

## THE NORTHERN OUTCROP

A Rock Garden Newsletter

April 2015

### Upcoming Events

**May 30 1:00** Steve Lesch has again invited us to hold a meeting at his nursery. He will give a tour after our meeting. Steve donates a percentage of our purchases to our chapter. [Landscapes Designs Nursery](#) is located at 3290 Elvehjem Rd, McFarland WI 53558

**May 9** Family Gardening Day at the UW Madison campus. Probably from 10 AM-2 PM. A fun time for the family and many will visit the Allen Centennial Gardens. Ed Glover, who is very dedicated to the rock garden at ACG, creates diversions from the temptation to climb on the rocks or toss gravel mulch into the pond. If you have hen and chicks or other easy to pot plants, let him know.

**June 26, 2015, 4 -8 pm and June 27, 2015, 9 am – 4 pm.** Rio Home and Garden Tour Debbie Wopat's garden is part of seven garden tour to benefit the Rio Community Library. Tickets are \$8 and available at the library, 324 W. Lyons St. in advance or on the days of the tour. It's part of Rio's Sesquicentennial celebration so there will be plenty of other activities as well. Please click [here](#) for more information or check out Rio's [Facebook](#) page.

(If your community or local garden club has an upcoming event that would interest our gardening membership, please send details.)

### April meeting at Flower Factory

What a great April meeting! Great weather and [The Flower Factory Nursery](#) is a beautiful meeting venue. Members discussed plants they loved or were interested in and some of us made another trip through the nursery to collect a few more plants!

Information on the plants that were discussed as well as any others that members are proud of, want to grow or have questions about will be included as they are shared with me at [jahalve123@gmail.com](mailto:jahalve123@gmail.com).

### Penstemon pinifolius

Iza Goroff posted "Plant of the Month" on the NARGS Web site for many years and shared his entry on Penstemon pinifolius after a discussion of that plant at the meeting. Below is part of the information from Iza.

Penstemon pinifolius is native to high altitudes in mountains straddling the border between Mexico and the states of New Mexico and Arizona in the Chihuahuan Desert.

This is a short plant, no more than 6 - 8 " (15 - 20 cm) tall with thin flower stems to almost 1' (30 cm) and spreading to about 18" (45 cm). Its stems are more like a heath's (Erica) than most other penstemons. Each narrow flower is about 1 1/4" (3 cm) long. Most plants have bright red-orange flowers, although plants I have seen in gardens at higher elevations (above 7,000' above sea level) seem to flower much more red. Although almost of the species flowers orange-red, two yellow flowered cultivars have been discovered: the first found is 'Mersea Yellow', a more recent one is 'Magdalena Sunshine', named for the Magdalena Mountains in New Mexico where it was discovered.

Penstemon pinifolius is now very widely planted and grown, hardy in almost all of the USA, with the exception of the Southeast. Coming from a dry climate, its culture requires a very well drained, porous, gritty soil. The top two to four inches (5 - 10 cm) should be coarse sand with a gravel mulch. Unlike many southwest penstemons it prefers a neutral to slightly acid PH. It needs half to full sun to flower well and very good air circulation to be healthy. I was most surprised to see it growing flowering very well at the Edinburgh Royal Botanic Gardens where full sun is less than what is half sun over most of the USA. But it was placed high with excellent air circulation.

Penstemon pinifolius is now widely available from many nursery sources, even from local garden centers. It can be grown from seed or propagated by cuttings. It is remarkable

that a plant from so far south and not from the highest of mountains can be hardy to such low temperatures.



Penstemon pinifolius



Penstemon pinifolius "Mersea Yellow"

( Note--My rock garden consists of 1-2' of torpedo sand (also known as builders sand) dumped on the lawn. Ed Glover reported some years ago about great success with this

method. However, this is apparently too stark for Penstemon pinifolius. Both were growing for me in a richer rock garden but may have been lost when moved to the pure sand bed. Jean H. )

#### Empetrum nigrum (Black Crowberry)

Lynn Groeschel said "This year I am trying to grow a plant I became aware of during a visit to the botanical gardens in Boothbay Harbor, Maine. I wonder if anyone has grown this attractive low growing plant.



