

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE by Emily Becker

You've ordered seeds, maybe even fired up your grow lights. Add one more item to your winter gardening to-do list: winter sowing!

Winter sowing is a bona fide garden trend that's exploded in popularity over the past couple years. It's a technique for starting seeds in cold weather that requires very minimal equipment and hardly any work.

A tsunami of web pages, Facebook groups, and YouTube videos are available to teach you the basics of winter sowing. Essentially, you're making a mini-greenhouse from something you might normally toss in the recycle bin. You poke some drainage hole in a plastic milk jug or similar container, cut it in half, fill the bottom with moist dirt, pop in some seeds, tape it back together, and set it outside for Mother Nature to work her magic.

Yes, yes, most of the online instructional videos take

place in some other place where gardeners have it easy and it doesn't get that cold. But I am here to tell you: winter sowing works in Alaska! Below is some evidence from last winter.

I have a list of at least 15 different plants I want to try in 2022, including perennial flowers. I don't even think we have to wait until March. When you get the inkling over the next month, why not give it a try? 🌱

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I planted seeds in my milk jugs on March 7. Notice, no caps. (Pro-tip! Write on the tape outside AND on a label inside.)



On March 26, my little greenhouses were covered with a blanket of snow. I thought, this can't be great. Nah, no problem.



Here are some plants on May 13. Cabbage and kale did especially well. No more babying starts! They are born tough and don't need hardening off. I peeked in on them during April and occasionally gave them a little drink through the top hole.

JANUARY MEMBER MEETING HIGHLIGHTS by Emily Becker

This summer, scientists will continue testing a new method of preventing spruce bark beetle attacks: pheromones. Entomologist Jessie Moan of the Forest Health Division of the USDA Forest Service gave AMGA members information about this and much more in her January presentation, "Spruce Beetles: What's New for 22."

Moan described how researchers have been testing different blends of semiochemicals to attract and repel beetles. The semiochemicals mimic the natural pheromones the insects use to communicate with one another. In particular, some pheromones guide beetles to aggregate, and some tell them to disperse. The semiochemicals are blended into a paste and applied to "trap trees," a pole of nesting funnels that looks a bit similar, if you have bug eyes, to a tree. If the pheromones work, the beetles will be lured to the trap tree and away from the spruce!

Semiochemicals have been known and studied for some time in other regions, but until now, researchers have not had quite the precise blend that worked on Alaskan spruce bark beetles. According to Moan, researchers found some success with various blends in 2021, and they plan to expand their work in 2022. It's possible that some day, forest managers might be able to know how many semiochemical trap trees are needed to protect, say, an acre of your yard. It's not currently being considered for forest protection.

In other bark beetle news, researchers are continuing to evaluate and monitor the insects' territorial expansion. Beetles were spotted as far north as Cantwell last year, and research teams will be dispatched there this summer, along with Seward and other locations on the Kenai Peninsula. They'll collect data on beetle impact, understory vegetation, landscape regeneration, the rate of decay of dead trees, and more. Aerial surveys will also continue.

What's not new: once your tree is under a major attack, there is nothing you can do to save it. Moan gave lots of detailed info on beetle biology, fostering general tree health, and pesticide options. Again, she emphasized: pesticides can only protect unattacked trees.

Great care must be taken in applying pesticides; read, read, read the label, or get professional help! Information on all this and more can be found on the website www.alaskasprucebeetle.org.

alaskasprucebeetle.org. It contains gobs of info on beetle biology and just about every spruce beetle topic.

