



The Trillium

Piedmont Chapter
North American Rock Garden Society
Chapel Hill, Durham, Raleigh, NC
<https://www.piedmontnargs.org>
www.facebook.com/piedmontNARGS

Confessions of a Plant Nerd

Joseph Tychonievich

I'm nuts about plants and I've pretty much always been that way. I asked for plants and seeds for my 5th birthday. My clearest memory of my first day of school was going to say goodbye to my marigold plant before I left. I also remember looking up at the marigold, which has left me with a strange attraction to absurdly tall marigolds to this day, though I've yet to find a variety that I can look up at as an adult. When my brothers got into playing Dungeons and Dragons, I wanted to play too, but I was more interested in my characters making farms and gardens than actually doing anything involving either dungeons or dragons. Since that early beginning, I've done a lot of different things in the plant world. I've worked in public gardens, in nurseries in the United States and Japan, studied plant breeding and genetics in graduate school, and have now stumbled into a free-lance garden writing career made up of writing books, articles, editing the *Rock Garden Quarterly*, and any other odd job I can cobble together.

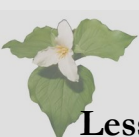
Plants have taken me a lot of interesting places and let me meet a lot of cool people, and I want to share some of the stories and gardening lessons I've learned along the way.

Lesson one: Love where you are

I grew up in northeast Ohio, on a rural property backing up to a large local park. I spent a lot of time running around those woods, which were filled with huge stands of *Trillium grandiflorum*, *Hepatica americana*, and *Phlox divaricata*. I remember thinking they were pretty, but I dismissed them as "common" and "boring" and I spent a lot of time wishing I lived somewhere like Colorado where they had "cool" wildflowers. My gardening efforts as a teenager were mostly focused on trying to grow plants that hated the climate and heavy clay soil. It wasn't until I moved away that I realized how truly special and beautiful those woodlands filled with wildflowers were. I would now kill for trillium displays half as impressive as those I took for granted. It took leaving to realize how special and unique where I



grew up was. Now that I live in coastal Virginia, I take time to appreciate how incredibly beautiful the crepe myrtles and evergreen magnolias are and focus on enjoying the plants that love the conditions I have rather than pining after everything that hates the heat and humidity. That isn't to say I've given up trying to go oddities and pushing the limits of my zone, but now I do that on the side while also fully embracing all the beautiful things I might be tempted to call "common."



Lesson two: You can find a space to garden.

When I moved out to college at Ohio State University, I wanted to garden but was living in a tiny apartment with my brother. I tried to compensate with houseplants and an enormous grow light (no doubt all our neighbors thought I was using it to grow something illegal), but it wasn't the same. I mentioned this to a gardening friend who lived in New Jersey, they mentioned it to a friend of theirs in West Virginia, they in turn had a friend who lived in the same city as I did who knew someone who had space in her yard where her late husband had grown a vegetable garden. And just like that, I had a garden!

Next I went to graduate school, dropped out and took a job at a small nursery, then married someone in graduate school, and moved with him for his academic career. That has translated to me gardening in no fewer than eleven different spaces in three states over the past fifteen years, and only two of those were spaces that I actually owned. I've borrowed space from friends of friends, leased vacant lots from the city (for the huge cost of one dollar a year), planted up huge numbers of containers on apartment patios. No matter where I've lived, I've always found somewhere – often multiple somewheres – to grow plants.



So no matter your stage in life or finances, you can find a spot. You can grow more than you think in an apartment or condo patio or balcony, and you have more friends than you realize (maybe even fellow members of your local NARGS chapter) who would be happy to let you do a little gardening on their property.

Lesson three: Do it now.

