



POTOMAC VALLEY CHAPTER  
 NORTH AMERICAN ROCK GARDEN SOCIETY  
**PVC BULLETIN**  
 NOVEMBER 2007  
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<http://www.pvcnargs.org/>



**CALENDAR**

November 3, 2007 Brookside Gardens  
**Annual Meeting and Elections, Members' Meeting:** slides et al.  
 Coffee at 9 A.M., meeting 9:30 -12:30  
 PowerPoint available

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.

February 9, 2008 Brookside Gardens  
**Sasha Borkevec** "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.

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**Next deadline December 15, 2007**

**It's not too early to begin thinking about dues for 2008. Send your check for \$15 to Margot Ellis, 2417 North Taylor Street, Arlington, VA. 22207**

**From the Chairman's Desk**

I can report progress along several lines. The talk by Janus Ruksans was a smashing success. Although his voice gave out after he gave his first talk, he left a copy of a CD of the second talk. This will be played during the members' slide show on November 3. Those who attended his talk can claim to have participated in the Army 10K race that morning. Crossing a constant stream of runners five-abreast can be a little intimidating. Not only did we have a good turnout of our own members, but two members from the Allegheny Chapter of NARGS and two from the Washington Daffodil Society attended. I hope to continue to reach out to other NARGS

chapters in the future and to pull in members of other local plant societies. Our Speakers Program continues to bring in new members.

The sale of Ruksan's book, *Buried Treasures*, also went well. Sixteen were sold or were spoken for and one remains. After it goes anyone wanting one will have to order it from Timber Press at a significantly higher price.

Plans are moving ahead on the Eastern Winter Study Weekend for 2009. We are currently negotiating with one hotel and investigating several others. Some speaker invitations have gone out and some really outstanding speakers have accepted. Any suggestions you may have

regarding speakers would be appreciated. The theme of the weekend is tentatively centered around climate change and its challenges and opportunities for gardeners. We're guessing that the change for us on the eastern seaboard will be warmer by a half zone to a zone, considerably drier, with some isolated high altitude species disappearing due to habitat elimination. But who can say for sure?

I want to encourage you all to participate in the NARGS Seed Exchange this winter. If you don't plan to grow them yourself, get them anyway and send them on to me. I'll find a home for them. We are hoping that enough people will grow enough plants that we can sell at the EWSW 2009 that we can create an additional financial cushion for this activity. While NARGS will guarantee that we don't lose money if they approve our plan, we would rather not have to depend on that. And if we can replenish our finances a little, so much the better.

My personal project to encourage members to make and use styrofoam troughs is also progressing nicely. An article has been prepared for the newsletter/website giving detailed instructions for making such troughs and several finished and planted troughs were shown at the plant exchange. A digital slide program has been prepared which also gives trough-making instructions using ProShow Gold, presentation software put out by Photodex. The software seems easier to use than PowerPoint, so you might want to take a look at it for your own use. Time permitting, it will also be shown at the members' slide show, November 3.

Paul Botting  
Chairman, PVC-NARGS

### **Our September Meeting and Plant Exchange**

There was a nice turn out of enthusiastic plant swappers for our September plant exchange, hosted this time by Lynn Blei. Lynn's garden makes good use of a potentially difficult site. There is some level ground surrounding the house, but about thirty feet behind the house the ground drops sharply to a creek valley. The outer side of this level area is bounded by a long pergola which effectively conceals the drop. The pergola runs across nearly the full width of the lot, and it curves a bit: the seats at the far end come as a pleasant surprise. These seats look out over the creek valley. There are steps down to

the creek, and the hillside is densely planted with a nice variety of shade tolerant plants.



A big patch of *Tinantia pringlei* in the beds on the level area got a lot of attention. This plant blooms in a color which most gardeners can't get enough of – yet how often have you seen this plant used so well in a local garden?



*Tinantia pringlei*

And how many of you saw this:



I was so busy enjoying the garden that I missed the earliest rounds of the exchange. Since my taste in plants seems to run counter to most people's, there are usually interesting things left after the initial frenzy subsides, and this time was no exception. A vaguely familiar leaf caught my attention, and a peek at the label confirmed my hunch: there was a nice little *Cistus psilosepalus* just the thing to try in the protected cold frame. And Bobbie Lively Diebold brought enough of her *Phacelia bipinnatifida* and large-leaf form of *Asarum canadense* from DuPage County, Illinois for me to finally get a start.