If you still have questions, you can, of course, contact your local CES – IPM Technician, Alex Wenninger, akwenninger@alaska.edu. She'll be delivering our April membership meeting talk on garden insects. 🌱

JANUARY 2021 TREASURER'S REPORT

Balances on 12/01/2021

| | | |
|-------------------------------|----|-----------|
| Checking S-88 | \$ | 22,759.68 |
| Savings S-1 | \$ | 5.25 |
| Savings S-19 | \$ | 16,930.89 |
| CD General 2 year 1.95%; 1/23 | \$ | 10,742.83 |

Total Assets \$ 50,438.65

Interest/Dividends \$ 31.31

This month's revenue

| | | |
|---------------------------|----|----------|
| Membership | \$ | 1,103.69 |
| Donations | \$ | 30.00 |
| Fundraising/Plant sale | | |
| Advanced M.G. course fees | \$ | 796.22 |
| Total revenue | \$ | 1,929.91 |

This month's expenses

| | | |
|-------------------------------|----|--------|
| Grants (scholarships) | | |
| Hospitality | | |
| Operations | \$ | 102.00 |
| Website | \$ | 255.00 |
| Plant sale | | |
| Public Relations (State Fair) | | |
| Newsletter | \$ | 19.99 |

Total Expenses this month \$ 376.99

BALANCES ON 11/30/2021

| | | |
|---------------------------------|----|-----------|
| Checking S-88 | \$ | 24,443.80 |
| Savings S-1 | \$ | 5.25 |
| Savings S-19 | \$ | 16,933.77 |
| CD General 2 Year 1.95%, (1/23) | \$ | 10,771.26 |

Total Assets on 12/31/2021 \$ 52,154.08

Prepared by Jan van den Top on 1/8/2021

HERB STUDY: RUE by Marjorie Williams

Which is the only garden herb more bitter than wormwood? The answer is rue (*Ruta graveolens*).

Also called herb of grace, herbygrass and ruta, rue is now mostly used as an ornamental plant and can be trimmed to make a hedge.

Rue has blue-green, oval lobed leaflets and a whitish bloom with tiny, four-part yellow flowers. The plants grow erect up to three feet tall and are not sprawling. Rue is hardy in zones 4 to 10, growing in full sun to part shade in well-drained soil with a pH of 7.

Ancients used rue for warts, cancer, poor eyesight and intestinal worms. In the Middle Ages, people used it as a strewing herb to dispel insects, scorpions and serpents and also held a sprig to their noses to ward off the plague.

In early Roman Catholic high mass services, branches of rue were used to sprinkle holy water to wash away sins. Other religions also have used rue for purification rituals.

Rue has been used as a pesticide and repellent. Mixed decoctions kill lice and fly larvae.

Rue has been used in candles, baths and as talismans against witches, curses and hexes. Wiccans use rue in several major holiday rites. A witch uses it to protect and strengthen her aura and promote health and concentration.

The seeds of rue were used in early Roman cooking. Rue contains rutin which has been found to strengthen blood vessels. It also is used as an anti-diarrheal, anti-inflammatory, antispasmodic, expectorant, hemostatic stimulant.

Use rue in small to moderate amounts because large doses can cause violent gastric pain, vomiting, systemic complications, and death. Take care when handling this plant as it can cause skin itching, burning and blistering. Gloves and long sleeves are recommended.

Plant rue as a companion to roses and raspberries to repel insects. It also is reported to repel cats. Rue is also used as a source for red dye. The oil and fresh or dried leaves are used in perfumes and some foods. 🌿



Ruta graveolens, Nadaja, [CC BY-SA 3.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

2022 AMGA GRANTS AVAILABLE

AMGA is continuing its annual grants program in 2022, offering grants up to \$500 to individuals and organized groups for gardening education or community garden projects.

Funds may be awarded to projects which promote the purposes of AMGA, including community education, responsible gardening practices, and promotion of volunteerism.

Three kinds of grants are available:

- A tuition grant, which assists CES-Master Gardener class students experiencing financial need

- An education grant, which pays for other Alaska gardening-related education/training
- A gardening project grant, which pays for materials and supplies needed for community gardening projects

Grant applications are judged by AMGA's grants committee. Recipients of the education and gardening project grants must give a visual presentation or a written report on their project that can be included in the AMGA newsletter.

Visit the AMGA website for more information. 🌿

HERB STUDY: FRANKINCENSE & MYRRH by Debbie Hinchey

Many people recognize frankincense and myrrh from the biblical description of presents from the magi to the baby Jesus. Both have been prized over many centuries. Frankincense and myrrh are resin extractions from trees in different genera of the *Burseraceae* family. The family includes both trees and shrubs, and is native to tropical regions of Africa, Asia, Australasia, and the Americas.

