

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE by Emily Becker

I considered shoveling snow back to my roof this week. As impatient as I am for spring to arrive, inertia won that battle. Let's hope for more meltage by the time you are reading this.

A protracted spring is great for extra garden planning time. Have you tried companion planting? It's a practice of growing two or more plant species together for a specific benefit: for timing reasons; to repel or attract insects; for climbing structure; to enhance the soil; or a host of other reasons.

Some gardeners swear by growing chives near strawberries. The strong scent of the chives supposedly distracts pests from the sweet smell of the berries. I didn't find any scientific evidence backing this one, but I happened to do this by accident, and I do get lots of berries, so I'm happy to keep them together.

Marigolds also often get shout-outs for repelling pests. The [Massachusetts Extension claims they must be grown as a cover crop](#) and tilled into the soil to release their

pest-repelling chemicals, but since they are so lovely, it's easy to plant them all around anyway. Alyssum, I've heard, helps attract predatory insects that feast on aphids. The [Iowa State Extension](#) confirms this. They smell fantastic, too!

Last summer, I tried a space-saving companion planting technique that increases vegetable yield. I planted radishes and mustard greens all around my potatoes. By the time the taters broke the soil surface, the radishes and greens were harvested. This type of companion planting focuses on saving space. I'll be doing that again this year.

A Google search found lots of articles on companion planting along with lists of plants and their allies or enemies, but not much scientific evidence. I'd love to hear about your favorite companions and the experiments you've tried.

Enormous thanks are due to your Master Gardener Conference Committee: Troy Weiss, Meg O'Mullane, Brenda Adams, Sharon Schlict, Rae Petrie, and myself. We were carried along by fantastic volunteers who

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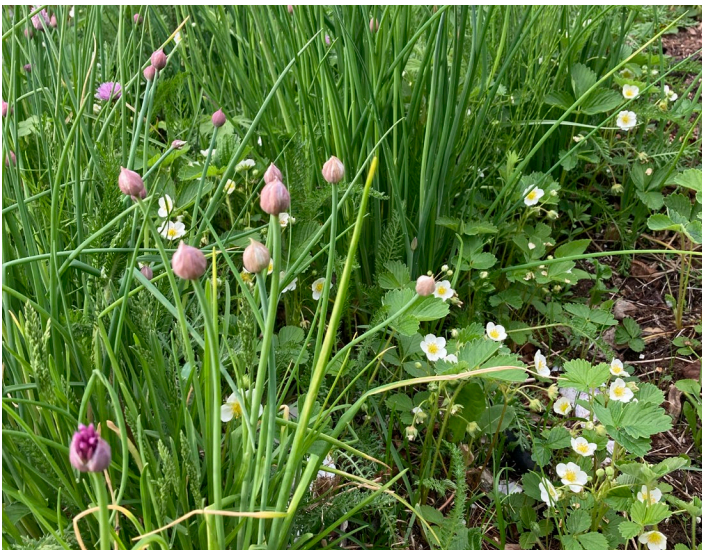
» **Herb Study: Nigella**

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Cover: *Erigeron compositus* is commonly found growing at Windy Corner in Chugach State Park in May.; chives and strawberries in Emily Becker's garden.

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APRIL 17 AMGA MEETING HIGHLIGHTS by Nick Riordan

At AMGA's April 17 in-person meeting at the BP Energy Center, Municipality of Anchorage Horticulture Supervisor Luis Lemus presented to us on **Tree Care for Homeowners**. Luis brought with him a lifetime of experience and passion for working with and enjoying the company of plants, but he also showed empathy for the gardener as well as the trees.

The first step is to choose a tree suited to your climate. After that, plant the tree well by digging a hold three times as wide and a little shallower than the tree's root ball. The #1 mistake Luis sees is trees planted too deep, so err on planting high.

It often takes three to four years for a tree's roots to become established, thus Luis emphasized the importance of regular attention for the first four years of a tree's life. Care includes watering with the goal of maintaining consistent soil moisture (slow and deep watering with drip irrigation placed near the trunk works well), staking (loosen stakes each year), 2-3 inches of aged wood chips for mulch that is spread around but not touching the trunk, and fertilizing with a little compost and/or compost tea.

Luis' presentation included pruning demonstrations on actual tree branches. He showed how cuts can be hidden by removing the entire portion of a branch (or branchlet) down to the nearest fork. Top cuts should be at an angle to deter water pooling, and when removing larger, heavier branches, Luis recommended making three cuts. The first two are to remove the majority of

President's Message, continued from Page 1

helped with a huge number of tasks. The conference was really fun and inspiring. Thank you to everyone who helped and/or attended.

