

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE by Emily Becker

As you may remember from my May 2021 column, I am obsessed with birch sap. This is my fifth year tapping trees, and I was feeling fairly confident in my ability to monitor the weather and predict a good day to drill some holes into my birch friends and welcome the tasty water.

Emily's birch tap dates in midtown Anchorage

2018: April 28

2019: April 10

2020: April 25

2021: April 20

2022: April 11 (Hmm, similar to 2019! We'll see if this means anything!)

It's felt like a cold spring; with nights below freezing and days barely above, and the snowpack still so high, I thought for sure it would be the end of April before the sap started running ... but never mind. Nature always knows better and is right on time. The

sap started running early this year (although, five years is a crummy data set for climate patterns). And next week's weather looks so warm, it might be done before April has its curtain call.

I gained new appreciation for trees this winter. I'm mostly a vegetable gardener/berry picker, and I've always loved the graceful and lovely birch, but I'm now in awe of spruce trees. It started in January with Jessie Moan's program for AMGA on the spruce bark beetle, which led me to start noticing the spruce resin that exudes from beetle-killed trees.

As part of my classwork for Lisa Strecker's spring UAF Ethnobotany class, I decided to make a salve from the spruce resin. I soon fell deep down a rabbit hole of scientific papers on spruce and bark beetles.

Did you know: spruce trees react within minutes of an intruder attack. Genetic messages for cellular changes are transmitted throughout the tree so that it can grow structural defense systems, for example, resin ducts, to expel the insects. Researchers in Sweden were even able to "defense prime" trees by inoculating them with a sub-lethal fungus; the inoculated trees produced more defensive chemicals and were largely spared from beetle mass attacks. Simply astounding.

Happy spring! Huge thanks to Susan Negus for organizing the spring plant sale at the Midtown Mall and for all the sellers and volunteers, especially Treasurer Jan van den Top. This is an important fundraiser for our club and helps us fund scholarships and grants, among other projects.

We'll soon be looking forward to garden tours! Please make suggestions to Vice President Troy Weiss. Remember, the garden doesn't have to be perfect! We love, appreciate, and learn from gardens of all kinds. 🌱

IN THIS ISSUE

- » Midtown Mall Spring Garden Show
- » Treasurer's Report
- » Keeping Worms Indoors
- » Herb Study: Lady's Bedstraw
- » May Event Calendar
- » Bird Chatter

MIDTOWN MALL SPRING GARDEN SHOW by Susan Negus

It was great to see all the faces again and talk gardening during the April 15 Spring Garden Show at the Midtown Mall. Many of the garden clubs were there, including AMGA/CES, the Alaska Native Plant Society, Anchor Gardens, the Wildflower Garden Club, the Anchorage Garden Club and of course the the Alaska Botanical Garden.

Volunteers and other gardeners stayed to chat all day and help sell the plants they brought. We had a mix of new Master Gardeners and longtime Master Gardeners who volunteered this year, a combination I like to see.



AMGA volunteers staffing the garden show booth, courtesy Lili Naves

The tables were full of plant starts, annuals, perennials, house plants, herbs, vegetable and peppers. Actually, there were plants starts under the tables too. Some of us did not adhere to the two-flat max, but it all worked out. I would like to thank all the volunteers and especially thank our treasurer, Jan van den Top, for hanging in there as the cashier all day.

I think we accomplished our goal of spreading the word of gardening and starting many people on their way to planting a garden. Soon the snow will be gone and we can get started outdoor gardening. 🌱

OUR DEEPEST SYMPATHY

Longtime AMGA volunteer Harry Deuber has passed away. This spring, Harry received the AMGA Lifetime Achievement Award. From 2016-2018, Harry served on the Board of Directors as President; he later served as the Volunteer Coordinator and put in countless hours volunteering at the Annual Plant Sale and Anchorage Pioneer Home.

Sympathy cards may be sent to Brian Lyons, P.O. Box 100168, Anchorage, AK 99510.

