



# The Trillium

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

## The Road to Reynolda

By Jon Roethling

Hard to believe but it has been over 15 years since Adrienne and I left the Triangle and headed for the Triad. The fledgling Paul J. Ciener Botanical Garden in Kernersville called to Adrienne as a new challenge after 8 years as curator at Juniper Level Botanical Garden. As I was working from home, a location change for me was not difficult and the Triad's size was appealing. Being closer to my parents in Greensboro was also a bonus. While we do not miss the traffic, we do miss the plant scene though.



In December of 2008, the downturn in the economy hit me and I found myself as a Lab Manager in the Biology Department at UNC-G. While it was a good job and I had a great team I worked with, it was not public horticulture, which I missed dearly. Then, in summer of 2010, I went over to High Point University as they were looking for advice on their efforts to establish a campus wide Arboretum and Botanical Garden. After a visit or two, I was asked if I would be interested in helping develop those gardens and just like that in November of 2010 I was back in public horticulture.

I've got to admit, even growing up in nearby Greensboro, and playing soccer in nearby Jamestown I hadn't heard of High Point University (then High Point College). I am sure many of you have heard of HPU by now as it is a transformation unlike anything else. Even in the 8 years I was there we went from 120 acres when I arrived in November 2010 to nearly 500 when I departed 8 years later. That exponential growth spilled into the gardens as well. The gardens expanded from 18 gardens or themed areas to 28 when I left. I was able to draw on my experiences at the JC Raulston Arboretum as well as the experiences networking and visiting gardens all over the US.

Those eye-opening revelations I had working at Plant Delights/Juniper Level and the JCRA with respect to the amazing diversity out there that the typical gardener is barely aware of became a personal





mission of mine. At High Point I inherited an area called the azalea path that initially was a few Encore® azaleas and a few indica azaleas. When I left, I had amassed over 270 different taxa of *Rhododendron*, spread equally over evergreen and deciduous azaleas.

Similarly, when I became aware there was a women's alumni group named the Steel Magnolias, I saw an opportunity to grow a sizeable collection resulting in 183 different taxa of *Magnolia* on the grounds when I left. I also had the opportunity to work with some great vendors ranging from



Piedmont Carolina Nursery & Landscaping, LKC Engineering and Robert Hayter, as well as Pond Professors. This later group led the effort to build a massive three-tiered water feature that provided some great opportunities for planting.

Late summer 2017 I received a call from well-known landscape architect and former JCRA Board member Chip Callaway. He was calling to let me know that Preston Stockton, Reynolda Gardens' manager for 37 years would be retiring soon and would I have any interest in the job. Mind you, Adrienne and I had visited Reynolda once before and, truth be told, could tell it was a historic garden that was static. While intrigued, I was up front with Chip telling him that I wondered how someone like me, whose background came from places like the JCRA and Plant Delights would fit in a historic garden. I still remember Chip's response to this day. "Jon, Katharine Reynolds was a progressive woman. To freeze her garden in time is a disservice to who she was." "Chip", I responded, "You've got my attention."

Shortly after that phone call, Adrienne and I went back to Reynolda for a second look. I was struck by the number of people out walking the grounds, whether on the trails or strolling the formal gardens. It had a life to it that immediately had me hooked. After what was the longest application period and interview process imaginable, I was selected as the new Director of Reynolda Gardens of Wake Forest University and began on Dec 1, 2018.

My first year at Reynolda was primarily one of discovery as I am a firm believer in getting to know something before you jump in and say what needs changing. A few things jumped out, with the phrase deferred maintenance, becoming a recurring theme. The historic greenhouse, a Lord and



