



**ALASKA MASTER
GARDENERS**
ANCHORAGE

**AMGA
NEWSLETTER**

**JUNE 2017
Volume 19, Issue 6**

Message From Harry



I probably just need to take a few deep breaths, find a nice bench to sit on, drink my tea and just enjoy being out in the garden. Isn't gardening supposed to be a relaxing, stress free, Zen-like experience? At the moment, I can't seem to

reach that state of mind because there's just too much to do, especially during May, when everything is happening all at once and certain chores just shouldn't be put off.

Somehow, we are expected (or expect ourselves) to have prepared and spruced up our gardens, catch the weeds before they get going, set up our hoses and garden furniture, shop the nurseries and garden club sales, tend to and harden off our plants and finally get them planted and watered in. There's transplanting and pruning to be done and on top of that we need to find time for our volunteer work. It's all feels a bit overwhelming at times.

Maybe the best thing to do is to just go ahead and find that bench, relax a bit in the sun and just not worry too much about that raspberry patch that is starting to run wild. All of those chores will still be there tomorrow.

Our May membership meeting was our last one until we resume our regular meetings again in September. We've had many interesting programs and I know we all appreciate our talented presenters. Thanks for your time and effort to those of you who have shared their knowledge and enthusiasm.

On June 5th, we begin our summer garden tour season. This year we resume our weekly tours to be

held on Monday evenings. There should be something for everyone to enjoy and plenty to learn from other gardeners.

Many thanks go to the numerous Master Gardener volunteers who have stepped up and helped this past month. We've had members conducting classes and demonstrations, leading tours and helping to plant at various public and community gardens. Everyone's efforts are much appreciated and really do make a big difference in our community.

I hope to see many of you out and about this summer at various events. Enjoy another gardening season and whenever possible take a break, sit back and enjoy your efforts.



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Center Of A Primrose World By Sheila Toomey

North America's largest collection of Primula lives in Alaska -- 23 miles from downtown Juneau.

Do you doubt? Just ask the American Public Gardens Association. It's a documented fact.

The Jensen-Olson Arboretum, a public garden strung out along the Inside Passage, boasts more than 200 Primula species and cultivars, according to horticulturist Merrill Jensen, who manages the 14-acre site. Officially ten years old, the arboretum enjoys a perfect micro-climate that has nurtured flowers, vegetables and trees for nearly a century.

Originally a gold rush homestead where Irma and Charles Olson farmed, the site reportedly provided food to miners starved for fresh produce. A photo from the 1940s shows the Olsons wrestling a horse-drawn wagon full of hay.

Carl Jensen inherited the property from his Aunt Irma in the mid-1960s. He and his wife, Caroline, a Master Gardener, built a home there and Caroline started to garden. She loved Primula. By one account, she had 40 or so varieties growing by the time she died. She also created three acres of gardens filled with native and non-native species.

Around the edges of her gardens, original trees still survive, some up to a century old, including a magnificently gnarled apple that stretches almost horizontally, propelled toward the water by glacial wind.

In the 1990s, determined to preserve the area as a public resource, Caroline worked with the Southeast Alaska Land Trust and the City and Borough of Juneau to carve out a conservation easement, completed in 1998. She was very specific about her wishes: The planned arboretum was not to become a large-scale tourist attraction. If you've ever visited Juneau during the high tourist season, you know what she wanted to avoid.

Small, non-commercial, an educational resource for UAJ and local schools, she decreed. And for gardeners in general. It was to be managed for biodiversity, and for pure esthetic pleasure.



"Gnarled apple tree" -
Photo by Betsy Brenneman

Caroline died in 2006 and in 2007 the City hired Merrill Jensen (no relation to Caroline) to run the place. Originally from Wyoming, he has worked at public gardens in California, Idaho and Oregon. It was Merrill who bumped the Primula crop to 200 varieties. The garden also features an eye-catching array of blue Himalayan poppies (*Meconopsis*), less familiar to Juneau-ites than to us.

