

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE by Emily Becker

I did not grow up gardening. Both my parents grew up in city apartments, in large towns in New England, and they were not gardeners. We were also a military family constantly on the move. So I really have no idea why, when I was just out of college and moving from a job in Missouri to one in South Dakota, I stopped by a roadside stand and purchased a yellow pear tomato plant.

I knew almost nothing, but luckily I knew enough that the plant would fry if left unattended in a hot car, so when I stopped at rest stops, I left the plant on the hood of the car. The rest of the journey, it sat beside me in the passenger's seat. When we arrived at my new home, the employee housing at Badlands National Park, I dug a small hole right outside my little unit and plunked it in the ground.

If you've lived in South Dakota, you know how lucky those gardeners are. Plant it and walk away. Well, almost. I am pretty sure all I did was water it. Sometimes, it had to remind me to do even that. Summer days commonly reach 90+ degrees, and there were many days I returned home to a wilted plant. But some night watering always perked it right back up, no worse for the wear.

By August, it had grown into an enormous bush with lots of flowers and many tomatoes that made their way into salads, salsas, and off the bush snacking. One night, deer came through the housing area, and other rangers

had their tomato crops munched. My yellow pear was completely spared—a novel variety must have scared them!

That is my first recollection of gardening. This spring, I found some yellow pear tomato seeds in our neighborhood seed library and the memory of those wonderful tomatoes came rushing back.

Growing tomatoes in southcentral Alaska is challenging. Still, many of us attempt it. The taste of an Alaska-grown tomato easily beats that of one from thousands of miles away.

This year, because I have a new



Emily Becker's yellow pear tomato in South Dakota.

greenhouse, I am growing more tomatoes than ever before, hoping for a big enough crop to can tomato sauce in the fall and still have lots and lots for fresh eating. I started a yellow pear and even though this time I am pampering it, it's nowhere near as big as my South Dakota plant. But carry on I shall! 🌱

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AMGA UPDATES

THANK YOU TO AMGA VOLUNTEERS

The St. Francis House food pantry second annual free plants event in late spring was a delight to volunteers, staff, and clients alike!

Thanks to the organization, expertise, and generosity of Alaska Master Gardeners, over 130 food pantry clients received a tomato plant, herb pot, or salad box in the last week of May. These are especially meaningful plants for people who have tight budgets and may not be able to afford these items at the grocery store. A special thanks to all the AMG Volunteers who helped during food pantry open hours to provide guidance on plant care and selection.

Iva Karoly-Lister (pictured left) is a part-time employee of St. Francis House food pantry and a recipient of an AMGA grant. She used the event to

connect food pantry clients with assistance purchasing materials for their home gardening projects and is now providing follow up via the grant funds.



Overall, the Master Gardeners provided the gift of growing one's own food to people who likely wouldn't have had this opportunity otherwise. Thank you!

Claire Lubke, Program Director, St. Francis House Food Pantry | Catholic Social Services

MAY 2021 AMGA TREASURER'S REPORT

Balances on 05/01/2021

Checking S-88	\$21,828.71
Savings S-1	\$5.25
Savings S-19	\$16,911.07
CD General 2 year 1.95%; 1/23	\$10,686.49

Total Assets \$49,431.52

Interest/Dividends \$2.87

This month's revenue

Membership	\$163.04
Donations	\$4.86
Fundraising/Plant sale	\$981.12

Total revenue \$1,149.02

This month's expenses

Grants	\$1,000.00
Operations	\$128.00
Website	\$73.16
Plant sale	\$134.25

Total Expenses this month \$1,335.41

BALANCES ON 5/31/2021

Checking S-88	\$21,642.32
Savings S-1	\$5.25
Savings S-19	\$16,913.94
CD General 2 Year 1.95%, (1/23)	\$10,686.49

Total Assets on 5/31/2021 \$49,248.00

Prepared by Jan van den Top on 6/14/2021

The Midtown Mall garden show and plant sale in May was a successful event, with total revenue of \$992. A total of nine revenue-producing sellers have received their 75 percent of the receipts.

The Grant Committee recently met and recommended the award of four garden project grants and one scholarship grant to the Board. In the May meeting, those recommendations were approved and the following grants were issued:

- Grace Christian School - \$500.00
- Create Academy - \$500.00
- Polaris K-12 - \$500.00
- St. Francis House (CCS) - \$250.00
- 1 ea. scholarship \$250.00.

We did receive a total of 11 grant applications and sent thank you letters to applicants who could not be funded this year. This is how the \$ 2,000 budget was used in 2021.