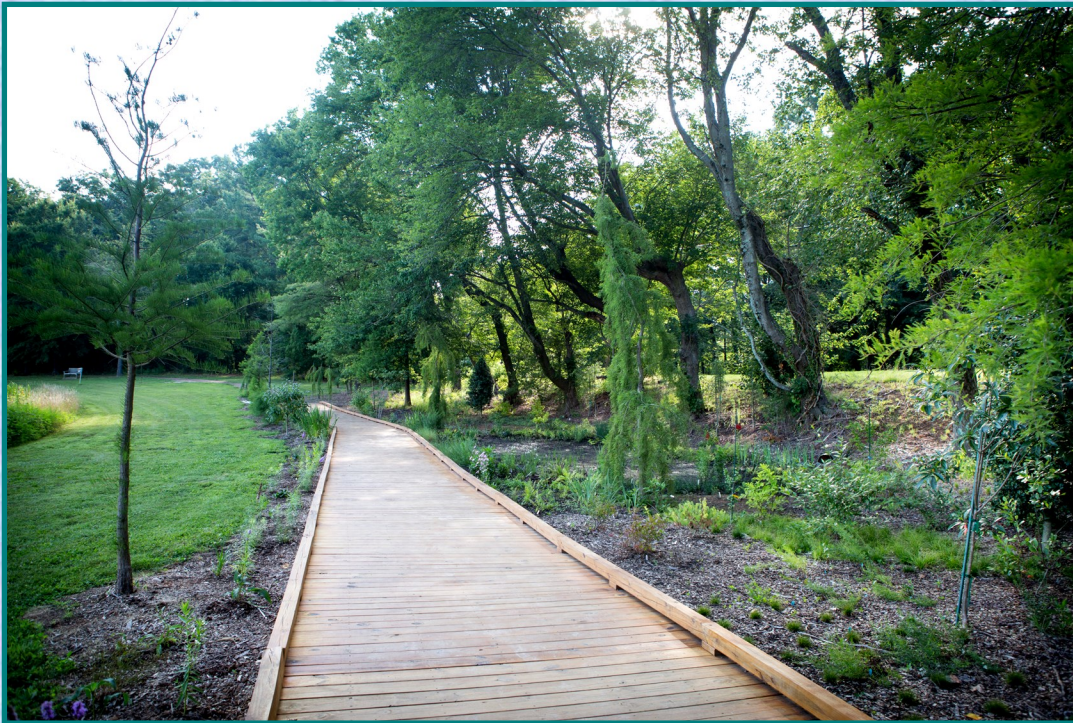


Burnham that was constructed in 1913, last saw renovation work around 2000. The four-acre Formal Gardens, designed by Landscape architect Thomas Sears in 1917 had undergone a massive restoration in the mid-1990's. Drain lines were completely clogged, with heavy rains leaving much of the lower gardens under a foot of water. The Greater Gardens, which refers to the other 130+ acres we maintain, were overrun with invasives. Trails throughout the areas were in conditions that could snap an ankle in a heartbeat.

November 2019 saw the first Garden Luncheon Fundraiser with a goal to raise money to cover addressing the horrible drainage in the gardens. Despite infrastructure being quite possibly the least sexy thing that you can raise money for, we had tremendous success. With my first year at Reynolda wrapping up things were looking great, and we were looking forward to 2020 with great optimism. Little did we know.

March 12, 2020, we made the announcement we were closing the greenhouse and cancelling all events

and tours for the foreseeable future. Two weeks later the state shut down. What followed was a year plus of constantly trying new ways to function and operate. What we noticed though was a steadily increasing number of people walking the grounds. Outdoors was the safe place to be. People either rediscovered Reynolda or discovered Reynolda for the first time. We saw foot traffic double if not triple. People learned the value of having places like Reynolda Gardens.



In summer of 2020, with the Museum closed for the foreseeable future, fundraising attention turned to where the people were, outdoors. We compiled a list of pressing needs and projects and began talking with donors. Then in November of 2020 work began. First with the 5 teahouses and 3 shelters getting repainted and new cedar shingle roofs. Shortly after that project started, we turned our attention to another big project, to bring back the 44 weeping cherries that surrounded the Formal Gardens. Each year since, we have tackled one project after another, renewing almost all the Formal Gardens. The Blue & Yellow Garden, Greenhouse Rose Garden, Pink & White Garden and main allée have all been completely redone. All of this has been done with more of a focus on what the intent of the historic design was rather than an exact reproduction of the 1917 plans. Issues like climate change, new pests and diseases, invasive issues, and improved cultivars and new plants make adherence to the 1917 plans a folly.





All this attention is not limited to the 4 acres of the Formal Gardens. Extensive work has been done to improve the trails that run through the estate. Sections overrun with invasives have been completely transformed resulting in a wide diversity of primarily native and selections of natives being re-

established along the trails.



Finally, this fall, the 1913 Lord and Burnham Greenhouse will shut down once more. This time however it will be for a much more positive reason, a complete restoration and renovation back to the 1913 historic architecture of the greenhouse. Come late spring 2024, visitors will enter a

completely refurbished greenhouse but with modernized controls.

