

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE by Emily Becker

A few months ago I shared one of my big gardening mistakes, the sad tale of the root-bound cherry trees. This month I thought I'd share a happier story about a robust, prolific zucchini variety named Homs Kousa.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought me the seeds. Back

in 2020, when one of the first effects of the pandemic was empty shelves, a group called the Cooperative Gardens Commission organized to distribute free seeds to groups all around the country. One of the major donors was Philadelphia's Experimental Farm Network, and one of the seeds they sent was a squash called Homs Kousa. EFN got the seeds from the U.S. National Plant Germplasm System, which collects and stores seeds and also distributes them to professionals and researchers who can responsibly breed them.

Homs refers to Homs, Syria, where the seeds were collected, and Kousa is the famous Middle Eastern dish of squash stuffed with spicy beef and rice.

This seed appealed to me for two reasons. One, I absolutely love zucchini and enjoy trying new varieties we don't get to see in stores. The other is that my mother never knew her father, but we know from genetic testing and Ancestry.com that he was very likely from Syria or Lebanon. I loved the idea of a plant helping me to

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Above: Homs Kousa is a vining-type squash that loves to sprawl through the garden and produces light-green, plump fruit.
Cover photo: A colorful astrantia leaf in Lile's Garden at the Alaska Botanical Garden, photo courtesy Elizabeth Bluemink.

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reunite with a place I had never been. I kept a few seeds and gave them a try.

I soon learned the difference between a bush squash and a vine squash. Summer squash usually grows in a large bush with the fruits radiating out from the center stem.

Homs Kousa is a vining variety. It loves to sprawl and ramble wherever it can, with enormous, stout leaves. Vining squash is often the tough-skinned winter variety, but not Homs. It's soft, light green, and juicy, unless you forget to look under all the leaves and leave one to harden and turn creamy colored. With tough skin, it can still be cooked and eaten, and then it's more like a spaghetti squash, with a noodley texture.

The stems and leaves of Homs are covered with prickly spines. Even the fruits have a downy fur to them that rubs or washes off. This means you really have to wear gloves when you are harvesting or handling the plant. The great benefit of this: no slugs! With the constant July-August rains, slugs found it all too easy to attack my poor Black Beauty zucchini plant. The pitiful zukes were just completely denuded. Not Homs. The sleek, fat fruits just keep coming and coming.

I grow too many other types of squash to reliably save

AMGA BOARD RECRUITMENT

Interested in serving the Anchorage gardening community?

Consider applying to serve on the AMGA Board of Directors.

Directors serve 2 years. The minimum time commitment is an hour a month for board meetings, but directors also help organize various volunteer projects.

Contact any current board member for more information.

the seed, but I am grateful that EFN found and continues to breed this wonderful plant. Its namesake city has been the site of horrifying violence and tragedy in the last decade of civil war in Syria. Growing Homs Kousa, then, seems like a small act of goodwill. 🌱

JULY 2022 TREASURER'S REPORT

Balances on 6/30/2022

Checking S-88	\$ 19,291.65
Savings S-2	\$ 5.25
Savings S-29	\$ 16,950.59
CD General 2 year 1.95%; 1/23	\$ 10,827.42

Total Assets \$ 47,074.91

Interest/Dividends \$ 2.88

This month's revenue

Membership	\$ 428.85
Donations	\$ 250.00
Fundraising/Plant sale	\$ -
Advanced M.G. course fees	\$ -
Total revenue	\$ 678.85

This month's expenses

Grants (scholarships)	\$ 700.00
Pioneer Home Plants	\$ -
Operations	\$ 102.00
Website	\$ -
Plant sale	\$ 429.75
Public Relations (State Fair)	\$ -
Newsletter	\$ 19.99
AMG speaker fee	\$ -
Lifetime achievement	\$ -
Total Expenses this month	\$ 1,251.74