On a recent May afternoon, a lowering sky and steady rain failed to dim the enchantment of the garden. Lots of flowers were already in bloom and a dozen or so plastic-covered raised beds promised a big food crop destined for a local food bank. And there are plans to add a botanical library, part of a new indoor educational facility.

The Arboretum is off the beaten track but if you visit Juneau, make it a planned stop. There's a reason why the APGA designated it a national collection -- meaning a national treasure -- in 2012.

Add the arboretum to the Shrine of St. Therese about a mile down the road, throw in the fabulous Alaska State Museum in downtown -- and you don't need any more reason to visit the Capital City this summer.

Treasurer's Report

Balances 3/31/17	
Checking account	6389.27
Savings account	<u>11725.55</u>
	\$18114.82

Dedicated Funds	8555.97
Interest Bearing CD	<u>10029.79</u>
	\$18585.76

Revenue:	
Donation	10.00
Education: Fundraising Plant Sale	1586.00
Education: Fundraising Logo Sales	20.00
Interest	1.44
<u>Membership</u>	<u>50.00</u>
	\$1667.44

Expense:	
Dedicated Donation	100.00
Education: Programs	8.00
Education: Fundraising Plant Sale	1082.25
Operations	116.88
<u>Public Relations (Volunteer Vests)</u>	<u>527.49</u>
	\$1834.62

Balances 3/31/17	
Checking account	6220.65
Savings account	<u>11726.99</u>
	\$17947.64

Dedicated Funds	8555.97
<u>Interest Bearing CD</u>	<u>10029.79</u>
	\$18585.76

The Discovery Garden By Gina Docherty

On a recent spring trip to Oregon, I visited the Discovery Garden, in Roseburg, Oregon, built & maintained by Master Gardeners of Douglas County. I was expecting just a little demonstration garden. What I found was a Master Gardener's dream: an actual 'Educational' garden! Their motto: *To interest, inspire, and educate the public.*

From the OSU Cooperative Extension website:
The Garden is designed to show the benefits of a variety of ecologically sound management practices including:

- proper irrigation including a rainwater collection system that is a part of our drip irrigation design
- use of mulch to suppress weeds and control evaporation
- water-wise (xeric) plant selection
- pruning
- composting

There are many different areas to explore, learn & enjoy, including:

1. Xeriscape garden
2. Containers and Raised Beds
3. Herb garden
4. Butterfly Garden
5. Pruning Demo Garden
6. Compost Area
7. Worm Bins
8. Pavilion
9. Hedge Row
10. Raised Beds (Lilies, Dahlias, Day Lilies)
11. Orchard
12. Children's Garden
13. Japanese Garden
14. Rose Entry Garden
15. Donor Boards

The Discovery Garden is open year round for both self-guided tours and educational tours guided by Master Gardeners. The Master Gardeners have developed this garden for community use and enjoyment. Our goal is to enhance and preserve the beauty and quality of the environment by using sustainable gardening practices. The Garden and Pavilion are used for instruction and demonstrations on various aspects of gardening.

I was told that the funding for this garden was from grants. It is affiliated with Oregon State University, Douglas County Cooperative Extension Program. From what I could find on their website, their extension office appears to be well staffed.

As an added bonus, the location is at the River Forks Park, near the Umpqua River, a beautiful location in itself.

As I was meandering through this garden, I couldn't help but wonder how an Alaska Master Gardener's "Discovery" garden would look - visions of floating row cover covering raised beds, hardy plantings, 6 foot high fences to keep out marauding moose & a "Closed for Winter" sign adorning the gate. But mostly I was wondering where all the volunteers would come from.

And by the way, the garden was listed as 4½ stars by TripAdvisor. Who knew?



Educational signs were noted throughout the garden complimented with visual examples of composting techniques, drip irrigation, pruning, worm bins, herb gardens, orchards, and a working greenhouse. They sell plants from this greenhouse to raise funds.



