



Crocus f. flavus A. Nicolson

POTOMAC VALLEY CHAPTER
NORTH AMERICAN ROCK
GARDEN SOCIETY

PVC BULLETIN

MARCH 2009



Gymnospermium altaicum J. McKenney

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

Deadline for next edition May 1, 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

The next event sponsored by the Chapter is our plant sale at Green Spring Park on Saturday, May 16; details will follow in the May PVC Bulletin.

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Chairman's Message

I checked the garden on Friday, and found that spring is really on its way. Hellebores were blooming robustly. Three *Galanthus nivalis* cultivars, one of which is a quite charming double snowdrop, ('Flore Pleno'?) were blooming in tight clumps. The *Galanthus elwesii* that for me starts blooming before Christmas had a lone bloom left on it. Of course the cheerful yellow winter aconite has formed a nice clump in one of the beds. Crocuses from I-know-not-where have popped up in several places in the yard. But the most exciting arrival is *Corydalis* 'Frodo'. I'd ordered it

from Janus Ruksans with no idea of where I would put it. When it arrived, I still had not found a place for it. Out of desperation I planted it in one of my Styrofoam troughs. Both foliage and what appears to be a bloom scape are poking up. What a rush!

We made about \$1500 at the EWSW09. Compared with the previous EWSW hosted by PVC-NARGS, that is modest, but considering the handicaps we operated under it has to be considered a major achievement. Kudos to Alice and the members of the PVC EWSW committee and to the members who generously donated plants for the sale. We were able to avoid

going into the red. Well done! On top of that, our vendors did well and were very appreciative of the opportunity to sell at the event. We should also mention the wonderful bulbs donated by Brent and Becky Heath and the fine plants donated by the vendors.

Now that the EWSW09 is behind us, we need to plan the rest of the year's activities. The speaker program is in Betty Spar's able hands. We've been invited to take the trip to Barry Yinger's nursery this Spring with Jim D's Garden Club. And we are always open to other suggested activities.

Finally, mention of Barry Yinger, Brent and Becky Heath, Tony Avent, and our other EWSW09 vendors reminds me that many of our vendors are not highly profitable ventures. We should try to support them to the extent we can during these difficult times so that they will be around when better times are with us. I still miss WeDu Nursery and Montrose Nursery and don't want to lose any more of these valuable resources.

Paul Botting
Chairman, PVC-NARGS

Eastern Winter Study Weekend 09

Well, folks, we pulled it off! Thanks to a lot of work by a dedicated group of members, we managed to put together a conference that proved to be entertaining and educational and, despite the unanticipated national financial nosedive, even ended up with a very modest profit! Who and How? While only 16 of our members registered for the full meeting, another 16 came as day registrants - and all of them pitched in to help in one way or another during the meeting - transporting plants, helping to sort out and clean plants at the sale table, assisting the vendors to set up, running

various errands, or generally helping to make the visitors welcome. A number of people stand out for their exceptional contributions.

Paul Botting, who co chaired the planning committee, set up the website, started seeds and made cuttings, bird-dogged the other co chair into making decisions, and undertook to manage the silent auction. (And **Maxine**, whose heroic efforts with Jim McKenney generated most of the excellent labels for our sale plants.)

Food Maven **Bobbie Diebold** worked through the complexities of the menu choices and sweet-talked the catering staff before and during the meeting, ensuring a series of wonderful meals for all the attendees, even most of those with special needs.

Jim Dronenburg, who organized the vendors and came up with some wonderful new participants, grew plants and did heroic duty transporting plants to the sale, and took part in the great potting-up session, enabling us to provide vast numbers of growing bulbs as giveaways. He and **Dan Weil** also stepped up to house one of our vendors as well, which enabled him to attend.

Treasurer **Margot Ellis**, who kept track of our money and undertook to arrange the trough sale, transporting and tidying the troughs from Melwood and carrying quantities of stuff to and from the meeting.

Bob and Audrey Faden, both of whom served as consultants during the planning, Audrey not only growing a lot of plants but also generating one of the breakout presentations with Mike Bordelon.