Frankincense is an aromatic resin used in incense and perfumes, obtained from several species of *Boswellia* trees. The trees start producing resin at about eight to 10 years old. Tapping is done two to three times a year with the final taps producing the best tears due to their higher aromatic terpene, sesquiterpene and diterpene content.

Recent studies indicate frankincense tree populations are declining, partly due to over-exploitation. Heavily tapped trees produce seeds that germinate at only 16% while seeds of trees that had not been tapped germinate at more than 80%. In addition, burning, grazing, and attacks by the longhorn beetle have reduced the tree population. Conversion of frankincense woodlands to agriculture is also a major threat.

Frankincense has been traded on the Arabian Peninsula for more than 5,000 years. It was also traded from the Horn of Africa during the Silk Road era. It was reintroduced to Western Europe by Frankish Crusaders, and other Western Europeans on their journeys to the Eastern Roman Empire where it was commonly used in church services. The name frankincense refers to the quality of incense, not to the Franks themselves.

Compounds of different chemical categories are identified in the frankincense resin. The pharmacological actions of *Boswellia* resin are attributed to the complementary effects of these compounds. Clinical studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of the resin in some

disease conditions like asthma, rheumatoid arthritis, irritable bowel diseases, osteoarthritis, and relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis. The essential oil obtained from *Boswellia serrata* showed antimicrobial activities.

Myrrh is a gum-resin extracted from a number of small, thorny tree species of the genus *Commiphora*. Myrrh resin has been used throughout history as a perfume, incense and medicine. Myrrh mixed with posca

or wine was common across ancient cultures, for general pleasure, and as an analgesic.

Myrrh is harvested by repeatedly wounding the trees to bleed the gum, which is waxy and coagulates quickly. After the harvest, the gum becomes yellowish, hard and glossy. Myrrh gum

is commonly harvested from the species *Commiphora myrrha*, native to Somalia, Oman, Yemen, Eritrea, Ethiopia and parts of Saudi Arabia. Meetiga, the trade-name of Arabian Myrrh, is more brittle and gummy than the Somali variety and does not have the latter's white markings.

Myrrh has been used in traditional Chinese and Ayurvedic medicines as well as in Hebrew, Christian, Islamic and ancient Egyptian and Arabian religious ceremonies. Myrrh is used as an oral antiseptic and analgesic for toothaches. It is also used in some healing salves and can be used in liniment for bruises, aches, and sprains. However, before adding myrrh oil to anything that is consumed, consider that it may cause heart arrhythmia, may interfere with blood-thinning medications, may cause hypoglycemia and that there are serious pregnancy concerns.

The name “myrrh” is also applied to the unrelated potherb *Myrrhis odorata*, also known as “cicely” or “sweet cicely.” 🌿



Frankincense trees on Socotra Island. Photo by Rod Waddington (CC BY-SA 2.0)

BIRD CHATTER

Sowing contradictions 'Tis the season to cluck happily over brand-new seed packets arriving in the mail. However, an AMGA member squawked at the label on a free seed packet sent by a popular "heirloom" seed company, which gushingly described the enclosed seed as a "newly developed" heirloom. Hmm.

Time to start plants for the Midtown Mall Garden Show
The 2022 Midtown Mall Garden Show is set for April 16. Don't forget to get plant starts ready to sell at the AMGA booth!

Ginger in the limelight at the Northwest Garden Show
AMGA member and former Newsletter Editor Ginger Hudson is giving two talks at the Feb. 9-13 Northwest Flower and Garden Show in Seattle. She'll be talking on "Gardening for Resilience" and "Alaska hardy" plants that do well in Pacific Northwest gardens. Visit the [speaker page](#) for more details!

It's too late, baby ... The "From the Ground Up" Zoom garden series offered by UAF CES and the Kenai Soil and Water Conservation District sold out! 300 slots were

available for the Zoom webinars and they filled up in two weeks.

Native seed is popular If the soaring volume of seed orders in the Alaska Native Plant Society's annual fundraiser is any indication, gardeners are getting excited about planting Alaska native plants. About half of the species in the [online catalog](#) sold out by the end of January.