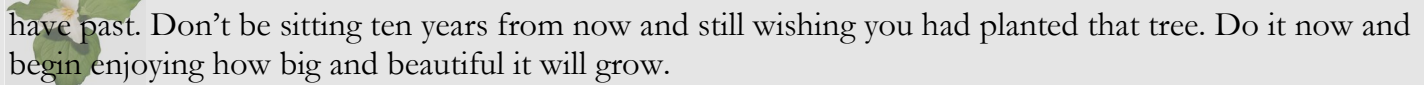
While I was in graduate school, I took a trip to upstate New York to visit the USDA apple germplasm center with a friend of mine. The USDA maintains sites like this around the country devoted to preserving as many varieties of possible of plants, mostly food crops, but some ornamentals as well. The site is covered with hundreds of apples trees, many of them rare, antique or unusual varieties, and included an enormous planting of trees grown from seed collected from the wild ancestors of modern apples in Kazakstan. They had large, delicious fruit, and grew into enormous towering trees. Thanks to some sweet talking by my friend, we got permission to collect as many apples as we wanted. I was mesmerized by the huge, Kazak apple trees, and took home dozens of fruits from my favorite trees.

When I got home, I removed the seeds from the fruits, and then sat looking at them. Was I really going to sow seeds of trees? It would take YEARS for them to get big and majestic like the ones I saw at the germplasm center. Why even bother? Besides, I was a graduate student, I would have to move soon.

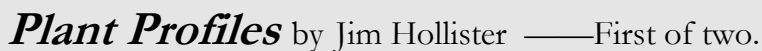
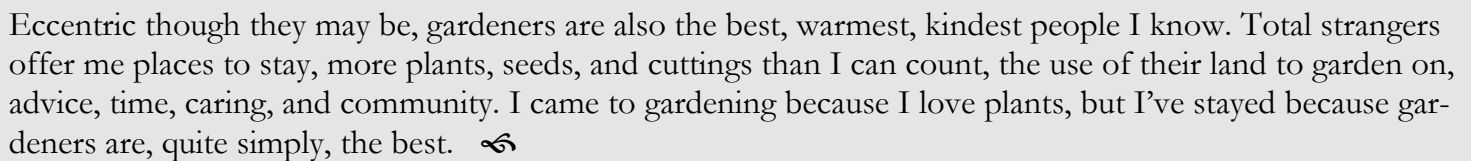


But I sowed them out and, yes, I did move shortly thereafter, several times in fact, but I dug up the trees and took them with me, and now I can sit in their shade and eat their apples. I'm so glad I planted those seeds, and I'm glad I didn't wait to do it.

Whatever garden project you are thinking about, now is the time to do it. Time speeds up. You are going to blink and ten years will



Gardeners are an odd lot. People who really, really care about gardening are some of the most eccentric, out there people I've ever met. I get to meet a lot of different gardeners for my work, and the experience is always interesting, to say the least. I took a trip to England to research my last book and ended up driving halfway across the country with someone's pet pheasant in the back of my rental car. If you visit one of the best plant propagators I know, you are likely to be greeted by one of the extremely friendly orphaned raccoon that she has raised since they were babies and live in her house. I've driven hours up to see a breathtaking collection of rare plants only to find all the flowers covered with plastic dishpans.



I walked around the garden this morning to find a couple of plants to write about. There are a number of new plants that I am very happy with in the new garden but I decided that I would prefer to share a couple that I have lived with for a while. The following are a couple that moved with me from my old garden to my new one last year and I am confident in their dependability and interest.

The first plant I would like to discuss really lights up dark corners of the shade garden. It looks like a yellow foxglove with a dark red throat, and goes by the common name of Woodland Foxglove, although it is not all that common. It's binomial moniker is *Titanotrichum oldhamii* and it is actually an African violet relative that is native to cliffs in China, and does amazingly well in shade here in the hot and humid South. I have a clump near a water feature tucked under the back deck, and another couple tucked in with some fatsia and illicium on the north side of the house. They started blooming in the second half of August. They tend to want to stretch for the light, but get a little burn if they find too much. Zones 6b to 10b. 🌀





Spring 2020: After Dixter, During Lockdown

By Cyndy Cromwell — Photos by Cyndy.

