

2026 NARGS Conference Schedule June 25-28, Calgary Alberta

Thursday, June 25, 2026

You are encouraged to arrive early for tours of [Reader Rock Garden](#) (National Historic Site) Thursday afternoon from 1 to 4 p.m. Please register for this tour on the Conference registration form.

The garden was started in 1913 by William Roland Reader, Superintendent of Calgary Parks from 1913 to 1942. You won't want to miss this hidden gem, home to approximately 1400 species. Take a step back in time and let [Friends of Reader Rock Garden Society](#), tour you around The City's crown jewel park.

- 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. Check in at the Grey Eagle Resort and Casino
- 11:30 p.m.–12:30 p.m. NARGS Chapters Chair meeting.
- 1:00 p.m.–4:00 p.m. Drive or take the shuttle to a guided tour of Reader Rock Garden. Guided tours will be provided by Friends of Reader Rock Garden Society (FoRRGS) volunteers.
- 4:30 p.m.–5:30 p.m. Happy Hour commencing in the banquet room of Grey Eagle. A place to mingle and network with plant lovers from far and wide. All activities are held in the same area of the hotel.
- 5:45 p.m.–7:00 p.m. Dinner in the banquet room of Grey Eagle.
- 7:15 p.m.–7:30 p.m. Todd Boland will give an update on the state of NARGS
- 7:30 p.m.–8:30 p.m. Todd Boland Presentation, “Wildflowers of Southern Alberta: Foothills to the Alpine”
- 8:30 p.m.–9:30 p.m. Jon Noad Presentation, “Geology on Your Doorstep”

Friday, June 26, 2026

You will have selected today's field trip and boxed lunch during conference registration.

Field Trip 1 Ptarmigan Cirque: Steep uphill hike to an alpine meadow.

Field Trip 2 Black Prince Cirque: Uphill hike, starts on an old logging road. Less elevation gain than Ptarmigan Cirque hike.

Field Trip 3 Many Springs & Garden Tours: Easy hike through a mixed evergreen and deciduous forest with an abundance of birds, wildflowers, and mountain views. Then a short ride to two CRAGS member's gardens in Canmore, followed by a stop at Botanical Gardens of Silver Springs (BGSS).

Field Trip 4 Garden Tours: Visit the acreages of two members, and a garden in Cochrane. A stop at Botanical Gardens of Silver Springs before heading back to Grey Eagle.

- 6:00 a.m.–8:00 a.m. Breakfast in the banquet room.
- 7:00 a.m.–9:00 a.m. Depart Grey Eagle by bus on the field trip selected for the day. Ptarmigan and Black Prince Cirque hikers will be provided boxed lunches from the Grey Eagle to enjoy in the field. Many Springs Trail and Garden Tour hikers will eat at one of the member's homes, lunch will be provided.
- 4:00 p.m.–5:00 p.m. Return to Grey Eagle from field trips.
- 4:00 p.m.–6:00 p.m. Plant Sale

- 5:00 p.m.–6:00 p.m. Cocktails served in the banquet room
- 6:00 p.m.–7:00 p.m. **On your own for dinner.** There are several restaurants at the Grey Eagle to choose from:
Blaze Bar & Grill
Buffet Restaurant – Prime Rib night
Little Chief – Blend of modern cuisine and traditional indigenous food.
- 7:30 p.m.–8:30 p.m. Jay Akerley Presentation, “Garden Resilience in a Land of Extremes”
- 8:30 p.m.–9:30 p.m. Vojtěch Holubec Keynote Presentation

Saturday June 27, 2026

You will have selected today’s field trip and boxed lunch during conference registration.

Field Trip 1 Ptarmigan Cirque: Steep uphill hike to an alpine meadow.

Field Trip 2 Black Prince Cirque: Uphill hike, starts on an old logging road. Less elevation gain than Ptarmigan Cirque hike.

Field Trip 3 Many Springs & Garden Tours: Easy hike through a mixed evergreen and deciduous forest with an abundance of birds, wildflowers, and mountain views. Then a short ride to two CRAGS member’s gardens in Canmore, followed by a stop at Botanical Gardens of Silver Springs (BGSS).

