



POTOMAC VALLEY CHAPTER
NORTH AMERICAN ROCK
GARDEN SOCIETY

PVC BULLETIN

September 2009



Moraea polyanthos J. McKenney

Habenaria radiata J. McKenney

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

Deadline for next edition October 15, 2009

HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN TO PAY YOUR DUES? If so, send your check for \$15 to Margot Ellis, 2417 N Taylor St., Arlington, VA 22207

Calendar

September 12, 2009, 9:30 A.M. home of Paul and Maxine Botting,
http://www.pvcnargs.org/plant_exchange.pdf

September 26, 2009 -- 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.
PARKFAIRFAX NATIVE PLANT SALE
3601 Valley Drive, Alexandria, VA 22302
See article below.

November, date, place TBA, our **annual members meeting and slide show.**

Chairman’s Message

One of the blessings of being on a web List Service like Alpine-L is that occasionally you learn about something that you hadn’t heard of elsewhere. Such is true of the book *The Brother Gardeners - Botany, Empire, & the Birth of an Obsession*, by Andrea Wulf. This tells how a small group of eighteenth-century naturalists made Britain a nation of gardeners and the world center of horticultural and botanical expertise. That doesn’t begin to do justice to this book, which, if you haven’t already

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guessed, I enthusiastically recommend to anyone who is obsessively interested in gardening, botany, and even empire. It is well written, describes the character of the gardeners in question, and presents their contributions as well as their interactions. But again I don’t do them justice describing them as merely gardeners. One is a nurseryman (Thomas Fairchild); another a wealthy British cloth merchant (Peter Collinson) who at the age of 34 became a Fellow of the Royal Society; a third a self taught American farmer (John Bartram). Then there is the world famous self-promoting

Swedish botanist (Carl Linnaeus) and his brilliant student (Daniel Solander). Also presented are the head gardener of the Chelsea Physic Garden (Philip Miller); the president of the Royal Society (Hans Sloan); an American printer and statesman (Benjamin Franklin) who was also a Fellow of the Royal Society; and a renowned plant explorer (Joseph Banks). Also involved were the King George III, and various and sundry dukes. Each contributed to the elevation of English gardening in a unique way.

I will not try here to summarize the accomplishments of all these men. You must read the book to see how their collaboration resulted in our modern gardens. But the author sums it up as follows:

“Without the achievements of Miller, Collinson, Bartram, Linnaeus, Solander and Banks, England would not have become such a nation of gardeners. Miller taught his fellow countrymen practical horticulture with his matter-of-fact advice in the *Dictionary* – making it the model for all future encyclopaedias. Collinson and Bartram enabled plant-lovers to translate their ideas about the “natural” Arcadian landscape into reality- incidentally nurturing the commercial seed trade and nurseries in England. Linnaeus and Solander transformed botany from the scholarly pursuit of a few educated men to a common pastime, for without the standardization of plant names there would have been chaos and confusion, making it impossible for people to share botanical knowledge and research. Banks built on these achievements when he consolidated practical horticulture, systematic botany, and imperial expansion into a coherent enterprise. As president of the Royal Society, member of the Privy Council, confidant of King

George III, and founder of the Horticultural Society, he, more than anyone before or after, saw how the three elements could bring pleasure and prosperity to the Nation.”

Read the book. It is fascinating.

Paul Botting

Origanum amanum



PVC member Terry Partridge submitted the photo above with this note: “Attached is a photo of a plant that seems to really enjoy the DC climate and is close to the ideal as a trough plant as it flowers continuously from May/June until the frosts.”

The Expanding Garden

Cercis racemosa: A Seed Germination Experiment

Cercis racemosa is one of the most interesting species of redbuds because it bears its flowers in small hanging chains instead of in clusters on the trunks, like the rest of the redbud species. This Chinese species also isn't the hardiest species for us. The National Arboretum lost their big tree in China Valley one winter.