Many different types of containers and raised beds were showcased, including ingenious upcycled items and an example of a square foot garden.



Part of the Children's Garden



Nice paths meandered through this garden; a great example of accessible gardening beds

Growing Young Gardeners: Encouraging Pollinators By Amy Reed

This month, my family officially entered the harmonious marriage of gardening and beekeeping. Our two four-pound packages of bees arrived safely from balmy California ready to be introduced to their new home in forty degree Alaska. My husband, daughter, and I all suited up in our new bee suits and tentatively held our breaths as we dumped the boxes of bees into their new hives.

The idea of becoming beekeepers came about as I was laboriously using a paintbrush to pollenate our squash and zucchini plants last summer. It was tedious mind-numbing work. We had gazillions of wasps dive-bombing us as we attended the garden, but the sight of a honeybee was a rare treat. Gardeners need a little help sometimes from our little flying friends!

Hours of research, books, beekeeping classes, and talking with fellow local beekeepers gave us just enough knowledge to give the idea of hiving bees a reality. We ended up purchasing a Warre' or top-bar hive, which allows the bees to make comb from bars hanging from the top of the hive instead of individual frames like a traditional Langstroth hive. The major advantage of particular Warre' hive we found is it is a perfect teaching tool for children by having observation windows. The windows allow us to not only do quick hive checks but also observe the rate of comb being produced each day. In a two-week span, we had six honeycombs formed by busy little bees!

It has been a great science lesson for my daughter as well. We observe and monitor times of day that the bees are most active, and we note the best time to do hive checks. We also produce and provide sugar syrup for the bees as a food source until the flowers are blooming and ready for pollination. I am so proud that she isn't frightened by the buzzing and allows the bees to crawl on her bee suit. Honeybees do not want to sting because losing their stinger is the death of them. When a honeybee stings a person, it cannot pull the barbed stinger back out. It leaves behind not only the stinger, but also part of its abdomen and digestive tract, plus muscles and nerves. This massive abdominal rupture kills the bee. We have taught our daughter to be slow, calm, quiet, and observant around the hives as not to disturb or make the bees angry and defensive.

Beekeeping has been a huge learning curve for our family, however we feel it is truly the perfect marriage with gardening. We hope the bees are happy being near the garden, produce a bounty of delicious honey, and that I won't have to wield my pollinating paintbrush again!

Great resources we have found with beekeeping in Alaska:

South Central Alaska Beekeepers Association: <http://sababeekeepers.com>

- Beekeeping Classes
- Hands On Hive Checks
- Alaska State Fair Educational Demo Booth
- Garden Shows
- New Beekeeper Mentoring
- Bee Presentations In Schools

Alaska Wildflower Honey <https://www.alaskawildflower-honey.com>

- Bee Supplies
- Order Bees
- Bee Education

Mann Lake <https://www.mannlakeltd.com>

- Bee Supplies
- Education



Warre' or top-bar hive, allows the bees to make comb from bars hanging from the top of the hive instead of individual frames like a traditional Langstroth hive (top photo) ... a perfect teaching tool for children by having observation windows (bottom photo).
Photos from Amy Reed



A Bigger, Better Community Composting Program For 2017 By Cheryl Chapman

The municipality's 2016 ANC Community Composting Program was such a success that Anchorage Solid Waste Services is bumping it up by 1,000 new participants, which with last year's 250 brings the total to 1,250.

There will be an additional drop-off site as well, mid-town's Central Transfer Station at 1140 E. 54th Ave., just south of the Peanut Farm off the Old Seward Highway, though the Anchorage Regional Landfill off the Glenn Highway, 15500 E. Eagle River Loop Road, will still be the only place to collect finished compost.

American Landscaping of Anchorage, this year's composter, will accept grass clippings and leaves as well as vegetable food scraps such as apple cores, orange rinds, egg shells, coffee grounds, tea leaves and slimy lettuce.