Empetrum nigrum



Close up of stem

Some comments from other members—flowers are insignificant but berries are great. Internet information—berries are an important food source for many animals and also used for juice and wine by humans.



**June, July, August** No set programs yet. If you would like to share your garden, please let chair Debbie Wopat know. [ddwopat@gmail.com](mailto:ddwopat@gmail.com)

**September 19** Annual chapter plant sale. This year's hosts are Jan and Larry Phelps, Baraboo WI.

**October 17** 1 PM Tom Horner travelogue to Denmark New Berlin Public Library, 15105 W Library Ln, New Berlin, WI 53151. Tom will show slides of his trip to Denmark. He said "there is much attention given to fascinating dwarf conifers and plants that fit in small places."

**November 21** 12 noon Annual business meeting

[West Madison Ag Research Station](#)

8502 Mineral Point Rd, Verona WI 53593

Potluck lunch. After our annual meeting, Steve Lesch will show slides of a family trip to an exotic location.

**December 5** 9 AM to 4 PM, seed sorting for seed exchange

[West Madison Ag Research Station](#)

8502 Mineral Point Rd, Verona WI 53593

The gathering of the chapter to help NARGS sort and package seeds of plants both wild and cultivated, common and rare. Includes pizza, drawings for prizes and great discussions about the size and appearance of seeds and of the plants they will become. Always a fun meeting. If you have unneeded garden items, bring them along so they can find a new home.



Each fall I look at the bulbs offered for spring planting and usually decide I already have that particular color. Then spring arrives and the landscape only has a few of the highly prized early bloomers.

This spring I made a note of plants I wish were blooming, including more of all colors of small crocuses, *Iris reticulata* cultivars and some species tulips. Several *I. reticulata* cultivars have been confirmed as lost. *Tulipa tarda* has happily made itself at home but *Tulipa batalinii* may not have survived transplanting. And it doesn't appear to reseed, at least not for me. This tulip comes in a variety of soft yellow and orange hues.

I have three different *Galanthus* species but I'm not sure of the identity except that they are commonly available. The page about [Galanthus](#) indicates arrangement of the emerging leaves identifies *G. nivalis* vs *G. elwesii*. Something to check next spring. Then there are all sorts of cultivars and some are really, really nice and the price is high to match, especially with the newest discoveries. Information from nurseries indicates this genus is best purchased "in the green," when it is actively growing. I may have to open the pocketbook and get a few next spring.

While working in your rock garden, check for plants that can be divided or otherwise propagated for our chapter sale. Dividing them now will provide a nicely growing plant for fall. And sharing the plants means a lost plant may be available from another member. *Tradescantia longipes* was purchased many years ago and shared but then lost. I had actually forgotten about it until Ed Glover brought it to last fall's plant sale and now I have it again. A short plant that doesn't seed around as quickly as the native species. Thanks, Ed!

Spring means birds singing in early morning, watching plants start to grow again, moving non-hardy plants outside and generally getting the gardening work started again. The non-hardy plants will need to be covered for the next week, since the warm weather that has spoiled us is retreating. Perhaps I was too anxious to move them out of the house. And I couldn't resist a few annuals that will now need to be covered as well. Hopefully next week will bring warmer weather.

Happy gardening in the upper midwest!  
Jean Halverson

**THE NORTHERN OUTCROP**

*Editor Jean Halverson*

*PO Box 101*

*Dodgeville WI 53533*

**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: Jean Halverson PO Box 101, Dodgeville WI 53533**

**2015 Chapter Officers**

Chairperson	Debbie Wopat	N5760 Hill Rd, Rio, WI 53960, (920) 992-3109, ddwopat@gmail.com
Vice-Chairperson	Lynn Groeschel	W12464 Boots Road, (608-497-3005) lsgroeschel@yahoo.com
Secretary	Damon Smith	218 DuRose Terrace, Madison, WI 53705. (608) 335-0336, damonsmith56@hotmail.com
Treasurer	Brad McDowell	1535 Speedway Road, Verona WI 53593, (608) 576-5732, bmcowell2577@gmail.com
Editor/Membership	Jean Halverson	1111 N. Johns St. PO Box 101 Dodgeville, WI 53533 (608) 935-3721, jahalve123@gmail.com

