

# The Trillium

VOLUME 16, ISSUE 2  
MARCH - APRIL  
2006

Piedmont Chapter  
North American Rock Garden Society  
Chapel Hill, Durham, Raleigh, NC

## Hellebores in Our Garden

Come January, the magic word in garden circles is “hellebores”. Year after year, late winter issues of gardening magazines are filled with alluring photos of everyone’s favorite winter flower.

It was those photos in English books in the early 90’s that began our search for colorful hellebores, as the only hybrids we knew at the time were the muddy colored greening forms of local gardens. We started with seed bought from Will McLewin, proudly advertised in the Hardy Plant Society of Great Britain Journal as “the best in the world.” We also bought seed from Gisela Schmiemann from Cologne, Germany.



Double #0776

We bought seed of any species offered, all from overseas. It is hard to imagine now how unknown, to us on the West Coast at least, were species hellebores such as *Helleborus torquatus*, *H. atrorubens* and *H. lividus*. Poor forms of *H. foetidus*, *H. x sternii* and *H. niger* existed, none of them that would make your head turn even once.

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## Pushing the Limits

Prior to moving from the UK, I loved the challenge of growing ‘choice’ and ‘difficult’ plants, particularly high alpine cushion plants such as members of the genera *Dionysia* and *Androsace*, and also Asiatic *Primula* and *Saxifraga*. Given the climatic conditions of the SE of England, there was little option but to grow these plants in pots. This made it possible to exert some control over the conditions, but not the unpredictability of the English winter (which could arrive in October, January or July, or all three), and the relative lack of ‘good’ light and summer heat. However, temperature extremes were moderate and generally most problems were not difficult to work around.

In September 1995 we moved to SE Pennsylvania and it immediately became clear that the days of growing high alpine cushions were over, notwithstanding the addition of an air-conditioned greenhouse. After 10 years babysitting thousands of potted plants which needed constant attention this was a massive relief and I determined to make a ‘proper’ garden of our nearly 2 acres of sunny hillside and deciduous woodland. Having overcome the biggest challenge (the fact that I now apparently gardened in a ‘yard’) I realized that it was home to a wide variety of microhabitats that presented an incredible range of opportunities. Best of all, I was blessed with that holy grail sought by all gardeners – per-

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## SPEAKER LINEUP

March 18, 2006

**Ernie O’Byrne**

Eugene, Oregon

“Hellebores in Our Garden”

April 16, 2006 (Easter Weekend)

**John Lonsdale**

Exton, Pennsylvania

“Pushing the limits:

Growing

Challenging Plants in the  
Open Garden”

May 6, 2006 (noon)

**Spring Picnic**

Garden of Suzanne Edney  
Apex, N.C.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Chapel Hill Garden Tour**  
Benefiting the NC Bot Garden

4/22/06 10am-4pm

4/23/06 12 noon—4pm

For ticket info:

Bot Garden: 919/962/0522

[www.chapelhillgardentour.org](http://www.chapelhillgardentour.org)

**Conservancy Open Garden**  
Days in Charlotte

Tour begins at Wing Haven

4/8/06 10am—4pm

4/9/06 1pm—5pm

6 private gardens &

3 public gardens open

Info: Contact Lindie Wilson  
704/374/1650

Wing Haven 704/331/0664

[www.gardenconservancy.org](http://www.gardenconservancy.org)



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How all that has changed in 15 years! Once I learned how to apply a paintbrush to the buds of hellebores and do the work of the bees (as long as I get there first) there was no stopping. We bought seed from Ashwood Nursery, and later plants of improved varieties and species. The 90's were years of learning. Eventually, plants that were prized possessions and regarded as the *non plus ultra* were discarded for better and better forms and colors. It is very hard and very important to be ruthless in selecting plants. Dumping mediocre hellebores on a compost pile is best accomplished by covering them quickly with a pile of other rubbish—old companions guiltily discarded.



Breeding Plant # 221a

Now, what are our favorites among the living in 2005? Hellebore hybrids grow thick and lush in our climate, but winter can bring botrytis and blackspot with moisture laden air. Some plants cope better than others, so we select our favorites from those, but I am particularly drawn to bright, deep yellows with red centers or veins. Our springs tend to be cool, gray and damp and yellow is the sunny antidote to the winter doldrums, visible and bright from a distance. Older plants can carry several hundred flowers, a giant bouquet of sunshine. (Ernie once counted 500 on one plant and quit before finishing the count!) If a slaty blue variety is added it becomes quite a fashionable statement as those are the two colors that by far outrank any others in sales.

