



THE NORTHERN OUTCROP

A [Rock Garden](#) Newsletter

January 2015

Thoughts from your editor

A mild December in southwestern Wisconsin, with very little snow and only some rain. It was nice enough to do some more garden cleanup but there's plenty left for spring!

I don't feed birds but decided to provide water for them this year. There's enough water from water lily tubs during the growing season. I bought a heated bird bath which has gotten a little use. The back door neighbors feed birds and their visitors will probably find the bird bath when the weather is colder.

January has started with some snow and then the promise of at least a week of very cold temperatures. Ideal for ordering seeds, reading catalogs and generally dreaming about spring.

My order for seeds from NARGS has been placed and I hope to grow some plants for our fall plant sale. That sale has had fewer plants in the past few years and we should all consider how we can better support it. That means dividing plants or taking cuttings early in the year as well as sowing seeds.

If any of you aren't members of our parent organization, the seed exchange is just one reason for joining. Seeds are offered that aren't available anywhere else and they are inexpensive. I just need to get back in the groove of planting seeds. Two indoor cats may add a challenge for seeds that are sown indoors. A tightly fenced backyard should provide protection from rabbits, etc., for outside seed flats.

May everyone have a healthy and happy New Year!

Upcoming Activities

We don't have a January or February meeting. Information about 2015 meetings is at the end of this newsletter.

The [Garden Expo](#) is February 13-15. Ed Glover will soon have a schedule for members to staff our booth. Our booth is one of the most popular since Flower Factory, Ed and some members provide blooming plants for our display as well as a selection of troughs.

We have a variety of handouts for choosing plants as well as building troughs so an in-depth knowledge of rock gardening isn't needed. The only requirement is an interest in plants and enjoy talking to the wide variety of visitors.

Meatball recipe from the December meeting

Lois Kinlen said "who measures" but she shared the following recipe:

2lb Ground Chicken

2 [cloves](#) garlic

1 small onion

2 eggs

4 T mayonnaise

2 c seasoned bread crumbs

¼ t red pepper flakes

½ t Italian blend seasoning

½ c Parmesan cheese

½ t salt

½ t pepper

Put Garlic & Onion in food processor until smooth.

Whisk together eggs and mayo, stir in garlic/onion

Add remaining ingredients

Drizzle cookie sheet with olive oil, Form meat balls

Bake 425; 15-20 minutes

Achilleas for the rock garden

Well, at least for the edges. This is a genus that is generally easy to grow and ranges from several inches to three and a half feet tall. The taller cultivars are selected for color—bright yellow, red, orange—and the faded flowers are still attractive. Cutting them back will prolong the bloom time and also reduce flopping.

But I like the short ones that have more attractive foliage and aren't quite as aggressive. *A. lewisii* "King Edward" is a pretty yellow and it makes a dense, slow growing ground cover. I trim the flowers off this and other short *Achillea* so the finely cut or lacy leaves are the center of attention.



Achillea lewisii "King Edward"

A. millefolium is a little taller and "rosea" is reported to be a nice pink form although I haven't seen it. *A. huteri*, with silvery, lacy leaves, is my favorite of the short *Achilleas*.

These plants are at the base of 6" or higher rocks that edge part of the rock garden, where I wanted a restrained ground cover. If I decide they no longer fit that area, these sturdy plants will be happy near the curb where groundcover is also needed!



Achillea huteri



<https://www.facebook.com/pages/North-American-Rock-Garden-Society/232300658503>

Auctions or sales of choice plants (or garden items like Jerry's troughs) at regular chapter meetings continue to be popular. A special plant that is blooming or at an attractive stage will earn more money than by waiting for the fall plant sale.

2015 meeting schedule

Meeting information is still being finalized. Several members will speak about their travels and some garden tours are also being planned. Debbie Wopat would welcome any suggestions about garden visits or a site for the plant sale.

March 21 1 pm Tom Horner or Dave Collura talk at Dane County UW-Extension, 5201 Fen Oak Dr, Madison 53718

April

May no chapter meeting. NARGS annual meeting in Michigan May 7-10

June

July

August

September fall plant sale

October Tom Horner or Dave Collura talk

November Annual meeting and travels with Steve Lesch

December Seed sorting

Orchid show January 31 and February 2

For the orchid enthusiasts among us, [Orchid Quest 2015](#) will be at the Marriott West Conference Center in Middleton, Wis.

