



# ALASKA MASTER GARDENERS ANCHORAGE

## NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2021  
VOLUME 23, ISSUE 2

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE by Emily Becker

We're not going to panic, we're going to take a deep breath and prepare. Right?

At this point in the winter, most gardeners have spent some time contemplating seeds.

I took a few days in early January to catalogue my collection and then dreamily circled desired varieties in several catalogs.

I went online to order, and to my surprise, found many varieties out of stock. In early January!? Yep, we are still in a national pandemic, and seed companies are even busier now than they were last spring!

Baker Creek noted their business has increased two or three hundred percent!! One company included a note that seeds might be shipped in blank envelopes. I do believe the seed business is bustling. Consider that most gardeners in the Lower 48 are getting ready to plant, so Alaskans, do not delay your seed orders!

But also, let's not panic. My personal seed stash is overflowing with, frankly, too many seeds.

I know the recommended time for keeping seeds is only a few years. I keep mine in a nice, cold garage. I have some tomato and pea seeds that are over 10 years old and still germinating like champs. I know my neighbors, and you, my gardening friends, also have big seed collections.

If we cannot order something, chances are one of us has a couple seeds to spare and share!

In my neighborhood, Airport Heights, we'll soon be starting up our seed library, and my personal goal this year is to quit hoarding and get rid of seeds that are older than a year! I also saved more seeds than ever from my

own garden last summer, and I have plenty of runner beans, chives, alyssum and more to share. (I do need to learn how to save tomato seeds!) I plan on ordering what I need and giving away what I don't use.

Speaking of seed libraries, I'll be presenting at the Alaska Botanical Garden March 4-5 on how to set up a seed library. It's easy, and even legal, thanks to a bill from former Alaska Rep. Jennifer Johnston in 2018. I'm sure there will be lots of other great presentations organized by our friends at ABG.

Also, there are an enormous number of fabulous seed companies out there!

A new one for me this year was Native Seeds Search, which specializes in varieties of the Southwest and offers free or reduced-price seeds to indigenous Americans, including Alaska Natives.

Our own Alaska Grown seed company, Foundroot, is profiled in this issue! So enjoy shopping around and trying some new things from new places.

Make haste, but no need for hysteria. We'll get the seeds we need. 🌱

### IN THIS ISSUE

- » January Meeting Highlights
- » Foundroot Q&A
- » Herb Study: Betony
- » Spring 2021 Advanced Master Gardener Course
- » Bird Chatter
- » Event Calendar

# JANUARY 2021 MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

Approximately 40 people attended the first AMGA meeting of 2021. The Jan. 18 meeting via Zoom began with a summary of last year's activities provided by Past President Susan Negus. Her report also was published in last month's newsletter.

The main topic of the meeting was "The Seedy Side of Gardening" presented by Don Bladow, Lutheran Church of Hope community food garden coordinator.

Don noted that many people have seeds but they don't necessarily know when those seeds were harvested or how they've been stored long term. A great way to check the viability of seeds is to place 10 seeds in a damp paper towel, fold the paper towel in half, and place in a sealed Ziploc® bag. Label with the seed type and date.

Once germination has occurred, record the germination date and how many of the seeds germinated. This give you a germination rate. This can help you know if your seeds are still viable and will help you determine planning density.

Don noted the need to prepare the soil and create furrows for the seeds. He described a variety of seeding methods such as the "packet shake" and "sprinkle" methods along with a variety of seed spreading and seeding tools. Packet directions on seeding density, depth and thinning requirements should be followed.

Don mentioned that the Cooperative Extension Service maintains a list of varieties tested in Alaska (publication HGA-00031). Many things can be direct sowed including carrots, kale, beets, collards, beans, chard, dill, turnips, peas, cabbage, broccoli, kohlrabi, etc. Don has even had success directly sowing zucchini seeds.

The main difference between direct sowing and transplanting seedlings is the time of maturation; directly sown plants will be a couple weeks behind the transplants. An advantage to direct sowing is reducing transplant shock to seedlings.

One pro-tip: if you grow many varieties of the same vegetable together, there is a chance for open pollination and hybridization. Saving seeds from those plants is not recommended as the hybrid may not resemble either of the parent plants.

Because of the pandemic, gardening has grown in

popularity and many people are reporting seed shortages or out-of-stock catalogs. A good tip for this year when seed availability might be scarce is to test the seeds you already have and grow them before buying more seeds.

