldest winters sometimes take a bite out of this one, but

otherwise it's a fine garden plant. Another fern, *Dryopteris sieboldii*, is anything but a typical fern. The five or six broad pinnae which make up a typical frond look as if they had been cut from plastic or rubber. It's one of those plants which just doesn't look real.

Hellebores vary a lot in foliage, and many are worth collecting purely for their foliage. At any rate, that is what I have done. The ones with the best foliage are not necessarily the best ones for winter interest, however. I've been disappointed by the winter effect of the otherwise very handsomely divided leaves of some forms of *Helleborus multifidus*. The varied garden hellebores have foliage which is handsome during the early part of the winter, although by winter's end I'm often impatient to get out and clean them up. A plant bought as *Helleborus torquatus* has interesting leaves which take the early part of the winter well. Whatever this plant is, it is in some years leafless and dormant during the summer and in other years leafless and dormant during the winter. From my point of view, the best of them all for winter effect is the commonest, *Helleborus foetidus*. I think that this and the Italian arum are the two best herbaceous plants for winter interest in our climate, and if I could have only one or the other, it would be the hellebore.

But the Italian arum is a very close second. *Arum italicum* varies enough to be endlessly interesting, and these variations make it a good collectible plant. It's easily grown. And as long as I've grown it, I still can't look at it at this time of year and not think "houseplant". During these first weeks of the year the plants have achieved enough leafy lushness to seem utterly out of place in the open garden. It's true that the leaves are subject to mechanical damage from snow and ice, but in late winter even more foliage will emerge as the plants go on to reach their full size.

Several forms of *Iris foetidissima* are now making the rounds, and all are worth garden space for their winter effect. This plant is interesting for at least three things: its fruit, its leaves and its flowers. Of the three, the flowers are perhaps the least interesting, although I grow the yellow-flowered form which is attractive. The main interest in this plant derives from its fruit. The typical wild forms have red fruit; the seed pods split and curl open during the winter to reveal the bright seeds clinging on the inside. Cultivars are available with white fruits and with yellow fruits. The foliage of this plant is evergreen, at least in mild winters, and attractive.

We're living in the golden age of *Epimedium* acquisition, and a bit of that largesse has made it into my garden. I'm not sure I'm ready to put epimediums into the front rank of plants valuable for winter effect, but some of the big newly introduced sorts are making a good winter show in my garden. As with the hellebores, be ready to get out sometime in late winter and clip off the by-then winter stressed leaves.

I've saved two more favorites for last. Some of you will perhaps wish I had omitted both. But for reasons celebrated by gardeners for centuries, box and tree ivies deserve a place in our gardens. For preference, the box should be one with good, strong box fragrance. On a warm winter day it can be a real pleasure to find that the box is giving its scent. If you find yourself among those who count the scent of box disagreeable, you'll find that there are many cultivars which are scentless. For rock gardens, there are forms of *Buxus microphylla* which will form broad, low mats of evergreen foliage. But for sitting areas nearby the rock garden, the best is old *Buxus sempervirens* 'Suffruticosa'.

Tree ivies are as uncommon in our gardens as box is common. I've often wondered why. The name may be part of the problem. If you Google "tree ivy" you'll get loads of hits on *Fatshedera*. That's not the tree ivy I have in mind. The tree ivies I have in mind are those bushes produced by rooting the adult branches of climbing ivy. For our climate, these are taken from mature *Hedera helix*. These have been known and grown since ancient times, yet few people seem to know about them. That's not too surprising: in a gardening culture dominated by flash, bang, snap, crackle and pop, something which hardly changes its basic greenness from season to season isn't apt to catch the public's fancy. On the other hand, for those who want a garden which evokes a sense of stability and repose, they are invaluable. These bloom and fruit, and that means that they are likely to set seed. Ivy seed means ivy seedlings, many popping up where they shouldn't be. If you grow fruiting ivy, be ready to be confronted by those sometimes tiresome cranks who insist that all non-native plants must be extirpated in local woodlands (and among the lunatic fringe, extirpated from gardens, too). The logic of that escapes me, especially the part which overlooks the inconvenient circumstance that the promulgators of this idea are themselves not native and seem reluctant to remove themselves back whence they came.

I said a dozen, but Dixie Hougen called me to remind me of the great winter effect made by *Edgeworthia chrysantha*. It isn't the flowers she has in mind – they'll come later. It's the overall effect the plant makes at this time of year, especially one well spangled with clusters of flower buds. But it has no foliage at this time, so it can't claim winter foliage interest. Uh oh...I feel a fourteenth coming on: Dixie's comments about *Edgeworthia* got me thinking about the *Stachyurus praecox* in my garden. This one has what from a distance seem to be catkins hanging from the branches. But when you touch them, you find that they are hard and rigid and firmly attached to the branch. So step back and pretend. It's another good one to have tucked into some corner to provide leafless winter interest.

Harry Dewey update

Bob York has asked that the following update on Harry Dewey's condition be distributed:

Harry suffered a severe stroke a week ago but is now well enough to be transferred from the hospital to Manor Care for rehab.

He can receive cards or visitors at: Manor Care, 2501 Musgrove Rd. , Room 102, Silver Spring , MD 20904 . At this time, he does not speak well enough to accept phone calls. The Manor Care number is 301-890-5552. They are civilized and flowers are allowed.

Directions from the Washington beltway (I-495): At Exit 30A, go north on US Route 29 (toward Columbia , not downtown Silver Spring) about 5 miles, turn right on Musgrove Rd. and immediately right to the Manor Care complex. Harry is in the 2nd building (red brick).

For a map, you can cut-and-paste this link:

<http://www.mapquest.com/maps/map.adp?fmttype=address&addtohistory=&address=<http://www.mapquest.com/maps/map.adp?fmttype=address&addtohistory=&address=>2501 Musgrove Rd&city=Silver Spring&state=MD&zipcode=20904-7128&country=US&geodiff=1>



Arum italicum
Dixie Hougen



Edgeworthia chrysantha
Dixie Hougen



Ruscus aculeatus
Dixie Hougen



Polystichum polyblepharum
Jim McKenney



Dryopteris sieboldii
Jim McKenney



Arum italicum
Jim McKenney

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