



Iris cristata 'Precious Pearl' and *Epimedium* cv
in Sacks/Shafer garden

The Newsletter of the New England Chapter of NARGS January 2022

Because of lingering pandemic issues, but in the spirit of optimism and hope, the Chapter is shifting our normal spring schedule by one month. We normally meet February, March, April, and May; for 2022, we will meet (or "meet") March, April, May, and June. March and April meetings will be on Zoom. May we will take our first step towards in-person meetings by gathering outdoors at Cochato Nursery. June we plan to have a regular in-person presentation by Randy Stone of the Pioneer Valley Fern Society, followed by a guided botanizing tour.

Details are still being worked out, but here is the schedule so far.

March 19, Sat.	Chuck Doughty from Cochato Nursery on Zoom; time 11 am; topic TBA
April 23, Sat.	Elizabeth Lawson speaking on <i>Primula</i> via Zoom - details TBA
May 21, Sat.	Rare Plant Auction, location TBA
May TBA	group visit to Cochato Nursery in Holbrook, MA - day TBA
June TBA	Randy Stone - presentation on Ferns followed by a botanizing walk; location TBA
July & August	no meetings, but possible optional garden visits made available to members

From the Chair - *Winter Thoughts*

As I sit here on an early January morning, welcoming the shivering newborn light of the returning sun, I find reasons for optimism all around me. In addition to the precious new minutes of sunlight, new plant and seed catalogues are appearing in the mailbox, I get to choose new seeds from the NARGS seed exchange, and a group of us is meeting to set up our programs for the new year. All happy signs of new beginnings.

In a weird kind of way time has expanded, contracted, and stood still. My chairmanship started just as the pandemic began, so in many ways it feels like I've been living in a no man's land, with so many changes to how we function as a club. Most members voted in favor of Zoom meetings and presentations, although this has been a challenge for some of us, and attendance has been sparse. Technology continues to present both challenges and opportunities, baffling and frustrating some of us, while making some previously more remote speakers more available. While in-person meetings are out for the winter months, we do have plans to have more garden tours and outdoor strolls in the spring.

Just to show how resilient we are, we did manage to hold some traditional activities: we held a very successful seedling sale in September; we were in the virtual back room of the NARGS seed exchange program by packing and sending on to the next chapter a portion of seed contributions from national members. We had our annual meeting, sadly lunch-less, with Mark McDonough giving his presentation **Garden Lab 2021: Year-End Review. Selected Highlights + Iris Summary**. As you see, the newsletter is back. Thanks to all – you know who you are, darlings – for making all this happen.

So here we are, and in spite of covid-19, political turmoil, personal trials and sorrows, and everything else the past year has thrown at us, we are still standing. I think that makes us true perennials and isn't that just fine.

With warm and hopeful wishes for the new year,

Estelle James

Rare Plant Auction to Return for 2022

One of the casualties of meeting virtually during the pandemic was our beloved Rare Plant Auction, always a highlight of the year and our principal fundraiser. Despite complications, the people of the chapter have spoken and we plan to hold the auction on Saturday, May 21 at a location to be arranged.

Aside from pandemic-related concerns, an issue that gave many of us pause is that of the jumping or snake worm invasion, which is severe in some locations. We do not want to move any of these creatures around, especially to areas where they may not be present already, so we are asking everyone to take great care when preparing plants to bring and even greater care with the plants that you take home. Consider bare-rooting, if your plants will tolerate that sort of treatment.

Here are a couple resources for learning more about the worms.

[Landscape: Jumping/Crazy/Snake Worms – *Amyntas* spp. | Center for Agriculture, Food, and the Environment at UMass Amherst](#)

[Jumping Worms in Connecticut](#)

Seedling Sale 2021–a highlight

The seedling sale last fall afforded several rare treats, among them getting to see some folks in person, and to share a few choice or favorite plants and stories. One very special addition to the day came from Darrell Probst, who donated multiples of a new species iris he discovered in China some years ago. Previously identified in the iris world as a species novum, it has now been accepted as *Iris probstii*, to honor Darrell's explorations and collections.

Congratulations, Darrell, and many thanks for your contributions to the plant world and your generosity to our chapter. Many members took home a pot of this iris to add to their gardens. Anyone interested in more information about, and availability of, this iris and other Chinese species irises can see Jan Sacks and Marty Schafer's catalogue at their site www.jpwflowers.com.

Ernie Flippo

Garden Lab 2021: Year-End Review Selected Highlights + Iris Summary

Notes by Rosemary Monahan

Because of the ongoing pandemic, our November 20, 2021 chapter meeting was held via Zoom. Mark McDonough's presentation was attended by an enthusiastic, if virtual, gathering.