Many years of selecting and crossing with help from plants bought in England and Holland finally produced offspring close to my imaginings of perfection—brilliant whites, picoteed and veined in pink. The sepals had to be nicely rounded and overlapping and all the way



Double form # 0176

open and pure in color. No green wanted here! Except for pure green, of course.

Although some plant snobs declare doubles as much too artificial and blowsy, to me they can be wonderfully graceful, both the ruffly, petite Party Dress type, or the large-flowered more symmetrical stars of some of the bigger hybrids. When repeated crossings finally resulted in a lovely picoteed pink double four years ago, I was floating in bliss. I took endless photos lying in contorted positions on my back resulting in stiff-neck headaches, but good photos. Now the search is on for a perfect black double with purple margins.

We now keep stock plants in pots on tables in the greenhouse, so pollinating and photography have been easier since.

As for species current favorites *Helleborus*  $\times$  *nigervors*, the silvery toothed short Ashwood strain of *H. X sternii*, *H. X ericsmithii*, and the silver-leaved drama of *H. foetidus* 'Red Silver'.

I do love the deciduous species such as *H. torquatus* also, but all those are much more prone to



Breeding Plant # 148





Breeding Plant # 226

nasty attacks of fungi which rot their lovely blossoms. *H. X nigercors* 'Honeyhill Joy' in comparison is not fazed by fungi, frost, or rain. Shiny, toothed, evergreen leaves are topped by multitudes of creamy white blossoms, which, over a period of three months, turn green, still looking good in May. *Helleborus X sterna* and *H. lividus* are best basking in the sun or very light shade, their roots well anchored in very well drained soil; otherwise the winter fungi will attack them, too.

Here we surround our hellebores with all imaginable early bulbs short in stature, following each other in rapid succession as the hellebores bloom for a good three months. They may start with snowdrops (*Galanthus nivalis*) and winter aconites (*Eranthis hyemalis*) in February and still look good when anemones and trilliums are finished at the end of April and May blooming blue *Corydalis flexuosa* becomes their companion.

To prevent the sameness of *Helleborus X hybridus* foliage in summer overwhelming the shade gar-

den we plant many different ferns and arisaemas in between clumps of hellebores.

**Marietta and Ernie O'Bryne** 🌿

### Resources

*Hellebores: A Comprehensive Guide* by C. Coleston Burrell and Judith Knott Tyler

*The Gardener's Guide to Growing Hellebores* by Graham Rice and Elizabeth Strangman

*Hellebores* by Brian Mathew (out of print and very expensive used)

*The Hellebore Queen* by Helen Ballard, edited by Gisela Schmiemann and Josh Westrich (with luscious photos by Josh Westrich)



Single #0912



Breeding Plant # 169



Single # 152



(Continued from page 1)

fect drainage – and also the benefits of abundant sunshine and four discrete seasons.

Thus armed, I set forth to create a garden that allowed my interest in bulbs to develop and expand to include a wide variety of woodlanders, trees, shrubs and other plants suited to the conditions. Fully expecting to kill large numbers of plants while trying to establish them in the garden, a hoop-house (which soon transitioned to two greenhouses) was built to give some protection to the large number of seedlings needed to help find plants as suited as possible to the conditions. The value of growing large numbers of plants from seed cannot be overemphasized, to allow ‘hardy’ individuals to be selected, but also to maintain as wide a variety of different forms as possible, to maximize the chances of naturalization.

This talk will meander through the trials and tribulations (and failures and glorious successes) of 10 years of making our new garden and ‘pushing the limits’ to introduce and establish many fabulous plants not traditionally found in N. American gardens, and to grow other N. American plants that are not native to the northeast. In some cases the limits pushed back too hard, but the successes have greatly outnumbered the failures. Much ado is made of winter ‘hardiness’ but that has proved to be rather less of a problem than summer heat and humidity. Strategies will be discussed to allow the gardener to grow a variety of choice bulbs and plants in a natural garden setting with minimal protection. Bulbs, corms and rhizomes will feature strongly, also cacti and succulents, woodlanders, daphnes and orchids –something for everyone!