In memory of Lynn Wince AMGA recently learned AMGA member and Alaska pioneer Lynn Wince passed away in July. Her obituary in the Anchorage Daily News said her "greenhouse and vast gardens won many ribbons from the Alaska State Fair over the decades. She particularly enjoyed helping her local church start their garden every spring. She was a Past President of The Pioneers of Alaska Women's Igloo No. 4 and one of the last - current - most senior active members." [Read her full obituary.](#)

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



Herb Study Group Meetings

- February 11: Nasturtiums, Canarybird Vines
- March 11: Native plants for ABG's Herb Garden
- April 8: Herb Garden Plans for 2022
- May 13: Yet to be determined

Anyone interested in learning about herbs is welcome to send an email to the Herb Study Group at anchorageherb-studygroup@gmail.com to receive our notifications. There are no dues or membership requirements.

Monthly meetings are via Zoom, noon to 1:30 p.m. on the 2nd Friday of each month, September-May. We also volunteer in ABG's Herb Garden during the growing season.



A FEW SLOTS LEFT!

Don't miss your chance to sign up for AMGA classes starting in February.

Garden Design with Brenda Adams will run six consecutive Wednesdays, 6-8 pm, starting Feb. 9. A few slots remain!

Intro to Botany and Plant Identification with Dr. Marilyn Barker will run 12 consecutive Tuesdays, 7-8 pm, starting Feb. 8. (This class has a wait list.)

FEBRUARY 2022 EVENT CALENDAR

CLASSES/WORKSHOPS

Friday, February 11, 5:30-7:30 pm

Anchorage Parks and Rec: Annual Flower Bed Design. Flower beds are a fun and creative way to add splashes of color to a garden and can be designed differently each year. We'll share how the Municipality Horticultural crew designs flower beds, how you can design a flower bed that fits your budget, what flowers to pick, and much more. Class will be held at the Dr. Lidia Selkregg Chalet. Cost: \$15. [Register.](#)

Friday, February 25, 5:30-7:30 pm

Anchorage Parks and Rec: Seed and Plant Starting. You'll learn how to get a jump start on the growing season by starting seeds indoors and (the crucial next step) how to take care of them. Class will be held in the main room of the Dr. Lidia Selkregg Chalet. Cost: \$15. [Register.](#)

Anytime (self-paced course)

Cooperative Extension Service: Bird vetch in Alaska. Self paced online course details the biology, impact, and management of the invasive plant bird vetch as well as decision tools for control and how to report invasive species. Cost: \$15. [Register.](#)

Anytime (self-paced course)

Cooperative Extension Service: Orange hawkweed in Alaska: Self-paced online course details the biology, impact, and management of the invasive plant orange hawkweed and decision tools for control and how to report invasive species. [Registration and more info.](#) Cost: \$15.

Anytime (self-paced course)

Cooperative Extension Service: Spruce Beetle in Trees and Forests: Online course details the biology, impact, and management of spruce beetles in Alaska and decision tools for control. [Register.](#) Cost: \$15.

MEETINGS & EVENTS

Thursday, February 3, 7-9 pm

Anchorage Garden Club: Monthly meeting held first Thursday of each month. [Get details.](#)

Monday, February 7, 7-9 pm

Alaska Native Plant Society Meeting: "Vegetation

monitoring in recently drained lakes of the Bering Land Bridge National Preserve" [Get meeting link.](#)

Wednesday, February 9, 7 pm

Wrangell Institute for Science & Environment: Pollinators and Other Insects in Alaska's Gardens with Derek Sikes and Joey Slowik, University of Alaska Fairbanks. [Register via Zoom.](#)

Thursday, February 10, 10 am-noon

Wildflower Garden Club of Alaska: "Upcycling Garden Treasures" Member Share & Tell" Monthly meetings held the 2nd Thursday of each month. [Get details.](#)

Thursday, February 10, 7-8 pm

Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers Association: Monthly meetings held the 2nd Thursday of each month (during the winter). [Get details.](#)

Saturday, February 19, 10 am-11

Alaska Rock Garden Society: Ed Buyarski presents on primulas – their growing conditions and growing them from seed. [Get details.](#)

JOBS, ANNOUNCEMENTS, ETC.