Ten Memorable Plants of 2021

Mark started by listing 10 memorable plants from the last year that he had either added to his garden or admired as they continued to flourish.



Monardella macrantha 'Marian Sampson'

Monardella macrantha 'Marian Sampson' – this perennial has brilliant red flowers and has tolerated our wet summer and has overwintered just fine.

Penstemon x Mexicali 'Red Rocks' – this perennial is a cross between hardy and tender Penstemons. It has beautiful bright pink flowers and willow-like foliage. It re-flowered for him this October.

Bukiniczia cabulica – this plant is in the Plumbago family. It is said to be a biennial, but

he suspects it is monocarpic and will die after flowering (instead of after its second year). It has gorgeous, to-die-for, rosettes of foliage.

Asphodeline taurica – Jacob's Rod – this perennial has a foot-tall spire of white flowers and lovely swirling silver blue leaves.



Bukiniczia cabulica

Cyclamen purpurascens – he has had success with a silver-leaf form that has gorgeous patterns. It comes to life in late July. The seedlings are green at first, but the silver variegation appears as the plants grow.

Triteleia laxa 'Humboldt Star' – this is a western bulbous perennial that blooms in late spring and summer. It has beautiful large blue flowers, with a crinoline texture to the petals. He doesn't get seed from it in most years.

Hemerocallis minor 'Mongolia Gold' – Mark bought it from Plant Delight Nursery in NC, where it is not inexpensive. It is a wild selection from Mongolia. It is very, very long-blooming, and is slightly fragrant.

Stewartia pseudocamellia – Mark said that if there is just one tree he must have in a garden, it's this one (the writer of these notes couldn't agree more!). It blooms in late June through mid-July, and is smothered in large white blooms with yellow stamens. The fall color is amazing, and it has gorgeous bark in winter. What's not to like?

Oxydendron arboretum – Sourwood - this tree flowers all July, delighting pollinators, and develops red foliage color early (late summer) which contrasts beautifully with the white flowering bracts that resemble flowers of *Pieris*. This photo was of one of the large weeds that Mark specializes in (joke).

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Woodland Iris From Seed

As we know from some of Mark's previous talks, he has been enthusiastically working on hybridizing woodland irises for the last 3 years. Since it takes 4 years to see bloom from most of these species, it is a work in progress, and we all look forward to seeing the results. Most woodland iris seeds have elaiosomes, which are fleshy structures rich in lipids and proteins and are intended to attract ants. This mechanism for dispersal by ants is common in other spring ephemeral plants as well. Seeds are best sown fresh, and if the seed is dry it can delay germination significantly. His typical germination rate from fresh sowing is 35-45%, but he keeps the seed pots and gets additional germination (of up to 60-70%) after the second year. He places organza bags (usually used for wedding favors) around the seed pods both to catch the seeds and to keep them from being eaten by chipmunks).

Iris cristata

Mark has been doing a variety of crosses with cultivars including:

'Montrose White' (a large white),

'Precious Pearl' (a small white selected by Barbara and David Schmeider with nice, arching foliage)

'Navy Blue Gem' (a dark blue, which was originally described as 'Dark Blue Violet' by Laurie's Garden until Jan Sacks and Marty Schafer renamed it and registered it in 1998)

'Dash It All' (also from the Schmeiders) – this is a vigorous clone and flowers a lot



Iris cristata 'Precious Pearl' (l); 'Montrose White' (r)



Iris cristata 'Powder Blue Giant'

'Powder Blue Giant' (found by Sam Norris in Kentucky in the 1960s – it was named and registered in 1998 by Jan and Marty)

Mark has been making crosses in both directions (with one cultivar being the pollen parent, and then the other). Because of the drought last year, he had to hand-water all his seedling pots, and is expecting to start seeing blooms after 4 years. He covers his seed pots with wire mesh to foil chipmunks and mice. Now he is putting pots up on tables to keep them away from jumping worms. He uses pressed fiber pots and puts them on top of a 1.5" layer of moist mulch on top of the 2' tall tables – this help keeps the pots moist.

Iris verna

Mark said that no one has worked on hybridizing this species before. All 12 of the named cultivars are selections from the wild. Many of them were named by Fairmount Gardens. He said that there are now only 3 cultivars in circulation. The ones he is hybridizing with are:

'Brumback Blue' (named after Bill Brumback at Garden in the Woods) – this has an orange color band over a white signal

'Alba' – this originally came from Dick Redfield and has shiny evergreen foliage

'Cleo Chapel Road' – this is from a plant that Darrell Probst collected in the southeast



Iris verna smalliana 'Brumback Blue'

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Iris koreana

Mark created a large patch of seedlings from open pollinated seeds. He sees a lot of variability in terms of size and marking, so he now has several selected forms of *koreana*.