John T Lonsdale 

## Piedmont Chapter's 20th Anniversary Celebration

The Piedmont Chapter of NARGS celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary on January 21, 2006 at the RTP Hilton with 58 people in attendance. In addition to the opportunity to socialize and to hear an interesting talk, the celebration was an opportunity to acknowledge some of the people whose fervor for gardening and willingness to donate their time and skills have made our chapter possible.

After drinks and a Tuscan Bistro buffet, Chapter President Bobby Ward welcomed those of us present with a beguiling account of the history of the national society and our local chapter. Bobby then recognized the three former chapter chairs who were present: Norman Beal, Bobby Wilder, and Marian Stephenson.

Prior to the evening's featured talk, Bobby Ward presented the Piedmont Chapter Service and Recognition Award to Tony Avent in recognition of the many ways in which Tony has extended himself to make our chapter successful. Among these services have been his recruiting and hosting prominent speakers, donating plants to our auctions and sales, giving talks to our chapter, and promoting our organization in his nursery catalog and on his web site. Of course, no one can forget Tony as plant sale auctioneer, admiring and caressing a plant as he carries it down the aisle, eliciting higher bids with his enthusiasm.

That vast enthusiasm for all things horticultural has brought much national attention to Triangle gardening, and Tony's contributions have helped to make the Pied-



Tony needs no caption!







mont chapter both prominent and solvent. Although we know that we embarrassed him with a carved crystal plaque and a standing ovation, we had to let him know how much we appreciated all that he has done.

Todd Lasseigne then introduced our featured speaker, (who else?) Tony Avent, who talked about his

which both buildings and buses have been air-conditioned.

- One year before our chapter was founded, the National Society held its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary meeting in Asheville in 1984—with organizational leadership from Frank Cabot, Bill Hunt, Sandra Ladendorf, Ritchie Bell, Ken Moore, Larry Mellichamp, and Fred Case. J. C. Raulston gave a talk about “Developing Microclimates for Environment-Specific Plants” and, with the typically J.C. grand style, awed his audience with a panoramic slide show using three projectors and three screens.



most recent collecting expedition: “Dollars to Dong-Bahts: Plant Exploration in Northern Vietnam and Northern Thailand.”

Bobby Ward’s diligent research into the history of the national society and our chapter allowed him to provide us with engaging anecdotes about people we know or remember.

- Bobby reminded us that one of Chapel Hill’s plantsman patriarchs, William Lanier (Bill) Hunt, was present for the first meeting of the American Rock Garden Society in New York in March 1934, and that Bill and Elizabeth Lawrence became founding members of the Society. When the South Atlantic Region had its first meeting in Chapel Hill in July 1934, Bill Hunt set up displays of shady and sunny rock gardens in a church basement. Native N.C. plants (including green and gold, wild ginger, orchids, and phlox) were shown on beds of sphagnum and leaves that hid 100-pound blocks of ice; ice and plants had to be changed daily. Although the Piedmont Chapter has had to work hard to host the three national meetings that have been held here in the Triangle during the last twenty years, we have at least done so during the era in

- A year later, in the fall of 1985, Edith Boyer, Nancy Goodwin, and Sandra Ladendorf sent letters to other local gardeners and placed an announcement in the newspaper about an organizational meeting for our local chapter. Among the twenty-five people who showed up for that first meeting were Edith Eddleman, M.K. Ramm, Bob Wilder, Marian Stephenson, and Allen Bush. The chapter’s meetings grew from a few per year to the current seven yearly meetings with diverse programs and nationally prominent speaker who seem to relish the opportunity to come to North Carolina.

Thanks to all who made the twentieth anniversary celebration a success and to the “thin green line” of intrepid gardeners who have given their time and energy to make it possible for the rest of us to learn more about plants. Here’s to the next twenty!

Carolyn Williams 🌸





## Sharpening Your Shears

A surprisingly large number of even good gardeners use shears that are dull – something which is bad for plants and which can damage the shears. The following are some practices which I have found useful.

