



Greetings from your new editor! John has generously offered his assistance which includes the box of old newsletters. I'll appreciate your patience as I learn how to produce a newsletter that will hopefully approach those produced by earlier editors.

As some of you know, I've moved from country life into Dodgeville. No worries about driving to work on bad roads this winter! I wonder if I'll miss the rural surroundings this summer? My new house has a large, fenced in back yard and no landscaping. Free time during spring, summer and fall will be spent moving plants.

The first project will be building a rock garden, hopefully learning from mistakes with my first one and also applying advice from others. The following is part of an article written by Jack Ferreri. His advice about a sand bed is at the end. Since I had started a sand bed before moving and both I and the plants liked it, sand will soon be delivered to my front yard. Even reading basic articles reminded me of some things to consider in the siting and construction of the new rock garden.

Creating a Basic Rock Garden

1. *Pick your site.* Choose an area that's not under trees and that gets at least half a day of sun. You can grow a rock garden in the shade, but you can't grow most rock garden plants in the shade. A site with a slope is a plus, especially south- or west-facing. Since the plants are small, you don't need a large area: start modestly.
2. *Create a rock gardening soil mix ... 1/3 rock chips, 1/3 coarse sand, and 1/3 soil.* We have to understand the high country weather ... no winter moisture, frequent winds to blow away any humidity, heavy spring moisture from snow melt, infrequent summer moisture. Soil mix is the major adjustment we can make to keep the plants from drowning in our 30+ inches of rain (many come from areas getting less than 10 inches a year.) Use the coarsest sand you can get (it should include some pebbles.) Use limestone rock chips if you can get them.
3. *Terraform the area in which you want to plant your rock garden.* You want the area to have some contour--slopes, valleys, and plateaus. A flat area or simple mound is visually boring

and doesn't give you as many planting options. This also allows you to vary exposures a bit, from south-facing slope for the most direct sun to a north-facing slope for a more sheltered position. Your rock garden mix should be about 18 inches deep. It's invigorating to play in the dirt as an adult! Think **big picture** and think **natural**.

4. *Use large rocks to add elevation, and to provide a microclimate.* You can have a rock garden without any rocks, but it will lose more than aesthetics. Rocks let you build up layers like a flight of stairs. Rocks let you squeeze young plants into crevices, and they'll grow to fill the crevices tight over time. Rocks provide you natural stepping stones for moving around in your packed garden. Get your stones from a landscaper or—at zero cost—by visiting abandoned quarries (they're shown on topographic maps of your area) and loading up your trunk (bring a strapping teenager for this).
5. *Provide protection from hot summer sun.* High altitude sunshine isn't the same as upper Midwest in high summer. And when you add the inescapable humidity, this can create problems. Most of these plants need to be sited a little away from a due south-facing direction. By using rocks to create pockets of shade and periodic protection from the sun, we can make them more adaptable to our climate.
6. *Put in paths,* Mulch them with something different than your growing area—perhaps different colored gravel or shredded pine bark. You'll be surprised at how many rock garden plants will seed into the path! The more paths you have, the better you'll be able to take care of your garden ... with weeding, top-dressing with mulch, with putting in new plants.
7. *Use small rocks (pea gravel) to mulch.* A stone mulch offers rock garden plants many advantages:

- a. reduces evaporation
- b. keeps foliage and plant crown dry
- c. helps reduce reappearance of native weeds

8. *Plant in early spring or fall to protect your new plants from summer heat and winter cold*

Sand beds.

Put down twelve inches or more of the coarsest sand you can get (it should have pebbles in the mix). Sand offers an ideal growing medium for xeric (dryland) plants. Sand is easy to work with—easy to dig in, easy to pull weeds out of. It also fosters the seeding of desirable plants, even though this seems hard to believe.

You don't need to do anything with the underlying soil. Put the sand right on top of the soil; my sand bed lies atop my former lawn. Many plants will eventually root down into the soil below. Try it with *Acantholimon*, *Achillea*, *Alyssum*, *Aethionema*, *Arabis*, *Arenaria*, *Armeria* (some), *Artemisia*, *Cactus*, *Dianthus* (some), *Draba*, *Gypsophila*, *Helianthemum*, *Iberis*, *Oenothera*, *Penstemon*, *Phlox* (some), *Sedum*, *Sempervivum*, *Stachys*, *Teucrium*, *Thymus*, *Veronica*

Thanks to Jack for the above information. Although sand is easy to plant in, the plants will need extra care for a few weeks. Until they are established, they need more watering and also more protection from the sun and wind than those planted in other areas.



WI-IL Rock Garden 2013 Meeting Schedule

Sat 13th) Flower Factory.

Dave and Nancy graciously open their [nursery](#) early just for us! If you especially enjoy a plant they have for sale, pick it up and bring it to the meeting for “show and tell.”

May (Sat 18th) Spring plant sale

Steve Lesch has invited us to his Madison area nursery, Landscape Designs, to shop. A percentage of the sales will be donated to our chapter. [Directions](#)

June (Sat 8th) Milwaukee Metro Garden Tours

The gardens of Jeff Fritz, Mary Stanley and Joy and Dave Collura are on the schedule with some further additions possible. This will be a great chance to visit with our Milwaukee area members.

July (Sat 20th or Sun 21th) Public Rock Garden workdays (Rotary or Allen Centennial Gardens)

August (Sat 17th) Public Rock Garden workdays (Rotary or Allen Centennial Gardens)

Dates for both are flexible, we will have a sack lunch and perhaps a tour of a local garden

September (Sat 21st) Annual Member Plant Sale
Plans are to have this -at a member’s

garden. As you get ready for spring in your own garden please, consider starting or dividing some of your more rare plants that cannot be purchased.

October (Sat 19th) - speaker (TBA)

November (Sat 16th) - Combination Business meeting & pot luck lunch.

Plus our annual treat of "Travels with Steve" (or where in the world is Steve?)



Dianthus arenarius “Snow Flurry”

Some members have been bringing special plants for auction at our meetings, including Viola pedata, Paeonia tenuifolia and Trillium.

If you have a plant that is a little unusual or that is looking especially irresistible and you don’t want to wait for the fall auction, bring it to a meeting that isn’t at a nursery.

You may be amazed at the spirited auction and how much other members value your treasure!

Membership Renewal Form

(check the newsletter label for your renewal date)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, ZIP: _____

Email: _____

Telephone: _____ Amount Enclosed: _____

Dues are \$10 per year. Please clip this form and send it along with your check (payable to WI-IL NARGS) or cash to: Brad McDowell, 1535 Speedway Road, Verona WI 53593

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THE NORTHERN OUTCROP

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