Field Trip 4 Garden Tours: Visit the acreages of two members, and a garden in Cochrane. A stop at Botanical Gardens of Silver Springs before heading back to Grey Eagle.

- 6:00 a.m.–8:00 a.m. Breakfast in the banquet rooms.
- 7:00 a.m.–9:00 a.m. Depart Grey Eagle by bus on the field trip selected for the day. Ptarmigan and Black Prince Cirque hikers will be provided boxed lunches from the Grey Eagle to enjoy in the field. Many Springs Trail and Garden Tour hikers will eat at one of the member’s homes, lunch will be provided.
- 4:00 p.m.–5:00 p.m. Return to Grey eagle from field trips.
- 4:00 p.m.–6:00 p.m. Plant Sales, sales end at 5:45 p.m.
- 5:00 p.m.–5:45 p.m. Cocktails served in the banquet room
- 5:45 p.m.–6:45 p.m. Dinner in the banquet room
- 6:45 p.m.–7:15 p.m. NARGS awards
- 7:15 p.m.–7:30 p.m. NARGS 2027 (North Carolina) Preview
- 7:30 p.m.–8:30 p.m. Stephanie Ferguson Presentation, “Higher and Drier”
- 8:30 p.m.–9:30 p.m. Mike Bone Presentation, “Collecting in Steppes: Journey Through Kazakhstan and Mongolia”

Sunday June 28, 2025 – Garden Tours

Join the excitement as CRAGS members have opened their gardens to showcase their gardens. (Check Instagram (@crag_yyc) as we will showcase the gardens in more detail)

- Meals today are on your own.
- Leave Grey Eagle at 9:30am, returning to Grey Eagle by 6 p.m. This will be on your own transportation or we will have volunteers drive to and from Grey Eagle. A donation of \$10.00 to the volunteer driver is recommended.
- Six CRAGS members within the city have graciously opened their gardens. These gardens will showcase a wide variety of alpines, ornamental plants and different styles.

Field Trip Descriptions

Field Trips Friday June 26, Saturday June 27

Friday and Saturday there are 4 options each day to choose from. There is limited space for each option so book early for your first choice. Shuttle buses and lunch will be provided both days and each option runs on both days.

Field Trip 1 Ptarmigan Cirque

Maximum 25

Moderate hike 3 to 4 hrs

Distance: 4.5 km/2.8 mi

Elevation Gain: 210 m/700 ft

The first part of the trail is steep with roots & loose gravel. Past the climb, you're in an alpine meadow with 360-degree views. Along the way you will pass a large avalanche slope, and a waterfall at the base of the bowl. Some of the plants you might see: Glacier Lilies (*Eythronium*), Paintbrush, (*Castilleja*) Arctic Lupin (*Lupinus arcticus*), Saxifrage sp., Mountain Avens (*Dryas octopetala*), *Cypripedium calceolus*, Alpine Larch and Engelmann spruce (*Picea engelmannii*).

Field Trip 2 Black Prince Cirque

Maximum 25

Moderate hike 3-4 hrs

Distance: 4.2 km/2.6 mi

Elevation Gain: 90 m/300 ft

Trail start follows an old logging road with an uphill climb toward Warspite Lake. The boulder field surrounding the lake is home to many alpine plants. *Linnaea borealis*, *Castilleja* sp., *Vaccinium scoparium*, many types of violets, *Primula conjugens* and Calypso Orchids (*Calypso bulbosa*).

Field Trip 3 Many Springs & Garden Tours

Maximum 25

Easy hike, around 1.5 hours

Distance: 1.3 km, 0.8 mi loop

Elevation gain: 46 m/151 feet

Easy hike through a mixed evergreen and deciduous forest with an abundance of birds, wildflowers, and mountain views. Some of the plants you might see: Wild rose, Indian Paintbrush, Lady Slipper Orchids, Yellow Dryad (*Dryas drummondii*) and Wolf Willow (*Eleagnus commutata*). Then a short ride to a garden in Canmore with over 25 troughs, filled with treasures of all kinds. The troughs are all built by the owner. On to another garden built in the spring of 2023 at a workshop put on by Paul Spriggs. Head back to Grey Eagle with a stop at Botanical Gardens of Silver Springs to check out the Crevice Garden CRAGS members built and maintain.