### Materials

Numerous materials are available. (For convenience, I'll refer to all of them as "stones".) Used properly, all of them are capable of doing the job, so I will only touch on them briefly. Of course, the originals were natural stones, such as the "Arkansas" stones. These are still widely used, although often replaced by similar-looking, but man-made, products composed of silicon carbide or aluminum oxide.

Two alternatives have found increasing favor in recent years. **Diamond stones**, in which very small synthetic diamonds are embedded in a resin matrix and topped with a steel grill, provide an even and aggressive sharpening action. They also offer the advantage of being exceptionally flat – and staying that way, unlike traditional materials that will hollow out with wear and need re-flattening. And there is no need for the oils used with traditional stones; just rinse them in water. I especially like the DMT brand products. They are available from specialty vendors, such as a woodworking shops or by mail order.

**Sandpaper**, mounted (two-sided carpet tape works well) on a flat block, also makes a remarkably good sharpening "stone". I like the 200 through 600 grit waterproof sandpapers. They are readily available and cost little.

All of these are available as bench stones (rectangles typically 2 inches wide and 4 to 8 inches long) or as small paddles (typically between one-half and one inch wide and 4 to 6 inches long).

### Some generally relevant factors

- Grits: Stones in multiple grades (or grits). Coarse grits are for tasks that require removal of greater amounts of metal, such as the initial work on quite dull edges, or for edges that do not need to be very sharp. One then shifts to a finer grit as the sharpening progresses.

- Bevel. One should try to maintain the same bevel angle on the edge being sharpened that the tool came with. While great precision is not important for garden shears

(unlike, e.g., certain woodworking tools) the angle has a significant effect on cutting characteristics. FYI, the Felcos have a 23 degree bevel.

- Pressure: Use a smooth, even stroke. Not much pressure is needed, especially with diamond stones. There's no hurry; make multiple light passes over the stone.

- Heat: Avoid motorized grinding wheels, attachments for power drills, etc. It's too easy to overheat the blade and impair the "temper" of the steel.

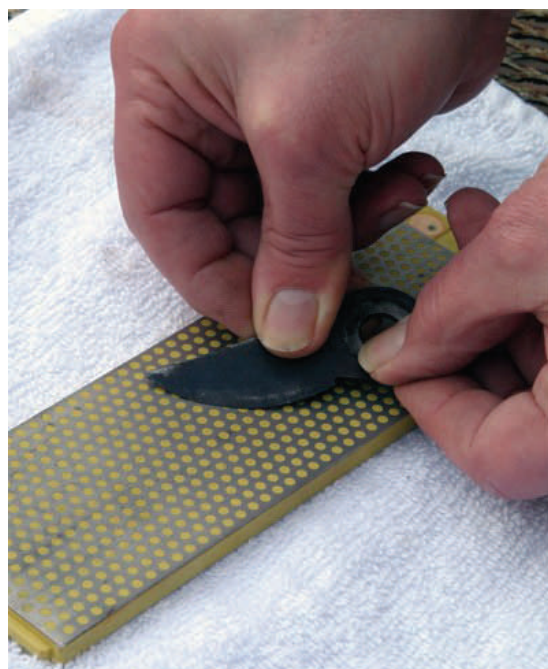
### So, let's sharpen something

The motion used sometimes confuses people – especially since lots of differing advice is given. While most of these variations can do an adequate job, the following is likely to provide a better result.

The basic principle is that one moves the blade as if trying to peel the stone. It may seem counter-intuitive to go against the 'grain' – rather like stroking a dog from back to front – but the goal is to remove slight amounts of metal *away from* the cutting edge.

This approach is applicable regardless of whether you are sharpening lawnmower blades, chisels, or shears, but the fact that shears have two edges that pivot together means that the part of the blade closer to the pivot is unlikely to provide sufficient room for access by a bench stone. We 'righteous'

people (you know who you are) take the shears apart. I start at the end of the bench stone nearer me and peel the stone. With a straight-edged blade, such that of most chisels, or anvil-style shears, a straight pass along the length of the stone will evenly sharpen the entire edge. Since the edge of



by-pass shears is crescent shaped, I make the same straight pass as with a straight edge, but slowly rotate the blade while doing so. This serves to provide proper bevel angle and direction to each segment of the edge over the course of the stroke. (See illustration.)