We are looking for one more grant committee member. If you are interested, let Emily Becker or Jan van den Top know.—*Jan van den Top*

THE SCOOP ON COMMUNITY COMPOST by Suzanna Caldwell

It's summer, which means Solid Waste Services' Community Compost Program is operating and ready for your food scraps!

This is the sixth year Solid Waste Services has hosted the program since launching it in 2016.

The program has undergone some changes—with this year being no exception—but its mission of keeping organic material out of the landfill for composting remains unchanged.

Here's how the program works:

- Save approved fruit and veggies scraps (including coffee grounds and eggshells) and bring them to Community Compost drop-off sites at the Central Transfer Station (54th avenue and Ingra Street) and Anchorage Regional Landfill (15500 E. Eagle River Loop Road).
- Drop-off sites are open whenever facilities are open – Monday through Saturday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- After dropping off scraps, come back once a month to pick-up finished compost.
- Each household is allowed up to 10 gallons (two 5-gallon buckets) of finished compost per month.
- Grow beautiful plants and delicious food with the finished compost!

The biggest change for 2021 is how finished compost is distributed.

In the past we asked participants to take equal amounts of finished compost to what they deposited in

food scraps. However, the finished compost pile operated on the honor system and we had reports of people taking large amounts of compost. This meant there wasn't enough left over for people who were participating in the program.

SWS does not have the staff to monitor the compost at all times. By having monthly drop-offs we can monitor the compost and guarantee at least one day a month when the finished compost will be available.

This year compost will be delivered monthly on the third Tuesday of every month at the Anchorage Regional

Landfill and the third Thursday of every month at the Central Transfer Station.

We can only guarantee compost on those days, however any compost left over will be available for pick-up following those days.

We ask that participants still limit compost to 10 gallons per household, per month, in order to allow equal access to the compost.

We appreciate everyone who uses the program and does their part to keep food scraps out of the landfill. You're saving landfill space, reducing emissions that cause climate change, and contributing toward the production of compost in Southcentral Alaska.

To learn more about Community Compost, visit www.muni.org/sws. 🌱

Suzanna Caldwell is the Recycling Coordinator for Solid Waste Services.



Suzanna Caldwell and Pierce Schwalb of SWS assist Community Compost Program participants on pick-up day. Photo courtesy Elizabeth Bluemink

HERB STUDY: GARDEN SORREL by Elizabeth Bluemink

When I was in college and needed to stay up all night to finish an assignment, I would head over to the student café and fill a bag with Sour Patch Kids™.

Those tart, chewy candies provided a shot of energy and comfort during difficult hours in libraries or computer labs. Usually the bag was empty by dawn.

While I haven't had a Sour Patch Kid™ in many years, I reminisce about the candy because of one plant in our garden: sorrel.

Sorrel has a sharp, lemony tang when you bite into a fresh leaf. (It only tastes like a vegetable to me after it is cooked.)

The sorrel in our garden came from seeds shared by Saskia Esslinger at least a decade ago. The seeds were labeled French sorrel (*Rumex scutatus*) but I believe they are garden sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*) based on the more elongated shape of the leaf and high acidity.

I've tended the same patch of sorrel in my perennial garden bed ever since. In fact, now I have two patches. Every few years, I divide the patches and give away clumps to anyone who will take them.

Why grow sorrel?

The biggest plus for sorrel is that it's a perennial native vegetable in Alaska.

The *Rumex acetosa* in our garden is native to Alaska and has several edible relatives. Many Alaskans enjoy the tart flavor of alpine or arctic sorrel (*Oxyria digyna*). The *Rumex acetosa* in my garden is one of the *Rumex* species known as sour dock, a traditional Alaska Native food. Another well-known edible is Arctic dock (*Rumex arcticus*).

In our Anchorage garden, the first shoots of garden

sorrel emerge in April from the partially-frozen ground—about the same time as the rhubarb. (That is interesting to me, because both plants are high in oxalic acid, which is responsible for their sour taste.)

Garden sorrel requires very little attention. In fact, the only attention I give it is what I give to its neighbor plants—water and occasional compost.

Another great thing about sorrel is that it isn't bothered much by pests. I find slugs but they don't do much damage. They just take a nibble here and there and then move on. Perhaps this is due to the oxalic acid, which plants use to repel insects and animals.

Our sorrel plants go to seed in early summer. At that point I hack them down and let them grow back for another crop.

How do we use it?