Iris odaesanensis

Mark has been growing Chuwang San #3' and 'Chollipo' as well as 'Ice Wisper' which he is crossing with white *odaesanensis*. These are warm germinators and like moisture.

Iris gracilipes

Mark showed the cultivar 'Buko' (a dwarf white from Mt. Buko in Japan) and 'Cobblewood Charm', which is a spontaneous cross of 'Buko' and the regular purple *gracilipes*. It was introduced by Joe Pye Weed Gardens (Jan and Marty's) and the first new cultivar of *I. gracilipes* in more than 60 years. He has planted out a lot of seeds from 'Cobblewood Charm' and is seeing a lot of color variation. He has selected one with pale amethyst flowers with gold veins. Mark donated 80-100 plants of *gracilipes* to the Acton Arboretum and will be following those as well.

Iris dabashanensis* and *Iris probstii

These are 2 new species in the *chinensis* section, with one named after Darrell Probst, and the other named *dabashanensis* (formerly known as *I. henryi*). In 2021 Mark focused on crossing *Iris odaesanensis* with *I. dabashanensis*, some seed has germinated and seedlings are being overwintered on a sunny windowsill, need to wait 3-4 years to see the results of a possible interspecific hybrid.

Iris speculatrix

There are 3 clones available of this evergreen species:

Lonsdale clone

Probst clone

Waddick-Shanghai clone

The seed pods in this species uniquely turn sideways and have fleshy white roots, not rhizomes, and the leaf fans grow in a circular pattern.

Iris sp. nov. Chen Yi #41

Mark has been working with the new species for about 8 years. It has very different flowers and foliage that looks like *I. tectorum*, and has horizontal rhizomes. In some of his 'Chen Yi' seedlings he is finding plants with no rhizomes so they may be an interspecific hybrid with *I. speculatrix*.

With that, the talk ended, and members greatly look forward to hearing about the results.

Chapter Award in Recognition of Accomplishment

As a token of appreciation for his efforts in the areas of studying, hybridizing, and selecting plants, as well as educating about these plants, we are pleased to recognize Mark McDonough. His recent work with woodland irises, in the same rich vein as his well-known investigations and introductions of alliums over many years, is promising and inspirational. We thank him for sharing his knowledge and results with the community of plant enthusiasts and wish him continued success in his endeavors. In support of his ongoing work, we are presenting a small cash grant to Mark.

—Ernie Flippo, on behalf of the chapter officers and members of NE NARGS

Special Book-ordering Opportunity!

NARGS is piloting a program that gives members the opportunity to buy newly published books from Filbert Press, a horticultural publisher in Great Britain. The first title is:

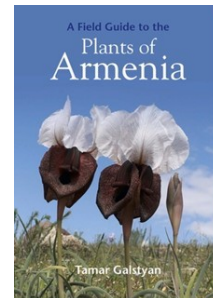
A Field Guide to the Plants of Armenia

Tamar Galstyan

paperback/ 592 pages/ 6 x 9", full color photos

Filbert Press (UK publisher)

<https://www.ipgbook.com/a-field-guide-to-the-plants-of-armenia-products-9781999734589.php>



To get the substantial discount (\$30 cost instead of \$55) **members must order through their chapters**, and the chapter needs to order at least four copies. Seems like a bargain, and my goodness, that iris on the cover! Books will be shipped to the chapter directly from the publisher and will take a couple months.

The hope is that this pilot goes well, in which case, similar offers will be made on future books, including **The Crevice Garden** by Kenton Seth and Paul Spriggs when it is published in August.

If you are interested in ordering a copy, please let me know. Deadline is March 1, 2022, so I can get the money to NARGS by their deadline. With luck, I will be able to hand you your copy in person; otherwise, there may be a local mailing fee.

Below is a review of the book by P.K.

BOOK REVIEW: Caucasian Delights

Panayoti Kelaidis

A FIELD GUIDE TO THE PLANTS OF ARMENIA

Tamar Galstyan

Paperback/ 592 pages/ full color photographs, 6 X 9"

Filbert Press January 2022

NARGS Chapters SPECIAL PRICE: \$30 (Regularly \$55) 46% Discount!

Minimum order per chapter: 4 copies

<https://www.ipgbook.com/a-field-guide-to-the-plants-of-armenia-products-9781999734589.php>

In April of 2018 I was privileged to participate in [a seed collecting expedition](#) with the Plant Collections Collaborative in Georgia (of the Caucasus—not the Peach State) for three weeks. A pretty extensive account of this expedition was published in the November 2019 *International Rock Gardener* which you can find here: https://www.srgc.org.uk/logs/logdir/2019Nov281574975266IRG_119.pdf.

