

Draining the Swamp

by Carol Eichler

After several years of neglect and debate, both Tompkins County Master Gardeners and ACNARGS agreed that it was time to retire the pond at the base of the Wurster Rock Garden. Or as we've been saying, time "to drain the swamp," This area will be transformed into a shade garden to include some of our spring ephemerals. The area between the pond and chain link fence defining the property boundary already includes a number of plants including hepatica, dodecatheon (shooting star), trilliums, hellebores, primroses and ferns to name a few.

The Master Gardener volunteer who initially installed the pond over 24 years ago (yes, it preceded the rock garden) was no longer active and no one else had stepped up to maintain it. Additionally, nearby trees had transformed that space from full sun to shade so that the pond could no longer support water plants. It did support a healthy stand of invasive yellow iris, *Iris pseudacorus*, and a carpeting layer of duckweed.

John Gilrein, Chair of the Adirondack Chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society (ACNARGS), was willing to do the literal dirty work of donning barn boots and wading into the muck if necessary. He came to Ithaca on August 15th prepared to work. First, John and I scooped and emptied numerous buckets of water until some of the liner was exposed. John then proceeded to cut away part of the liner to allow any remaining water to naturally seep into the subsoil. He didn't even get that dirty! Within a few hours the draining was complete – end of phase 1. This part turned out to be much easier than expected.

Next, we will want to remove the liner and start filling the rather cavernous hole. This fall our plan is to ask the City Parks and Forestry crew to deliver a load of free woodchips (they do this often for Extension). The chips will require a work party to move them into the dug space. The hole is huge so it may even take 2 dump truck loads. Perhaps for the final step we will want to bring in some topsoil or a combination soil/compost mix.

Hopefully by next spring, if the ground has settled sufficiently, this area will be ready to plant with woodland and shade-loving plants. Stay tuned. Eliminating the pond has created a new planting opportunity!