At the end of the meeting, President Emily Becker announced Anchorage climate scientist Brian Brettschneider will be the featured speaker at the February 15 member meeting. - *Compiled by Beth Norris*

## AMGA TREASURER REPORT

### December 2020

#### Balance 12/01/2020

Checking S-88	15748.36
Business MBR Shares	5.25
Business Premium Shares	16897.09
CD General 2yr. 1.95% (1/21)	10606.24
	\$43,256.94

#### Revenue:

Membership	1707.58
Interest/Dividends/CD	5484.58
Donations	192.60
Fundraising	266.25
	7,651.01

#### Expenses:

Operations	174.58
Fundraising	266.25
Newsletter	187.81
Membership refund	21.30
Website	535.00
	\$1,184.94

#### Balance 01/01/2021

Checking S-88	22159.43
Business MBR Shares	5.25
Business Premium Savings	16899.96
Certificate 2yr. 1.95% (01/21)	10658.37
	\$49,723.01

#### Nancy Grant 01/09/2021

# HERB STUDY GROUP: BETONY by Elaine Hammes

There are many common names for *Stachys officinalis* besides Betony, including Wood Betony, Hedgenettle, Heal-all, Self-heal, Woundwort, Lamb's Ears and more.

The genus name comes from the Greek 'stachys' meaning ear of corn, probably referencing the inflorescence of related plants.

One cultivar of *S. officinalis*, 'Pink Cotton Candy,' has been growing in a shady area of the ABG Herb Garden since 2013.

Betony was an important medicinal herb to Anglo-Saxons of early medieval England. During the Middle Ages, people wore amulets made from betony to ward off evil spirits. The Romans listed at least 47 illnesses betony was believed to cure. It was also believed that wild animals ate betony when they were injured.

Modern herbalists use betony to treat tension headaches, migraines, and chronic headaches of hormonal nature. For the culinary herb garden, it is popular as a base herb for herb tea mixes, to which it adds a light, clean flavor. All of the parts that grow above the soil can be used equally. A tincture can be made using fresh leaves and blossoms and a fine yellow dye can also be obtained from the leaves.

Betony will grow 9 inches to 3 feet tall, depending on the variety, and it blooms in late July through August in most planting zones. Its flowers are attractive and long-lasting, and their unusual shape makes them an eye-catching addition to a rock garden. The flowers bloom in a short spike at the top, then there is stem growth, then another burst of flowers further down. Known as an "interrupted spike," the flowers will add interest and brightness to an area that may otherwise be lacking due to limited sunlight.

Clumps will spread over time to form a dense ground

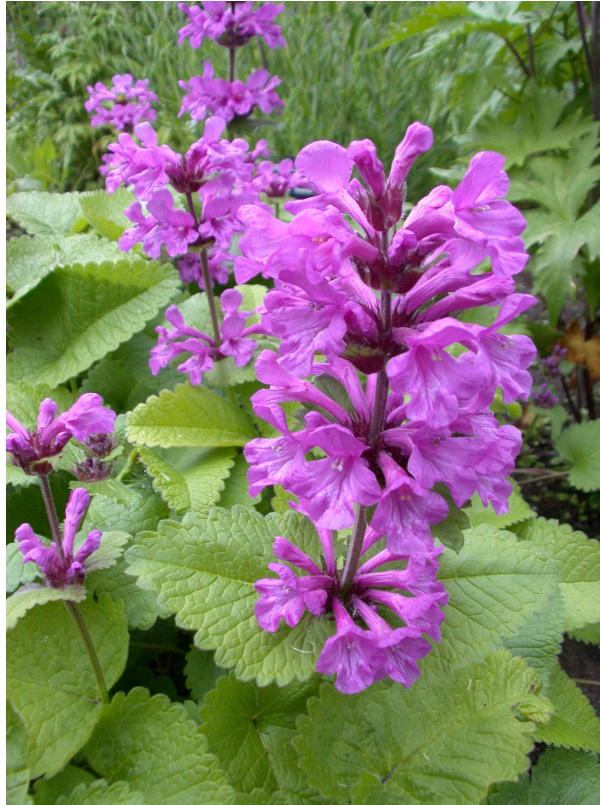
cover. Although some species of *Stachys* are grown primarily for their gray woolly leaves (e.g., *S. byzantina* or Lamb's Ears), this species is grown primarily for

its vivid flowers (white to pink to deep purple) which can provide a spectacular display, particularly when massed.

To start betony, seeds and cuttings work equally well. Cover seed at the start of spring or the beginning of autumn, and seeds can be started indoors.