Frankly, I am out of breath just writing all of this but I do hope you will be able to attend the November lecture yourself and see what we have been up to. Even better, make the drive west to Winston Salem and see all that Reynolda has to offer.

UPCOMING NARGS WINTER STUDY WEEKEND

# EUREKA!

## Exploring Troughs and Crevice Treasures Around the Bay

Hosted by Western Chapter of NARGS, Tilden Regional Parks Botanic Garden, and NARGS

**Save the date!**

March 8-11, 2024

Oakland, California

Visits to Tilden Regional Parks Botanic Garden, University of California-Berkeley Botanical Garden, Ruth Bancroft Garden, the Gardens at Lake Merritt, and outstanding private gardens on both sides of San Francisco Bay.

Special plant sales, outstanding speaker lineup, opportunities to sample unlimited Bay Area cuisine, and MORE!

Details and registration will be included in the winter issue of the NARGS *Rock Garden Quarterly*.





## Sally Walker: a Life Well Lived

by Tony Avent

Sally Walker was such an amazing person as well as a source of incredible, little-known plants that would have otherwise been unavailable for both horticulture and ex-situ conservation. As a fellow-plant explorer, I understand the incredible effort she put in, to locate, document, collect, and then distribute the seed.

For 42 years, Sally was one of the only sources of many southwestern U.S. native plants, introducing several great new plants to commerce, including *Agastache rupestris*, *Penstemon cardinalis*, and *Aquilegia desertorum*. Her relentless travel schedule took her throughout the southwestern U.S. and into the mountains of northern Mexico, first to find and study the plants and then return a second time to collect seed. I would always drop what I was doing when Sally’s catalog arrived, filled with her own plant sketches.



Photo by Bobby Ward

I treasure each of her visits to our garden, when we could easily get lost for hours in conversations about both her travels as well as the plants that she worked so hard to make available. The horticultural world has lost a stalwart with the passing of plantswoman, Sally Walker. A life well lived!

*Editor’s note: Sally Walker operated a seed business in Arizona called Southwestern Native Seeds. She made frequent trips to the Triangle area to visit her family, including grandkids, who lived in Apex. On these trips she visited many local public and private gardens and nurseries.]*

## Sally Walker: “I Brake for Wildflowers”

by Bobby J. Ward

NARGS member Sally Jane Walker, plantswoman extraordinaire, died in Sedona, Arizona, on March 17, 2023, one month shy of her 88th birthday. She was born in the United Kingdom and grew up on the south coast of England in Bournemouth. Her father was a British magistrate in Sudan and her early travels with her family included visits there and to Egypt. She did not want to go to secretarial school or train for other jobs that were traditional for females at the time, but set her sights on horticulture. Her mother found that Waterperry School of Horticulture, near Oxford, accepted females as students and enrolled Sally there.

While a student at Waterperry in 1956, she wrote to the renowned plant explorer Frank Kingdon-Ward, asking for advice on how to become a plant hunter. He replied that he did not want to discourage her, but that “you are of a great –[but] not insufferable—disadvantage. Your age (I presume





about 20) your sex, your lack of experience are against you; on the other hand you may have great assets such as determination, courage, and a will which will outweigh your disadvantages, and triumph in the end.” In his response, Kingdon-Ward recommended she serve in “a subordinate position as an assistant” on an expedition but not to be “too ambitious to begin with: a holiday in the Alps, the Tyrol, or the Pyrenees would give you a lot of preliminary experience.” He gave Sally the name of a friend in botany at the Natural History Museum in London to contact and ended with “I am sorry I can’t be more helpful, but I must steer a course between being discouraging and being optimistic and above all not to mislead you.”

After receiving the Certificate of Horticulture from Waterperry, Sally took a job at Jack Drake’s Alpine Nursery (Aviemore, Scotland) and then moved on in 1958 to work at Ingwersen Nursery (East Grinstead, England). In the spring 1994 issue of the NARGS *Bulletin*, Sally described her work at Ingwersen’s, which included trips to London on several spring Mondays. With Paul Ingwersen driving the van filled with the nursery’s alpine plants, they headed for the Royal Horticultural Society Hall to set up for its Tuesday-Wednesday horticultural shows. Part of her job was to bring up rocks from the basement, stored there from the previous show, to build a rock garden with both sunny and shady sides, filling it with the plants from the nursery. Potential customers could see how the plants were used in a rock garden and Sally was there to take orders. Everything was then dismantled on Wednesday nights and the rocks were returned to the basement.