Who doesn't have a bucket list? The Caucasus were near the top of mine—for many reasons. So many classic garden plants come from there: *Cyclamen coum*, *Helleborus orientalis*, *Draba bryoides*, *Paeonia mlokosewitschii* (and a host of other choice peonies), *Primula juliae*—the list goes on and on. After spending three spectacular weeks blessed with mild, sunny weather and a wealth of new impressions and a long list of seed collections and thousands of photographic images (criss-crossing Georgia repeatedly in the process!), I realized that we'd only encountered a fraction of the plants I'd hoped to see: the Caucasus are a botanical hotspot. They're BIG...and mind you, we'd only been to Georgia.

We drove through both Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli—the two Georgian provinces bordering Armenia—and I peered longingly towards the fragmented homeland of the Armenian people, who (like the Greeks) have contracted to a fraction of the former lands they once lived in. I have grown so many plants with the epithet "*armenum*, *armeniacum*" and permutations on the name—almost all of which have thrived for me. What else could possibly be lurking there, beyond? I have many books on

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the flowers of Greece and Turkey, but with the notable exception of Vojtech Holubec and Pavel Krivka's fantastic coffee table book (**Caucasus and its Flowers**, ISBN: 10: 8090254136 ISBN 13: 9788090254138) which is now long out of print and extremely expensive if you are lucky enough to find a copy for sale!

Until now, I should say. Filbert Press, a UK publisher, has just released **A FIELD GUIDE TO THE PLANTS OF ARMENIA**, a very slick, chubby little tome (about 6 x 9") with a durable soft cover that is good for taking into the field. Each of the well over a thousand taxa in the book is beautifully illustrated—many with multiple images (closeup and longer view). The plants are grouped alphabetically by genus, then alphabetically by species. Each taxon also has a dot map showing in which provinces in Armenia it has been recorded. There is a concise description of each taxon, and clear notes on elevational range, habitat and range beyond Armenia. As I parse this book, I was surprised how few circumboreal plants like *Achillea millefolium* are in it. There is some overlap with the Alps (*Gentiana pyreneica* and *G. verna* pop out at you!) What impressed me most was how many truly local endemics are shown throughout—particularly among Apiaceae, Asteraceae, Boraginaceae, Brassicaceae, Fabaceae and Lamiaceae—plant families that dominate throughout Northern and Southern hemisphere steppe climates. And, of course, the petaloid monocots (bulbous plants) are numerous—e.g. *Iris reticulata* but also its cousin *I. sisianica*, which I'd never heard of! And the stunning *Iris iberica ssp. elegantissima* on the cover!

It is the wealth of endemic taxa which make this book invaluable to armchair botanists. There's some overlap with **Caucasus and its Flowers** by Holubec and Krivka but far less than I'd imagined. But what other field guide includes *Acantholimon glumaecum*, *Draba brunifolia*, and *Gentiana gelida*?

The plants from this region are so diverse, so widespread and important to gardens, this seemingly localized book is far more important to have in hand than you might think—particularly if you're lucky enough to go to the Caucasus in person one day! Hopefully soon!

Chapter policy re payments to speakers AND please write for the newsletter!

As we continue to build on and enjoy the traditions established by the former members and leaders of the New England chapter, it may be worth reminding ourselves of the following information. In our small group, with its emphasis on sharing and communicating information about and experience with plants and gardening, we rely on programs, whether generated by members or by outside experts. The established chapter practice has been that outside speakers receive an honorarium/fee and that chapter members do not receive a fee for presenting to the club. - E.F., Treasurer

P.S. from Vivien: Contributors to the newsletters also do not receive payment, but are likewise held in great esteem and their articles and information-sharing are deeply appreciated. Please contact Vivien to submit an article and/or pass along any items you come across that you think members might be interested in. Please send to Vivien (and I hope the scammers can't read this) at vbouffard55"at"msn"dot"com. - V.B.

NARGS-New England Chapter

Our Chapter meets 6 times a year (typically February, March, April, September, October and November; as announced in COVID times), publishes a newsletter in email format, and organizes garden tours in season. Our \$10 chapter dues were suspended for 2021, but as we resume programming for 2022, we will be accepting dues again. Details will be forthcoming.

Local Chapters: There are about 35 NARGS-affiliated chapters active in North America. Chapter events include lectures, an email newsletter, garden visits, field trips, demonstrations, and plant sales. These friendly gatherings provide a wealth of information; offer a source for unusual plants, plus the opportunity to be inspired by other gardeners in your region.

Chair: Estelle James

Secretary: Rosemary Monahan

Treasurer: Ernie Flippo

Newsletter: Vivien Bouffard