Last September, I attended a week long symposium at Great Dixter, a garden near Hastings, England, learning about how gardening is done there from Head Gardener Fergus Garrett. Dixter is an intensively managed space, and my time there was equally intense. Every day, from 8:30 in the morning until after dinner our group of a dozen mostly garden professionals spent almost every moment with Fergus, most of that time listening. We wandered the garden early in the morning before opening times, during the day and, best of all, in the quiet, mellow evenings. We ate all our meals together, attended lectures and demonstrations and took notes constantly. It was an exhilarating, electrifying experience, completely changing the way I think about gardening.

While there were practical lessons - on propagation and staking for example - mostly we learned about the thinking that goes on at Dixter. We learned always to consider extending interest by mixing woodyes, perennials, ephemerals, bulbs, self sowers and annuals, and to plan for companion plantings that could coexist in harmonious succession. The

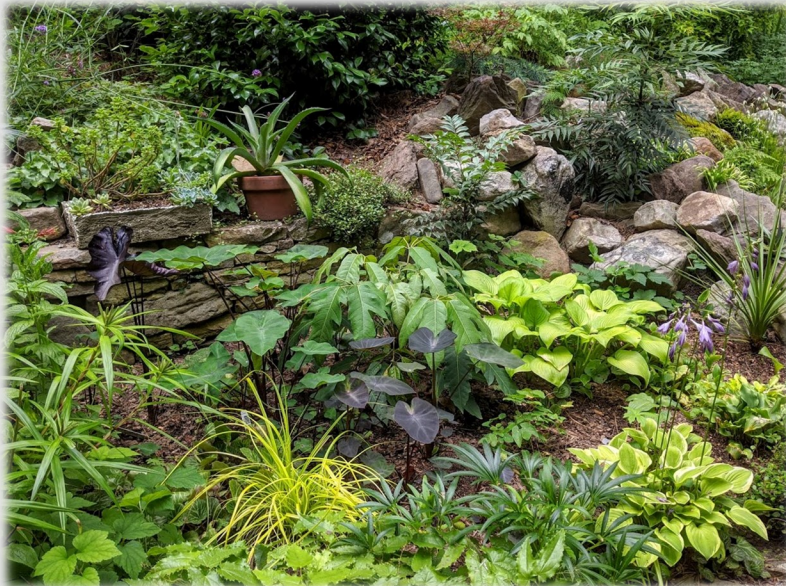


mind maps Fergus makes for each month are extremely complex, plotting out everything

that has to happen during a single month. April 2019 was a doozy! The result is a garden full of dynamism and charm. Maintenance is surprisingly minimal in some areas, to make time for the more intensively cultivated parts of the garden, some of which are changed over four or five times a year.



Confined to the home garden this spring, I finally had the time to focus on and begin applying some of what I learned in this great garden. Asking questions was a huge part of the course at Dixter. Surveying my garden this year in early spring, I could just hear Ferg saying, "That's a weak spot, can you do better there?" The honest answer was always, "Yes!" At Dixter we learned to question ourselves, and also every plant in the garden. How long will you be interesting and attractive? A couple of days, a few weeks, several months? How much maintenance do you require? Can you live happily with other plants that will take over when you grow dull, or even die back? And, most important of all, do I even like you? This spring I found many weak areas, and chose two to address.

