



Paeonia obovata

J. McKenney

Potomac Valley
Chapter

North American Rock
Garden Society

PVC Bulletin

November 2014



Colchicum 'Waterlily'

J. McKenney

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

You can pay your dues by sending your check for \$15 (payable to PVC NARGS) to Margot Ellis, 2417 N Taylor St., Arlington, VA 22207 4pvctreas@gmail.com

Calendar 2014

Most meetings are Saturday mornings- 9:30am coffee; 10am presentation, unless otherwise noted. Coffee/Tea and donuts will be provided at meetings.

November 22, Members' Slide Show and Annual reports from Officers and Committee Chairs, Bring special images of your garden or a garden that you have visited on a flash drive (thumb drive). Come a bit early with your images (preferably in a PowerPoint presentation format but other formats OK too) and Jody will load them onto our laptop computer. Location is Community Room A WEST at Bethesda-Chevy Chase Regional Services Center, 4805 Edgemoor Lane, Bethesda, MD 20814 (free parking [entrance on Edgemoor] under the building) <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/bcc/> As you get closer to the building, watch for the BCC Regional Services Center signs, they will guide you to the parking lot.

December 6, US National Arboretum Azalea Collections 10A.M. to 3 P.M., clean up in the azalea collection: see An Opportunity to Volunteer, page 6

January 31, US Botanical Garden at **10:30 am**, 100 Maryland Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20001, "10 tips for Tighter Buns" Practical advice on growing [cushion](#) plants. And we will hear a bit about his work with the Garden Conservancy. Carlo Balistreri, Vice President of Preservation for the Garden Conservancy. Carlo's professional credentials include: Head of Horticulture for the Royal Botanical Gardens in Canada, Executive Director of the Gardens at Turtle Point in Tuxedo Park, New York and Curator of the Rock Garden at The New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx, New York. His creations range from [rock gardens](#), [crevice gardens](#), alpine lawns, an under-lights collection of orchids and other exotics, to the multi-habitat 3000 taxa NYBG rock garden. Carlo is the primary author and [photographer](#) of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Rock and Water Gardening, Illustrated*

You must RSVP for this lecture to jodyfetz@gmail.com because we share seats with the Botanical Garden (we have at least 30 seats) Note the later time!

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The deadline for the next issue of this bulletin is December 15, 2014

President's Message

November starts, and with it starts the demolition of our old potting shed. The new one will be fourteen by twenty-three, polycarbonate roofed and a large chunk of the walls will be recycled patio doors. (Can we say "unheated greenhouse", boys and girls?

... I knew you could.

This will give a LOT more space for starting seed and potting up cuttings and divisions of things for Green Spring in May. It also eats a fair chunk of yard space, which is already at a premium for most of us, but when you get, you also usually have to give. Just incidentally, I received some seed yesterday from a friend; it will get planted tonight and hopefully will come up. For now, I'm not revealing what they are. And I have, also to be planted, some Jack-in-the-pulpit seed—our native *Arisaema triphyllum*. On with the old rubber gloves—the berries have an irritating pulp.

For PVC people, of course, November is a busy month. Bulbs to plant—my own order just got here-- trees and shrubs and perennials to plant—we can, folk wisdom says, plant until "three weeks before the ground freezes" which around here tends to be mid-January, so all November and December are *prime* planting time. In the cool November air you can think about moving some of those honking big rocks that would have killed you in July and August. (There is a pallet of stone in Arlington with my name on it, dear Lord help us.) And best of all, when the leaves are down you can

actually see better what the layout of your garden is. And make changes. Spend your children's inheritance. Generally annoy your spouse.

Some tidbits of gossip:

(1) We had what was supposed to be an information booth at the fall Green Spring Day sale this year. Supposed to be... and at the last minute we got a wonderful donation of beautiful plants from Carolyn Beck. So we had a bit of dirty, nasty money as well as exposure. Also, Rob Gimpel had the troughs he makes for sale; several were planted so that people could see the possibilities of a trough right in front of them. They sold well and attracted quite a lot of attention.

