



A Rock Garden Newsletter

January 2019

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Early January with temperatures in the 40s and no snow on the ground, at least not in southwestern Wisconsin. Extremely unusual and who knows how this will affect our plants. Our next chapter project will be a booth at the Garden Expo, February 8, 9 and 10.

Secretary Lynn Groeschel provided the following report of our last meeting:

At our annual November meeting, all officers agreed to fulfil their duties for another year. Our Chairperson challenged the assembled group to offer themselves up for service, but there were no volunteers. I offer my special thanks to Jean Halverson for fulfilling my secretarial duties when I am unable to attend meetings.

The treasurers report was given. We have \$7766.66 (or something like that) in our treasury. This includes 2 C.D.'s. One of the members questioned the reason for accumulating money in our treasury. We discussed various programs that we have ongoing, such as our propagation programs with the Flower Factory & Steve Lesch, our annual display at the Garden Expo, contributions to NARGS, supporting new memberships in the local chapter and the national chapter and other special events such as our Spring Gala this year. We also pay certain speakers a fee.

It was suggested that we continue to support new memberships, both in the local WI-IL Chapter and the national chapter. Another suggestion was that we peruse catalogs and reference books with the purpose of developing a new propagation wish list. The Flower Factory handed out a list of rock garden plants that will be available for next year.

Plans for future speakers were raised. Jane Barnett has offered to talk about her experience in Newfoundland this year while attending the national conference. If anyone has a speaker suggestion, please bring this to a future meeting.

The Great Lakes Chapter of NARGS is having a spring gala this year, detailed in the last email. The question was raised whether we should invite the Hardy Plant Society to the event with the idea of trying to get a bus chartered to Ann Arbor.

The whole month of March will be dedicated to filling the second round orders for NARGS. Location is still under consideration. Lois stated that she would ask her business partners if a vacant part of their building could be used by the chapter. We will have tables set up all month. Various members offered tables for use during the month.

As usual, we had a splendid pot-luck spread before the meeting.

Dave & Joy Collura visited Iceland this year and were kind enough to share their marvelous slides with us after the elections and business meeting.

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The Chapter Service award and the Don Haven's award were presented to chapter members this fall.

Dave and Joy Collura received the Chapter Service award. They have been fantastic supporters of the chapter and they've been members of this chapter for over 20 years. They often drive from Milwaukee to volunteer in Allen Centennial Gardens, where they are members of the rockhead group. Dave has been chair of the chapter, Joy has served as secretary, they've been fantastic hosts for us in Milwaukee organizing garden tours and hosting us in their home and beautiful gardens. They've done so much for our chapter that they really deserve this award.

Joy and Dave described how they first became aware of rock gardening. While touring the Denver Botanic Garden, they kept returning to the alpine area. A worker finally said "why don't you get your sleeping bags and stay overnight." When he found out they were from Milwaukee, he told them Ted Berginc was one of the most fantastic alpine gardeners and he lived in their area. He explained about NARGS, including the Quarterly bulletin, and the advantages of the rock garden clubs. Then said it's quitting time and why don't you come to my house. Of course, it was Panyotti and they were given a tour of his extensive gardens including the berm in the back. Joy and Dave came home and joined our chapter.

The Don Havens award is awarded by a committee made up of the current chapter chair and two previous chairs. They voted to give this award to Lois Kinlen. Lois has been a member of the chapter for close to 35 years and she served as treasurer for 11 years. She has often had garden tours and plant sales in her home and often brings interesting or rare plants to meetings for door prizes. One impetus for getting the award this year was the NARGS meeting we held last spring. NARGS contacted Chairperson Ed Glover a year ahead of the meeting time, asking if we would hold it. He agreed to bring it up at a meeting and Lois said "hm, that would be something new and different, I'll think about that." So she decided that she would organize the meeting, which turned out to be a great success. But she said she had two things she wanted. If the meeting made money, she didn't want it to go into the general treasury. She wanted it to be used to promote membership and promote propagation of alpine plants. Because of this, we're subsidizing membership in NARGS for new members by paying half of it the first year. We also started a propagation program with Flower Factory.

Lois added that she couldn't have done it without the committee of Jane LaFlash, Barbara Cochrane and Jack Ferreri. It would never have come off or been so successful. And virtually everyone in the chapter participated, including working at Allen Centennial Gardens and the gardens on the tour.

From Iza Goroff's Plant of the Month file



Penstemon pinifolius



P. pinifolius 'Mersea Yellow'

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, although there is another Penstemon named for a conifer, P. laricifolius, which is somewhat similar in leaf. 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. 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.

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