Our tree of *C. racemosa*, which we purchased as a small plant at one of the Arboretum plants sales some years ago,

has been growing and flowering reasonably well, although it did require a lot of pruning this spring. A few years ago I tried to germinate some of its seeds, using a method suggested by Michael Dirr for our native redbud, namely half an hour in concentrated sulfuric acid, followed by a cold period. That method has been very successful for our native *Cercis canadensis* and also for another Chinese species, *C. chinensis*, but for *C. racemosa* we got only one germination.

This year we decided to be more scientific in our method, so having collected lots of seeds last summer/fall from our tree, we divided the seed into four groups of 25 each. They were given the following treatments: 5, 15 or 30 minutes of concentrated sulfuric acid and a control group that was untreated. This was done last February. The seeds were then placed in sealed plastic bags containing moist sphagnum and put in a refrigerator. Our intention was to take them out in three months, but ultimately that became five months, so they were removed from the refrigerator and potted up on July 15th.

Germination was very rapid in all of the pots, and, unfortunately, the number of germinations in each pot was so similar - between 10 and 15 seeds out of the 25 per pot -- that we could only conclude that none of the treatments made any difference. The only other generalization that we could make from this little experiment is that seeds of *Cercis racemosa* do not require acid scarification for germination if they get five months of cold treatment. Scarification either by acid or by abrasion is the thinning or fracturing of the testa (seed coat) so that water may

enter the seed and begin the germination process. For some plants that may be sufficient for germination. For others, additional treatment, such as a cold period, may also be required.

Among the seeds that we obtained from the NARGS Seed Exchange last year were those of *Sophora koreensis*, a shrubby legume native to Korea for which I could find no information about germination. I contacted the seed donor, Tony Reznicek of Ann Arbor, Michigan but he didn't know the specific requirements either. However, it was his general advice about how to deal with seeds that have an impervious testa that I would like to share with you.

Obviously not everyone has concentrated sulfuric acid handy, and it is not very nice to work with anyway. The most common way to effect scarification is by using sandpaper or a file. The questions are: "How do you know when to stop?" and "Do you actually need to make a hole through the testa?" Based on our limited experience, the answer to the second question is "No". Only the outermost part of the testa seems to be impervious to water. Tony's suggestion for answering the first question was simple but ingenious.

After you have rubbed the seeds between two sheets of sandpaper and have obviously made an impression on the surface, put them in a dish of water overnight. By the following morning the seeds that have been scarified sufficiently will have imbibed (taken in water) and obviously swollen, whereas those that haven't will show no change in size. Sometimes waiting another 24 to 48 hours will be sufficient for the other seeds to imbibe, but, alternatively, a failure to imbibe may mean that you haven't scarified those seeds sufficiently or the seeds were not viable.

Imbibed seeds are ready for planting or for a cold treatment or both. If you have enough seeds you can plant some where they will get warmth and moisture for germination and put a second batch in the refrigerator for cold stratification. In the case of *S. koreensis* we got two germinations fairly quickly without a cold treatment, whereupon we removed the other seeds from the refrigerator and soon some of them germinated too. If you have only a small number of seeds I would recommend a warm treatment first, following imbibition. If no germination occurs after about two months, I would put the pot in the refrigerator. A useful length of time for a cold treatment is three months, but the actual requirements will vary, and some species may require two or more cold periods with intervening warm periods in order to germinate. Returning to *Cercis racemosa*, the result of our failed germination experiment is that we now have lots of seedlings of this interesting species to give away, and I know that many of you have already called Audrey and expressed an interest in some. Happy growing!

Bob Faden

PARKFAIRFAX NATIVE PLANT SALE

Twelve vendors from Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia will be at the 6th anniversary Parkfairfax Native Plant Sale, which has grown into the largest native plant sale in the Washington D.C. area. Several of the vendors carry native trees and shrubs as well as perennials, and several of the vendors specialize in some aspect of native plants, such as fruiting shrubs, wetland plants, carnivorous plants, or native azaleas. A few of these vendors do not come to our local area for

any other plant sale.