Field Trip 4 Garden Tours

The least strenuous yet very enjoyable outing; exploring some of the larger gardens in our club. On one acreage, a garden utilizing “urbanite” (broken pieces of concrete) for the path between crevice garden beds. On another, crevice gardens and dwarf conifers, with a woodland vibe along a created stream. In Cochrane, a garden with multiple troughs and beautiful peonies. Last stop is the Botanical Gardens of Silver Springs where you will be able to enjoy over fourteen different gardens and see the CRAGS demonstration Crevice Garden, all maintained by volunteers.

Acreage 1

Set within a four acre parcel of natural Poplar woodland and Prairie, the gardens occupy the disturbed perimeter of the house and access built over twenty years ago and provide a transition to the natural surroundings. Over a half dozen different crevice gardens take advantage of many exposures. An extensive wetland system flanking the house includes a tufa spring feeding a Koi pond, a one hundred and fifty foot stream system integrating differing bank environments and a series of underflow crevices and bogs, with a large Water Lilly pond as its source. Woodland beds lie on the slope to the pond, including a peat bed finally installed to support those plants that kept failing in the naturally calcareous conditions.

A large variety of conifers, including dwarf varieties, have been incorporated into the surroundings, and a large collection of miniatures have been planted into the gardens and troughs to test hardiness and demonstrate growth in this Zone 3 environment. The owner did his own grafting of dwarf and miniature material from local trees and has two Douglas Fir, one Lodgepole Pine, and three White Spruce selections found nowhere else.

In support of a propagation addiction, extensive sand beds house thousands of potted plants yet to make it into the gardens.

Acreage 2

This rock garden is a 50 by 6 m (164 x 19 feet) on a gentle slope facing northeast located on the south side of an asphalt driveway. There are two sections – one of sandstone and one of tufa. A 20 by 6 m (66 x 20 feet) crevice garden built of sandstone 4 to 9 years ago, and a creviced tufa terrace, home to saxifrages built in 2019. A small pond is part of the sandstone crevice garden.

The sandstone crevice rock garden is subdivided into five beds accessed by narrow paths of “urbanite”, slabs of broken sidewalk. The rock garden is populated with a several smallish and dwarf evergreens – junipers, spruces

and mugo pines. Many species of alpines bloom there starting with Hepaticas, early Primulas and Scillas in April. In summer, Androsaces, Drabas, Callianthemums, Columbines, Edraithus, Gentians, Hostas and many others. In fall, Colchicum and *Silene schafta* close the blooming season of the rock garden.

Cochrane Garden

The Alpine garden was started 26 years ago, with new beds being added. Same year the property owner joined CRAGS...

The garden has many rooms: tufa crevice bed, scree, crevice, woodland gardens, and three perennial gardens. There are 25 different troughs and pans.

Growing in the garden are many tree species, Monterey, Scotch, Limber and Lodgepole pines.

Botanical Gardens of Silver Springs (BGSS)

“The BGSS is open to the public year-round from dawn to dusk and is situated within a multi-use space that began as a Birthplace Forest covering several acres of land. Within this area there are over fourteen gardens each displaying unique features. These garden areas are accessible by connecting walking paths of mulch leading throughout the entire area. Along these pathways leading to the gardens are beautiful flowering shrubs, fruit trees and a variety of trees. The gardens demonstrate what can grow and thrive in Northwest Calgary.” (From the Silver Springs Community Association [website](#).)

Speakers

Thursday June 25th

Jon Noad – “Geology on Your Doorstep”

Jon Noad graduated in 1985 and started working as a mining geologist in South Africa. He returned to the UK to work in marine cable laying and completed a Masters in Sedimentology in Dinosaur Provincial Park. This led to a full time PhD, working in eastern Borneo, after which he joined Shell International working Middle East exploration and in several production roles. He moved to Shell Canada in Calgary in 2006, followed by senior geoscience roles at several major oil companies. Since 2017 he has run many field trips, core logging courses and has taught at two universities. He joined Stantec as a qualified Palaeontologist in 2022 and now undertakes site monitoring for new pipelines and construction projects.