Huge thanks also to our outgoing membership manager, Alexis St. Juliana. She helped modernize our records system, integrate new technology, and keep everything running smoothly. We're hoping this gives her more time to help out with some of our graphic design needs! Thank you to Board member Jamie Lang for taking on the membership task.

Get your green thumbs in action! May is here! 🌱

the branch well away from the trunk. The third cut can then be made carefully and cleanly, close to the trunk without risking injury to the tree.

Thanks to Troy for bravely being our stand-in tree trunk and the helpers who cleaned up twigs and shavings from the carpet! 🌱

MARCH 2022 TREASURER'S REPORT

Balances on 3/1/2023

Checking S-88	\$ 25,910.47
Savings S-2	\$ 5.25
Savings S-29	\$ 16,973.17
CD General 2 year 1.95%; 1/23	\$ 10,885.44

Total Assets \$ 53,774.33

Interest/Dividends \$ 59.31

This month's revenue

Membership	\$ 266.70
Donations	\$ -
Fundraising/Plant sale	\$ -
State Conference	\$ 9,053.33
Name Tags	\$ 7.00
Total revenue	\$ 9,327.03

This month's expenses

Postage Directory	\$ 77.70
Pioneer Home Plants	\$ -
Operations	\$ 107.00
Website	\$ -
Hospitality	\$ -
Name tags	\$ -
Newsletter	\$ 29.99
AMG speaker fee	\$ -
Lifetime achievement	\$ -
2023 AMGA conference	\$ 287.05
Total Expenses this month	\$ 501.74

BALANCES ON 3/31/2023

Checking S-88	\$ 34,735.76
Savings S-2	\$ 5.25
Savings S-29	\$ 16,976.05
CD General 2 Year 1.95%, (1/23)	\$ 10,941.87

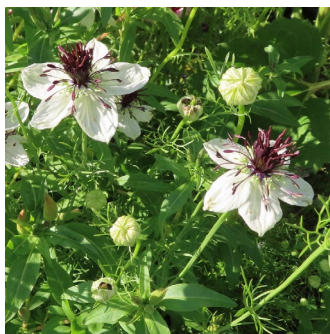
Total Assets on 3/31/2023 \$ 62,658.93

Prepared by Jan van den Top

HERB STUDY: NIGELLA by Elaine Hammes

Many more species of *Nigella* exist but gardeners can obtain seeds for *Nigella damascena*, *N. hispanica* and *N. sativa*, described on Wikipedia, and *N. orientalis*, at other websites.

Nigella species are in the Ranunculaceae family native to the Mediterranean region through western Asia to northern India. They have many common names but are most often called Love-in-a-Mist. They grow 8–35 inches tall and their finely divided leaf segments are quite narrow to threadlike. The flowers are white, pink, blue, purple or yellow with five or more petals (or sepals). The fruit is a capsule composed of several united follicles, each containing numerous seeds.



Left to right: *Nigella damascena* and *N. sativa*; *N. hispanica*; *N. sativa*; and a “mish-mash” of nigella with other potted plants. Courtesy Mary Contrary.

Nigella seeds have been found in the tomb of Tutankhamun and other archaeological excavations. The Greek physician Dioscorides (d. 90 AD) wrote that black cumin seeds were taken to treat headaches, nasal catarrh, toothache, and intestinal worms, as a diuretic, and to increase breast milk.

The most popular species for medicinal and culinary uses is *N. sativa* but many species are used as traditional cures for various ailments. Health benefits may be attributed to the presence of several bioactive components. The National Institutes of Health has published studies that indicate anti-inflammatory and anti-microbial activities of extracts from *Nigella* species.

The seeds of *N. sativa*, known as kalonji, black cumin, black caraway, black coriander, roman coriander, black onion seed, onion seed, charnushka, git (in historical Roman cuisine), or just nigella, are used as a spice and a condiment in South Asian, Ethiopian, Middle Eastern and Polish cuisines. The seeds are described as having a slightly bitter, oregano-like flavor and aroma when ground or chewed, or crunchy with a peppery-nutmeg flavor, or having an aroma resembling carrots or

strawberries when crushed.

The light-blue or white flowers of *N. sativa* are self-fertile, but cross-pollination also occurs through insects. *Nigella* has long been domesticated and can be found growing wild as a weed and interplanted in cultivated crops, generally in the Middle East and South Asia. Regional cultivars are popular in these areas. Variability of yield and quality characteristics is frequently seen in and among the cultivars. Farmers grow local cultivars developed through selection.

