



*Scutellaria laeteviolacea* A. Nicolson

POTOMAC VALLEY  
CHAPTER  
NORTH AMERICAN ROCK  
GARDEN SOCIETY  
**PVC BULLETIN**  
MAY 2008  
Jim McKenney, Editor  
jimmckenney@jimmckenney.com  
<http://www.pvcnargs.org/>



*Nectaroscordon tripedale* D. Hougen

## CALENDAR

May 24, **our spring plant exchange** at Alice Nicolson's home, 3435 8<sup>th</sup> St S, Arlington, VA  
Coffee and donuts at 9:30, the exchange to begin at 10 A.M.

June 28, **our summer picnic** at the home of Freddi and Dick Hammerschlag: see below

August 2-3, 2008, noon to noon **joint trough workshop** with the Allegheny Chapter NARGS, Harrisburg, PA; likely topics are Styrofoam troughs, hypertufa pop bottle troughs, leaf impression bird baths, populating a trough. No bus but car pooling likely.

## INDEX

Our summer picnic	p. 1
Spring has Sprung	
Bob Faden	p. 2
Book Review: <i>Designing with Succulents</i>	
Elaine Lahn	p. 3
Serendipity Strikes Again	
Jim McKenney	p. 4
Last minute additions:	
Bob Faden on Adrian Higgins's article on rock gardens	tacked on at end
Directions to the Hammerschlags's place follow the above.	

## Next deadline June 15, 2008

**Margo is still accepting dues: send your renewal check for \$15 to Margot Ellis, 2417 North Taylor Street, Arlington, VA. 22207**

### Our Summer Picnic

Freddi and Dick Hammerschlag are hosting our summer picnic on June 28 at their home in Howard County, Maryland. Since both Freddi and Dick have backgrounds in botany and are enthusiastic gardeners, their garden should provide plenty to interest everyone attending. Back in the days when the chapter published a list of member gardens open by appointment, the Hammerschlag garden was on the list. But how many of our current members have visited this garden? Here's your chance!  
Directions are enclosed separately for paper; for online and PDF versions they appear below.

### Spring has Sprung

Every spring the garden has its expectations and surprises. The surprises this spring have included the first flowers on an *Enkianthus* shrub (disappointing) and on a sapling Pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*), and buds for the first time on the small Euscaphis Tree (*Euscaphis japonica*), although it is only a meter high. A pair of blue jays has built a nest near the top of the 15 foot high Japanese Umbrella-pine (*Sciadopitys verticillata*) in our back yard. The tree was only about six inches high when we planted it, perhaps 15 years ago. This is the first time that we have had blue jays nest. Last week a brown thrasher, which we rarely see in the gardens, was

singing from a tree over the large leaf mulch pile on the west side of the YMCA parking lot. It was the first thrasher that I have heard singing for many years.



*Cercis racemosa*

A. Nicolson

While they weren't surprises, *Cercis racemosa* (Chain-flowered Redbud) has been particularly lovely in flower this spring, as has the hybrid lilac *Syringa* 'Tinkerbelle' that we obtained last fall.



Unnamed tree peony cultivar J. McKenney

Our unnamed tree peony, purchased at Winterthur about 10 years ago, had 49 huge white blossoms this year. All of the seed grown trees that got planted out last fall, including a hybrid catalpa with purple leaves, a native persimmon, and the summer-flowering tree *Tetradium* (*Euodia* or *Evodia*) *daniellii* (Korean *Evodia*), a member of the citrus family, are growing well, so provided that the mowers don't get them, we look forward to watching them

grow up. And the pair of gray catbirds that spend their summers with us every year returned two days ago (April 29) as the male squeakily announced his presence. I spotted the female two days later. The catbirds always arrive just as the first mahonia berries ripen.

This spring we had a great deal of concern about the survival of some woody plants that did not fare well during last summer's drought. Of course, some trees and shrubs are normally late to leaf out, the crapemyrtles, for example, and we never worry about them. In contrast, the shrub *Leptodermis oblonga* – a small, delicate-looking member of the coffee or madder family, which is not in Dirr's manual of cultivated trees and shrubs – did cause me some concern. Our plant, which is quite attractive because of its pinkish lavender tubular flowers, had been moved once, lost a lot of branches the following spring, and is now situated between two other woody plants that clearly did suffer from the 2007 drought. As of mid-April it had shown no new growth this year.

