

ALASKA ROCK GARDEN SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

**VOL 29
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February, 2025

COMING EVENTS:

**Saturday, February 15, 2025,
ARGS Membership Meeting, at
1:00 PM via ZOOM**

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

**February Program, Saturday at 1:00
PM, Todd Boland. Alpines Along the
Beartooth Highway 2**

**Do You Recognize This Plant? Wel-
come New and Renewing Members 3**

**Our Talented Neighbors in British Co-
lumbia, by Kathy Swick 4,5,6**

**ARGS 2025 Calendar of Activities and
Meeting Dates 7**

Plant Profile by Florene Carney 8

**ARGS Positions of Responsibility, Join
NARGS and ARGS Web Address 9**

From the President, February 2025

Congratulations fellow Rock Gardeners at surviving the 100 days of January! About one third of my NARGS seed has already germinated, and the sight of those tiny green babies is sustaining me as the days get longer. 2025 is shaping up to be a fun year for our society. In February our friend Todd Boland will share with us the Flora of the Beartooth Mountains, some of which we already grow. Come March, I will give an overview of the enormous genus Saxifraga, how it is organized into sections, featuring some of the more desirable European species and cultivars. In April we will hear about the many Alaskan native Saxifrages from Forrest Baldwin. The month of May of course includes our regular plant sales, in Anchorage at the Alaska Botanical Garden and in the Valley at Snowfire Gardens on the Saturday of Memorial Day Weekend. We are also planning on more short hike field trips and weekend workshops this summer. Keep your eyes and ears open for those announcements as spring develops. Meanwhile, if you store Dahlia tubers, I recommend checking them. Mine had started sprouting and needed to be planted this week. Happy gardening!

Jaime Rodriguez

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**SATURDAY
FEB. 15, 2025**

1:00 pm

ARGS zoom program

**Alpines along
the Beartooth
Highway (MT/WY)**

by Todd Boland

There is perhaps no more stunning area for western Rocky Mountain alpines than along the scenic Beartooth Highway. NARGS has had several tours to this area in recent years, for good reason. It is truly one of the best places in North America for seeing a wide variety of alpine plants. This presentation will show us the plants along the spectacular Beartooth Highway, from wet seepages in the sub-alpine to 7000+ feet

Todd lives in St. John's, Newfoundland, where he is the chief horticulturist at the Memorial University of Newfoundland Botanical Garden. He is the current president of NARGS, the author of the NARGS "Plant of the Month" feature, and their administrator of the image gallery. In 2023, he became the tour manager for NARGS, is a regular contributor to The Rock Garden Quarterly, and has spoken to gardening groups in North America, the U.K., and New Zealand. He has authored six photographic field guides on the flora of Atlantic Canada, as well as three gardening books, *Favourite Perennials for Atlantic Canada*, *Shrubs and Vines for Atlantic Canada* and most recently *Gardening for Acidic Soils*, co-written with Jamie Ellison of Nova Scotia. **ARGS is VERY fortunate to host him as our February speaker.**





Do you recognize this plant?



A perennial with leathery, rounded leaves and umbels of nodding purple to violet flowers, 1.5cm in length in early spring.

Welcome New or Renewing Members:

Janice Berry
Debby Hinchey
Robert Staniland
Thais Thomas
Corinne Reintjes
Bonnie Friedman
Charles Utermohle
Zoe, Todd and Jack Bradley
Linda Flowers
Jaime Smith
Janice Troyer
Ginger Hudson



Membership for the Alaska Rock Garden Society is for the calendar year.
Renewal information can be obtained on the ARGS website at:

<https://www.akrockgardensociety.org/membership.html>

Annual memberships are just \$15 for individuals and \$20 for families. ARGS strongly encourages use of on-line renewals by eliminating surcharges for using your credit card.



Our Talented Neighbor in British Columbia

by Kathy Swick

When covid restrictions were in full swing, I joined some Canadian rock garden groups to satisfy my craving for information about alpine. I have kept my memberships going ever since because it has been so enriching, not to mention fun! One of the information sources I value very much is a shy fellow from Vancouver Island named Chad, who has the most amazing horticultural talents. He gave me permission to share his comments and pictures with ARGS, so here is a sampling.

In particular, Chad loves to grow bog plants, not an easy ambition to satisfy. He doesn't own his home, and cannot dig a big hole in the yard to make a bog. Instead he has found a most unique and successful method using containers, peat moss (some with live sphagnum), and tufa. Tufa!? Tufa, shown in the photo below, is a very limey rock, and bog plants prefer a very acid medium. How has he managed this amazing feat?





Each tufa rock is extremely porous with lots of pores for both air and moisture. They are amazingly efficient at wicking water upward. Chad builds a crevice style environment in the container and stuffs the cracks with peat moss. For some plants he mixes a growing media which is one-third to one-half sand with milled peat moss. For other plants he uses live sphagnum, more on that later. Then the container, if it has drainage holes, is set in a large pan with a few inches of water which wicks upward through the rock and peat. Chad says any bog plant he has tried to grow succeeds in this kind of environment.



When he is working with baby plants in smaller containers, he uses the same principles, but may use the baled peat like we can buy here from Lowe's, then tops it with live sphagnum.