Germination time is two to four weeks at a temperature of 70°F (21°C), two months in advance. Transplant hardy varieties outdoors before the last frost or towards the end of autumn.

Grow the plants in the same location until they become overcrowded, then divide them and replant. This is usually necessary after about three years in a sunny location. If grown in partial shade, the plant may not need to be divided for five years or more.



Betony (*Stachys officinalis*), unknown location. Photo courtesy Debbie Hinchey.

Betony spreads by creeping stems (stolons) that root as they go along the ground. Plant 12-18" apart for use as a ground cover. Cut back the flowering stalks to encourage re-blooming.

To use betony for teas and infusions, cut the entire plant at the base of the stem and hang it to dry in an out-of-the-way location. To keep the leaves bright, it's best to gather the plants in bundles and place them into a brown paper bag, hanging the entire bag.

Betony fades quickly. Once the plants are dry, break off the toughest part of the stem and store the rest in as whole a form as possible, using colored glass jars, or clear jars out of direct sunlight.

Keep dried betony in a cool, dry, dark place (emphasis on dark). Don't dry them in a food dehydrator, as this seems to fade the plant immediately. 🌿



# Q&A: FOUNDROOT'S LEAH WAGNER

Leah Wagner runs Foundroot, a small farm and seed company in Haines, Alaska, with her husband, Nick Schlosstein. Their company seeks to empower more people to grow their own food and create systems of self-reliance and food sovereignty for northern communities.

Seed saving wasn't part of the curriculum when Leah took the online Master Gardener course years ago. She and Nick teach what they know to gardeners around Alaska, including this recent Q&A with the newsletter.

## **Tell us how your seed growing operation ended up in Haines?**

We chose Haines due to its microclimate, affordable land, and history of agriculture in the first half of the 1900s. Haines met three main criteria for Alaska seed production:

- A long, frost-free growing season for seed crops to come to maturity
- Mild winters for overwintering biennial crops
- A relatively dry climate to allow seeds to cure outdoors

With approximately 50 inches of rainfall annually, Haines is wetter than places like Fairbanks or the Matanuska Valley, but dry and warm in the summer by coastal Alaska standards, with a comparatively longer frost-free season. The often-thick snowpack and mild winters mean that crops left in the field have a good chance of surviving the winter, which is key for biennial crops that require a cold spell before producing seed.

In 2014, we purchased a small piece of forested land and moved our lives and our business from Palmer to Haines. The next year, we set up a camp in our woods and spent the next six months living in a tent while clearing the land, building our yurt as our year-round home, working full-time jobs, and managing the local farmers market, while continuing to keep Foundroot afloat. By 2016, we had cleared a ¼-acre garden space and lived indoors once again.

In 2017, we broke ground at leased space on an old homestead field one block from our home. In 2018, we began growing our own seeds on a commercial scale. By breeding seeds at 59°N we are developing varieties that tolerate cool temperatures, long days, short seasons, and with resistance to pests, disease, and the extreme tem-

perature fluctuation that is becoming our new normal. In distributing and breeding only open-pollinated seeds, we are strengthening the public commons of seed genetics because these seeds can be propagated and saved by simple home gardening methods. Out of the approximately 80 varieties in our 2020 catalog, 12 were grown on the farm.

In 2021, we plan to expand our production field to a full acre, establish two hoop houses, and bring on staff to increase production to meet the increasing demand. After nearly 10 years, we finally have the infrastructure and labor available to truly accomplish what we initially set out to do.

## **What seed crops do you focus on?**

We focus on rare and difficult-to-grow varieties such as early-ripening tomatoes, mold-resistant beans, and slow-bolting spinach. We are not breeding brassicas at this time. It is clear from our trials that kale seed from Alaska versus kale seed from California has made no appreciable difference in the plant growth. Tomatoes, however, are a very different story.

Growing seeds in Alaska is slow and difficult. We source most of our seeds from farms and ethical companies in the United States aligned with our core values. Everything has been trialed in Alaska and we use our seeds to grow the produce we sell in the summer.

## **How do you keep out predators?**

Our main predators are bears and they are near our field every day by the end of the season. We have a simple, solar-powered electric fence with three strands



Leah Wagner and Nick Schlosstein in Haines.

*Continued on page 5*

# FOUNDROOT INTERVIEW, CONTINUED

*Continued from page 4*

attached to rebar that encompasses our field and a similar setup at our home garden. We had a horrible, record-breaking year of bear issues in Haines this year with 47 bear killings. They broke steel garage doors and ate through drywall, but never entered our growing space.