The Central Transfer Station began taking drop-offs from participants on Monday, May 22; the Anchorage Regional Landfill began the program on Wednesday, May 24.

The goal remains to promote a "circular economy" through Zero Waste policies such as composting.

Here's how it works:

1. Anchorage residents who sign up will be given a cheerful flowered 5-gallon organic waste bucket with an airtight lid.
2. The bucket's contents may be dropped off at designated sites at the Transfer Station or the Anchorage Regional Landfill.
3. Those who drop off their food scraps can then take finished compost provided at the Anchorage Regional Landfill. The compost is for individual home use only.
4. Compost is much more compact than the scraps that produce it, so "leave a quarter, take a penny" is the best approach. Also, you'll be surprised to see how far a little compost goes: 10 parts soil to 1 part compost is about right.

Last year, participants filled landfill dumpsters with more than 6 tons of kitchen scraps, and the composter brought back more than 6 tons of compost, said Travis Smith, Anchorage Solid Waste Services recycling coordinator.

The free program got going at the April 2016 Master Gardeners Conference in Anchorage. Mayor Ethan Berkowitz dropped by and asked for ideas, and the gardeners responded with, "We need compost. More compost." And so it all began with the mayor's ceremonial bucket dump into the landfill bin on July 11.

Those vegetables and fruits filling Alaska grocery stores are mostly trucked in, barged in or flown in from out of state. "It takes a lot of energy to bring in that apple, and there's an up-and-coming national trend for food waste recycling because composting recaptures the energy while promoting local food-growing," Smith said.

In the three months between the pilot program's launch and its Oct. 25 termination, a rotation of participating gardeners pulled up to the landfill scales, dug out their laminated "ANC Community Compost" cards and were pointed down the hill to the roll-away dumpster to turn their salad leftovers into black gold.

Smith said last year's available buckets were snapped up by the end of the first day and another 250 people had to be turned away.

To sign up or for more information about the free program, contact Smith at Anchorage Solid Waste Services, 907-343-6275, or smithtj@muni.org.

Happiness is
a full compost bin -
photo by Gina Docherty



Soil Calculator: How To Calculate Volume In Square And Rectangular Raised Beds From Jane Baldwin

An online calculator to do this is available at:
<http://www.gardeners.com/how-to/soil-calculator/7558.html>

To determine how much soil you would need to fill a square planter or raised bed, just enter the dimensions (in inches) for length, width and depth. Click the "Calculate" button. It will provide your answer in cubic feet or cubic yards (your choice).

Imagine that you could also roughly calculate the amounts needed to fill large round garden pots by pretending they are rectangular in shape and guestimating the measurements for length, width and depth accordingly. For an garden pot 2' tall with a diameter of 18" estimating it as a rectangle 18" (length) x 18" (width) x 24" (depth) would produce an answer that would be on generous side, but could help when buying bagged potting soil and having to choose from 1 cu ft, 1.5 cu ft or 3.2 cubic feet bags.



Bird Chatter

NOTE TO SELF. . . Do NOT make your annual Valley plant-buying run the weekend before Mother's Day -- especially not the day before. OMG! Pistols at dawn over the last flat of Picasso petunias. And, no, the copycats with skinny LIGHT pink borders are NOT good enough.

To quote Charlie D, it was the best of times, it was the worst of times in nurseries and plant centers from Mill & Feed to Bushes Bunches. AMG's who should have known better were everywhere. The crowds were a bit annoying but, on the plus side, greenhouse stock seemed to be fuller and brighter than usual. Or maybe that's just how the long winter made it seem. But next year, remember, not on Mother's Day weekend!

SHE'S BAAAACK. . . Alas, not for long. Julie Riley is reportedly in town for a few weeks, helping out at her signature project -- The Refugee Garden in Mountain View.

Yeah, BC is so surprised they want her help. Aren't you? Sorry.

To continue: Expect to spot Julie at the Pioneer Home, ABG and other places where people are laboring in gardens for the community.