MARCH 2022 TREASURER'S REPORT

Balances on 2/28/2022

Checking S-88	\$ 23,307.06
Savings S-1	\$ 5.25
Savings S-19	\$ 16,939.25
CD General 2 year 1.95%; 1/23	\$ 10,771.26

Total Assets \$ 51,022.82

Interest/Dividends \$ 30.77

This month's revenue

Membership	\$ 195.05
Donations	\$ -
Fundraising/Plant sale	
Advanced M.G. course fees	\$ -
Total revenue	\$ 195.05

This month's expenses

Grants (scholarships)	\$ 300.00
Hospitality	
Operations	\$ 102.00
Website	\$ -
Plant sale	
Public Relations (State Fair)	
Newsletter	\$ 19.99
AMG speaker fee	\$ -
Roster	\$ 811.05
Total Expenses this month	\$ 1,233.04

Balances on 3/31/2022

Checking S-88	\$ 22,269.07
Savings S-1	\$ 5.25
Savings S-19	\$ 16,942.13
CD General 2 Year 1.95%, (1/23)	\$ 10,799.15

Total Assets on 3/31/2022 \$ 50,015.60

Prepared by Jan van den Top on 4/8/2022

KEEPING WORMS YEAR-ROUND by Diane Dunham

I have been asked if I keep my worms over the winter or start with a fresh batch each spring, and the answer is, they've got a year-round lease. My goal with the worms was to compost through the winter without providing an outdoor buffet for my dogs. I researched the best methods for this, and the answer is definitely indoors. I over-winter my bin in the garage and then it moves to Compost Alley, a shaded area in the side yard, in the summer. These are the questions I am most-often asked.

Q: Can you keep worms outside? You can, but they will most certainly die off. If you rely on hot composting to keep the worms going outside, it is likely you will fry some and freeze the others.

Q: So how does one maintain a worm bin through the winter? Well, harvesting the end product for the garden takes some work and if you're going to have a bin, you're going to have to harvest.



Red Wiggler worms

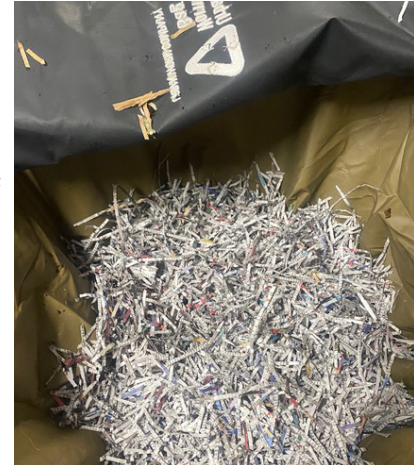
Every bin on the market will tout some kind of system where the worms eat and defecate (the castings) in one area and, when they are done, you can put your scraps in another area, leaving the first area "worm-free" and ready for harvest. This is almost never the case;

there is no separation fairy. There are always some worms straggling behind in the finished area. I recommend a harvest late in the fall and then not harvest through the winter. If your bin is large enough, it will accommodate a season's worth of worm castings and active compost.

Q: "Will I get flies?" The answer is, yes, you will, but it is easily managed. Indoor placement of the worm bin is very important. Mine is placed in the garage, less than two feet from the back door to the yard. When I plan to open the worm bin, the back door opens first. I then open the bin and the flies unknowingly fly outside to their frigid demise. The root of the fly problem is too

much moisture, which can be managed -- but never, in my experience, 100 percent. I control the flies as much as I can using shredded newspaper in the bin. I put in a feeding for the worms, then add more paper on top.

Q: What do you do with castings in the winter? Well, I put mine outside and let them freeze in the same bucket I sorted them into. In my research on the matter, there are diverging opinions on how freezing might diminish the quality of the castings. My philosophy on this is simply, whether you do it now or next fall, you are going to be freezing those castings. I do not worry about it. The worm castings have always produced great results for me, frozen or not, and you can't avoid the fact that things in Alaska freeze.