## **Tell us a little about your business cycle.**

We run a year-round business. In the summer, we run a small market garden, partnering with like-minded businesses in Haines and Juneau to help fill the dire need for fresh food in our region.

When seed sales slow in May, we are in our busiest time on the farm. In October, we shut down the farm and begin processing seed crops, doing inventory, testing our seeds, packing envelopes, and getting our shop up for the next season. Once the shop is open, we spend any time we aren't filling orders on crop planning, engaging with customers, and giving talks and workshops for gardeners statewide. We try to work a normal schedule in the winter, spending weekends in the snow and evenings knitting and watching movies, but we are quite full up year-round.

## **Tell us about the pandemic rush on seeds.**

The huge rush on seeds in March 2020 depleted the stock of our rarer varieties, including Alaska grown seeds from our farm.

Last spring, we purchased a piece of equipment that would have allowed us to make small hoop houses on our field to protect our seed crops. Due to interrupted supply lines from Covid-19, this never arrived. In addition, we had record rainfall in the summer months. Rain is our greatest challenge to getting seeds to dry to maturity. Without protection, our seed crops were poor, and we don't have surplus to sell many of the varieties we had planned on in our 2021 catalog.

The cost of organic seed we sourced from last season to this one increased by two to eight times. We have some organic seed in our back stock but had to resupply with mostly conventional seed. It was more important to us to make sure the varieties our customers rely on stayed available.

So, when you shop with us this year, you will see some seeds missing, less organic and Alaska grown varieties, and limited quantities of some of our rarer varieties. What we do have, we have loads of and we finally have the infrastructure and labor available to make seed production a top priority in 2021.

## **What can gardeners do to ease seed supply and demand issues?**

Gardeners can test their own seeds to make sure they use them up before purchasing more, only buy what they actually need, share what they have, and consider making seed saving part of their efforts.

## **How do you advise gardeners to maximize their seed saving potential?**

We recommend learning some basics about plant pollination and focusing on vegetables with perfect flowers such as lettuce, tomatoes, peppers, and peas. It's easiest to pick just one variety of that vegetable to grow for the year to reduce potential cross pollination.

Save your strongest, healthiest, most bolt and disease resistant plants for seed and make sure they are properly processed and dried.

Follow minimum planting requirements and make sure your garden is far enough away from the neighbors to keep minimum distance requirements or learn about bagging and caging techniques. After that, you can do a simple home germination test and store your seeds in a cool, dark, dry place to use for next year. You can end up with quite a few seeds from one plant so consider coordinating a seed swap in the winter months to share your bounty. 🌱



Foundroot Farm, photos courtesy Leah Wagner.



# MASTERING GARDEN DESIGN: SPRING 2021 ADVANCED MASTER GARDENER CLASS

Join international award-winning garden designer, educator, and Alaska Master Gardener **Brenda Adams** for an information-packed Advanced Master Gardener class created especially for Alaska Master Gardeners.



From crystalizing what you want out of your garden and understanding the details of your site, to realizing your dream garden, this class will take you through each step along the road to success.

With 12 hours of content plus 3 hours of bonus discussion, you will delve deeply into the important aspects of garden design with the goal of gaining the knowledge and confidence to make your garden beautiful, thriving and sustainable.

Topics will include:

- Envisioning garden flow
- Designing in layers
- Using light to influence how colors appear
- Developing your personal garden style
- The role of paths and structures
- Scale and proportion
- Evaluating plants from a design perspective and determining their utility, suitability and potential for success
- Designing for special situations like pollinator habitat and lower maintenance
- Pulling all the elements together, planning for the future, and on-going maintenance considerations

Having designed over 200 client gardens from Homer to Anchorage, Brenda Adams has helped a myriad of people create their little pieces of heaven in a broad range of conditions. Her acclaimed books, *There's a Moose in My Garden: Designing Gardens in Alaska* and *the Far North* and award-winning *Cool Plants for Cold Climates: A Garden Designer's Perspective*, have provided thousands of gardeners with the tools to achieve success

in their own gardens. These books are recommended, but not required, reading for the class. A sought-after speaker, Brenda has twice been invited to speak at the Northwest Flower and Garden Show in Seattle, the Alaska state Master Gardeners' annual conference, the Alaska Botanical Garden Spring Conferences and many garden clubs throughout Alaska and Outside.