BALANCES ON 7/31/2022

Checking S-88	\$ 18,718.76
Savings S-2	\$ 5.25
Savings S-29	\$ 16,953.47
CD General 2 Year 1.95%, (1/23)	\$ 10,827.42

Total Assets on 5/31/2022 \$ 46,504.90

Prepared by Jan van den Top

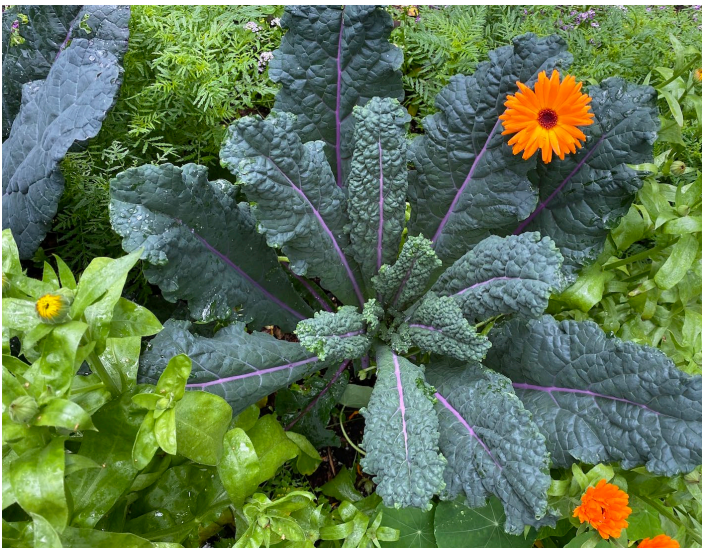
AN ARTFUL, PEST-DETERRING GARDEN MESS by Bill Yeagle

A wildish garden thing happened in one of my veggie beds this year. It started with information from the 2020 book, [Plant Partners: Science-Based Companion Planting Strategies for the Vegetable Garden](#), by Jessica Walliser.

In the past, I sometimes followed traditional companion planting advice with mixed and inconsistent results. The book explained the science behind plant neighbors.

This year, I edged with sweet alyssum, followed by marigolds (single petal signets), and densely-interspersed calendula (resina) and trailing nasturtiums among kale, cabbage, and rutabaga. Dense is an understatement, it's an unkempt mess.

However, harvesting in recent weeks, I've only seen a handful of slugs and cabbage maggots, with nominal leaf nibbling.



Calendula peek between kale leaves in Bill's companion-planted veggie bed.

Given the ample sunlight followed by significant rain, this planting became densely packed, and I neglected it (rarely watered and never amended). The shading provided by the calendula and nasturtium kept chickweed and other local "weeds" at bay, and few of them set seed.

Plant habit and height is a consideration with this strategy. For example, the stouter kale and cabbage rose above the trailers. The rutabaga foliage could not compete with the calendula and nasturtium. Note to self: maybe not so dense next year.

The alyssum along the border stayed where it was and there were noticeably more hover flies this year. Note to self: if planting alyssum draws beneficial insects like hover flies, might planting alyssum near gooseberries and nonblack currants reduce sawfly (imported currant worm) infestation?

The marigolds filled in hedge-like around the base of the veggies. The trailing nature of the calendula and nasturtium filled in gaps between the players in this planting.

The color combination is artwork, and all have unique and appreciated fragrances. The kale (dazzling blue) and cabbage (red express) are tasty.

Other than initial planting, this was about the most hands-free veggie experience I've ever had, albeit happenstance and serendipity.