(2) We went in three ways with the Four Seasons garden club and the National Arboretum to have Panayoti Kelaidis speak. This allowed us to have him as an "additional" speaker, (since the NARGS Eastern Speaker—ironically, also from Denver Botanic Garden—was already booked, and from what I hear, absolutely great). And even better, of course, it was CHEAP. Even better than getting dirty, nasty money is holding on to it. ☺ FWIW, the Arboretum is open to more of these.

(3) Don LaFond, from the chapter of NARGS in Ann Arbor, MI, will be coming to town on the MLK weekend, and speaking—not to us, unfortunately, but to the Mason Dixon Chapter, north of Baltimore, on Jan 17th Sat. Perhaps if we *whimper* loudly enough, they will invite us. Don is a great speaker, his garden has to be seen to be believed, and of course he'll be talking up the NARGS

Annual Meeting next May, in Ann Arbor. NOTE THAT THIS IS DRIVEABLE FROM DC. Especially if you carpool up so there is more than one driver, (although over the years I've done it by myself and lived to tell the tale).

(4) ASK NOT WHAT YOUR CHAPTER CAN DO FOR YOU, BUT..... Kevin McIntosh just emailed me that people from Rare Find nursery, an absolute candy shop in NJ, will be vending at the FONA plant sale at the end of April 2015. Kevin asked, would I be interested in having them speak to PVC? *Don't throw me in dat briar patch, B'rer Fox.....* I suggested he talk to Jody about arranging that.... AND I note that he/she/they will need lodging. Is anyone up to this, preferably someone who lives convenient to the Arboretum?

(5) Make Friends And Influence People.... Barbara Bullock, the Curator of the Azalea Collection at the Arboretum, has announced a Work Day on Saturday Dec. 6th, to several garden groups. I've forwarded the blurb to Jim McKenney. Do consider going. Do consider the sordid possibilities of both Doing A Good Deed and also talking people in to PVC.

Jo Banfield service

The memorial service for charter member Jo Banfield, held at the family home the afternoon of our plant exchange, had a narrow but deep representation of PVC members. That is, there were not many of us, but those there brought long connections with Jo and her chapter activities. I doubt if any other current members could have matched the stories told by Ken Wurdack and Kevin McIntosh. Ken's father, the late John Wurdack, used to bring him to our meetings when he was a kid, and he had some stories to tell about those old days when Jo was actively involved in chapter business. Kevin's stories brought out something I'll bet a lot of you didn't know: Kevin was a PVC member long ago, dropped out for years, and now is back in

the saddle. He remembered field trips in the Annapolis area where he was barely able to keep up with Jo as she trudged on through a swamp *in August*, determined to find those rare and interesting plants.

I heard other stories which will probably come as a surprise to most of our current members. How many of you knew that Jo came within a hair's breadth of finishing the work for her PhD in botany? A couple of pregnancies left her drifting further and further from that goal.

The service commemorated the passing of both Jo and her son Sandy. Their ashes were scattered on the home grounds over the site where the family dogs had been buried. I'm a dog lover, and so I was touched. But I was also reminded of a historical precedent: Frederick II, the Great, of Prussia wished to be buried on the terrace of his palace Sans Souci where his dogs had been buried.

Chris Herbstritt, who worked admirably as the chapter's contact person with Jo's daughter Sarah, was also there. Here's a photo of Chris, Kevin and Ken:



Sarah will soon provide a picture of Jo which I'll use to make up a page on our chapter web site similar to the one done for Sasha. Once that's up, I hope others will provide more stories about Jo's long involvement in our chapter.

Our September plant exchange

...was well attended and plenty of plants found new homes. Thanks to Sharon and Gay for hosting us.



And how about this: *Impatiens namchabarwensis*, the blue impatiens - and it's really blue!

Tiny trumpets and some other little daffodils

Quietly, something exciting has been happening in the world of daffodils: tiny daffodils which for decades had only been in the hands of serious collectors and exhibitors are now appearing, and appearing at very reasonable prices, in some of the better general bulb catalogs. These are the little guys which look right in troughs or pots. If you plant them in the ground, you'll have to get down on your hands and knees to see them well.