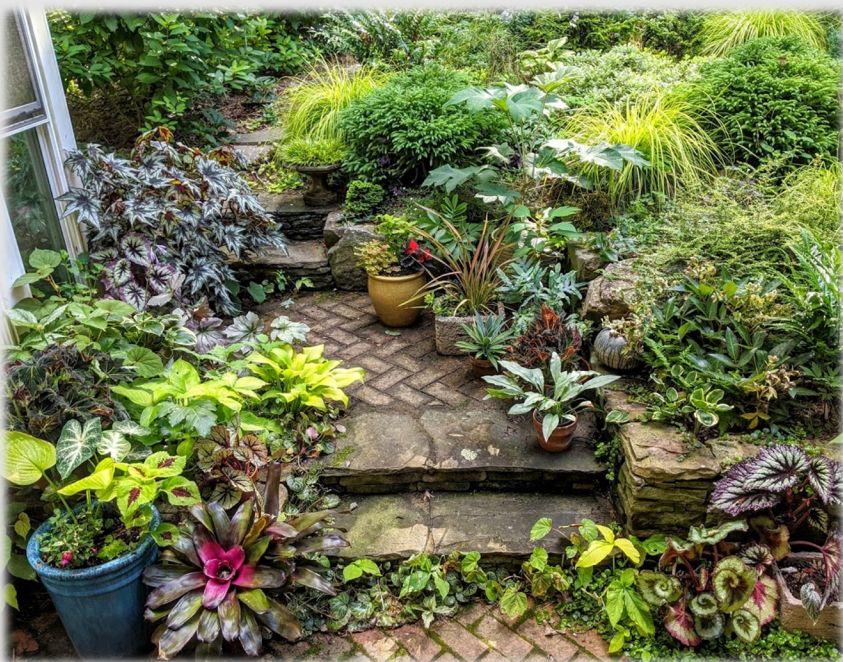


First, one of the raised beds behind my house was ripe for a rethink. It contains ephemerals like *Corydalis leucanthema* 'Silver Spectre' and *Ficaria verna* 'Brazen Hussy' (discovered by Christopher Lloyd in the woods at Great Dixter) as well as daffodils and primroses, all adding interest early to mid-spring.

Once summer arrived though, I knew the bed would be taken over by aggressive, poorly blooming anemones; removing most of these was a no brainer. Though the space is not very large, I decided to replace the weedy looking plants with bolder material, starting with a *Schefflera delavayi*. Next, I added a dozen dark leaved colocasias, the plan being to remove all but the best performers at the end of the growing season. I've left the spring plants, as well as a mashup of beloved plants, alstromerias, echinaceas, pulmonarias and hostas, which I'm not ready to remove, yet. Also left in place for structure are a silver *Mahonia confusa*, a hardy cordyline and a gold podocarpus cultivar. Finally, Bal-lerina tulips have been ordered to fill in the late spring gap before the colocasias emerge. If I'm not happy with this arrangement next year, it's all subject to a further review and redoing. Long live freedom and experimentation!



Next, I thought about pot displays. Potted plants have always been a part of the summer garden here, but things had gotten stale. I was dragging stuff out of the glassed-in porch and not really thinking about how it all worked together. If you've seen photos of the famous pot arrangements at Great Dixter, you know how splendid they are, the result of thought and care. I could certainly do better here at home, albeit on a smaller scale. While I was at Dixter in September, the big late summer pot display was being dismantled, to be replaced by a fall display assembled by interns. The process took a couple of days, with all of the numerous fall interest containers being considered and interrogated.



Do you bring height, texture, flowers, movement, color or interesting foliage? Do you play well with other plants? Do your colors clash (a good thing at Dixter), textures marry, do you make your neighbor look better? After the interns had finished, Fergus did some critiquing and tweaking, and the finished product was quite beautiful. Every year and in every season, this arrangement is different.

Back at home this spring, I hauled out my pots as usual, but with a more critical eye. I ordered some favorites I had grown in the past, like *Melianthus major* and a showy *Phormium 'Jubilee'*, and picked up some delicious neoregelias from Pat McCracken's Garden Treasures nursery in Wendell. The plants that didn't fit in well with the display, or were less

than lovely on emerging from the porch are tucked away around the corner from the main display, under the eaves. Now, as plants tire and fade, I have backup players to pull. I'm so much happier with my pots now that I've approached their display with more intentionality.

Focusing on the mental part of gardening - analyzing how and why a planting or arrangement works or doesn't, planning the propagation, planting and maintenance necessary for making an exciting, interesting garden, and always asking, "Can I do better?" - this is the great lesson I learned at Dixter. This spring, I've been grateful for the gift of time to spend wrestling with the endless challenge of doing better, here in my own garden. 🌿



Exploring and Botanizing Greece

By David White —Photos by David

The first rains of fall bring a “second spring” to Greece, when bulbs that have been baking in the hot summer sun come to life. If this sounds familiar, it may be because you read it in the spring issue of *The Trillium*. Unfortunately, Covid-19 forced cancellation of our chapter’s April meeting, but we are going to try again in September. For this issue of *The Trillium*, I’ll highlight some of the places we went during the tour and leave most of the discussion of bulbs and other flora we saw to our presentation at the meeting.