The reverse side of the cutting blade is mostly flat but with a very slight (on the Felcos approx. 5 degree ) back bevel. Although not essential, it might be useful to give couple of light passes over the stone so as to smooth it and remove any burring that might have developed at the edge during the sharpening of the other side.

Don't want to take the shears apart? (Your secret is safe with us.) You can still do a good job with a thin paddle. I start the stroke near the pivot and move the stone parallel to the cutting edge while sliding it "against the grain". Think of the paddle as a bow being pushed across the strings of a fiddle while also being moved up the neck.

That's about all you need to do. I suggest finishing with a couple of light strokes, parallel to the cutting edge, to remove any microscopic burr that might have been pushed up. And rubbing on a bit of light oil or WD-40 never hurt.

Get going; spring is just around the corner. **Kirt Cox** 🌿



## HOME FOR SALE

**14 acres, two lots, 3 BR non-toxic house, large garden & pond \$624,800**

Secluded site, cozy neighborhood, paved road, and garden with diverse ornamental trees and shrubs surrounded by deer fencing. House with cedar siding, custom built by John Hartley -- all electric allergen free home. West of Chapel Hill and 12 minutes to Carrboro & UNC-CH; 30 min to Duke; CH address, county taxes. Master bedroom, living area, and dining area have custom bookshelves, living area with cathedral ceiling and overlook to 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, 2 bedrooms upstairs, window seats in 2 bedrooms; oak or tile floors throughout; large garage with workbenches and storage shelves, washer/dryer, appliances, sauna convey. Living area, dining area, bedroom windows and spacious deck all overlook a 1.25 acre pond & ornamental garden; canoe, dock and chair convey.

**(Special note to gardeners:** the garden is large & diverse with many RGS seedling shrubs & Woodlander trees! (919)423 8024 or (919) 942 9728 for information.

## International Interim Rock Garden Plant Conference

[Plants of the Western Cordillera: Alpines in All Directions](#)

**Friday, July 21 - Wednesday, July 26 2006. Host: Wasatch Chapter**

Join NARGS at the International Interim Rock Garden Plant Conference. This conference will include lectures and field trips, in **Utah, Nevada and Wyoming**. Take a unique vacation. Here's a great opportunity to learn about the US western alpine flora through lectures AND extended field trips. This International Conference is sponsored by NARGS & hosted by the Wasatch Chapter.

The Conference will be divided into two parts: At the Snowbird Ski and Summer Resort, enjoy slide presentations from the Friday evening until Sunday morning, to give you a good grounding in the geology and flora of the western mountains.

**Loraine Yeatts:** *Western Alpines: Life on the Tundra*

**Noel Holmgren:** *Penstemon*

**Sean Hogan:** *Levisia and other succulents*

**Richard Hildreth:** *Snowy Range*

**Stuart Winchester:** *Ruby Mountains*

**William Parry:** *The Geology of the Western Cordilleras*

**James Reveal:** *Eriogonum*

**Elizabeth Neese:** *Southern Utah*

**William Gray:** *Wasatch Mountains*

**Noel Holmgren:** *Teton Mountains*





***Hope, patience and work -  
these are the three graces  
of Spring. -***

*Ruth Shaw Ernst  
(The Naturalist's Garden)*

#### **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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Sept. Plant Sale Manager: Kirtley Cox  
Refreshments: Gwen and Maurice Farrier

#### **REMINDER**

We encourage you to bring goodies to share during the meetings this year. If your last name begins with the letters below, we hope you'll bring something to the appropriate monthly meeting. Thanks.

**March R—U**

**April V—Z**

**May—Picnic**

*The Trillium*, Newsletter of the Piedmont Chapter  
The North American Rock Garden Society  
1422 Lake Pine Drive, Cary, NC 27511

Place  
Stamp  
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**First Class Mail**

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#### **Piedmont Chapter Meeting**

**March 18, 2006, 10am**

**Ernie O'Bryne  
Eugene, Oregon**

#### **“Hellebores in the Garden”**



*Double 210-196b*



*Double 147*

**Ernie and Marietta O'Byrne own Northwest Garden Nursery in Eugene, Oregon. Their website can be found at [www.northwestgardennursery.com](http://www.northwestgardennursery.com).**