Sue Hodapp, our Registrar, managed to process the applications and deposit checks and even run the charges, despite a

punishing job taking care of email for the White House and having to deal with the NARGS charge machine that arrived with no instructions and needed parts.

Linda Keenan managed to generate a good selection of donations for the raffle despite undergoing hand surgery.

Anne Mazaitis, sounding board and unfailing support, created centerpieces out of cute little plants, evergreen clippings, a few blooms and some unlikely props, with the help of Barbara Cobb and Audrey Faden.

Jim McKenney, who undertook to keep track of and organize the donated plants, generated and applied countless labels, and then, at the meeting, organized the plants at the sale and then staffed the sales tables for most of the meeting, enabling PVC to make money rather than losing it!(with the assistance of **Lynn Title**, **Diana Nicholls** and **Bobbie Diebold** among others). (He also proofed endless printed material, was the other potter of the 1500 donated bulbs, and drove the Bridgens back to BWI.)

Karen Rexrode not only gave a great breakout session on photography but also worked with Dan Weil on the photography show and even rustled up the stands for the entries.

Betty Spar was a font of good ideas for speakers and subjects, was positive all the way through the planning, and her contacts enabled us to have gorgeous crocuses and sedums for our centerpiece gift plants (additional thanks go to **Ed Snodgrass** of Emory Knolls, **Brent Heath** of Brent and Beckys Bulbs, **Claire Porterfield** of Prince Georges County Parks, and our own **Monica Saxton** of USBG, who grew on a wonderful assortment of perennials for the sale).

Ed Spar provided help and suggestions without which we would not have had the best audiovisual support EVER.

Dan Weil drew our *Ruellia* 'Black Magic' conference logo and then generated the criteria for, and judged, the photography show.

All the members who attended, and some who didn't but donated plants or provided help in one form or another: **Pete Jones**, who generated an incredible number of pots of *Bletilla striata* and other divisions from his small garden and then transported them to the meeting; **Dick Hammerschlag**, who picked up the Bridgens from BWI; **Thornton Burnett**, who filled in at the last minute to transport the blooming crocuses from P.G County, ran errands and then drove Tony Avent to the airport; and many others whom I've overlooked.

What is left to say? just Thank You All!

Alice Nicolson

The Expanding Garden

Two Short-Lived Perennials You Should Grow

We always seem to be looking for new plants for the garden. I don't know why. Perhaps it is the challenge of trying something different and learning how to make it look its best or, in the case of more difficult plants, trying to figure out how to keep them alive. But every year we always try at least some plants that we haven't grown before. We obtain our new "test subjects" from many sources: local plant sales, mail-order nurseries, plant exchanges and seeds.

Growing plants from seeds provides an opportunity to experiment inexpensively with new garden plants. Two species that we stumbled upon through the NARGS Seed

List and have come to like very much are *Anchusa leptophylla* subsp. *incana* (a bugloss, borage family) and *Lallemantia canescens* (no common name, mint family). We ordered seeds of the former as “*Anchusa caespitosa*” and it took quite a few years to learn that the plant we grew was instead *A. leptophylla* subsp. *incana*, with which true *A. caespitosa* has been confused in horticulture. Like some other examples of misnamed seeds, the plant we got has proven to be one that we really like because of its attractive dark blue flowers, long flowering season and ease of propagation.

Anchusa leptophylla subsp. *incana* is a native of Turkey and grows to about 30 cm (1 ft) tall for us, although the literature indicates a somewhat greater stature. Its stiff, hairy stems are spreading, and its leaves are narrow, hairy and dark green. Its flowers closely resemble those of forget-me-nots (*Myosotis* species) in size but are a deeper blue. Plants that overwinter begin blooming in late spring/early summer, just as the woodland forget-me-not (*Myosotis sylvatica*) finishes flowering. The anchusa may continue to flower throughout the summer and into the fall. Individual plants probably do not bloom the whole period, and the early flowering ones are likely replaced by those that have grown from seed the same year. Because not all of the self-sown seeds will germinate at the same time, the effect is that the species has a very long flowering period, and one can have an entire growing season of blue forget-me-nots closely followed by similar-looking anchusa flowers in the garden.