N. damascena has been grown as an ornamental, especially in English cottage gardens, since the Eliz-

abethan era. Seeds for cultivars such as ‘Miss Jekyll’ and ‘Persian Jewels’ are commercially available. This is a cool-weather annual, grown for unusual flowers and seed pods that can be used in flower arrangements. Seeds are sown in the garden as soon as the ground can be worked. *N. damascena* prefers average, medium moisture, well-drained soils in full sun.

Some websites include *N. hispanica* as a separate species while other sites indicate that *N. hispanica* is a synonym for *N. papillosa*. Photos of both *N. papillosa* and *N. hispanica* from several seed companies show distinctive dark red, purple or black stamens. Some advertised cultivars of *N. papillosa* and/or *N. hispanica* include ‘Midnight,’ ‘Delft Blue,’ ‘Bridal Veil,’ ‘Alabaster’ and ‘African Bride.’

N. orientalis is yellow-flowered and native to western Asia. The flower is actually the calyx, with the central stamen attached to the flower in an umbrella shape. The total bracts, like the leaves, elongate into thread-like bracts. The North Carolina State Extension indicates mixed success with *N. orientalis* in a 1996 trial. 🌿

MAY IS ALASKA NATIVE PLANT MONTH by Elizabeth Bluemink

On May 1, Governor Mike Dunleavy issued a proclamation encouraging Alaskans to celebrate Alaska Native Plant Month in May 2023.

The proclamation recognizes the importance of native plants to Alaska's people, economy, and ecosystems.

Native plants are defined as indigenous species that have evolved alongside native wildlife and occur naturally in a particular geographic region, ecosystem, and habitat. In Alaska, we have an estimated 2,500-plus species of native plants.

To our knowledge, this is the first executive proclamation in Alaska celebrating native plants, and AMGA is one of a number of organizations that helped make this happen. Many months ago, the board approved co-signing a letter to request the proclamation, and some of our members helped put together the outreach activities that will happen in May.

AMGA president Emily Becker took on developing a K-12 curriculum guide for native plants. This guide also can be used throughout the school year!

The curriculum guide as well as a statewide event calendar, native plant trail guides, resources for gardeners, and other information are all available on this page: .

Why should gardeners bother with native plants? Maybe it's obvious, but native insects, birds and other wildlife depend on them. We can protect their food and habitat by removing non-native invasive species, planting native shrubs, trees and flowers in our yards, and following ethical harvesting practices.

Dr. Patricia Holloway, retired UAF horticulture professor, put together [a brochure for Alaska gardeners](#) a few weeks ago that gives even more reasons for gardening with native plants. For one thing, she says, they are hardy and well adapted to our soils. They provide early-season color in flower gardens. They are also useful for food, medicine, crafts, and building materials. Incorporating them in a formal garden can also help connect it to the surrounding natural landscape.

Holloway lists a number of native plants appropriate for different garden uses, sources of seed/plants, and recommended reading. You can download the brochure from the [Alaska Native Plant Society website](#).



Calypso bulbosa (calypso orchid) and oak fern at the Eagle River Nature Center. Photo courtesy Elizabeth Bluemink.

Visit the [Alaska Native Plant Month website](#) for a calendar of events and much more!

The brochure is available for anyone to reprint for non-commercial purposes.

Alaska joins nearly 50 states that have established a native plant month. The effort to establish one in Alaska this year began when The Garden Club of America reached out to the Alaska Native Plant Society about its initiative to encourage a native plant month in all 50 states.

If you have any questions about Alaska Native Plant Month or would like to become a supporting organization, please contact ak-native-plant-month@aknps.org.

In addition to being your friendly newsletter editor, Elizabeth Bluemink is the president of the Alaska Native Plant Society.

MAY 2023 EVENT CALENDAR

CLASSES/WORKSHOPS

Friday, May 12, 5:30-7:30 pm

Anchorage Parks and Rec: Trowel and Error: Maintaining a Raised Bed Garden. Learn the basics of planning, preparation, planting, watering, weeding, fertilizing, tools, and pest management. Our horticulturalists will share lessons learned and tips for managing your bed so you still have time to enjoy our short summer \$15 registration Lidia Selkregg Chalet. Costs \$15. [Register here.](#)

May 2, 10, 16, 17, & 24

The Extension Service has an exciting bundle of webinars tied to [Alaska Native Plant Month](#), mostly at noon, including Respectful Harvesting, Landscaping with Native Plants, Backyard Insect Ecology, and Landscaping for Birds. [Check out a list of native plant month webinars and plant walks on this online calendar.](#)

May 17, 18 & 19

Anchorage Public Library: Growing Together Series. In May, APL will be covering Seed Starting, using seeds provided by the library as examples. To-go packets available at all library locations for the duration of the month or as long as supplies last. [Get schedule.](#)

Thursday, May 9, 7-9 pm

Anchorage Garden Club: Blueberries and Other Fruit at Central Lutheran Church.