At one show in April 1958, “a small elderly man . . . came to the exhibit. *Primula hyacinthina* was on exhibit and he asked me where it was native.” She recognized the questioner as Frank Kingdon-Ward, and she was sure he knew more about the plant than she did. She mentioned to him that he had written her two years earlier with advice about becoming a plant hunter. He invited Sally to afternoon tea in the basement of the Royal Horticultural Society Hall and she accepted. Afterwards, he told her he’d like to have tea with her again at the next show in two weeks. Unfortunately, that was not to be, because Kingdon-Ward suffered a stroke and died a week later at age 72.

Sally left Ingwersen’s in January 1959, immigrating to New Zealand to work at a rock garden with the parks department in Invercargill. During her time there, she wrote many articles for the New Zealand Alpine Garden Society.



Photo by Bobby Ward





In 1963, Sally went on a seed collecting trip with friends to several countries in South America, including Chile. Upon learning that the only way to get back to New Zealand by ship would be through the U.S., she arranged to have a bus trip through parts of the U.S., including Arizona. There, she met her future husband, Tim, working for the U.S. Forest Service at the Grand Canyon. He asked her to go camping with him and a budding relationship began. They were married in Las Vegas later that year.

Together they explored the western United States and Mexico, collecting seeds and snakes (the latter Tim's interest), taking their young daughter, Karen born in 1966, with them as they home-schooled her. They built an adobe home with no running water or electricity in Arizona's Chiricahua Mountains on 29 acres of land they purchased.

Sally and Tim founded a seed business in 1975 called Sally's Seedery (later renamed Southwestern Native Seeds), packaging seed for world-wide distribution from their kitchen table. In the first years of the business, she also worked four summers as a plant propagator at the famous Western Hills Nursery in California. During a typical year, Sally would leave home and live alone in her Volkswagen van (while Tim went out on his own snake-hunting and seed collecting in other areas), both bringing back seeds to clean, prepare a catalog, and send orders to customers.

She introduced many native plants to horticulture, primarily from the North American West, from Mexico to Canada. A sample seed catalog from 2010 lists many species of agastache, aquilegia, calochortus, lewisia, penstemon, primula, salvia, sisyrinchium, zephyranthes, and yucca—with some of Sally's illustrations on each page. Sally and Tim operated Southwestern Native Seeds until 2018, closing the business after 42 years.

I first met Sally in June 1999 at a NARGS annual meeting in Banff, Alberta. I approached her about being interviewed for a book I was writing on modern day plant hunters, those of the latter part of the twentieth century. She frowned and seemed puzzled why anyone would want to write about her. I told her that Panayoti Kelaidis said I should include her on a short list of plant hunters who have made important contributions to the art of rock gardening. I reminded her that she had received the NARGS Marcel Le Piniec Award in 1996 for enriching and extending the plant material available to rock gardens. She harrumphed and agreed. We talked briefly and decided to correspond further to complete the interview. I later learned she had a daughter, Karen, living near me in North Carolina. After Sally warmed to me, she'd write and say she was coming to visit her daughter and grandchildren and could we spend a day visiting local gardens and nurseries. During a two-decades plus friendship, mostly through her annual visits, we'd go to Tony Avent's Plant Delights Nursery, Nancy Goodwin's Montrose Gardens, the JC Raulston Arboretum, Sarah P. Duke Gardens, and the North Carolina Botanical Garden, as well as private gardens and other area nurseries. I have 30-some letters from her describing Arizona weather conditions (too much rain or too little rain), local wildfires, new plants she had discovered, family news (her and Tim's health issues; Karen's moving West to be near her; Tim's death in 2020), inquiries about her NARGS membership, and, later, the decline in her seed order business. Many times, she would slip a couple of packets of seeds into the correspondence, telling me she thought they would grow well for me.