The Alaska Botanical Garden has a number of positions available in 2022, including a year-round Event Coordinator and a number of seasonal positions. [Find out more and apply.](#)

Alaska Seeds of Change has a temporary, part-time, entry-level grower position available in its hydroponic greenhouse operation. [Learn more and apply.](#)

Vendors are sought for the Alaska Botanical Garden's annual Spring Garden Conference to be held virtually on March 11 and 12. Being a vendor is an opportunity for community businesses, local makers and artists to promote upcoming events, share resources and sell products with conference participants. Email inquiries to ABG's Program Director at stacey.shriner@alaskabg.org.

The Harvest of Hope Memorial Garden is seeking to fill volunteer roles: a grant writer, blogger, and volunteer

Continued on next page

Calendar, from previous page

coordinator. Also, the first HHMG planting date will be Feb. 5, for leeks and onions. If interested, please contact Don Bladow at (907) 830-5723 or email him at dfbladow@gmail.com.

AMGA is seeking multiple volunteers for the 2023 Conference Committee, and one volunteer for the Grants Committee. [Get info and sign up.](#)

The USDA recently approved the State of Alaska's industrial hemp program, meaning that the current pilot program for Alaska hemp growers will become a permanent program. [Find out more.](#)

The Alaska Division of Forestry is offering grants to "tree-vitalize" schools. Grants are available up to \$10,000 for qualifying organizations to purchase trees, supplies and materials for tree planting as school-wide or classroom projects. The deadline to apply is March 4. [Find out more.](#)



AKFOODPOLICYCOUNCIL.ORG

Alaska Food Policy Council

MARCH 17-19

2022 ALASKA FOOD FESTIVAL & CONFERENCE

EVERYBODY EATS: NOURISHING OUR CULTURE, OUR HEALTH, OUR FUTURE

Intertribal Agriculture Council

UAA Dietetics & Nutrition College of Health School of Allied Health

CONFERENCE PARTNERS: INTERTRIBAL AGRICULTURE COUNCIL AND UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA DIETETICS & NUTRITION

The poster features a vibrant illustration of two reindeer in a field of various vegetables like carrots and leafy greens, with mountains in the background. Logos for the Intertribal Agriculture Council and UAA Dietetics & Nutrition are included.



ALASKA BOTANICAL GARDEN

Spring Garden Conference



The Alaska Botanical Garden's Spring Garden conference will be held virtually starting at 3 pm on Friday, March 11 and ending at 8 pm on Saturday, March 12. Details TBA. In the meantime, vendors can [register here](#).



Bonus photo: Ivory-colored sea holly growing in Les Brake's Coyote Garden in Willow in 2019. Photo courtesy Elizabeth Bluemink.

AMGA Board of Directors

| | |
|-------------------|----------------|
| Emily Becker | President |
| Troy Weiss | Vice President |
| Jan van den Top | Treasurer |
| Nick Riordan | Secretary |
| Kathleen Kaiser | At Large |
| Keenan Plate | At Large |
| Kat Karabelnikoff | At Large |
| Meg O'Mullane | At Large |

Committee Chairs, Program Coordinators & Volunteers

| | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| Emily Becker | CES Liaison |
| Steve Brown, Gina Dionne | CES Master Gardener Program Liaison |
| Keenan Plate | Broadcast Email |
| Nick Riordan | 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 |
| Jan van den Top, Sheila Toomey | Grants Program |
| TBD | 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 an AMGA Member

Use our [online form to join/renew and pay online or by mail](#). Your membership supports AMGA and its mission of gardening education in partnership with the University of Alaska Cooperative Extension Service. We provide continuing education, grants for garden projects, garden tours, and more, all in service to the community.

Next AMGA Meeting via Zoom! February 21, 2022

"Alaska Food Policy Council" Robbi Mixon

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). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, AMGA meetings are currently being **held online via Zoom**. 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