Diane uses shredded newspaper to reduce moisture that attracts flies into worm bin.

Q: What happens if you miss some worms and freeze them? Well, they die. I tried to save every worm in the early days, and now I am a bit more numb to the carnage. I have made my peace with that. On the matter of expansion and contraction of the population, the worms will adapt to the space and resources they are given. If there is too much food, they will reproduce. If there is not enough, they will die off, and the weakest links become part of the food chain. I currently maintain the ancestors of the original 1,000 worms I purchased years ago.

Q: What kind of worms should you use? Red Wigglers are the standard. I have heard about also using African Night Crawlers but have read a few horror stories about mixed populations of wigglers and crawlers getting into a brawl à la West Side Story.

Keeping worms can be fun, but it is certainly not for everyone. There definitely can be an ick factor -- there was for me in the beginning. But once you are past that, it is really a great way to compost food scraps year-round. 🌱

HERB STUDY: LADY'S BEDSTRAW by Elaine Hammes

Galium verum (commonly known as lady's bedstraw or yellow bedstraw) and *G. odoratum* (sweet woodruff) have both grown in the Alaska Botanical Garden's Herb Garden. In addition, there are two species of *Galium* that grow wild in Alaska: *G. triflorum* (fragrant bedstraw) and *G. boreale* (northern bedstraw). There are over 600 species of *Galium* (one of the largest genera of flowering plants) in the family RUBIACEAE.

The RUBIACEAE family is commonly known as the coffee, madder, or bedstraw family. It consists of

dense clusters. Bloom time is July through September. It grows easily in the Herb Garden, but it is considered a noxious weed in some places. It thrives in bright sunshine, tolerates dry soil and is hardy in zones 3 to 8. Its rhizomes and branched taproots store water.

To counter its invasive tendencies, lady's bedstraw should be planted in an enclosed area or in a spot where it won't matter if it spreads. If it tends to flop, it can be propped up or surrounded in a peony hoop. Fresh seeds germinate more readily than those that have been dried



Lady's bedstraw in the AGB Herb Garden, courtesy Mary Contrary



Galium triflorum growing in Eagle River, courtesy Elizabeth Bluemink

terrestrial trees, shrubs, lianas, or herbs. The family contains about 13,500 species in about 620 genera, which makes it the fourth-largest angiosperm family. RUBIACEAE has a large area of distribution; however, the largest species diversity is concentrated in the tropics and subtropics. *G. verum* is an herbaceous perennial, widespread across most of Europe, North Africa, and temperate Asia. It is naturalized in Tasmania, New Zealand, Canada, and the northern United States.

Lady's bedstraw is a low scrambling, vigorous plant, with the stems growing to 24–47 inches long, frequently rooting where they touch the ground. The narrow leaves are shiny dark green, hairy underneath, borne in whorls of 8–12. The flowers are small yellow and produced in

and stored. You can easily divide established plants in spring or early fall.

In medieval Europe, dried lady's bedstraw was used to stuff mattresses, as the coumarin scent of the plants acts as a flea repellent. The dried leaves are said to smell like vanilla or newly mown hay. The flowers were also used to coagulate milk in cheese manufacture (which gives the plant its name, from the Greek word γάλα, gala 'milk') and used especially in Great Britain to color cheese. The plant has also been used to make red madder-like and yellow dyes. In Denmark, the plant (known locally as gul snerre) is traditionally used to infuse spirits, making the

Continued on next page

Herb Study, from previous page

uniquely Danish drink bjæsk. The roasted seed has been used as a coffee substitute.

In Norse mythology, Frigg was the goddess of married women who helped women give birth; and as Scandinavians used lady's bedstraw as a sedative, they called it Frigg's grass. In Gaelic mythology, it is said that the hero Cú Chulainn, who suffered fits of rage during battle, would take a tea of this plant to calm his frenzy. The practice of stuffing mattresses with lady's bedstraw may have given rise to the legend that the Virgin Mary lined the manger in Bethlehem with it (among other herbs such as thyme, lavender, pennyroyal).