Todd Boland – “Wildflowers of Southern Alberta: Foothills to the Alpine”

Todd lives in St. John’s, Newfoundland, where he works as the chief horticulturist at the Memorial University of Newfoundland Botanical Garden. He is the current president of NARGS, the first Canadian to hold the position. Since 2009, he has been the author of the NARGS website “Plant of the Month” feature and is the administrator of the on-line image gallery. Starting in 2023, he took over as the tour manager for NARGS. He is a regular contributor to The Rock Garden Quarterly and has spoken to gardening groups across North America as well as in the U.K. and New Zealand. He has authored six photographic field guides on the native and naturalized flora of Atlantic Canada. He has also authored three gardening books, Favourite Perennials for Atlantic Canada, Shrubs and Vines for Atlantic Canada and most recently Gardening for Acidic Soils, a book co-written with Jamie Ellison of Nova Scotia.

Friday June 26th

Jay Akerley – “Garden Resilience in a Land of Extremes”

Jay will explore the design, construction, and plant choices behind his rock garden projects in British Columbia’s interior—from the arid valley floor to the alpine ski slopes. In a region where extremes define the landscape, he’ll show how thoughtful strategies turned challenges into thriving gardens—and continue to expand his interests, keep rock gardening exciting, and inspire future plans. Learn about specialized growing mediums, microclimate techniques, and propagation techniques for native and non-native wildflowers. This talk is ideal for anyone interested in dryland and alpine plants, water-wise and fire-safe gardens, and wildlife-friendly gardens. It also offers inspiration for gardeners adapting to new realities—whether physical challenges, lifestyle changes, or smaller spaces.

Jay Akerley is a rock gardening enthusiast with unique experience gardening at sea level in Vancouver, at subalpine elevations in Canada’s second largest ski resort, on British Columbia’s high and dry Thompson Plateau and in its arid, desert-like interior. His degree in Geography from Simon Fraser University and training at the Pacific Horticulture College in Victoria nurtured an interest in the world’s montane, high steppe, and desert plants and landscapes. His gardens have featured the widest possible variety of rock garden plants in British Columbia’s wettest and driest environments, from USDA Zone 3 to Zone 8.

Vojtěch Holubec – Keynote Speaker – Topic TBA

Vojtěch is a researcher in the Plant Gene Bank and past National Coordinator for Plant Genetic Resources. He has been interested in alpinism and botany since he was 11 years old. He loves mountains and travels extensively to photograph plants and wild habitats around the world. He got obsessed with crevice rock garden construction. He constructed main rock gardens in the show garden of Rock Garden Club Prague (RGCP) together with Ota Vlasak and Zdenek Zvolanek. They received a Gold Medal for rock garden construction from the International Horticultural Exhibition, IGA Erfurt, Germany. He headed shows of the RGCP and is the current President of RGCP. He runs a seed nursery and has published 3 books on rock garden construction with Ota Vlasak. He co-wrote “The Caucasus Flowers” with Pavel Křivka, and “The Tian Shan And Its Flowers” with David Horák. He was awarded the Lyttel Trophy by the AGS in 2010.

Saturday, June 27th

Stephanie Ferguson – “Higher and Drier”

Stephanie Ferguson is an artist who gardens in Calgary, Alberta, assisted by her husband, David, an architect who loves to dig and move large stones. Together, they have sculpted their inner-city lot into a rocky home for alpinism and steppe-desert plants. With a particular interest in growing plants from seed, they have transformed a barren hillside into an environment unique in its diversity of plants.

Mike Bone – “Collecting in Steppes: Journey Through Kazakhstan and Mongolia”

Mike Bone has worked at the Denver Botanic Gardens for more than 20 years. Mike is the Curator of Steppe Collections and an associate director of horticulture. He has been involved in the Plant Select program since the late 90’s and has been a part of bringing many new and exciting plants to the marketplace. Much of Mike’s work revolves around finding, selecting, and breeding plants. As one of the gardens plant explorers Mike is looking at the future of plants in our urban environments. Mike has traveled to each of the 4 great steppe regions of the world looking at our sister climates and how our changing climate is affecting these areas.