The tour started October 28, 2019, and included 21 NARGS members, with almost half being members of the Piedmont Chapter (Cyndy Cromwell, Nancy Doubrava, Amelia and Richard Lane, Elsa Liner, Gloria and Jim Jahnke, and David and Carolyn White). We actually had two tours, a 12-day botanical tour lead by Lefteris Dariotis followed by an optional 4-day cultural tour lead by Archaeology Professor Stavros Oikonomidis. A map of Greece showing the locations we visited in red on the right. We traveled from the woodlands of northern Greece to xeric landscape of the Peloponnese and visited major cultural sites in Athens, Delphi, and Mycenae. Among the daily highlights were the fabulous lunches featuring local Greek cuisine.



Cyclamen hederifolium

Acropolis and very near the Ancient Agora. From there, we spent three days exploring botanical highlights and marvelous

During the first four days, we traveled north through forests carpeted by *Cyclamen hederifolium*, searched for crocus, sternbergia, and colchicum, toured the ‘elevated’ monasteries of Meteora, and visited commercial *Crocus sativus* fields near Kozani. It was the part of Greece that most American rarely visit.

We then returned to Athens and for three days. Our hotel was to the northwest of the



***Crocus goulimyi* near Aeropoli in the Peloponnese**



scenery around Athens, including Lefteris' two personal gardens, the Temple of Poseidon at Cape Sounion, and the art collection and gardens at the Vorres Museum.

We then headed south to the scenic coastlines and mountains of the Peloponnese, with its historic towns, ancient olive groves, an abundance of crocus and colchicum species, and numerous other small bulbs. We traveled through the Gates of Hades, saw olives harvested to make oil (yes, there is a difference in the olives that we eat versus those used for oil), watched the sun set over the Ionian Sea, and enjoyed eating in towns that you read about in school (e.g., Sparta).

Following the botanical tour, most of the group stayed over for four additional days to visit historic sites and museums in Athens, in the northern Peloponnese, and in and near Delphi. If you have a chance to visit Athens, be sure to visit the fabulous Archaeological Museum. And if you have an extra day, go to Delphi (it was a much larger community than I realized) and to the reasonably nearby Monastery of Hosios Loukas.

My presentation will include photo highlights of these places – and others – and of some of the lesser bulbs that are not in Cyndy's and Nancy's talks. ✨



Narcissus serotionus

Plant Profiles continued ...

Sinningia tubiflora by Jim Hollsiter

The second plant that I want to share is a sun lover that was never too impressive in my former more shady venue, but has done magnificently with ample sun in the new garden. It has striking 4 inch long tubular fragrant white flowers and is spreading out to make an impressive presence. This one is *Sinningia tubiflora* or Tube-Flowered Hardy White Gloxinia. It is a native of Argentina and is hardy in zones 7b to 10b. It spreads by large underground tubers. I admit that one of the reasons I picked this plant up was that the little 4-inch-plastic container that it was being sold in was just busting at the seams with little "potatoes". I've spread them out and they are doing great. Keep them dryish in the winter. ✨



Now Showing – Greece in Autumn

By Nancy Doubrava

I still dream of Greece. In fall, the days turn from hot and dry to rainy and cool, and most of the tourists quickly flee. The autumn-flowering crocus, colchicum, and cyclamen species now take center stage, but they are not alone. Greece's natural flora is rich with 6,500 species and subspecies, and nearly 1 in 5 of these are endemics. For twelve days in fall of 2019, Eleftherios Dariotis, led our group from the North American Rock Garden Society to the nooks and crannies of Greece, sharing with us amazing Mediterranean plants, places, and people.