Waid Vanderpoel was a long time member of our chapter who served as chairman as well as supporting the chapter in the plant sales and with programs. He had an extensive display of large troughs at his Barrington, Ill, home and provided pictures and articles for the NARGS Handbook on Troughs as well as NARGS bulletins. He wrote the following for our newsletter about an experiment with growing *Primula* in troughs.

Most of us have grown *farinosa*, or birdseye, primroses. When in flower, few small plant are more charming. However, my experience has been that they are either expanding—or rotting off at the crown. I've grown *P. farinosa* for years and have accepted its occasional, unexplained death wish for the glory of its bloom. I've grown the Balkan member of the birdseye group, *P. frondosa*, the attractive amiable species, *P. darliaca* as well as *P. farinosa*'s taller cousin *P. halleri* (difficult for me). I also tried lovely little Asian members of the group, *P. clarkei*, *P. rosea* and *P. warshenewskiana*. After an initial spurt, my Asian birdseyes have all too soon disappeared from the garden. I have always believed that slugs contributed mightily to the demise of *P. Clarkei*. Even the vigorous hybrid of *P. clarkei* and *P. rosea*, *P. 'Peter Klein'* has eventually deteriorated.

Our literature states that birdseye primroses need moisture. Doretta Klaber's Primroses mentions "half shaded, damp, well drained soil." My observations in the Pyrenees and Alps were that *P. farinosa* was usually near the little upper meadow streamlets (not the larger streams), but in full sun. Lincoln Foster says they are "neither easy nor long lived" and "most successful near running water in a rich moraine in sun." Sun we have—a moraine we don't!

In 1982 we decided to plant birdseye primroses in small troughs set on bricks in our pools. Hypertufa, the peat/perlite/cement material of which troughs are made, is not waterproof. An empty trough, with no drainage holes, placed so the inner bottom is below water level, will eventually fill to the level of the surrounding water. Therefore, a trough used for this purpose can, but need not, have drainage holes. Filled with a standard alpine soil mix laced with some extra leaf mold, the soil became very wet indeed—would it be a stagnant wet (in nature, *P. farinosa* is seldom in stagnant, wet areas)? Could the plants tolerate a full exposure to our fierce summer sun, even with wet soil? We planted—and we hoped!

The plants bloomed well and appeared to thrive in the troughs. However, some literature indicated that the plants need to dry and harden in late summer and fall. In mid August, I removed 2 of the troughs to a shady, fairly dry spot. This treatment killed about two thirds of the primroses in rather short order.

Encouraged by our early results, we added *P. rosea* and several of the vernalis oxlips, *P. elatior*, a number of which we had planted in our shady, but moist, primrose area in the garden.

The primroses flourished with the sun/moist soil conditions. Early in 1984, we added *P. clarkei*, my last, struggling *P. warshenewskiana* and a pair of weak 'Peter Klein's'.

In the spring of 1984, we enjoyed glorious bloom from our aquatic primroses. The *P. elatior* in the troughs produced triple the flowers of our conventionally planted primroses. With their crowns only 3 or 4 inches above the water surface, all species thrived. The troughs need only 1 ½ to ½" of water to induce capillary action. There was no wilting, even on the hottest days. The plants in the sun were tighter, stronger and avoided the crown rotting problem of the land-based primroses. We now remove the troughs from the water only in mid September, making certain the plants receive full rainfall.

We believe the results are so encouraging that I urge other members to join us in this experiment. Incidentally, if slugs were a problem for *P. clarkei*, the slugs must have been frustrated since the little monsters can't swim. While many members do not have a pool, a small, plastic wading pool, buried to its rim, would work just fine. Based on our experience to date, the result may prove rewarding.

(Editor's note: Waid doesn't explain how the "aquatic" troughs were over-wintered. Maybe he just left them on the ground with mulch around them? If anyone knows, please let me know. His large troughs were elevated and didn't sit on the ground. Waid was a tall man and wanted the treasures he grew where they could be better appreciated. Bags of leaves were stuffed under and around the large troughs for winter protection.)



Another note—I'm happy to act as editor but all of us are the reporters. Any articles, no matter how long or short, would be appreciated. It can be about a plant you like, a garden or nursery you have visited, or anything related to your garden. We have all made changes to our gardens or plan changes. Most of us aren't plant "experts", we just know what we like.

"Plant portraits" were included in some of the earlier newsletters and I will reprint some that interest me. I encourage all of you to pick a plant that interests you and write a short explanation of why you like it or how you use it.

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Membership Renewal Form

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) to: Brad McDowell, 1535 Speedway Road, Verona WI 53593

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