We had a brief board meeting after the exchange. It was then that most of us discovered the huge bowl of fruit salad Lynn and her neighbor Madeline had prepared. I tried a bit of it just to be polite. A few minutes later I was back to fill a cup – for the first of several times. The next day I was shopping at the local Whole Foods and noticed their fruit salad. It was the price which really caught my eye. A quick mental calculation suggests that at those prices, I had enjoyed about \$20 worth of fruit salad at the plant exchange. No wonder I felt so fine for the rest of the day.

Boys do have appetites! Here's a funny story on that theme: About two years ago I was returning from judging a lily show in south-central Virginia. It was early afternoon, and I was trying to decide if I should drive through to home or stop and have a light late lunch/early dinner. As I drove through Culpepper, a pizza place caught my eye – that did it. While waiting after being seated, a school group came in filled several of the tables near me. These were young children, maybe in the ten to twelve year old range. Once my pizza arrived, I didn't pay too much attention to them until I noticed their chaperone trying to address the lively group. Things were getting interesting. Their tables were covered empty pizza pans. One of the little girls was asking the chaperone if she could have another piece of pizza. The chaperone looked over the table and saw nothing but empty pizza trays. Puzzled, she asked the group "How many of you had more than three pieces of pizza?"

What happened next had me laughing so hard I almost lost my lunch. Every boy at that table raised his hand. Every one had rapidly wolfed down at least three pieces of pizza while the girls (who were probably busy talking) daintily picked

at one. I think there are several lessons in this story.

### **Our November Meeting**

The November meeting is shaping up to be a good one. Bob Faden will guide us through Janis Ruksans' disk of *Fritillaria*. That in itself should be worth the price of admission. Alice Nicolson has prepared a ppp (Power Point Presentation) drawn from her recent trip to the Switzerland. If those don't fill our time, your Editor has a ppp prepared showing some of the wonderful things which can be grown in a protected cold frame. And Paul Botting might have something to show us about his Styrofoam trough project. Anyone else?

### **The Annual New Year's Day List**

Dixie Hougen is getting geared up to do the annual New Year's Day list. She is willing to scope out her own garden and maybe the Faden's gardens, but otherwise it's up to us to let her know what's blooming in our gardens. These reports are always fascinating, and they give us a glimpse of an aspect of gardening which most gardeners ignore. I intend to report everything in bloom or about to bloom – including lawn weeds (several of these are dependable mid-winter bloomers).

I like these lists for another reason. Most of us don't do much garden visiting during late December and early January. By watching these lists, I've learned that several of you are growing some very interesting winter blooming plants, plants which I would never notice during a May visit.

If you are shy about reporting your plants because you think you don't have anything interesting, think again. To some of us, even the pattern of dandelions, chickweed or *Draba verna* blooming or not throughout the greater Washington, D.C. area is interesting. And that reminds me: are any of you growing little *Erigenia bulbosa*, Harbinger of Spring?

Let Dixie know what you see this year!

### **Trough Aroids**

Aroid growers are enjoying good times now: the range of aroids available for our gardens is greater now than ever before. The Chinese aroids

are the focus of many growers, and more and more aroids of middle-Eastern origin are finding their ways into our gardens. Gone are the days when the only aroids likely to be encountered in gardens were the local jack in the pulpits or, in the gardens of the adventurous, the Italian arum. Almost all of the hardy, garden worthy aroids have one thing in common: they are big and leafy.

On the other hand, several of us are growing the comparatively tiny aroids of the genera *Ambrosina*, *Arisarum* and *Biarum*. These are little guys: think aroids the size of a coffee mug. I'm not aware that any of us are growing them in troughs, but their size makes them ideal for such usage.