First-century Greek physician Dioscorides prescribed an ointment of bedstraw to treat burns. The 17th-century English herbalist Culpeper found it useful for treating children's skin disorders. More recently, the National Institute of Health notes a study that examined the effects of a methanol extract of *G. verum* on heart functions. This resulted in promising potentials of *G. verum* that may be a basis for further research clarifying how the effects could provide heart protection. 🌿

Herb Study Group Meetings

The regularly scheduled May 13 meeting may take place in the garden or may be the last "Zoom" meeting of the season. Those who are on the mailing list will be notified. Monthly meetings are generally via Zoom, noon to 1:30 p.m. on the 2nd Friday of each month, September to May.

The Herb Study Group currently expects to be repotting and planting as plants and ABG staff are available, approximately late April into early and mid-May. Further information will be sent to those on the email list.

We volunteer in ABG's Herb Garden during the growing season. Anyone interested in learning about herbs or volunteering in the garden is welcome to send an email to the Herb Study Group at anchorageherbstudy-group@gmail.com to receive our notifications. There are no dues or membership requirements.

BIRD CHATTER

No "free" compost for you! Anchorage Solid Waste Services will take your scraps but is no longer provide free compost at the Central Transfer Station. A few weeks ago, the city's website identified companies where you can buy compost, but has since been edited to remove that information and add links to [these CES publications about composting](#).

March of the invasive worms In addition to running for Congress, local Anchorage Daily News garden columnist Jeff Lowenfels is warning us about [the march of invasive worms through North America](#).

Start potting for the late season sale The AMGA Late Season Plant Sale will be Saturday, August 13. Perennials, houseplants, three classes, maybe garden art, and a table for gently used tools and pots. There will be plenty of volunteer opportunities and a Signup Genius will go live in July. For more information contact Susan Negus at 907-227-6288 or senegus@gci.net.

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



Spring Wednesday Webinars

March 23 @ 5:30 PM, Seed Starting from Scratch
March 30 @ 5:30 PM, Large Seed Starts, Corn, Pumpkins, and Potting Soil
April 6 @ 5:30 PM, Soil Testing and Interpretation for Garden and Farms
April 13 @ 5:30 PM, Working with Fertilizers and Compost
April 20 @ 5:30 PM, Warming Things Up with Plastic, Glass, and Plastic Mulch
April 27 @ 5:30 PM, Raised Rows, Raised Beds, and How to Make Them
May 4 @ 5:30 PM, Herb Gardening, Inside and Out
May 11 @ 5:30 PM, Seeding Directly into the Garden
May 18 @ 5:30 PM, Planting Potatoes
May 25 @ 5:30 PM, Hardening Plants and Transplanting to the Garden
June 1 @ 5:30 PM, Composting, No Time to Waste

UAF INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURE,
NATURAL RESOURCES & EXTENSION
University of Alaska Fairbanks



APRIL 2022 EVENT CALENDAR

CLASSES/WORKSHOPS

Monday, May 2, 6-7 pm

Alaska Botanical Garden: Plant Propagation Workshop
[More info here.](#)

Wednesdays, May 4, 11, 18, & 25, 5:30 pm

Kenai Peninsula CES: Online Gardening Class Series taught by Casey Matney. See flier on page 5 of May newsletter for class schedule. [Zoom links for each class.](#)

Wednesday, May 4, 11, 18, & 25, 6 pm

Alaska Botanical Garden: Local Wildflower and Plant ID 4 day class series. [More info here.](#)

Saturday, May 7, 1 - 3 pm

Hot Composting Workshop taught by Christine Wilcox at the new Midtown Community Garden (2930 Cheechako St). [Reserve a spot.](#)

Saturday, May 7, 1 - 3 pm

Anchorage CES: Greenhouse Heat: Greenhouse energy efficiency expert Scott Sanford will be discussing ways to extend the growing season in heated greenhouses. This free, in-person class will be held in the Loussac Library's Raven Room and [via Zoom.](#)