The takeaway, for me, during this experience—sometimes let plants do what they are going to do and not interfere. I fantasize about incorporating onions & fava beans into this mix next year. 🌿

A SHORT REPORT ON THE AUGUST 13 PLANT SALE by Susan Negus

Thanks to all of the volunteers who persisted through the all-day rain. Thankfully, we had many tents. Total sales were about \$6,000, which is \$2,000 less than last year's very busy plant sale. I believe this is still above average sales. It was great to hear talks from Troy Weiss, Julie Riley and Debbie Hinchey, who had some challenges, like rain suddenly pouring off the tents and making a big splash. Many volunteers took the tents home to their garages to dry out. Thanks again to all who helped before, during and after the event! 🌿



PHOTOS: MASTER GARDENERS (AND FRIENDS) OUT & ABOUT



AMGA Board member Keenan Plate leads AMGA members on a tour of Grow North Farm on August 11.



Troy Weiss teaches how not to kill peonies at the Aug. 13 AMGA plant sale.



AMGA supported the Alaska Humanities Forum's Black/Land Project weekend events on August 7-8, which included activities and conversations about race and land at the Mountain View library and Grow North Farm. Photo courtesy Splitting Image Photography.



AMGA sponsors the Division 12 Outdoor Grown Vegetable Special Awards at the Alaska State Fair. Congratulations to 1st week winner Nicole Yount!



Around 100 volunteers came out for the Anchorage Invasive Species Smackdown at Tikishla Park in Airport Heights. Volunteers cut *Prunus padus* trees and stacked them along the trail, where they will be wood chipped back into the forest. They also planted baby spruce trees.



Emily Becker, Keenan Plate and Elaine Hammes staffed a booth at the Intertribal Agriculture Council's Grow North Farm Field Day on August 29.

HERB STUDY: MONTHLY MEETINGS RESUME by Elaine Hammes

Herb Study Group monthly meetings at noon on the second Friday of the month resume via Zoom starting September 9 and continuing through May.

Topics for the September 9 meeting include a recap on how the summer went this year and topics for upcoming meetings.

Anyone who would like to participate in the meetings should think about topics they'd like to propose for discussion between October and May. Topics could include different species of herbs or different groups or combinations of herbs.

Are there herbs you have grown or would like to know more about? Herbs that you'd never heard of until recently? Wondering if a particular herb will grow here? Are you interested in wild herbs, or herbs for specific uses? The possibilities for topics are endless.

As these meetings begin, plants in the Herb Garden at ABG may still be growing. Those who have been volunteering in the Herb Garden may be doing "double duty" in the garden, at least until frost, putting the garden to bed for winter as well as at attending meetings. If you are interested in joining ABG's volunteer program, please contact the ABG Program Director at education@alaskabg.org or (907) 770-3692.

HERB STUDY GROUP Winter Meeting Schedule 2nd Friday of the month, 12-1:30 pm, via Zoom

September 9

October 4

November 11

December 9

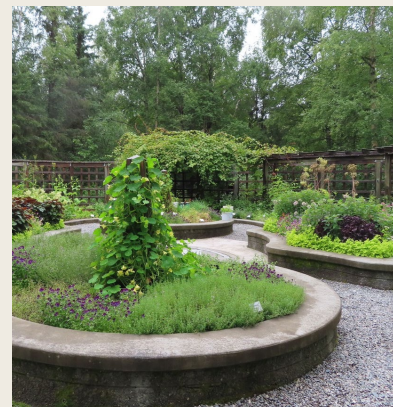
January 1

February 10

March 10

April 14

May 12



Request Herb Study notifications by emailing anchorageherbstudygroup@gmail.com.

Anyone interested in learning about herbs is welcome to send an email to the Herb Study Group at anchorageherbstudygroup@gmail.com to receive our notifications. If you have any questions, you may leave a message at 907-276-4295 for Elaine, or email at ehammes@hotmail.com. 🌿

BIRD CHATTER

Don't eat slugs and wash your lettuce You don't want to get encephalitis from the rat lungworm parasite. You can [learn more in this 2018 article](#), if you dare.

August plant sale, by the numbers! As Susan Negus noted, total sales for the AMGA plant sale on August 13 nearly hit \$6,000, despite all-day rain. Minus expenses, AMGA members selling plants made about \$4,500. One vendor sold \$10 worth of plants, and another one made over \$1,000!

