

SHASTA CHAPTER NEWSLETTER



NORTH AMERICAN ROCK GARDEN SOCIETY

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Editor Narda Krum

IN DEFENSE OF NONCONVENTIONAL ROCK GARDENS

by Panayoti Kelaidis

The following article was written by Panayoti Kelaidis of the Denver Botanic Garden, a very involved member of NARGS both locally and nationally, and a recognized expert in rock gardening. It was written in response to a stated perspective that a "real" rock garden contains only alpine plants and that a rock garden society should not be involved with woodland, Mediterranean and non hardy plants. With his permission, here is his rebuttal. (Editor).

I possess a classic sort of rock garden, chockablock full of androsaces, primulas, saxifrages, gentians galore and all the other card carrying members of the Bona Fide Alpine Plant club. In fact, I suspect I grow as many of these as just about anyone else. I love them of course. I would not want to be without them. You can find most plants in this garden represented in many of the several hundred rock garden books I have accumulated in the course of my lifetime: it's pretty conventional really. I still like it.

And yet I have another garden where nary a saxifrage grows, let alone a primula, much less an androsace. Here you will find over 100 kinds of miniature cacti, South African succulents, penstemons, eriogonums, ten species of *Talinum*, oncocyclus iris, juno iris galore, crocuses, strange cushion plants like *Satureja spinescens*. These are grown in crevices and among rocks just as they might in nature. Probably half the plants in this garden have never appeared in a single rock garden tome. In my heart of hearts, I love both gardens very much, and would be hard put to choose between them: the dryland rock garden has one stellar quality, however. It is utterly novel and fresh in every way.

But what would we make of the blue gramma meadow filled with fritillaria, calochortus and allium? Or the twin berms, one filled with tiny carpeting treasures from Western America (the usual steppe rabble) and the other from the Eastern hemisphere: veronicas, acantholimons, tulips and a jillion tiny mints

and composites. And hardly a single rock in any of these gardens, which comprise many thousands of square feet? They would hardly qualify as a rock garden technically. They sure as heck ain't perennial borders.

Or my little bog, filled with *Sarracenia*, *Drosera* and treasured *Dionaea*, with blazing spikes of *Lobelia cardinalis* and mats of cranberries and *Mimulus primuloides*, encrusted with *Dodecatheon*, *Primula frondosa* and *Spiranthes cernua* (still blooming alongside the piercing blue of *Gentiana sinoornata*). Are these to be excommunicated too?

I have but a few shady strips of garden here and there, but these are crowded with hepatica, six or seven kinds of *Polygonatum*, lots of *Epimediums* from Darrell, a few treasured azaleas and rhododendrons, and as many woodland waifs as I can persuade to join me in our godforsakensteppe. These are some of my favorite miniatures, and there are rocks among them in several beds. I brashly think of them as my woodland rock gardens (fool that I am).

I have always thought that rock gardening was the last great refuge of the little plants of the world, the rock ferns that are so precious to us, and so ignorable to the masses. I realize it's hard to define rock gardening, but while you're at it, give me an air-tight definition of music, love, God, poetry or friendship. Show me a rock gardener who doesn't grow (or wouldn't like to) *Cardiocrinums* and *Meconopsis* and I will show you a paragon of purism: pin a rose on their nose, please, and call them rosy nose.

Of course, we pay special honor to the treasures of the highest crags, but I would think that any rock gardener worth his or her salt would bow on their knees to worship bluets in a New England lawn just as fervently. And I would hope they would marvel as I have at *Rhodohypoxis* and *helichrysums* and *Craterocapsa* on the bona fide Sani Pass tundra in South Africa, the very homeland of Mother Flora. And what about those Mediterranean hills, once so brimming with bulbs and tiny shrubs and herbaceous plants galore (now more and more replaced with barracks of beach homes for Northern European retirees?). Or the vast stretches of semi-arid steppeland on four continents, filled with tens of thousands of species of miniature

gems, few of which have ever been cultivated (so many new to science even), chomped on for millenia by sheep and goats, now ground underfoot by guerillas, blasted by bombs and demolished hourly by the acre for oil and gas development? Who is to notice, to cherish, to champion these, if not rock gardeners? Are we to turn our back on the vastest treasure trove of rock plants on the planet, because they are not in Farrer or Sampson Clay or happen to grow in the Dolomites?