Most of the fresh leaves I gather become pesto and sorrel sauce, and the flowering stalks go to the community compost station.

The leaves are OK in salad but if eating raw, my preference is pesto. I freeze the pesto and we eat it with pasta all winter. The cooked version of sorrel sauce is OK frozen, too, and is nice on potatoes.

An important fact about sorrel is that when cooked, it will quickly turn from bright to drab green and melt down to a little blob in the pan.

Each summer, I experiment with a gourmet dish using sorrel—French sorrel soup or salmon and sorrel, usually. We've also tried gongura (sorrel) dal, rhubarb sorrel crisp and vegetarian borscht made with sorrel. One of these days, I'll try to make candied sorrel leaves, to see if they



Perennial sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*) growing in Anchorage.
Photo courtesy Elizabeth Bluemink.

Continued on next page

AMGA Summer Garden Tours

UPDATED! Remember to check
email for tour details/changes.

6/28/21 Marsha Burns & Lynn Highland
7/12/21 Steve & Lou Ann Hennig Garden
7/19/21 Brown Hen Farms, Chugiak
7/26/21 Opa's Garden
7/31/31 Les Brake, Willow, **Noon**
8/2/21 Roof Top Garden, Hope Center
8/9/21 Faye Stiehm Garden
8/16/21 Carrol Samuelson Garden
8/23/21 Pioneer Home Garden
8/26/21 Grow North Farms, **6-8 pm**

7:00 PM start time unless noted differently

Garden Sorrel, continued from previous page

taste at all like a Sour Patch Kid™. I'd also like to try making sorrel pasta or sorrel gnocchi.

Until then I will continue to churn out sorrel pesto and enjoy sugar-free snacks from the sour patch. Also, I have plenty of sorrel available for division if anyone would like some! 🌿

*This article was adapted from Elizabeth's garden blog,
www.transcendentalgardening.com.*



Contact the Herb Study Group

If you want to volunteer, have questions or you want to be added to our email list, please email us at anchorageherbstudygroup@gmail.com or call Elaine at 276-4295 and leave her a message.

JULY 2021 EVENT CALENDAR

CLASSES/WORKSHOPS

Thursday, July 8, 12-1 pm

Mat-Su Experimental Farm & Extension Center: Bug Boxes with Joey Slowik. Ever wondered about ways to increase natural predators and pollinators in your garden? Have you considered a bug house? In this live stream event, we will be building a basic form, and discussing all the possibilities to provide a safe bug refuge in your garden. We'll cover the materials you need as well as the technical prowess to get it done, and start getting help in your garden from our six and eight legged friends. [Live on Facebook](#).

Saturday, June 17, 10-11:30 am

Alaska Botanical Garden: Join a unique workshop to learn how to create a beautiful, "overgrown" floral arrangement using flowers cut fresh from the garden. With simple supplies and cut floral and foliage varieties commonly found in Alaskan's backyards, you will be amazed at what you can create! \$55 fee. Pre-registration required. [Register here](#).

Tuesday, July 27, 12-1 pm

Mat-Su Experimental Farm & Extension Center: Chicken University teaches participants how to successfully raise a backyard flock in cold weather conditions. Topics include appropriate breed selection for Alaska, coop design, nutrition, disease identification/management and chicken psychology. Along the way will be sprinkled a few funny stories about raising chickens. [Register here](#).

MEETINGS & EVENTS

Saturday, July 10, 9 am

Alaska Native Plant Society: "The Wildflowers of Craigie Creek" at Hatcher's Pass. Meet at 9 am at the Palmer Fred Meyer. Hike along an old mining road up a lush sub-alpine valley, about 2 miles with very little change in elevation. If time allows the group might stop at April Bowl on the way home for a look at higher alpine flora. More info: Beth Norris at enorris@aknps.org or call (505) 500-2142.

Tuesday, July 20, 6-7 pm

Alaska Botanical Garden: Walking Tour of the Garden. Make the most of our short growing season, learn to identify Alaskan plants and find out what's blooming in our collections with one of our monthly walks in the Garden. Be sure to dress for the weather (good walking shoes or boots, rain layers, bug spray, hat, sunglasses, water). Space is limited; pre-registration is encouraged (space will fill up quickly). No refunds for cancellations made with less than 48 hours of the tour. \$8 for Members/\$10 for Non-Members. [Register here](#).

Saturday, July 24, 12 pm-TBD

Yarducopia is hosting a Garden Bike Tour to highlight some of the amazing things growing in Anchorage's many backyards. Visit the [event page](#) and reach out with ideas of gardens to visit at garden@akaction.org.