Who says you can't braid hardneck garlic? It's always a good idea to check your assumptions at the garden fence. Here is [one of many tutorials](#) on how to braid hardneck garlic. And also, [here is a beautiful photo](#) of braided hardneck garlic from Territorial Seed.

Wondering about the next regular MG course? The next

one advertised is the statewide Fall 2023 Alaska Master Gardener Online Class taught by Heidi Rader. The Anchorage office of the Cooperative Extension Service maintains a local class interest list [here](#).

Anchorage area plant geek on TikTok You don't need a TikTok account to watch these [short, informative videos](#) on topics ranging from hazelnuts to propagating native serviceberries. All from up-and-coming nurseryman Josh Smith of [Bear Mountain Forest Nursery](#).

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



SEPTEMBER 2022 EVENT CALENDAR

CLASSES/WORKSHOPS

Wednesday, Sept. 7, 7-8:30 pm

Anchor Gardens: Seed Saving 101 workshop at the Chugiak-Eagle River Senior Center. [Get details.](#)

Tuesday, Sept. 13, 6-7 pm

Alaska Botanical Garden: Virtual Garlic Workshop taught by the ABG horticulture team. [Purchase tickets.](#)

Tuesday, Sept. 20, 5-7 pm

Alaska Botanical Garden: Mushroom Kit Workshop. Learn to grow your own mushrooms from the owners of Far North Fungi. [Purchase tickets.](#)

Wednesday, Sept. 21, 5:30-7 pm

Alaska Botanical Garden: Winterize your Garden. Join Claire Kaufman of Boreal Bioscapes Garden Service for a hands-on workshop. [Purchase tickets.](#)

Wednesday, Sept. 28, 7-8:30 pm

Anchor Gardens: Putting Your Garden To Bed workshop at the Chugiak-Eagle River Senior Center. [Get details.](#)

MEETINGS & EVENTS

Saturday-Sunday, Sept. 3-4

Turnagain Arm Mycological Society: Girdwood Fungus Fair. [Learn more.](#)

Thursday, Sept. 8, 10 am

Wildflower Garden Club of Alaska: Mulching

with Mother Nature, presented by Debbie Hinchey, who has experimented with many types of mulching materials, utilizing seasonal timing, and has developed incredibly rich and productive soil in her garden beds. [Learn more.](#)

Saturdays, Sundays & Mondays, Sept. 17-October 24, 10am-4 pm

Alaska Botanical Garden: BOOtanical Garden. Members and Children 6 and under have free admission. Note that this spooktacular event starts early and ends before Halloween.



Sunday, September 11, 1-2:30 pm

Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers Association: The first of two apple tastings will be held at Anchorage Begich Middle School. This is an opportunity to taste before deciding what kind of apples you may want to grow.

JOBS, ANNOUNCEMENTS, ETC.

Interested in serving the Anchorage gardening community? Consider applying to serve on the **AMGA Board of Directors**. Directors serve two years. The minimum time commitment is an hour a month for board meetings, but directors also help organize various volunteer projects. Contact any current board member for more information.

The **UAF Integrated Pest Management Team** is conducting a **fruit tree pollinator survey** for 2022. This survey is anonymous and will help with development of outreach/educational resources and guide potential research to improve pest management in Alaska. [Fill in survey online.](#)

VOLUNTEERS 4 GARDENS

Alaska Master Gardeners
Anchorage and the Alaska
School Garden Network
maintain a list of volunteer
opportunities at public
gardening projects in
Anchorage.

[View the list/join a project.](#)

Next AMGA Meeting via Zoom! September 19, 2022

“Plant Division Techniques” presented by Will Criner

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). 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.

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.

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/send items to 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
YouTube: www.youtube.com/channel/UCvZehJprKkQzQivQvNDKopQ
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