As it turned out, my concern was unfounded. Had I recalled a comment about 'Chinese *Leptodermis*' in the Spring 2008 Fairweather Gardens catalog or listened to my wife, I would not have worried, because, like crapemyrtles, *L. oblonga* is also normally slow to break dormancy in the spring. Last Sunday (April 27) we observed it leafing out on all its branches, which prompted us to clean weed its corner of a bed on the YMCA. While doing that we found a number of crocuses (fall flowering *C. speciosus*) whose capsules were in the process of being elevated above the ground so they can split and allow the seeds to be dispersed. *Leptodermis oblonga* is a nice shrub for a small space, flowering in summer when few other shrubs are in bloom. It grows about three feet high, likes sun, and has no special soil requirements.

Some other trees and shrubs did not fare as well. Dead this spring are the dwarf holly *Ilex* 'Rock Garden', both large plants of Seabuckthorn (*Hippophaë rhamnoides*), the Summersweet *Clethra alnifolia* 'Ruby Spice' (the last survivor of five shrubs, including four cultivars, of *C. alnifolia* that were planted in beds between the YMCA parking lot and Simpson Park), one Igiri Tree (*Idesia polycarpa*, although it is suckering from the base), our last Sourwood (*Oxydendrum arboreum*), and the very nice columnar sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua* 'Shadow

Columnar Form') that was in the park. Heavily damaged were *Chamaecyparis thyoides* 'Glaucia Pendula', Little Epaulettetree (*Pterostyrax corymbosum*), Dwarf Fothergilla (*Fothergilla gardenii*) and one plant of a Chinese St. Johnswort (*Hypericum kouytchense*). While it is likely that not all of these deaths and injuries were due to the drought, a pattern is evident: nearly all of the plants that were severely affected or died were badly situated with regard to their horticultural needs and tolerances.

The moral is clear: learn your plants before you plant them, improve the growing conditions, especially the soil, when necessary, and don't try to stretch the ecological limits in which the plants are known to grow. If a plant does poorly, move it before it declines too much or gets too large. Don't buy plants if you can't provide suitable conditions for them. (This is definitely a 'Do as I say, not as I do' for those who know our gardens.) Of course, as the late John Wurdack used to say, every death provides an opportunity to grow something else. Our problem is that we tend to buy three or four plants for every one that dies!

The Expanding Garden  
Robert Faden

### **DESIGNING WITH SUCCULENTS**

Debra Lee Baldwin. Timber Press 2007. 255 p.  
\$29.25 (\$19.99 Amazon)

Reviewed by Elaine Lahn

Zone 9 gardener Barbara Lee Baldwin has written another of those Timber Press specialty books *DESIGNING WITH SUCCULENTS*. You might say to yourself, "What business do I have with a zone 9 style?" In reality we cannot aspire to the beautiful lush looking xerophytic gardens featured in this book. We can take a little vacation and daydream of aeoniums, agaves, aloes, euphorbias, ice plants and so on. There are species which do survive in our climate. Where would any of us be without the glorious *Sedum* 'Autumn Joy'? One chapter is devoted to growing succulents in cold climates. Baldwin makes some great points about microclimates and there are yummy photos of places as close as North Carolina and New York!

There are chapters on design, installation,

specialty gardens, plant care and propagation, plant descriptions, containers, wreaths and a list of gardens specializing in the succulents. Ms. Baldwin's advice is sound and down to earth (I should say sand). Essential for the succulents is good drainage. Dig a one gallon hole. If it drains water in a few minutes you probably have sandy soil. If the hole still contains water after an hour it is more clay and not the place for succulents. Solution: raise the bed or plant in containers. Infrequent watering is best, one good one per week.

I liked the very solid advice she gives on garden design. Generally position succulents on the top and sides of berms and banks and place perennials and annuals at the base where water collects. Consider scale and proportion. Plant small plants in small places and large plants in spacious ones. Repetition is necessary for unifying a landscape and difficult for collectors to follow. You want to keep plant color (such as the silvery blues of ice plants) repeating the theme. Another example of repetition is to use not necessarily the same plant but similar foliage. Since you will be repeating leaf color or texture consider contrasting with asymmetrical placement or complimentary shapes such as yuccas for height or grasses for softening. She uses photo examples of *Stipa (Nassella) tenuissima*. Emphasis enhances the repetition by creating a focal point: framing a view with taller plants or connecting two elements such as sitting areas. Remove or disguise anything unsightly. She painted a utility box in her garden the same color as the wall. When landscaping on slopes which may erode arrange plants in staggered rows. Build a little mound on each plant's downhill side using soil from the planting hole. Mulch with jute netting blankets. Ice plants are a good choice for steep slopes. Baldwin recommends *Artemisia* 'Powis Castle' as a good perennial contrast for succulents. She devotes an entire chapter to other companions.