Sally and Tim made extensive plant collections over the years and provided duplicate selected pressed specimens to several Southwest regional herbaria as well as the Missouri Botanical Garden, the New York Botanical Garden, and the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew. At least one of their collections in the 1970s from western Mexico in the Sierra Madre Occidental (El Palmito, Sinaloa) proved later, in 2018, to be a new species, *Chiococca grandiflora*, a shrub with showy white flowers in the Rubiaceae. But the bulk of their collections of 1,884 pressed plant specimens were donated to the Intermountain Herbarium at Utah State University in Logan, greatly expanding its southern collection. Director Emeritus Mary Barkworth says that the Herbarium “initiated a program working with the inmates of the Daggett County Jail. At first, we had them remount [Sally’s pressed] specimens on archival paper and then we had them [entered into a database] using a program one of them wrote.”

Those herbarium specimens are just one aspect of the legacy Sally left for the gardening world. She was quietly modest and seemed to go out of her way to avoid publicity but her car’s bumper sticker (“I Brake for Wildflowers”) was shorthand for her tireless efforts to find and introduce new plants through seed collection. And, although Frank Kingdon-Ward did not live to see Sally’s full flowering, he likely would have been impressed that she did, indeed, have the determination, courage, and will to succeed as a notable, highly respected plant hunter.

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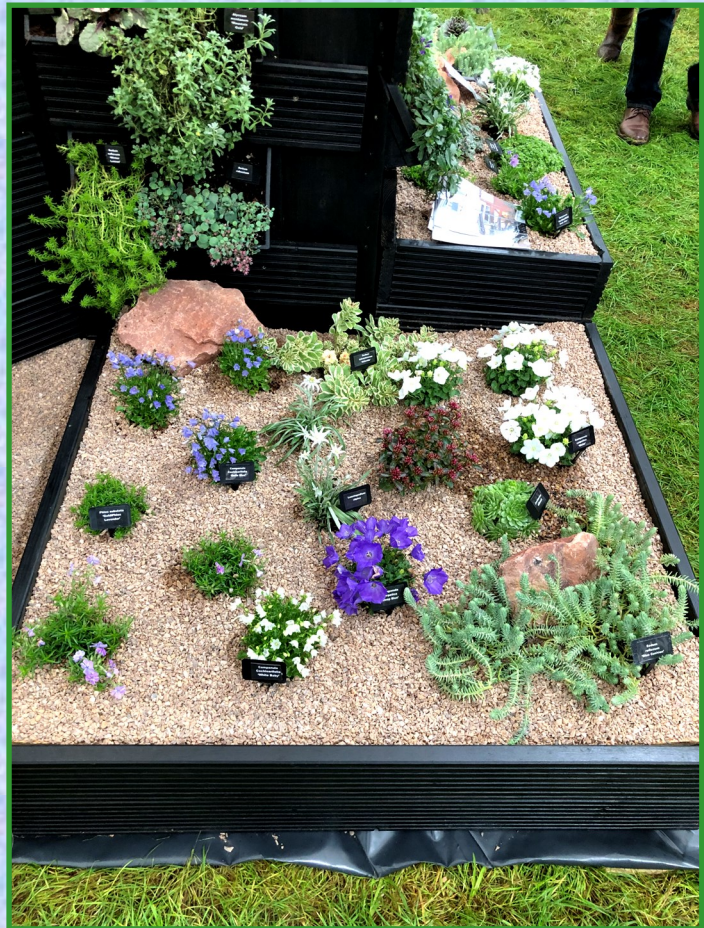
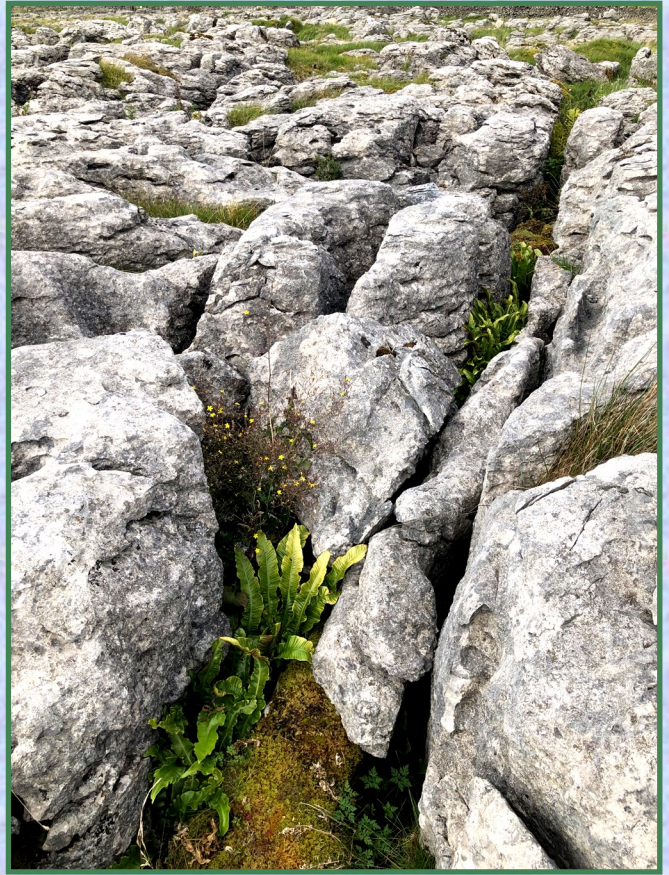
## A Glimpse from a Northern England Trip