All photos courtesy Brenda Adams

Brenda's books are available on her website at <https://gardensbybrenda.com/our-books.html>, at several local Alaska bookstores, and on Amazon.

**Location:** Online via Zoom

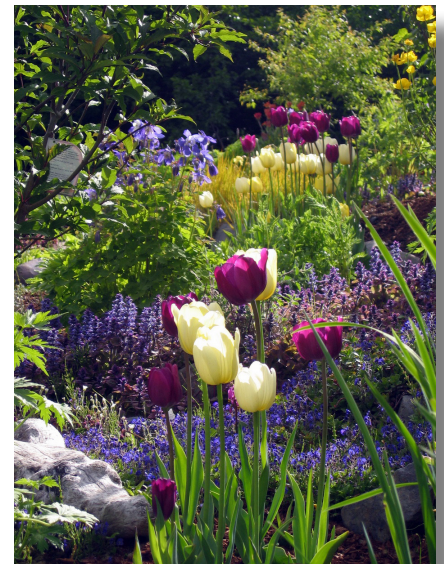
**When:** Wednesdays, beginning March 3 and ending April 7 (six weeks), 6-8 pm

You must attend all 12 hours of class and then complete 15 hours of volunteer work to earn an Advanced Master Gardener Certificate.

**Course Fee:**  
\$50 for AMGA members; \$70 for non-members

**Registration:** [https://www.alaskamastergardeners.org/advanced\\_mg\\_program.html#class](https://www.alaskamastergardeners.org/advanced_mg_program.html#class)

**Questions?** Contact Gina Dionne, Program Assistant at the Cooperative Extension Service, Anchorage Outreach Center at [gddionne@alaska.edu](mailto:gddionne@alaska.edu) or 907-786-6313.



# FEBRUARY 2021 EVENT CALENDAR

## CLASSES/WORKSHOPS

### Thursday, February 4 @ 6 pm

Alaska Botanical Garden: Fall in Love with Dahlias online workshop. Learn all about dahlias with Greta Lewanski of Turnstone Farm, Alaska Botanical Garden, Via Zoom and recorded for later listening. [Buy tickets.](#)

### Tuesday, February 9 @ 11-noon or 4-5 pm

Wildflower Garden Club: Making a Heart-shaped Birdseed Ornament with Kathy Liska via Zoom. Pre-register by Feb. 2 at [akwildflowers@gmail.com](mailto:akwildflowers@gmail.com). Cost is \$7 (cash/check) or \$8 (credit card).

### Wednesday, February 17, @ noon

UAF CES Anchorage Outreach Center: Starting Seeds! A free virtual seed starting class. Register at [http://bit.ly/AOC\\_SeedClass2021](http://bit.ly/AOC_SeedClass2021)

### Thursday, February 18 @ 6 pm

Alaska Botanical Garden: Making a Garden Journal with Patrick Ryan. Via Zoom and recorded for later listening. [Buy tickets.](#)

### Tuesday, February 23 @ 8:30-10:30 am

Alaska Cottage Food Producers webinar, hosted by Alaska Food Policy Council and others. Attend for free via [Facebook](#).

## MEETINGS & EVENTS

### Monday, February 1 @ 7-9 pm

Alaska Native Plant Society monthly meeting, Aaron Wells presents "Ecological Land Surveys in Alaska: Botanical Adventures Across the State." Reports on Spirea from Marilyn Barker and on Therorhodion glandulosum from Glenn Brown. Via Google Meet. Contact [president@aknps.org](mailto:president@aknps.org) for meeting link.

### Wednesday, February 3 @ 2:15 pm

Walkabout Wednesdays, Matanuska Experimental Farm & Extension Center, with soil scientist Lorene Lynn; free via [Facebook Live](#).

### Thursday, February 11, 10-11 a.m.

Wildflower Garden Club Regular Meeting and Program: "AgrAbility: Easier Gardening" DeShana York and Art Nash; contact [Paul Marmora](#) for details.

### Thursday, February 11

Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers Association Regular Meeting and Program; join at [www.apfga.org](http://www.apfga.org) to receive meeting details and instructions.

### Friday, February 12 @ 12-1:30 pm

Herb Study Group monthly meeting, CBD oil presented by Debbie Hinchey. Via Zoom, contact [anchorageherbstudygroup@gmail.com](mailto:anchorageherbstudygroup@gmail.com) or call Elaine at 276-4295.