Anchusa leptophylla subsp. *incana* is useful in the rock garden or front of the perennial border. It needs full sun and good drainage. Its seeds, which will attach themselves to your socks in late summer and fall, germinate easily. They may be sown indoors during the winter or planted outside

in the spring. The plant self-sows in the garden but not obtrusively. Although rated as Zone 7 hardiness, most or sometimes all plants do not overwinter for us, so although it is considered a true perennial, it is best treated as a short-lived perennial here. An advantage of starting seed indoors is that those plants will replace the ones that do not survive the winter and will provide early flowering.

The name *Lallemantia* first captured my attention in a NARGS seed list because I had not heard of it. Ordering seeds just because a name is unfamiliar can easily get you into trouble, and you may wind up with plants that are totally inappropriate for your garden or region, so I checked further and discovered that *Lallemantia canescens*, the name in the seed list, could make an attractive garden plant.

Lallemantia is a genus of five annual and short-lived perennial species from southwestern Asia that is related to the dragonheads (*Dracocephalum*). The genus is named for the German botanist Julius Leopold Ave-Lallemant who died in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Lallemantia canescens grows to about 45 cm (1½ ft) tall. The blue to bluish-lavender flowers are each up to 3.5 cm (1½”) long and are produced in abundance during the summer. The plant is described as a biennial in some books and a short-lived perennial in others. Our observations are that plants rarely live more than two years. The ellipsoid, reddish black seeds can be removed from old fruits in the fall. It is somewhat time-consuming but worthwhile because plants will not always reliably reseed the following year. Like *Anchusa leptophylla* subsp. *incana*, *Lallemantia canescens* can be grown in a rock garden or front of a border. It is also easy to germinate and grow from seed. It too

requires full sun and good drainage and is listed as Zone 7 hardy.

As I write this our gardens are covered by fresh snow. I wonder whether the winter aconites (*Eranthis hyemalis*) will still set fruit, if the winter has been cold enough to kill off many of the garden pests, and which of the marginally hardy perennials that we planted last fall will have survived. On the brighter side, we have sown a variety of seeds in pots and some have started to germinate, including 17 of the 18 seeds of *Anchusa leptophylla* subsp. *incana* that came from our garden. I ponder which lot of seeds might yield the next great garden plant for our area.

Bob Faden

Other events which might be of interest to our members:

The Four Seasons Garden Club is organizing a day trip to Asiatica Nursery and the estate of Gordon Hagen (lots of magnolias) on April 25: contact Jim Dronenburg for details. Jim needs to know asap if you plan to participate. .

Please come to the Gesneriad Society's 2009 Annual Convention and Show!

July 1-4, 2009 at the Hilton Silver Spring 4 blocks from the Silver Spring Metro at 8727 Colesville Road, Silver Spring MD.

The Gesneriad family includes African violets, streptocarpus, gloxinias, sinningias, chiritas, and many more.

The Convention includes a plant show, a plant sale including commercial vendors such as Lyndon Lyon Greenhouses and Rob's Violet Barn, lectures, tours of local spots of botanical interest, and other activities.

The show and sales are free and open from 1:45 pm -5 pm on Friday, July 3, and from 9 am -3 pm Saturday July 4.

For more information, please visit www.nationalcapitalgesneriads.org or <http://gesneriadsociety.org/conv2009/index.htm>

We hope to see you there!

Editor's note: many gesneriads are, in nature, lithophytes – they grow on rocks. Although most members of the family are not winter hardy for us, and the few which are are generally regarded as difficult, at least some of the tender sorts have potential for summer use in rock gardens. I'm experimenting with achimenes, but there are other genera which have potential. I was hoping that a member of the gesneriad group would be willing to write up something for us about the use of gesneriads as rock garden plants. No luck there, perhaps because it's already been done: the Gesneriad Society offers a CD on alpine gesneriads. I have not seen this, but it sounds interesting.

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