Photos by Kyle Sonnenberg

Mary and Kyle Sonnenberg made a a trip recently to northern England. While there, they visited the rock garden at Sizergh Castle, which is about 100 years old; an area of limestone pavement in the Yorkshire Dales; and an alpine exhibit at the North of England Harrogate Flower Show. Here are some of the photos of the gardens they visited.











# Piedmont NARGS Speakers/Events Fall 2023/Winter 2024

**October 21, 2023**

**Sandy Horn:** “Conifers for Rock Gardens”

Plus 15-minute talk by **Tim Alderton**,  
“Hardy Gesneriads at the Raulston Arboretum”

**November 4, 2023**

**Jon Roethling:** “Reynolda Gardens:  
What Was Old Is New Again”

**January 20, 2024**

**Zachary Hill:** “Unusual Native Plants of  
the U. S. Southeast”

Plus 15-minute talk by **Tracy Thomasson:**  
“Critters in the Garden: the Good and the Bad”

**February 10, 2024**

**Tim Alderton:** “NARGS-Sponsored  
Argentine Patagonia Trip, December, 2023

Plus 15-minute talk by **Jim Jahnke** on  
“NARGS Extension Trip to Southern  
Patagonia, 2022”

**March 16, 2024**

**Paul Spriggs** (NARGS Traveling Speaker):  
“A Grand Tour: Experiencing the  
Rock Gardens of the Czech Republic”

**April 20, 2024**

**Scott Zona:** “Turning Rocks into a  
Rock Garden”

Plus 15-minute talk by **Cyndy Cromwell:**  
“NARGS Nova Scotia Annual Meeting,  
June 2023”

## Membership Form

### Piedmont Chapter—NARGS

Membership year is from July 1 to June 30

**Membership Options:** Individual: \$15  
Circle one. Household: \$20

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Second person name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Street** \_\_\_\_\_

**City:** \_\_\_\_\_ **State:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Zip:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

Make Check payable to: **Piedmont Chapter, NARGS**

Mail to : **Cyndy Cromwell, 5304 Deep Valley Run,  
Raleigh, 27606**

Visit <https://www.piedmontnargs.org/> to learn more about  
the Piedmont Chapter





## NARGS Piedmont Chapter Meeting

McSwain Center at the Raulston Arboretum

10:00 a.m.

October 21, 2023

Sandy Horn:

“Conifers for Rock Gardens”

Plus 15-minute talk by **Tim Alderton,**

“Hardy Gesneriads at the  
Raulston Arboretum”

### Goodies to Share

If your last name begins with a letter below, we encourage you to consider bringing a goodie to share with others



Sept A-C

Feb M-P

Oct D-F

March R-S

Nov G-H

April T-Y

Jan J-L

May Picnic

## Chair's Corner

by Sandy Harwood

“What, are you crazy?” If you had told me 10 years ago I would join a Rock Garden Society, that might have been my response.

Well, things change. Thanks to Cyndy Cromwell's invitation, I'm honored to be involved with the Piedmont Chapter which has such a rich heritage of programs, interesting members, travel adventures and support.

Please join us at our meetings this year as you are able. I'm looking forward to getting to know you and continuing to learn with you. Bring a friend or share a link. Remember you can share and binge watch past programs on our playlist on the JC Raulston YouTube channel.

(755) North American Rock Garden Society  
(Piedmont Chapter) Lectures - YouTube

Sandy

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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