Wednesday, May 11, 2:15-3:15 pm

Matanuska Experiment Farm & Extension Center: Walkabout Wednesday-Container Gardening/Window-sill Gardens. [Facebook Live event.](#)

Friday, May 13, 5:30 - 7:30 pm

Anchorage Parks and Rec: Raised Bed Gardening class at the Dr Lidia Selkregg Chalet Outdoor Space. [More info here.](#)

Wednesday, May 18, 2:15-3:15 pm

Matanuska Experiment Farm & Extension Center: Walkabout Wednesday-Josh Smith on Growing Fruit Trees in Alaska. [Facebook Live event.](#)

Wednesday, May 18, 6 - 7 pm

Alaska Botanical Garden: Alaskan Pollinators - A Citizen Science Workshop on the value of pollinators in Alaska, their conservation status, current monitoring and conservation efforts, and what you can do to promote pollinator conservation. [More info here.](#)

MEETINGS & EVENTS

Monday, May 2, 7-9 pm

Alaska Native Plant Society Meeting: "Plant Photog-

raphy." A presentation by Glenn Brown. [Get meeting link.](#)

Thursday, May 5, 7-8:30 pm

Anchorage Garden Club Meeting: "Potatoes." Everyone is invited. It is in person/Zoom. Pioneer Schoolhouse 437/ E 3rd Avenue. Email anchoragegc@gmail.com for the Zoom link.

Monday, May 16

Society of American Foresters' Arbor Day Tree Seedling Sale: Celebrate Arbor Day on May 16 by ordering a bundle of spruce, larch, birch or pine seedlings for pickup in June. [Link to order form.](#)

JOBS, ANNOUNCEMENTS, ETC.

Master Gardener Kim Davis is looking for 2-3 full or part-time garden helpers for her residential gardening company, **Alaska Sunscapes**, which cares for about 25 gardens throughout the season. Base pay starts at \$23+ per hour depending on experience. Call Kim at 907-230-4045 or email ak.sunscapes@gmail.com.

Friends of Boyers Orchard has officially incorporated as a non-profit. [Read more here](#) and donate to help cover [annual maintenance costs.](#)

A **new community garden** is under construction in Midtown (2930 Cheechako Street). Contact Nick at Yarducopia/ACAT (garden@akaction.org) to sign up for a bed or help set up the garden.

Anchor Gardens' manure/mulch pickup spots are stocked around town. Check in with AG for details. www.facebook.com/groups/anchorgardens

Fundraising for **Steller Secondary School Orchard** continues with matching funds offered from a local donor – [visit their GoFundMe page.](#)

Please [sign up!](#) AMGA needs to fill the following positions for the **2023 Master Gardener Conference.**

- Vendor Coordinator: Contact vendors, collect vendor forms, determine layout of vendor area and tables needed. Communicate with vendors on conference day.
- Gifts/Door Prizes Organizer: Select and solicit gifts for speakers and door prizes. Coordinate prize distribution during the conference.
- Silent Auction Organizer: Write request letters, coordinate donations, label and price donations, set up auction tables, supervise volunteers.



Peonies cultivated by AMGA May 17 member meeting speaker Barbara Henjum, 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! May 17, 2022

“Peony Growing”
presented by Barbara Henjum
Check your email, our website or Facebook
page for connection instructions.

Meeting Schedule

Member Meetings: 7 pm every 3rd Monday of the month, September through May (except December). 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.

Newsletter Submissions

We welcome letters, opinions, public event announcements, articles, ideas and inquiries. The deadline for submitting an item for publication is the 20th of every month. Educational articles (400-600 words ideal), Bird Chatter, calendar items and announcements are always welcome. Contact the editor at newsletteramga@gmail.com and send Bird Chatter items to birdchatter@alaskamastergardeners.org.

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>
Membership issues/address corrections: Alexis St. Juliana at astjuliana@hotmail.com.
Mail: AMGA, P.O. Box 221403, Anchorage, AK 99522-1403

