



POTOMAC VALLEY CHAPTER
NORTH AMERICAN ROCK GARDEN
SOCIETY

PVC BULLETIN

JANUARY 2009



One of Dixie's Primula D. Hougen

Arum italicum Dixie Hougen

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

Deadline for next edition February 15, 2009

**NOW IS THE TIME TO RENEW YOUR DUES: send your check for \$15 to
Margot Ellis, 2417 N Taylor St., Arlington, VA 22207**

CALENDAR

January 30-February 1 2009. **Eastern Winter Study Weekend**, Sheraton Reston Hotel, Reston, Virginia
Single day registrations are available to members who do not wish to register for the entire event
www.ewsw09.org/EWSW09index.htm

INDEX

Chairman's Message	p. 1
The Expanding Garden: Columnar Trees	
Bob Faden	p. 2
New Year's Day Bloom Report	
Dixie Hougen	p. 3
Plants and troughs to be offered at EWSW09	
Editor	p. 4
An appeal for volunteer help	
Alice Nicolson and Paul Botting	p. 5

Chairman's Message

Time is racing to the Eastern Winter Study Weekend (is that a mixed metaphor or just bad writing?) and great strides are being made to wrap up the plans. One development that most of you have heard about is the adoption of partial registrations for those local members and friends who for some reason will be unable to attend the whole meeting. Unfortunately, the registrations have not come up to expectations so we have taken this approach to widening the net. It also provides

outreach to many who are ready to make a step up to the level of gardening that we like to think we represent. See the Partial Registration form elsewhere in this newsletter.

Please urge your friends to take advantage of at least one day's session. For those interested in maximum access to vendors and a talk by the legendary Tony Avent at a minimal cost \$15, the Friday afternoon and evening session is recommended. For the greatest number of outstanding speakers as well as plenty of time to shop for the rare and wonderful plants offered by our

vendors, the Saturday session at \$100 is recommended. Finally, Sunday offers three highly sought-after speakers and a final shot at our vendors – come early as many will be packing up to leave. For more detail see Partial Registration form elsewhere in this newsletter.

Paul Botting

The Expanding Garden

Columnar Trees

Columnar trees can make interesting focal points in gardens and landscapes. The point of this commentary is not to sing their praises or even to recommend ones that do especially well in our area but rather to share some of our experiences.

The first columnar tree that we tried was *Juniperus scopulorum* ‘Gray Gleam’ (Rocky Mountain Juniper), which we grew in the tiny grassy patch in front (on the north side) of our house. Its gray color was quite attractive and the tree kept its tight growth habit. A house finch once nested in it. It seemed to continue growing well even after it fell over, once we had uprighted it. But eventually brown patches appeared in the foliage and cutting them out didn’t seem to slow the progress of whichever one of the many diseases to which this species is susceptible. I wouldn’t grow it again.

The Incense-cedar (*Calocedrus decurrens*) of western North America is a surprisingly good grower in our area. We bought one from Woodlanders Nursery quite a few years ago and planted it in the area we call the “Back Forty”, north of the YMCA parking lot. It grew well and had very attractive dark green foliage and a columnar habit. In fact we liked it so much that we bought two more plants several years later and placed them in the same general area, but much closer to the parking lot. They too grew well for a few years until one of them developed a large patch of brown foliage at

a height that suggested either a large dog or an average sized man had relieved himself on it, the latter most likely at night. Within a few months dead foliage started appearing higher up on the tree and the second of the new trees also started developing symptoms. Going back to Michael Dirr’s book we found that this species is subject to a heart rot in the eastern U. S., particularly, I expect, when it is exposed to stress, such as coping with the heat from the blacktop of the parking lot during the drought that we experienced last summer. In the end we had to remove the two trees, but the original one is still thriving.

Our fastigate English oak (*Quercus robur* ‘Fastigiata’), which is growing in Simpson Park east of the butterfly garden, was an ‘odd’ or an ‘end’ in the Woodlanders catalog one year. In its early years it was at great risk from Alexandria Parks and Recreation workers who menaced and nicked it when they got their hands on a weed whacker. But it survived and it is now about 15 feet tall. It gets mildew some years, but not too badly. I like to joke that we planted it to hide one of the poles supporting a bank of lights for the nearby baseball playing field, but the tree will have to grow another hundred feet to do that.