On the first day, our vans left the hustle and bustle of Athens and seemed to be magically transported three hours north, to a peaceful evergreen Mediterranean forest of Greek fir (*Abies cephalonica*). We arrived at the base of Mount Parnassus at elevation near 4,000 feet in the Pindus Mountain range. It was cool, as we walked quietly through the conifers. Every now and then, golden foliage from European beech trees (*Fagus sylvatica*) towered overhead. Before long, we came upon a grassy meadow with pink flowers of *Colchicum parnassicum* under our feet. We continued searching, this time for the Greek peony (*Paeonia parnassica*). We found it, but sadly a dry season left only parched plants for us to admire.



Greek fir (*Abies cephalonica*) an evergreen conifer, is endemic to the mountains of Greece, and often found growing with European beech (*Fagus sylvatica*).

Every now and then, golden foliage from European beech trees (*Fagus sylvatica*) towered overhead. Before long, we came upon a



Colchicum parnassicum is endemic to Greece and found in the mountains of Parnassus, and is closely related to the familiar Autumn crocus (*Colchicum autumnale*).

grassy meadow with pink flowers of *Colchicum parnassicum* under our feet. We continued searching, this time for the Greek peony (*Paeonia parnassica*). We found it, but sadly a dry season left only parched plants for us to admire.

Leaving the forest, our vans passed men with their mules and timber waiting along the roadsides. It was a relief to learn that logging is selective here. That is, instead of clear-cutting, trees are individually chosen and harvested. Mules carefully drag the logs, one at a time, from the forest to the roadside to wait for pickup. The forests of Greece only comprise only about 25% of its total area, but this is a pretty good amount for any European country.

The first day of our journey was now nearly over. There will be more stories to tell and plants to learn about during our presentation at the NARGS Piedmont chapter meeting on September 26th. Until then, here are a few more Greek plants from our trip. ❧



Photo by Gloria Jahnke

Olives are harvested by dragging rakes over the branches to dislodge olives. The olives fall into nets under the trees and there is a smell of olive oil in the air.



Kermes oak (*Quercus coccifera*) is the host plant for the scale insect, *Kermes vermilio*, used to produce a rich red dye, as far back as ancient Greek and Roman times.



Smoke trees (*Cotinus coggygia*) turning shades of red and orange, along the road sides and shrubland areas.



Photo by David White

Virgin's bower (*Clematis cirrhosa*) is an evergreen, winter-flowering vine with large, creamy, bell-shaped flowers.



Autumn heather (*Erica manipuliflora*) is a common small shrub that grows in the open rocky and sandy areas of the shrubland ecoregion. Flowers late summer through autumn, producing a wonderful honey.

Upcoming Fall Bulb Sale

Amelia Lane

Our chapter is having our second “Bulb Bonanza” this October!! We have ordered 1600 bulbs from Van Engelen Flower Bulbs, enough for lots of you to try some unique and beautiful specimens in your garden.

There are five each of eight different bulbs per bag. 40 bulbs per bag!- for \$20!!

You may begin ordering October 1. The limit 2 bags per



Allium karataviense



*Allium siculum
bulgaricum*



Fritillaria meleagris 'Alba'



Ipheion uniflorum
'Rolf Fiedler'



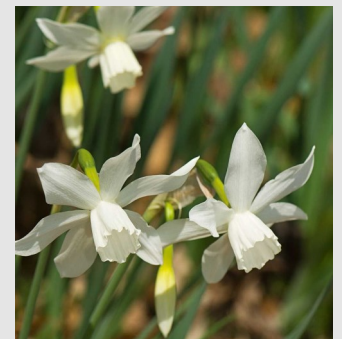
Anemone 'Giant Blue Poppy'



Iris reticulata 'Clairette'



Narcissus romieuxii
'Julia Jane'



Narcissus 'Thalia'

TO PURCHASE: Beginning October 1, email Amelia Lane (Amelia.Lane@gmail.com), indicating whether you want 1 or 2 bags.

Then send your check to: David White, 3 Ontario Ct., Durham, NC 27713. Check should be made to: Piedmont Chapter, NARGS.

When the bulbs arrive, they will be available for pick up at my house, 4904 Hermitage Dr., Raleigh. There will be other pick-up places—in Chapel Hill, Cary, and Durham.