I've long been fascinated by these tiny daffodils. I'm old enough to remember the bad old days when local garden centers yearly offered collected bulbs of *Narcissus cyclamineus* and *N. asturiensis* (and *Sternbergia clusiana*). I kept an eagle eye on the shops in September, and as soon as the bulbs were put out for sale I pounced. The tiny bulbs of those daffodils were often desiccated and dubiously viable, so the newly purchased bulbs were immediately soaked and planted. A gratifying percentage of them survived and bloomed. Not only did these bulbs bloom and set seed, they hybridized among themselves. One day while mowing the lawn I spotted a bright spot of yellow in the grass. When I checked it out, I got a real surprise: it was a hybrid of *Narcissus cyclamineus* and *N. asturiensis*. It was, in effect, a spontaneous re-occurrence of the hybridization which produced 'Minicycla', another rare and storied hybrid.



Only a real gardener would have thought of this...



Clever use of *Microbiota decussata*

Where are they now? It turns out that these tiny daffodils are very vulnerable to the attacks of bulb fly. It's disgusting enough to see a bulb fly larva in a big daffodil bulb, but it's especially disgusting to see one in the bulb of these tiny daffodils: the larva is likely to be as big as the nearly consumed bulb. All of these are now just memories.

Although a few sorts have been readily available in commerce (and the local garden centers) for decades, until recently unless you travelled in daffodil circles you were not likely to be able to enlarge the variety in your holdings. This year I pounced on the tiny trumpets and some still uncommon cyclamineus hybrids which I've had my eyes on for years. They will join the hoop-petticoat sorts already on hand to give a very nice assortment of these tiny daffodils.

What makes a plant rare and storied? In the case of *Narcissus* 'Snipe', it was the combination of an enticing picture in a book and a long and unsuccessful search for a source. *Collins Guide to Bulbs* was my bulb bible when I was a teenager learning my bulbs. It arrived just as I was making a leap to a for me new level of gardening: it was my Baedeker to the world of British, and by extension European, bulb growing. When published back in 1961 it was the best such book available. Other than the seemingly unavoidable problems caused by changes in nomenclature, the otherwise excellent text is still worth consulting. It was illustrated with a few color photographs, line drawings, plates of colored drawings and monochrome (grayscale) photos. The monochrome photos were stunning: the carefully chosen plants so illustrated were plants most of us on this side of the Atlantic had never seen, the sort of plants the bulb enthusiast would dream about having.

Now, at the other end of life, I pick up this book and realize how much we have all grown as bulb enthusiasts and gardeners in general. One by one plants which seemed to be utterly unattainable rarities are now readily available – if not at the local garden center then by mail order from nurseries both domestic and foreign. Among the plants illustrated in those photographs and which eventually bloomed in my garden are *Arisaema candidissimum*, *Allium karataviense*, *Lilium brownii* and *Lilium canadense*. With the exception of *Lilium*

brownii (which might be extinct), all of these are now readily available.

Also illustrated in those monochrome photos are two little daffodils, 'Snipe' and 'Petunioides', each of which fits my sense of "rare and storied". These are by now over a half century old, but 'Snipe' only appeared in a widely distributed catalog (at a reasonable price) a year or two ago, and 'Petunioides' remains one of those plants which it might take both love and money to acquire.

Don't confuse 'Snipe' and 'Jack Snipe': the latter has for long been readily available and widely grown. Each has *Narcissus cyclamineus* in its background, and both are worth having. 'Jack Snipe' has that look sometimes called "rude good health", whereas 'Snipe' suggests a thin, elderly aunt with osteoporosis.