The columnar Panicked goldenraintree (*Koelreuteria paniculata* ‘Fastigiata’), of which there is a large specimen growing in the daylily collection at the U. S. National Arboretum, is more of a curiosity than a beauty. Dirr wrote that he never tested whether it would grow true from seed, which it doesn’t produce in abundance, unlike the typical form of this species. I took that as a challenge and one year collected seed from the Arboretum’s tree. To make a long story short, we got a number of seedlings, but of course the habit of a tree takes time to manifest itself. Of the three we kept and planted out, two are definitely narrowly vase-shaped, not columnar. One of those two is in a good place in Simpson Park where it is outgrowing the large, bushy crape myrtles among which it is planted.

The other one of the two, also in Simpson Park, will probably be replaced this year because it doesn't seem to have any great merit in either habit or placement.

We planted the third sapling *K. paniculata* as a street tree in front of our house after it appeared to be keeping its columnar form. We placed it under a space between two overhead utility wires. Then the new neighbors got cable and now the 'space' has disappeared. *Koelreuteria paniculata* is supposed to be not subject to serious diseases, but this one has some sort of leaf blight. Moral: if you want this tree, buy one. We saw it for sale at Merrifield Nursery a few years ago. You might be able to grow one from seed but don't count on it.

One tree that I really liked and would definitely recommend is the columnar form of the native sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua* 'Slender Silhouette'). It's a beautiful tree, fast growing and keeps its very tight upright growth. But be sure to grow it in a suitable place, with moist soil. Unfortunately we didn't and it died in last summer's drought.

Finally, a tree that is columnar in youth may not keep its shape as it matures. The best example is the so-called fastigate European hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus* 'Fastigiata'). Why anyone would grow this form when the more difficult to obtain, normal spreading tree is so attractive is beyond me. But it does have a certain 'cuteness' in its youth, being more or less columnar. However, it soon develops a middle-aged spread, a 'paunch' perhaps. Having neither the promise of youth nor the graceful habit of the standard tree it becomes a blob!

While we would never plant the fastigate European hornbeam we do grow *Parrotia persica* 'Vanessa' (Persian Ironwood cultivar) which, like the hornbeam, promises to be narrowly columnar in youth, only to disappoint as it ages, producing spreading branches off the vertical ones and beech-like roots along the surface of the ground that

few herbaceous plants can compete with. In addition to those drawbacks, the bark has failed to produce the attractive peeling patches and the foliage a good fall color that the typical species shows.

An overall theme of this column, which is also columnar, I suppose, is that if you want a narrow, upright tree, first read the literature carefully or, better still, go to your local nursery and see what they carry. Only if you must have something more exotic would I recommend going the mail order nursery route, but be prepared to be disappointed. Like children, they don't always turn out the way you expect.

Robert Faden

New Year's Day Bloom Report

A 70-degree day in the week following Christmas created anticipation of a blaze of color on New Year's Day. However, temperatures dropped to their normal lows, and all thoughts of a lot of new blooms froze. New Year's Day was above freezing but cloudy.

Several branches from my *Chimonanthus praecox* perfumed my Christmas table. I do not recall having so many blooms so early. Jim Dronenberg's tree was in bloom also. The Faden's *Chimonanthus* had no flowers but Alice reported a few. If any gardeners have interest in winter blooms and have a sunny spot in the garden, consider this wonderful small tree. It is about 15' tall and trouble free, with a long period of fragrant blooms and the possibility of a Christmas Day bonus. I would be very interested if any other members grow this tree and their results with early year bloom.

Jim added *Rosmarinus officinalis* 'Hill Hardy', *Sarcococa confusa.*, *Prunus mume*, light (almost white) pink, *Elaeagnus pungens*, Japanese pussy willow, *Hamamelis virginiana*, last straggler blooms, *Osmanthus*

heterophyllus 'Variegatus' and pansies to the list.

Bob and Audrey Faden's large sunny garden, while not ablaze with color, had more than most of us. I have added (*) to plants that have been reported in bloom in previous reports.