Perish the thought!

Panayoti Kelaidis
Denver, Colorado USA (Zone 5ish)

DELICATE & LACY

by Barry Glick, Sunshine Farm & Gardens

That's only two of the complimentary adjectives that spontaneously pop into my mind and best describe our beloved, native *Dentaria laciniata*, one of the earliest plants to flower in the Spring.

Known to legions of wildflower lovers worldwide as "Cutleaf Toothwort", the bloom can be so prolific that the ground seems carpeted by snowfall when the long lasting white flowers open.

But exquisite flowers alone shouldn't be your only motive for growing the ever perennial *Dentaria laciniata*, as the fabulous, finely filigreed, fancy, free-flowing, fantastic foliage is variably delightful and the 6"-12" tall plants are a welcome addition to any garden. I've had equal success growing them in full sun and full shade. Actually, there isn't much shade this time of year except for the shadows of large tree trunks. *Dentaria laciniata* is not very particular of soil type, texture or fertility. In the wild, I've seen it growing in a host of situations, all except for wet, soggy conditions.

Despite the delicate looking foliage and dainty flowers, *Dentaria laciniata* is one helluva tough plant! This past Winter, temps plummeted to minus 12 degrees Fahrenheit with 45 mile per hour arctic blasts and all of my *Dentaria laciniata* was outside unprotected by their usual blanket of snow. They survived beautifully and are now ready for a new home in YOUR garden.

The common name of the genus is "Toothwort". It acquired this moniker and the scientific name, *Dentaria* (which means teeth in Latin) because of the irregular angular ribs, or "teeth", which are actually leaf scars from the previous season's growth. This effect is more apparent on the related species *Dentaria diphylla* as *Dentaria laciniata* grows from a more tuberlike rootstock. As for the other common name of

the genus *Dentaria*, "Pepper Root", it's said that Native Americans enjoyed the peppery taste of the root. They also used the root medicinally although I haven't been able to find the exact medicinal attributes.

This is an extremely effortless plant to grow and before you know it, you'll have a great colony of bright white flowers in early Spring. Propagation is easy by seed. By the way, the brown seed pods are called silique and contain dark brown seeds that mature about 4-5 weeks after flowering. The seeds can be collected and sown in pots or you can just let Mother Nature do her thing.



Photo by Sunshine Farm & Gardens

If they can grow in the conditions described in the article, it should be an 'easy grow' here. If you want to order some, contact Barry at barry@sunfarm.com, visit his web site at www.sunfarm.com (the virtual tour of his gardens is worth the visit alone - zone 5) or call (304) 497-2208. (Editor)



Dentaria laciniata Internet photo



Dentaria diphylla Internet photo

CELEBRATING NARGS 75th ANNIVERSARY

by Bobby J. Ward

Bobby is an ex-President of NARGS National and is currently serving as Executive Secretary. (Editor)

In 1934, North Americans were listening to Paul Whiteman and Duke Ellington on the radio and were watching Clark Cable and Claudette Colbert on the silver screen. In March of that year, 250 American garden enthusiasts gathered in the Commodore Hotel in New York City to formally launch the American Rock Garden Society. The organization grew to over 30 chapters by its 60th anniversary in 1994, the year it changed its name to the North American Rock Garden Society (NARGS) to recognize its large Canadian membership. Now with 35 chapters, the society celebrates its 75th anniversary in 2009.

My introduction to NARGS was in 1989 when I joined my local Piedmont Chapter, which was organizing its first Winter Study Weekend. I attended that meeting and made the acquaintance of long-time NARGS members, many becoming fast friends over the years. Expert speakers there sparked my abiding interest in bulbs and hellebores. I soon discovered that there is much diversity in gardening styles and plant interests among the NARGS members across North America, reaching from Alaska through the Canadian provinces to all corners of the U.S. Regional differences in climate, rainfall, and temperature, push gardeners to adapt. Verna Pratt in Alaska does not garden the same way that Ev Whittemore does in North Carolina. Todd Boland in Newfoundland may not fully appreciate the gardening challenges that Marion Jarvie faces in Ontario. Larry Thomas's admirable eleventh-floor terrace garden in New York City is far different in space and concept from the rock gardens at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver or the Denver Botanic Gardens.