SAVE THE DATE . . . Our annual late-season plant sale will be held this year on Saturday, August 12th. The location isn't set yet -- some members feel the parking lot at our new offices isn't big enough or that buyer parking will be a problem, so the Board is exploring other options (as they say).

Remember, saving the date isn't enough: Now is the time to start designating plants in your garden that you want to divide and pot up, or simply get rid of. All the plants sold are donated by members, who get to keep 75% of the sale price. The emphasis is on perennials that buyers can plant this year for next season. But all good stuff is welcome.



Clematis

A poem to help you pronounce it:
"Because it climbs on lattice,
Some people say "Cla-MA-tis".
But Webster won't let it rest,
Until you say it "CLEM-uh-'tis"

Clematis 'Clare de Lune' - photo by Eileen Hankel Burton

May Herb Study Group at ABG's Herb Garden By Elaine Hamms

It was baseball cap and shades weather in the Herb Garden May meeting. Some of last year's perennials were already leafing out. Cathy Sage led the discussion of herbs, a brief history and evolution of herb gardens as well as a brief overview of the design, evolution and herbs incorporated in Alaska Botanical Garden's (ABG) Herb Garden.

The Herb Society of America defines herbs "as plants (trees, shrubs, vines, perennials, biennials, or annuals) valued historically, presently, or potentially for their flavor, fragrance, medicinal qualities, insecticidal qualities, economic or industrial use, or in the case of dyes, for the coloring material they provide." An herb generally refers to the leaves while a spice generally refers to the bark, root, or seed of a plant.

Early English gardens began at the time of a military physician, Dioscorides, for the Roman army in the 1st Century A.D. Mediterranean plants familiar to and used by the Romans and Greeks were brought to England. Cathy recommends K. Sanecki, *History of the English Herb Garden* and Maude Grieve, *Modern Herbal* from the 1930's for further herb garden reading.

ABG's Herb Garden is a somewhat new style design using plants based mainly on plants used by the Romans. The Herb Garden focus is on individual plants with mostly green texture and foliage diversity rather than color or repetition. Volunteers should not think they have to identify all of the plants in the Herb Garden. Pick five plants that you would like, learn a bit about them and when visitors ask, the volunteer can tell about the ones they do know. Visitors often have information from their own experience to add interest to the conversations.

Keeping good records of plants aids in determining where they have been planted as well as how well or poorly they have grown. The garden is constantly evolving. This year the planting plan is changing in several locations. For example, last year the East Bed had four varieties of sage and in 2017 the theme is Herbs de Provence including thyme, marjoram, oregano and summer savory. Both the East and West Beds will have nasturtium on an obelisk in place of last year's potted peppers.

All are welcome to join the Herb Study Group in the Herb Garden at Alaska Botanical Garden. Learn to care for the many different species of herbs. Bring tools, kneeling pads and a bucket for weeds. Meet Tuesdays and Fridays 1:00 - 3:00 p.m. at Alaska Botanical Garden, 4601 Campbell Airstrip Road, Anchorage.

Garden Event Calendar

MEETINGS and EVENTS

Thursday, June 1

Anchorage Garden Club Monthly Meeting: Featuring Your Garden in a Flower Show by Sheila Parcel. 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm at Pioneer Schoolhouse at 437 E 3rd Avenue, Anchorage. Details at: <http://www.alaskagardenclubs.org/anchorageclub.htm>.

Tuesday, June 6

Valley Garden Club Monthly Meeting: Outdoor Meeting and Potluck. 10:30 am at 4051 Harness Loop, Wasilla.

Tuesdays and Fridays, June 2 - June 30

Herb Study Group: Join the Herb Study Group during summer in the Herb Garden at Alaska Botanical Garden. Learn to care for the many different species of herbs. Bring tools, kneeling pads and a bucket for weeds. 1:00 pm at Alaska Botanical Garden, 4601 Campbell Airstrip Road, Anchorage.