Allium thunbergii

**Aster carolinianus* (*Ampelaster carolinianus*)

Aster oblongifolius (*Symphyotrichum oblongifolium*)

**Camellia* 'Winter's Star'

**Camellia* 'Winter's Beauty' [the squirrels missed a couple of buds]

**Camellia* 'Snow Flurry'

Campanula rotundifolia

Chrysanthemum pacificum (*Ajania pacifica*)

Crocus laevigatus

**Erysimum helveticum*—Alice and I have plants that have bloomed since September

**Galanthus elwesii* var. *monostictus*

**Jasminum nudiflorum*

**Lonicera fragrantissima*

Osmanthus heterophyllus 'Variegatus'

**Phlox subulata* 'Laura' [not certain about the cultivar name]

**Rosmarinus officinalis*

Viburnum farreri 'Nanum' [there were a few flowers after all]

Alice Nicolson reported on January 2:

Camellia oleifera

Chimonanthus praecox 'Luteus' - early but several blooms

Chimonanthus nitens - a few late blooms

Erica 'Springwood Pink' - in bloom but early

Erysimum helveticum - in continuous bloom since Sept

Galanthus elwesii var. *monostictus*

'Hiemalis Group' - full bloom

Galanthus elwesii var. *monostictus* - just beginning

G. elwesii elwesii - several patterns

Hamamelis virginiana - ending but still quite a few fls.

Jasminum nudiflorum - early, several blooms and wonderfully forcible

Osmanthus heterophyllus - several blooms

Anna Mazitis had fewer blooms than usual but she still had flowers on a *Chaenomeles* (probably *speciosa*) and *Erica* × *darleyensis*.

Warren Schoor had several plants listed above but added *Crocus laevigatus* (the form distributed under the name "fontenayi") *Hammelis* × *intermedia* 'Jelena', *Narcissus romiieuxii* (the garden form sometimes called "mesatlanticus").

I didn't overlap much of what appears above but I had two blooming *Helleborus orientalis*, full bloom on *Crocus imperati* 'DeJager' and a single *Primula*—located about 12 inches from the early blooming *Chimonanthus*. I know—it makes no sense.

Dixie Hougen

Editor's note: About a week later Dixie notified me that she had forgotten to mention her *Iris unguicularis* which had about a dozen flowers. And she has determined the identity of a *Camellia* which is blooming freely for her now: 'Winter's Cupid'.

And how many of you saw Ann Raver's article in the New York Times which quoted PVC member Bill McLaughlin on *Solidago stricta*: "It's the plant I name when the local rock garden society asks, 'What's blooming in your garden in January?'"

You can see the entire article here:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/08/garden/08garden.html?scp=1&sq=Solidago&st=nyt>



Photographed January 9, 2009 and from the Editor's garden: *Iris unguicularis*, *Galanthus elwesii*, *Helleborus foetidus*, a garden hellebore, *Chimonanthus praecox* 'Luteus', *Hamamelis* × *intermedia* 'Jelena', *H.* × *intermedia* 'Feuerzauber', *Jasminum nudiflorum* and foliage of *Arum italicum*, *Hedera helix*, *Danaë racemosa* and *Sarcococca humilis*,

Plants and troughs to be offered at EWSW09: some of these are worth a day registration!

Roughly eight hundred plants have been assembled for sale by PVCNARGS at EWSW09; most of these are member contributions, although some have been specially raised for the occasion from Jelitto seed and other sources. If you would like to see what will be offered, a list has been posted on the chapter web site: see the Bulletins Page for the link. Or copy this and paste it into your browser:

http://www.pvcnargs.org/plant_list.pdf

The day registration form can be viewed at:

http://www.pvcnargs.org/One_day_Registration.pdf

An Appeal for Volunteer Help.

We surely do hope that those of our members who are registered will also chip in from time to time as needed. Remember, the planning committee members have also paid to attend the meeting, and will also miss a lot of the action while they do their jobs – how about helping out a bit if asked? Those chapter members who aren't registered but are planning to help out will be welcome to attend sessions between working shifts if there is space – alas, we cannot invite you to meals!

Contact Alice Nicolson at 703-979-5871 or any of the following leaders to volunteer:

Jim Dronenburg	301-834-6515	2rutlands@comcast.net	Vendor assistance – mostly from 9 am to 3 pm Friday
Paul Botting	301-869-3742	pmbotting@comcast.net	Drivers needed Thursday, Friday, and Sunday * Pick up speakers at airport, train station, or Metro stop * Pick up plants and troughs from Nicolson's
Jim McKenney	301-770-1867	jamesamckenney@verizon.net	Plant sale
Linda Keenan	301-434-9671	linda_s_keenan@yahoo.com	Raffle
Paul Botting	301-869-3742	pmbotting@comcast.net	Silent Auction
Dan Weil	301-834-6515	2rutlands@comcast.net	Photo Contest
Anne Mazaitis, Audrey Faden, and Barbara Cobb		jmazaitis@worldnet.att.net	Dining Room Setup
Bobbie Lively-Diebold	540-635-9635	b2diebold@yahoo.com	Meals and Special Meals