Of all the advice and wonderful inspiring photos I think the most doable succulent gardens for our area are the container gardens. Lushness is more pleasing than sparseness. Consider balance so the planting is not lopsided or top heavy.

Contrast with different textures. Match pots to flower color or leaf color. Do not put a delicate plant in a bulky container. There are half pots for walls, wreath forms for doors and fences.

There are wrought iron stands to elevate the pots so they are not all sitting at the same height.

Use overturned pots with sedum spilling out, entry pots, steps pots, dramatic huge pots at entries. (Hot tip: check out Ikea's pots for style and price.) Succulents seem to be made for terra cotta pots. If you go with plastic make sure it looks real. The fancier the pot, the simpler the planting should be. I fell for the photo of *Orostachys* which is a hens and chicks plant in scale with 6" spires of flowers. It was planted by itself in a 2' diameter low iron rimmed pot.

(Once they flower, the main rosette dies and their offsets take over, or not.) There are tips on potting medium formulas, how to transplant and when, how to plant a wreath and a globe.

I wonder if you are getting the sedum fever that I have caught? Anne Raver wrote about the barn green roof of Ed Snodgrass in a November *New York Times* article (November 15, 2007). She describes a cattle trough he has planted with *Sedum album* 'Red Ice'. A head size volcanic rock has sempervivum eyes and there are rock feet at the other end. He sleeps next to a planted trough of purplish red *Sedum album* 'Purpureum'. "That's his wife" Mr. Snodgrass said. "I have to get some mannequin arms so they can hold hands." A relatively new sedum widely available is the gold toned 'Angelina' (*Sedum rupestris*). Both Balwin and Raven wrote about it. It is easy to grow and looks gorgeous in pots and on the ground. Sedums and other succulents look great in living wreath forms which are sold by Kinsman (\$20) [kinsmangarden.com](http://kinsmangarden.com). Gardener's supply catalog features living-wall planting grids shown containing sedum and sempervivum (\$59.95) [gardeners.com](http://gardeners.com).

### Serendipity Strikes Again

I love it when seemingly disparate events spontaneously come together to produce a whole which is definitely a lot more enjoyable than its parts. That happened recently. Paul Botting had arranged for me to participate in the judging of the rock garden show of the Allegheny chapter near Pittsburgh. The drive to Pittsburgh is a bit more than four hours, and that gave me a lot of time to think things over. I was in the car and moving by 5 A.M. Sunday morning: the first hour of the trip was in the dark, although I had the roads mostly to myself. I figured I would have to gas up at least twice during the trip, and at current gas prices that made the trip a lot more

expensive than it would have been as recently as a few years ago. I kept grumbling to myself about all the plants I could buy with that gas money.

I had apprehensions about driving the Pennsylvania Turnpike: years ago an uncle who drove that road on business complained about it every time I saw him. I half expected to find myself on one of those over-utilized, under-maintained urban traffic conduits scarred by decades of mishaps and neglect. Actually, the road must have been very well maintained, because I barely gave it a second thought once I was driving on it. That's not too surprising: the road passes through hundreds of miles of very picturesque countryside. In many places the road itself is placed on the crest or upper slopes of ridges: the views down into the valleys with their seemingly impeccable farmsteads and country churches are post card perfect. For about a half hour there was a magical light effect which turned hundreds, maybe thousands, of acres of lush grassy pastures into glowing emerald landscapes. Unfortunately the minimum speed is apparently 40 mph, so there is no slowing down to take in the views.