Tuesday, June 13

**L.U.V. Garden Club: Bring Your Favorite Garden Tool and Plan a Harvest Party. 7:00 p.m. at The Hispanic Cultural Center, 4233 Mountain View Drive, Mt View.

** Alaska Rock Garden Society: ARGS Members Will Be Available to Discuss Design and Building of a Rock Garden. 6:00 pm - 7:00 pm at Alaska Botanical Garden, 4601 Cambell Airstrip Rd, Anchorage.

Tuesdays, June 13 and 27

Tragopogon Pull. 6:30 pm at Potter Marsh Section House Parking Area. Adults only. Bring garden gloves and dandelion digger.

Wednesdays, June 14 and 28

Campbell Creek Science Center Work Party to Weed the Wildflower Beds. 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm at the East Entrance of the of the Science Center, 5600 Science Center Drive, Anchorage.

Thursday, June 22

Dandelion Removal on the Lowenfels Trail. 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm, Lowenfels Trail, Alaska Botanical Garden, 4601 Campbell Airstrip Road, Anchorage. Helpful tools to bring: Dandelion digger, kneeling pad and a 5-gallon pail or plastic bag.

Thursday, June 15

Alaska Botanical Garden: An Evening in the Garden. Annual Fundraiser for Alaska Botanical Garden: Garden Art Sale, Silent Auction, Beer, Wine, A Light Garden Buffet and Music by The Alex Cruver Jazz Trio. Guests over 21 only. 6:00 pm - 8:30 pm. Cost: \$95. Details at: <http://alaskabg.org/event/an-evening-in-the-garden-2/>.

CLASSES And WORKSHOPS

Tuesdays, June 6 - August 22

Bird TLC at Alaska Botanical Garden: Topics Include Biology, Ecology and Conservation by an Experienced and Certified Presenter from Bird TIC. Cost and Times at: <http://alaskabg.org/programsevents/>.

Thursday, June 8

Story Time in the Garden: Nature Stories and Activities for Children Ages 3 - 5. 11:15 at Alaska Botanical Garden, 4601 Campbell Airstrip Road, Anchorage. All Children Must Be Accompanied by an Adult. Times and Details at: <http://alaskabg.org/programsevents/>.

Wednesday, June 21

Alaska Botanical Garden: Peonies by Mary Stella. Learn the History and Care of Peonies, When to Purchase and Plant. 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm at Alaska Botanical Garden, 4601 Campbell Airstrip Road, Anchorage. Cost: \$45 members, \$50 non-members. Preregistration required. Details at: <http://alaskabg.org/event/abg-workshop-peonies/>.

Saturday, June 24

**Alaska Rock Garden Society Monthly Meeting: Potluck and Picnic to Discuss Gardening in Southcentral Alaska and to Plan the Next Year as a Tribute to Verna Pratt, Past President of ARGS. 2:00 p.m. at Snowfire Gardens, 3379 Inlet Vista Cir., Wasilla. Details at: <http://www.akrockgardensociety.org/calendar.html>.

**Willow Garden Club: Solstice Celebration at the Gardens of Dorthea Taylor and George Murphy. Time, address and other details at: <http://willowgardenclub.blogspot.com>.

Tuesday, June 27

L.U.V. Garden Club: Bring Your Favorite Garden Tool and Plan a Harvest Party. 7:00 pm at 1710 Tammy Ave, Anchorage.

Thursday, June 29

International Mud Day: Fun for the Kids! Children Can Learn About Soil and Play in the Mud! Time and Other Details at: <http://alaskabg.org/programsevents/>.

PLANT SALES

Saturday, June 3

**Anchorage Garden Club Plant Sale. 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. Location and Details at: <http://www.alaskagardenclubs.org/anchorageclub.htm>.