By the time you read this, some bulbs of 'Snipe' should have arrived here. Along with them should be a nice assortment of tiny trumpet daffodils such as 'Elka', 'WP Milner', 'Gipsy Queen' and 'Midget'. In recent years a strict interpretation of the rules for the classification of garden daffodils has resulted in the placement of some of these tiny daffodils in the division established for the big garden trumpet daffodils. The result strikes me as incongruous, but these things are subject to change. How tiny is tiny? Some of these daffodils are only three or four inches high when in bloom. As with crocuses, you'll be able to enjoy them a lot more if you grow them in pots which can be placed on a reading or dining table while the plants are in bloom.

Of the hoop-petticoat sorts, the collection presently includes some twenty names: 'Julia Jane', 'Taffeta', 'Joy Bishop' and seventeen under dubious botanical names. The botanical names of these hoop-petticoat daffodils are a real muddle, but the flowers are all charming. Elizabeth Lawrence wrote about her experiences with 'Taffeta' a half century ago, so even these hybridized or selected forms are nothing new. So why are they still so uncommon in gardens and on commercial lists? Most of my plants of these hoop-petticoat daffodils came from generous contributors to the bulb exchange of the Pacific Bulb Society.

It's not too late to treat yourself to some pots of these little daffodils, and they combine well with the varied blue-flowered minor

bulbs now so readily available. If you don't manage to get them potted up before the ground freezes (they do need a cold period to develop properly), simply pot them up and put the pot in a zip-lock bag and then put the bag in the refrigerator (not the freezer) until the flower buds are well up out of the bulbs. Then bring them into gentle warmth and enjoy them.

An opportunity to volunteer

Calling all volunteer gardeners, garden clubbers, master gardeners, and those willing and able:

I am seeking up to 25 volunteers to assist in fall clean up in the Azalea Collections at the National Arboretum for Saturday December 6th from 10am to 3pm. This is always an enjoyable day in the garden and you are guaranteed to meet some nice folks.

We'll meet in the Lobby of the National Arboretum at 9:45a.m. Please park in normal visitor's parking lots. We will have an informal lunch in the garden. If you can stay until 3, you should bring a lunch. Please bring your own gloves and water in a plastic bottle. I will have all tools, rakes, or shovels needed for the various jobs. Dress in layers, and wear appropriate shoes. Bees, poison ivy, getting poked by branches, are some of the hazards you may encounter but usually we don't. If you haven't been before, the garden is on a steep wooded slope, uneven terrain with some nominal walking to get to the work site.

Tasks will mostly have to do with dealing with our large volume of leaves, particularly with raking them into tarps which are then dragged and spread in the adjacent woodlands; or picking them out of azalea shrubs. There will be a limited amount of pruning and weeding work as well. Anything that gets pruned will be loaded into my work truck and hauled away-eventually to be chipped or ground up and recycled into compost.

For logistical reasons, I need to limit the number of registered volunteer helpers to 20-25 – so if you are planning to come, please call or email me as soon as you can (my contact info. is below). If you need to

cancel, please be so kind as to let me know so that I may add another.

Please fill out and bring the attached form with you prior to working in the garden, unless you are a regular Arboretum volunteer. If you forget it, we will have extra copies at the receptionist desk. You may also email it if that works for you.

In the event of rain, sadly we will have to cancel. If we cancel, our front desk receptionist will be notified by 8:30am the morning of December 6th, so that if you are wondering, call 202-245-4523 before leaving home.

Thank you! I look forward to working with each and every one of you!

Very sincerely,

Barbara

Barbara L. Bullock
Curator of Azaleas & Rhododendrons
U. S. National Arboretum
3501 New York Ave. NE
Washington D. C. 20002
Ph: (202) 245-4511 Fax: (202) 245-4575
[Email: barbara.bullock@ars.usda.gov](mailto:barbara.bullock@ars.usda.gov)
Visit <http://www.usna.usda.gov>

On the masthead:

Paeonia obovata from the garden of Carolyn Beck. When in bloom during a hot spring, the flowers of these peonies are sometimes literally ephemeral. But the drama of the opening seed pods can go on for weeks.

Colchicum 'Waterlily' this early twentieth century hybrid must be close to a hundred years old now. It's an easy garden plant as long as the summer soil is not too damp.

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