Now here's where things get interesting. Our chapter archivist, Elaine Lahn, has a daughter who lives in Pittsburgh. Elaine was visiting Pittsburgh the weekend of the show, although she did not find out about it from me in time to stretch their planned stay. However, she had been doing some botanizing in Pittsburgh area parks, and she mentioned one really impressive natural display: she saw whole hillsides covered with a small plant with dayflower-blue flowers. She emailed me to ask what I thought it could be. I had a hunch: it's a plant which does not grow in Maryland or most of Virginia (where it occurs only in a few far southwestern counties). Nor does it occur in most of Pennsylvania – in that state it's confined to the southwestern part of the state. It's also a plant which until then I had never actually seen; nor had I ever seen a good modern photograph of it. I did however know one of its western relatives, Chinese houses, a species which was often included in California native annual mixes.

If you are from the mid-west, you probably know her as Blue Eyed Mary. She's a winter annual, often only a few inches high, and where happy she covers the ground to the exclusion of almost everything else. Botanically, she's *Collinsia verna*, a member of the *Scrophulariaceae*.

So as I drove to Pittsburgh Sunday morning, I had Elaine's glowing description of the plant in mind: surely I would see it somewhere in the Pittsburgh area? The interstates took me to within a stone's throw of the meeting site, and once parked and steady on my land feet again, I followed the signs to the Alpine Plant Show and Sale. I had about a half hour to kill before my official duties began, so I hit the plant sale. As soon as I entered the plant sale area, my eyes fixed on a patch of blue on one of the tables: could it be.....? YES: there was a vendor who had brought little pots generously filled with Blue Eye Mary plants. By the time I got there, a half-hour into the sale, more than half had been purchases. I quickly picked out some for Elaine and some for me, paid for my treasures and then squirreled them away in the car.



*Collinsia verna*

J. McKenney

If Blue-Eyed Mary looks a bit familiar to some of you – those of you who know your annuals well – it's because it repeats the striking color combination seen in a garden form of one of its south African relatives. There is a cultivar of *Nemesia strumosa* (also a scroph) which has the same color combination and roughly the same floral form as Blue-Eyed Mary. Look for the cultivar 'KLM' (as in the Dutch airline). These two presumably evolved utterly independently of one another, but who knows?

Then it was back to the plant sale. Most of what was offered had been professionally grown and brought in. A number of interesting dwarfish woody plants had caught my eye, and suddenly I was feeling very deprived in the dwarf woodies category. So a few of these went into my box. Then I spotted a lone plant of *Primula* 'Wanda'. This of course has been around for ages, but it had never made it into my garden. It got off to a bad start I think: on the trip home, the heat in the car turned all of the flowers blackish maroon. Several other odds and ends caught my eye and went into the box. Then I began to wonder how

much I was spending. And with that, the specter of yet another trip to the gas pump presented itself. About then I got the signal that the judging was about to begin in a few minutes, so I dropped my box off at the check out table. I mentioned that I would be back to pay after the judging, and it was then that sweet sounds muffled the swoosh of the gas pump: "if you're a judge, we would like to thank you by letting you choose about \$40 in plants for free..." Hmmm.... did hearing that before the judging cause an ethical dilemma?

The show was a small one, but there were some very nice plants. Here's my vote for best in show:



This is *Allium perdulce*, a species from the Midwest with very fragrant flowers, exhibited by C. Gehenio of the Allegheny Chapter.

There was a class in the show for mixed bouquets of rock garden flowers. This one, exhibited by Amanda Haney was judged the best for variety and quality:



As soon as I looked at that little bouquet, it reminded me of this, a plate from an early twentieth century edition of *Gartenschönheit*:

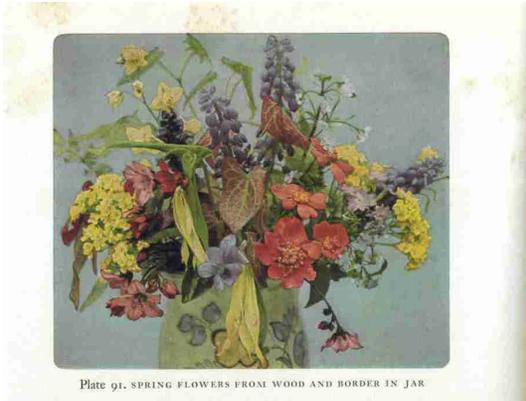


Plate 91. SPRING FLOWERS FROM WOOD AND BORDER IN JAR

This is a sweet tradition we should try to continue.