Thanks to Elsa Liner, David White, and Cyndy Cromwell for researching and helping make our selections. So many choice bulbs!!



Message from the Chair

Cyndy Cromwell
piedmontnargs.org

I hope you have all been well and enjoying this summer in the garden! While it has turned steamy recently, the abundant rainfall has made many of our gardens their best ever. One of those is Jim and Anita Hollister's new garden in Apex, featuring stone work by Jeremy Schmidt - look for photos on the website gallery page. Would you consider sharing photos of your own wonderful gardens for the website? I've seen many of them this summer and they are looking fantastic!


While we wait for normality to return, some Piedmont Chapter activities will continue, albeit with modifications. Most importantly, Program Chair Bobby Ward has arranged a wonderful lineup of speakers for us to enjoy via Zoom, at least through the fall. I'm hoping we will be back to in-person meetings by next year. Our member and JCRA Programs and Education Coordinator, Chris Glenn will be facilitating the online meetings. Chris will be happy to help any members who have questions about joining our meetings online: email chris_glenn@ncsu.edu

You will receive an email from me about ten days before each meeting. It will cover topic, time and have a link to join the meeting. When you click on the link, Zoom will ask you to launch the meeting or download and run Zoom. When this is completed, you will then be allowed into the meeting by the host. When you have joined the meeting and Zoom is operating, scroll to the bottom of your screen to access the Tool Bar, which will allow you various functions, including chat.

Our first meeting is Saturday, September 26 at 10 am, when Nancy Doubrava, David White and I will share some highlights from our NARGS Fall Bulbs of Greece tour last November. Please check the website for a complete schedule of meetings and for updates on meeting protocols.

I'm excited there will be a repeat of last year's sellout Bulb Bonanza, organized by Amelia Lane! This year there will be five each of eight varieties in each sampler, forty bulbs for only \$20! Photos are posted on the Plant Sales page of the website. Look for Amelia's detailed information on ordering in this issue of *The Trillium*.

Thanks to generous donations from chapter member and Plant Delights proprietor Tony Avent, we were able to have an online plant sale for members last spring, which sold out very quickly. Enormous thanks are due to Plant Sale Chair Jim Hollister and to everyone who participated! I sincerely hope we'll be back at JCRA's Raulston Blooms in 2021 and offering some of the choice plants our members are able to share from their own gardens.

Finally, if you are not already a member of our program co-sponsor, the JC Raulston Arboretum, please consider joining. If you are a member and feel able, please consider an additional donation. Staff have been working hard to continue various educational offerings, plant sales, and online experiences during a very difficult time. There will even be a safe version of the annual October plant giveaway for members this year - don't hesitate, deadline for the giveaway signup is September 15! 

Cyndy Cromwell
Chair, Piedmont Chapter
piedmontnargs.org



NARGS Piedmont Chapter Meeting
Zoom

10 am Program Begins

September 26, 2020

**Nancy Doubrava, Cyndy Cromwell and
David White**
Raleigh, NC

“Fall Bulbs from a NARGS Greece Tour”

Piedmont NARGS Speakers
Fall 2020/Spring 2021

October 24, 2020

Joseph Tychonievich,
Williamsburg, Va.

“Confessions of a Plant Nerd”

November 21, 2020

Janice Swab
Raleigh, N.C.

**“Sailing from Canada to Greenland:
Arctic Warming in the Northwest Passage”**

January 16, 2021

Dick Tyler
Clarksville, Va.

“Hellebores: Homeland to the Present”

February 13, 2021

Brandon Huber and Jason Lattier
NCSU and High Point University

“The Aroid Collection of Alan Galloway”

March 20, 2021

John Dole
Former head of the Dept. of Horticulture at NCSU
Associate Dean and Director of Academic Programs
for the College of Ag and Life Sciences at NCSU

**“A Floral Journey:
Discovering the Magic of Flowers”**

April 17, 2021

Jeremy Schmidt and Meghan Fidler
Raleigh, N.C.

“The Bristol Briar: From Space to Place”
[the development of their garden south of Raleigh]

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