Here are some of the ones making the rounds in local gardens now:

*Ambrosina bassii* (the name is sometimes still given as *Ambrosinia*) has a scattered distribution in North Africa, several Mediterranean islands and Mediterranean Europe. If you can imagine our local skunk cabbage shrunk down to the size of a coffee cup, you'll have a pretty good idea of what it's like. Alice Nicolson and the Fadens grow this, too, and I suspect that we all got it from the same source, Jane McGary. Last year this question of their provenance briefly had some significance. Alice had mentioned that her plant was in bloom; my plant was in bud. We schemed to cross pollinate the plants. But it came to nothing. A note from Jane McGary provided the likely reason: all of our plants are apparently divisions of one original plant.



*Ambrosina bassii*

This one blooms in late fall or early winter and, in common with all the species mentioned here, is summer dormant. The inflorescence is peculiar: superficially it looks like a little slipper with a curlicue at the toe end. It's held horizontally, and the spathe is divided horizontally (i.e. along its long axis which is held horizontally) into two compartments. The upper one, the one obviously open to the air, has the female flowers. The lower one, hidden beneath the false floor of the divided chamber, contains the male flowers. In the photo notice the little bulge on the underside of the spathe: that's the hidden chamber which contains the male flowers.

The genus *Arisarum* has several members which are also relatively tiny. *A. proboscideum* is widely grown in local gardens; Barry Glick has offered plants at the twice-yearly Green Spring sales frequently. This is often named mouse plant, so-called because the extended tip of the spadix sticking up and out over the foliage gives the impression of the tails of little mice disappearing into the clump of leaves.

Less certain as garden plants are *A. vulgare* and *A. simorrhinum*. I'm growing these in a cold frame and neither has bloomed yet for me. An earlier trial of *A. vulgare* in the open garden ended in the loss of the plant, but not before it bloomed once. The spathe of this one is striped in white and maroon; it reminded me of elegant, medieval Italian stockings.

The genus *Biarum* is represented in local gardens by several species. I'm not convinced that these are reliable garden plants for me here in Montgomery County, Maryland, but Alice in Alexandria and the Fadens in the Alexandria palm belt seem able to grow some of them in the open. These too are winter growing and summer dormant, and the foliage in my experience is easily destroyed by prolonged freezes. Of the five species I grow, three have bloomed here so far: *B. tenuifolium*, *B. carduchorum* and *B. davisii*. Take a look at the photos and you'll see that the spathe style is distinct in each species. *B. tenuifolium* and *B. davisii* bloom in the autumn; *B. carduchorum* blooms as the plant is entering summer dormancy.

Of the ones I've grown, it's hard not to favor *B. davisii*. Beauty, except in the sense of the "beauty of the devil", is not usually the first word which comes to mind when seeing an aroid

inflorescence. But the inflorescence of this species strikes me as being really beautiful. The spathe has such a striking color and shape. The color and texture remind me of that strange woodland plant, Indian pipe or *Monotropa uniflora*, or of some costly *objet d'art* delicately carved from creamy marble or maybe of some very oddly shaped fungus. The blakish spadix makes a nice contrast.



*Biarum davisii*

Very different is the inflorescence of *B. carduchorum*. The spathe of this one is a flat, glossy, green tipped purple-black tongue, and the spadix is also black or very dark purple. The first time this one bloomed here, I found it only after the inflorescence had passed its prime. That's not surprising because it blooms as the plant is dying down for the year. I had been putting pots of bulbs away for the summer and touched something startlingly fleshy. It really gave me a jump! Something about the spathe said that it was past its prime, so for a full year I was uncertain about what it really looked like. When it showed signs of blooming the next year, I kept a careful eye on it and finally saw it in all its glory.



*Biarum carduchorum*

*B. tenuifolium* is more a plain Jane sort: a typical maroon brown aroid spathe wrapped around a spadix of similar color. Although not speckled in the form I grow, this one suggests a miniature voodoo lily (*Sauromatum guttatum* or *Typhonium venosum*) when in bloom.



*Biarum tenuifolium*

So there you have it, a nice selection of uncommon little aroids for the garden, troughs or the protected cold frame. They seem to be easily grown and find our warm summers agreeable. But I would play it safe and keep them dryish during the summer; and if they are in the open garden, protect them carefully in the winter. If you get seed on any of them, please let me know!

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