I learned that dry and steppe plants of the Colorado intermountain basin won't last a minute in the warm nights, high humidity, and the summer heat of Delaware or Maryland without amended soil or raised beds. But we seldom give up if we fail the first time, often relying on pass-along information from more experienced rock gardeners. With better understanding of a plant's requirements, such as drainage, soil type, the right amount of shade (and a bit of a green thumb), we usually can have success.

NARGS members freely interchange the terms "alpine plants" and "rock garden plants," and we don't always agree on what constitutes a rock garden or how to define it. Thus, we grow plants in small troughs, rock walls, raised beds, on a

large mound (berm), in woodland settings, in alpine meadows, or among natural rock formations. For the neophyte or would-be rock gardener, placing native plants in scale among local rock is often the first, tentative beginning of "rock gardening fever."

North American rock gardeners can grow an extremely wide range of plants. Jane McGary, an Oregon bulb grower and editor of the NARGS publication, The Rock Garden Quarterly, notes that "Rock garden plants comprise both evergreen and herbaceous perennials and shrubs, and bulbous plants; a few annuals or biennials may be admitted, such as alpine poppies. In addition to flowering plants, rock gardens may include dwarf conifers, small ferns, and small-scale, non-spreading ornamental grasses."

There are many styles of rock gardening practiced by NARGS members. Pamela Harper, who gardens in coastal Virginia, has pointed out that the great woodland forests of North America have provided a backdrop for "a distinctive American style (of rock gardening) that has evolved naturally in regions of rocky woods rich in wildflowers." These include spring ephemerals, such as Trillium, Claytonia, and Erythronium. Tom Stuart of New York, says, "what North America has contributed more than methods is in the extension of plant materials." He notes the presence of cactus and mosses in NARGS members' rock gardens.

Our members often develop specialty gardens for their interests in a certain genus (perhaps Penstemon) or in bulbs (such as Crocus). Many rock gardeners grow plants from seed, planting dozens--even hundreds--of pots each year. Some foreign members join NARGS specifically to acquire seed from the annual seed list, which generally consists of about 4,000 selections.

Panayoti Kelaidis, of the Denver Botanic Gardens, has said that North American rock gardening is a vibrant, community of plant enthusiasts who share not only a complex and fascinating art, but also great bonds of friendship. "It fosters enthusiasm and excellence and honors biodiversity and human diversity: a tall order indeed!"

North Carolina gardener Elizabeth Lawrence wrote that "the cultivation of rock plants is the highest form of the art of gardening . . . Gardening is an art, and the rock garden is its purist form. All gardeners become rock gardeners if they garden long enough."

As NARGS heads towards its centenary, I look forward to its continual inspiration and support for its members in this most rewarding of pastimes.

FEATURED FLOWER FRITILLARY

There are about 100 species of Fritillary as well as a huge family of butterflies of the same name. Fritillaries are a bulbous plant in Liliaceae or lily family. Most of the species flowers are bell or cup-shaped with nodding heads causing the common name of Mission or Mountainbells in many of the species. The majority bloom in spring. They range in size from about six inches to three feet in height and many share a tendency to have checkered coloration. They are native to the Northern Hemisphere, many of which are found in California.

Fritillaria comes from the latin for dice-box *fritillus* which is thought to be due to the checkered pattern common to many fritillaries. Some species have medicinal qualities especially used in Chinese medicine for cough remedies and for hyperthyroidism. Most of the bulbs contain poisonous alkaloids.



F. pudica
Yellowbells Picture by Bev Shafer



F. recurva
Scarlet Fritillary Picture taken in Siskiyou County



F. affinis
Checker Lily Picture taken in Marble Mountains, Siskiyou County



F. sewerzowii
Internet photo



F. imperialis
Kaiser's Crown Grown in Etna garden



F. verticillata



F. liliacea
Fragrant Fritillary Internet photo