JOBS, ANNOUNCEMENTS, ETC.

AMGA is seeking program topics for future monthly member meetings. Most of the spaces are filled for 2021 but we are looking for 2022 topics. If you have ideas, please contact AMGA vice president Troy Weiss at troydweiss@gmail.com.

Check out a wide range of volunteer opportunities with local garden projects at [Volunteers 4 Anchorage Gardens](#), a list compiled by AMGA and the Alaska School Garden Network.

Did you miss Brenda Adams' "Mastering Garden Design" class? AMGA will offer it again in the fall. Date/time TBA. [Sign up here](#) to make sure you get the first notice. Please note that this class will not be offered for an Advanced Certificate and will be open to all gardeners.

AMGA is surveying members on topics for the next Advanced MG class. Give your input by filling out [our online survey](#).

AMGA Late Season Plant Sale

**SATURDAY AUGUST 14, 2021
10 AM – 3 PM**

**Benny Benson School and the ABG
parking lot
4515 Campbell Airstrip Rd**

A SignUpGenius will be sent out to member in mid-July and published in the August newsletter.

We will need more tents and tables. Let Sue Negus know if you can bring these to the pre-sale setup on the day before. Also put your name on the table and tents.

Start potting your plants!

Sue will try to attend the rest of the garden tours and carry the yellow tags with her for the potted perennials. She will also have yellow tags at her house 10201 Our Road (near the Zoo).

**Perennials, house plants, fruit, trees
and maybe garden art.**

**Setup the day before.
Volunteering for setup will also be on
SignUpGenius.**

**Questions? Contact Susan Negus at
902-227-6288 or senegus@gci.net.**

BIRD CHATTER

Need garden help of the “Zits” variety? Per Emily, the Facebook group Anchorage Teens for Hire is where everyone is finding their garden helpers this year.

Towering (but silent) magpies Fran encourages us to check out the new sculpture installation of magpies at the Alaska Botanical Garden called Night and Day, created by The Myth Makers out of locally sourced birch and willow saplings. At 20 ft tall and spanning the width of the trail midway between the lawn and the herb garden, viewers can amble underneath to admire from all angles. Andy Moerlein, one of the artists, grew up in Anchorage, but now resides on the East Coast. The Myth Makers have travelled the world creating ephemeral sculptures in botanical gardens and festivals. The idea is that the sculpture will slowly break down and return to nature in 3-5 years.

Garden tour intel The summer tours are a great opportunity to trade knowledge with other gardeners. A couple tidbits from the June 21 tour: Meg O’Mullane had outstanding ranunculuses that she started from seed indoors. Apparently some say not to do that? You can see Meg’s success in our front page photo. Also, Emily Becker and newer MG Lisa received expert advice from Debbie Hinchey on their lackluster “hardy” kiwi. As Debbie explained in the [January newsletter](#), sometimes the kiwi marketed as “hardy” are not the right kind to grow here. The one that flourishes in Anchorage is *A. kolomikta*.

Trouble with liverwort? After reading up on this, several AMGA members are using mustard powder to knock it down. Gina, who heard about it from Madge, sprinkled the powder on a bed full of liverwort, which “just dissolved.” Mustard powder has nitrogen in it, so it is actually somewhat of a plant fertilizer too, Gina says. She used it around primulas and they were unscathed, as were the horsetail. The powder did leave a ‘mustard’ residue on the top of the soil, but she turned the soil over and it looks fine now.

*What’s new, interesting, confounding and delightful?
Send your bits of interesting garden news to birdchatter@alaskamastergardeners.org.*





Bonus photo: St. Francis House clients picking up a “salad box” during the last week of May. Photo courtesy Claire Lubke.

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
Vacant	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, Jane Baldwin	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

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

Next AMGA Meeting via Zoom!

September 20, 2021

Urban Gardening in Anchorage

Nick Riordan, Keenan Plate & Nick Bachman

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

Member Meetings: 7 pm every 3rd Monday of the month, September through May (except December). Meetings are 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. **2021 meetings are currently being held online.** These monthly educational programs are free and open to the public. **Visitors and guests are welcomed and encouraged.**

Board Meetings: 2nd Monday of the month, 6-7 pm, anyone is welcome to observe. Send an email to president@alaskamastergardeners.org for the meeting link.

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

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

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

Youtube: www.youtube.com/channel/UCvZehJprKkjQzivQvNDKopQ

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