**Mat Su Master Gardeners Plant Sale. 9:00 am - 3:00 pm at Palmer Pavilion across from the Palmer Visitor's Center.

**Wildflower Garden Club Plant Sale. 9:00 am to 2:00 pm at 7435 Old Harbor Road, Anchorage.

Saturday, June 10

Central Peninsula Garden Club Plant Sale. 10:00 am until plants are sold out. New Life Assembly of God Church Parking Lot, Corner of Kenai Spur and Princess Rd. 209 Princess Lane, Kenai. Details at: <http://www.cenpengardenclub.org/fundraisers.htm>.



Swaths of beautiful primroses - *P. denticulata*, *p. juliae*, among others - at the Jenson-Olson Arboretum in Juneau. See article on page 2 about Sheila Toomey's recent visit. Photo from Parks & Recreation Website: <http://www.juneau.org/parkrec/arboretum-images.php>

**2017 Summer Garden Tour
Information on following page**



AMGA regularly meets at 7:00pm every third Monday of the month, September through May (except for December).

Meetings are held at the Anchorage Cooperative Extension Office Chugachmiut Building, 1840 Bragaw St. Anchorage

Monthly educational programs are free and open to the public. Visitors and guests are welcomed and encouraged.

The Alaska Master Gardeners Anchorage welcomes letters, opinions, articles, ideas and inquiries. Contact the editor, Gina Docherty, at:

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AMGA Google Group:
<https://groups.google.com/forum/?fromgroups#!forum/AkMGA>

To send concerns or information to the AMGA directly, mail to:
AMGA
P.O. Box 221403
Anchorage, AK 99522-1403

If you have questions or want to make address or email corrections, please contact Jane Baldwin at: ak.jbaldwin@gmail.com

Newsletter Submission Deadline

The deadline for submitting an item for publication in the following month's edition of the AMGA newsletter is the 20th of every month. Items arriving after this date may or may not be included.

Educational or garden related articles, Bird Chatter, calendar items and announcements are always welcome.

For information about membership or upcoming programs, contact:

Harry Deuber, President
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907-440-6372

AMGA Board of Directors

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Pioneer Home:	Erma MacMillan (design)
	Lynne Opstad
Volunteer Coordinators:	Julie Ginder, Joyce Smith, Lynne Opstad



Summer Tours - Save The Dates by Sheila Toomey

We're talking about Mondays, from 7p.m. to 9 p.m., in June, July and August. Your garden tour committee has lined up site visits for most Monday nights this summer, and hopes to have every slot filled before long.

This year's theme is "Dig that Dirt: A Summer of Working Gardens." The goal is to learn from experienced gardeners' challenges, successes and -- yes -- failures.

Will there be pretty flowers? Probably, and we do love those pretty flowers. But this year, that's not the point. Teaching moments are the goal. Beauty is a side product.

The one exception to this theme is the first Monday in June, when we'll make our traditional trek to Indian to Forget-Me-Not Nursery, with an optional side-trip to member Robbie Frankevitch's greenhouse and plant sale in Girdwood. This is for all of us with last-minute holes to fill in our own gardens.

On June 12th, we step back into Anchorage of the 1960s -- right in Midtown. Large houses sit on old homestead acreage near Chaney Lake, where Tom and Ruth "garden" in wooded shade. Tom used glass from the house's old windows to build his little greenhouse. Challenges include moose, rabbits and squirrels -- lots and lots of squirrels. The acre+ property contains a smoke-house, a birch tapping and cooking operation and a moose "exclosure" -- a fenced-in vegetable patch.

Later this month we'll visit another greenhouse gardener and the Lutheran Church of Hope Community Garden -- member Don Bladow's farm on Northern Lights Boulevard.

There's no tour on July 3rd because of the holiday.

Garden tour information, including addresses and directions, will be posted Thursdays on our Constant Contact message system. Members should get an automatic e-mail.

NOTE: Addresses will NOT be posted on our Website, which can be accessed by anyone. Tours are for members and we have promised our hosts that we won't disseminate their information at large. Please honor this and do not re-post the information on Facebook, Twitter, etc. Looking forward to seeing everyone -- and TGIS -- Thank God it's Summer!