### Wednesday, February 17 @ 2:15 pm

Walkabout Wednesdays, Matanuska Experimental Farm & Extension Center, with IPM agent Joey Slowik, plus making seed tape; free via Facebook Live. [Event details.](#)

## BIRD CHATTER

**Home gardeners eligible!** The Alaska Division of Agriculture has food security grants available to individuals, not just organizations. Deadline to apply is Feb. 15. Also, it's not just for growing food, it's for things like fencing to protect poultry, small animal production, hydroponics and help with tools and plants for starting a new garden.

**Hanging by a thread** Members love to read Bird Chatter (judging by a recent online survey) but no one has volunteered to carry it on. Also, no one volunteered to carry on the Calendar. These sections will stay chickadee-sized unless (or until) these roles are filled.

**Greenhouse mania** No less than 255 people from across Alaska zoomed in for Palmer-based UAF CES Horticultural Agent Stephen Brown's virtual talk on greenhouses at noon on Tuesday, Jan. 26. Stephen went on to spend a half hour answering questions. Ask him sometime about his thirsty dog :)

**Seed mama** Congratulations to Leah and Nick of Foundroot. Leah gave birth to a little girl in Anchorage between giving an interview to our newsletter and its publication date. More details (and sweet photos) on Foundroot's Facebook page. Talk about a busy seed season!



## SAVE THE DATE! ALASKA BOTANICAL GARDEN SPRING GARDEN CONFERENCE MARCH 4-5, 2021



ABG's annual Spring Garden Conference is going virtual for 2021.

[View schedule.](#)

Tickets soon!

## Become a Member

AMGA memberships are based on calendar year. If you have not renewed, [you can pay online](#) or you can print and mail [the form on our website](#).

Questions? Contact Alexis St. Juliana at [astjuliana@hotmail.com](mailto:astjuliana@hotmail.com)

## Next AMGA Meeting via Zoom!

February 15, 7 pm

Climate Change & Alaska Gardeners

with Dr. Brian Brettschneider

**Check your email, our website or Facebook page for connection instructions.**

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

Meetings are held at the BP Energy Center, 1014 Energy Court, Anchorage, accessed through the BP tower parking lot. The Energy Center is just south of the main building.

NOTE: Meeting location may change

2021 meetings are currently being held online

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 at:

[newsletteramga@gmail.com](mailto:newsletteramga@gmail.com)

AMGA, Newsletter

P.O. Box 221403

Anchorage, AK 99522-1403

## 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 (400-600 words ideal), Bird Chatter, calendar items and announcements are always welcome.

## Connect with AMGA

Website: [www.alaskamastergardeners.org](http://www.alaskamastergardeners.org)

Facebook: [facebook.com/Alaska-Master-Gardeners-Anchorage](https://www.facebook.com/Alaska-Master-Gardeners-Anchorage)

Youtube: [www.youtube.com/channel/UCvZehJprKkjQzivQvND-KopQ](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCvZehJprKkjQzivQvND-KopQ)

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

Mail: AMGA, P.O. Box 221403, Anchorage, AK 99522-1403

If you have questions or want to make address or email corrections, please contact Alexis St. Juliana at [astjuliana@hotmail.com](mailto:astjuliana@hotmail.com)



## AMGA Board of Directors

Emily Becker	President
Troy Weiss	Vice President
Jan van den Top	Treasurer
Beth Norris	Secretary
Kathleen Kaiser	At Large
Keenan Plate	At Large
Nick Riordan	At Large
Faye Stiehm	At Large

## Committee Chairs, Program Coordinators & Volunteers

Emily Becker	CES Liason
Steve Brown, Gina Dionne	CES Master Gardener Program Liaison
Faye Stiehm	Broadcast Email
Teresa Stephenson	Calendar of Events
Don Bladow, Troy Weiss, Emily Becker, Fran Pekar, Gina Dionne	Advanced MG Course
Janice Berry	Directory Editor
Kathy Liska, Cindy Walker	Facebook
Troy Weiss	Meetings & Educational Programs
Troy Weiss	Garden Tours
Mary Rydesky, Gina Docherty	Google Group Managers
Troy Weiss, Jan van den Top, Beth Norris	Grants Program
Lynn Hansen, Ruthe Rasmussen, Sharon Schlicht, Wendy Willie	Hospitality
Alexis St. Juliana	Membership Database
Elizabeth Bluemink	Newsletter Editor
Gina Docherty	Website
Lynne Opstad	Lifetime Achievement
Lynne Opstad, Julie Ginder	Pioneer Home Garden
Emily Becker, Keenan Plate	Volunteer Coordinators