For a list of vendors, and links to their websites, please see the plant sale website at

<http://www.home.earthlink.net/~sknuds/en/>

and click on the "vendors" page.

The sale is entirely organized and run by volunteers. No one makes money from it except the vendors. The purpose of the sale is to promote native plant gardening in our region because gardening with natives helps our watershed, our woodlands, and our wildlife, especially birds. Bringing together a variety of growers makes it easier for local gardeners (especially those new to native plant gardening) to find quality plants and encourages a greater demand for natives in the nursery industry.

For those interested in news about these sales, the Parkfairfax Native Plant Sale has gained a following. At the sale last April, well over 800 people who came buy plants from the ten vendors at the sale, making it our best-attended sale yet!

Directions: Parkfairfax is located in the Washington DC metro area within the I-495 Beltway, in northwest Alexandria directly across I-395 from Shirlington.

From I-395, exit Shirlington/Quaker onto Quaker Lane. At the first light on Quaker, turn left onto Preston. Follow Preston to Valley and turn left on Valley.

The sale will be just past Gunston on your right. Maps and directions are available on the sale website.

Alice Nicolson

***Lycoris squamigera* in a country garden**

I don't know how many of you grow *Lycoris squamigera*. It's hardly a rock garden plant, and because of its peculiar life cycle it's apt to be dismissed as a plant for kids. And over the years it has acquired some names – naked ladies, resurrection lily, magic lily- which hardly contribute a sense of gravitas to this plant. In one widely distributed catalog it has been represented by a photo of *Amaryllis belladonna* for years.

We should probably call this plant *Lycoris* × *squamigera* because the consensus is that it is of hybrid origin.

This is the plant long known in American gardens as *Amaryllis hallii*: that name commemorates a nineteenth century Rhode Island physician George R. Hall. Hall is largely forgotten now, but in his day he was important enough to get a nice entry in Bailey's *The Standard Cyclopedia of Horticulture*. Hall served as a physician stationed in Shanghai and then traveled in China and Japan. He introduced many plants, the best known of which to local gardeners is doubtless *Lonicera japonica* var. *halliana*.

This lycoris has also become expensive in recent years. All of these things have contributed to placing it in a sort of horticultural limbo: most experienced gardeners recognize it when they see it, but few of us feature it boldly in our gardens.

Over the years I've seen two local gardens where it is used in profusion, where mid-August sees it blooming in its hundreds, maybe thousands. Once

you've seen this, you'll perhaps be tempted as I am to squirrel away bulbs here and there in the garden as you wait for the day when a similar abundance floods your own place.

Last year I stumbled on a small country garden in western Virginia during lycoris season. I went back this year to take some pictures. You can see them here:

<http://mcwort.blogspot.com/2009/08/lycoris-squamigera-in-country-garden.html>

and here:

<http://jimmckenney.com/Lycoris%20squamigera%20iacg.htm>

I posted notices to these photos on the forum of the Pacific Bulb Society and maybe Alpine-L, but here is a chance for those of you who don't follow those lists to see them. I hope these photos give you a new appreciation of what this plant can do for our gardens!

Jim McKenney

Directions to the September plant exchange

Our September plant exchange will take place on September 12 at the home of Paul and Maxine Botting, 12901 Riffleford Ct., Gaithersburg, MD 20878.

Since most of our membership live south of that, the directions given here are from their perspective:

From I-495 take the I-270 spur N toward ROCKVILLE/FREDERICK.

Keep RIGHT to take I—270 LOCAL N.

Take the W MONTGOMERY
AVE/MD-28 W exit, EXIT 6B. toward
DARNESTOWN.

Turn SLIGHT RIGHT onto W
MONTGOMERY AVE/MD-28 W.
Continue to follow MD-28 W.

Turn RIGHT onto RIFFLEFORD RD

Turn LEFT onto RIFFLEFORD CT

12901 RIFFLEFORD CT is on the
RIGHT.

PVC Bulletin

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