Chad tries to reduce his use of commercial peat, because it is a finite resource. How? By growing his own! He even has a series of pictures to show



how, which I will share in the next newsletter. Here is one example of his “bog barrels.” As you can see, impossible-to-grow plants are thriving in this environment. When I



asked him about growing *Kalmia* from seed, he said they grow everywhere in his containers, so many that he can't repot, give away, or sell them all, so he just has to weed them out. Imagine!

Chad's method has promise for use in Alaska, but we will have to make adaptations that suit our climate. Containers with water and plants sitting above ground might have a high fatality rate here in winter. Containers could be buried with only a few inches sitting above ground level. Another solution might be to bury one of those plastic pond containers found at the hardware store. Or perhaps digging a hole and lining it with pond cloth might increase plant survival. Whatever the environment, setting in rock crevices, peat, sand, and live sphagnum would still be necessary. The *Primula* expert Pam Eveleigh, who created the incredibly informative website *Primula World*, also recommends growing moisture-loving *primula* this way. We have lots of those native to Alaska that are not otherwise easily growable, so this method has great promise. I look forward to exploring this medium, and invite you to do the same. More next month! In the meantime you can follow Chad on instagram [#amindlikecompost](#).



ARGS Calendar of Activities and Meeting Dates for 2025

***Society meetings are the third Saturday of the month and are held at 1:00 PM via ZOOM unless otherwise indicated. Dates for events and field trips are approximate and when available, additional information will be sent to members.**

Saturday, January 18— General Membership Meeting, Paul Spriggs — My Rock Garden: Gardening on the Dry Side of Victoria Island

Saturday, February 15 —General Membership Meeting, Todd Boland—Plants of the Beartooth Mountains

Saturday, March 15 – General Membership Meeting, Jaime Rodriguez—Overview of the Saxifrage Family Including European Treasures

Saturday, April 19 – General Membership Meeting, Forest Baldwin—A Complete Survey of Saxifrage Native to Alaska

May Activities

- Clean-up at ABG Rock Garden in Anchorage
- Clean-up at Palmer Visitor Center Rock Garden
- ARGS Plant Sale at Alaska Botanical Garden
- ARGS Valley Plant Sale at Snowfire Gardens

June, July, August Garden Visits, and Field Trips, Time and Locations TBD

Saturday, September 20 - General Membership Meeting, In Person - Plant Exchange and Social, Elks Hall, Eagle River

Saturday October 18 - General Membership Meeting

Saturday November 15 - Last General Membership Meeting of 2025

No General Membership Meetings are held in December



Plant Profile by Florene Carney



This photo is from my garden, growing right in front of the Lady Slippers.

Did you guess this plant? It's Soldanella alpina

The alpine snowbell or blue moonwort, is a member of the family Primulaceae, native to the Alps and Pyrenees.

(Wikipedia) It has been growing in my shade garden for many years. Spreading from being the size of my thumbnail when I got it from Washburn's Nursery (as a gift) it is now about 8" across with leaves the size of a quarter. Baldassare Mineo recommends cultivating it in part shade in humus-rich, gritty soil. Only gets about 3-6 inches tall.

Propagation: Seeds are reported to germinate after about five-six weeks of cold stratification in the fridge.

Edelweiss Perennials [<https://edelweissperennials.com>] sells plants and Jelitto [<https://www.jelitto.com>] and Ferri Seeds [<https://ferriseeds.com>] has seeds for sale.



POSITIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY

President: Jaime Rodriguez

Vice-President: Vacant

Secretary : Dorte Mobley

Treasurer: Madge Oswald

Past President: Florene Carney

Membership: Charles Utermohle

Programs: Kathy Swick

Newsletter Editor: Bonnie Friedman

Palmer Visitors Center Garden: Jaime Rodriguez

Librarian/ABG Rock Garden: Kathy Swick

Technology Upgrader: Charles Utermohle

Sunshine Committee: Dorte Mobley



**NORTH AMERICAN
ROCK GARDEN SOCIETY**

If you are not already a member, considering joining the North American Rock Garden Society (NARGS). You can enjoy the Rock Garden Quarterly, featured plants and books of the month, photo galleries, blogs of interest to rock gardeners, and information about upcoming events. Go to www.args.org/join and give yourself the gift of national membership.

**ENJOY OUR FACEBOOK PAGE,
WORKSHOP OR FIELD TRIP?**

Then Become an ARGS Member!

We have about six meetings per year, plus plant sales, field trips and workshops. Our meetings are generally on the third Saturday of the month, Fall, Winter, and Spring, and may be via ZOOM or a Hybrid format with an in person at the Elk's Club in Eagle River and ZOOM. To join, please send your name, address, phone number, e-mail address and a check payable to ARGS at 12001 Audubon Dr., Anchorage, AK 97516 or join on the web at <https://www.akrockgardensociety.org/membership.html>

Individual Membership \$15.00

Family Membership \$20.00

Canada Membership: \$20.00 US

Overseas Membership \$25.00 US

Membership is for the calendar year and includes all issues of the newsletter and Crevice Bulletins for that year. The ARGS Newsletter is published 4-6 times per year and our bulletin, CREVICE is published to announce special news or events. We invite your suggestions and contributions to the newsletter. Please contact Bonnie Friedman, email Bonnief@gci.net

Seeking your input: If there are any program topics or activities you would like to see in the next year, please contact Kathy Swick, our program coordinator.

WWW.AKROCKGARDENSOCIETY.ORG

Webmasters: Open

ARGS is on FACEBOOK at:

<https://www.facebook.com/alaskarockgardensociety/>