The return trip in the afternoon was not simply a repeat of the morning drive to Pittsburgh. The landscape appeared from new angles and in new light conditions. As I approached the Maryland border from the north, I saw South Mountain as I had never seen it before: a massive hulk which stretched from horizon to horizon, like a wall between me and my destination.

I got home early in the evening and had a few hours of daylight to enjoy the home garden. I brought all of the new goodies in from the car and spread them out on a table to admire them. There will be some stories about several of them in future editions of the *PVC Bulletin*, along with some more information about one or two of the outstanding plants exhibited in the show. Here are some of the gift plants:



Clockwise from the upper left: *Cotoneaster* Strieb's Findling, *Ulmus* 'Jacqueline Hillier', *Pinus mugo* 'Sherwood Compact' seedling, *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Nana' photos J. McKenney

The sight of all of those neat little potted plants arrayed before me got me thinking: why don't we have shows? Our gardens are stuffed with great plants, so a shortage of suitable plants can't be the answer. If we're waiting for the local branch of Dionysias Я Us to open, we'll be waiting a long time. A show is a great way to educate the public, and a show in combination with a plant sale has got to be a win/win combination. We might practice (as we have done now and then in the past) for a season or two by displaying blooming plants along with the tiny ones we offer for sale at our plant sales.

## TWO LAST MINUTE ADDITIONS

First a note from Bob Faden about the recent *Washington Post* article about rock gardens; following that are directions to the Hammerschlags' place.

The weekly column of *Washington Post* Garden Editor Adrian Higgins in the Home Section on Thursday, May 15 was about rock gardening. It was inspired by a visit he made the week before to a garden in Suitland, MD that was designed and installed by our former chapter chair Mike Bordelon. The garden surrounds the Smithsonian Institution Botany Department's Research Greenhouses, which Mike is in charge of, and it is not open to the public, but groups can make arrangements for a tour. The garden is covered

by coarse gravel, with a liberal use of tufa rocks donated by the U.S. Botanic Garden. The article was illustrated with pictures taken by Higgins and greenhouse assistant Leslie Brothers. The day that Higgins visited the Smithsonian rock garden he also saw the tufa gardens in Simpson Park, Alexandria, which were at peak. One image from those gardens appeared in the article. It is a pity that no mention was made of NARGS or our chapter. RBF

Here's a link to the article (copy and paste this into your browser if clicking on it does not work):

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/14/AR2008051400966.html>

### TO GET TO THE PICNIC

Directions: The Hammerschlags live at 7106 Deer Hollow Rd., Highland, MD 20777. This is approximately a half hour drive from the northern parts of the Beltway.

If you are coming from Maryland, use whichever route is best for you to get onto Georgia Ave, Md Rt. 97 N. From there:

- turn right onto Old Baltimore Rd
- turn right onto Olney Sandy Spring Rd/MD-108 E. Stay on this for about 3 miles
- turn left onto Mink Hollow Rd.. Stay on this for about 2.3 miles
- turn right onto Deer Valley Rd. Go about 0.4 mile.

The picnic is at 7106 Deer Valley Rd.

### FROM LOCATIONS IN NORTHERN VIRGINIA

Get onto I-495 N/Capital Beltway toward Maryland.

- Keep LEFT to take I-270 SPUR N via EXIT 38 toward ROCKVILLE/ FREDERICK.  
2.0 mi
- I-270 SPUR N becomes I-270 N.  
0.9 mi
- Keep RIGHT toward MONTROSE RD.  
0.3 mi

- Take the MONTROSE RD EAST exit, EXIT 4A.  
0.1 mi
  
- Take the TOWER OAKS BLVD ramp.  
0.3 mi
  
- Turn LEFT onto TOWER OAKS BLVD.  
0.7 mi
  
- Turn RIGHT onto WOOTTON PKWY.  
1.3 mi
  
- Stay STRAIGHT to go onto 1ST ST/ MD-911 E. Continue to follow 1ST ST.  
0.7 mi
  
- Stay STRAIGHT to go onto MD-28 E/ NORBECK RD.  
3.6 mi
  
- Turn LEFT onto MD-97 N/ GEORGIA AVE.  
2.0 mi
  
- Turn RIGHT onto OLD BALTIMORE RD.  
1.2 mi
  
- from this point follow the directions above

MapQuest estimates the driving time at about one hour from Alice Nicolson's place in Arlington; the distance is about 35 miles.