Saturday, May 13, 10 am-4 pm

ABG Spring Plant Sale Kickoff. Shop the garden nursery to stock up on plants, seeds, and tools. Members receive 10% off all nursery and retail items. Online plant sales will not be available until Monday, May 15th.

Monday, May 15, 7-8 pm

What's In Bloom Walking Tour at the Alaska Botanical Garden. The hour-long outing occurs monthly May, June, and July, and is led by Patrick Ryan, ABG's education specialist. [Register here.](#)

Saturday, May 27, 12-4 pm

Anchorage Soil & Water Conservation District: We are looking for volunteers to help pot white spruce seedlings and build native plant nursery beds. Volunteers will get white spruce seedlings to take home, courtesy of the Audubon Society! Project site is at Government Hill Commons, 801 Erickson Street.

JOBS, ANNOUNCEMENTS, ETC.

The Medical Respite Program at the **Brother Francis**

Shelter is looking for a Master Gardener or Master Gardener-in-training to help plan a raised bed vegetable garden. If you'd like to help, contact Raeshawndra Jett at rjett@cssalaska.org or 907-277-1731, ext. 119.

The Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers Association is holding two top-working workshops in early May (May 6 and May 13), the first in the Valley and the second in Anchorage. [Join APFGA](#) to participate in these events.

The Anchorage Audubon Society will distribute thousands of white spruce seedlings at various locations starting in late May or early June. Learn more about this on [this website.](#)

The Friends of Boyer's Orchard will be holding their 2023 Blossom Festival on June 3, with live music, local vendors, refreshments, and trees and shrubs for sale. [Get tickets at alaskaorchard.org.](#)

GROWING TOGETHER
Gardening basics for all skill levels

In Person at..
Mountain View third Wednesday at 5 PM
Loussac third Thursday at 12 PM
Muldoon third Thursday at 4 PM
Chugiak Eagle River third Friday at 3 PM

Or pick up a program kit at any branch

Logos: Alaska Botanical Garden, ANCHORAGE GARDENS, ANCHORAGE MUSEUM, COOPERATIVE EXTENSION, Thanks to our partners, and a circular seal.

MEETINGS & EVENTS

Monday, May 1, 7-9 pm

Alaska Native Plant Society: The May meeting coincides with the first day of [Alaska Native Plant Month](#), and includes a medicinal plant talk by Elaine Hammes on *Rhodiola integrifolia* and a featured presentation by Aaron Wells on the "Flora of Chugach State Park Project." [Zoom link.](#)


BIRD CHATTER




NO POEM AS LOVELY AS ... A tree, of course. So BC is jazzed about the project unveiled by the Anchorage Audubon Society: They will be giving away free white spruce seedlings starting May 25th.

Mr. White Keys – King of the Birds (a.k.a. head of Anchorage Audubon), says they've bought 10,000 of the baby trees to help heal the wreckage left by ravaging spruce bark beetles. So, if you've been planning to replace lost trees in your yard or on your block, now's the time.

Distribution locations at press time start with Saturday, May 27th at the following farmers markets: South Anchorage Market, from 9-2; Spenard Market, from 9:30-2:30; and the Anchorage Farmer's Market (15th & Cordova), from 9-2. Other distribution locations and updates will be announced at <http://www.mrwhitekeys.com/trees.html>.



FREE SPRUCE TREES
from
Anchorage Audubon



But yikes! 10,000 seedlings – not seeds! We're talking 12-inch plants. That's a lot of trees. That's half a Central Park. (FYI: Some people with a questionable understanding of real life recently counted 19,933 trees in NYC's iconic green space). But Mr. White Keys says this is not an effort to re-tree the Chugach Mountains or build a park. It's a gift for those of us who want to help the ecosystem in a small way, including birds and other animals; and a gift for Nature – the mother we so often treat badly.

Want to help by organizing distribution in your neighborhood? Get in touch at flybynightclub@gci.net today!

PRODUCE PRODUCTION ... We're all used to buying fresh veggies from the refugee garden up in Mountain View at the stand the farmers run right on site. But this year, come summer – if it comes – they'll also be selling produce, etc., at the Muldoon Farmers

Market and the Midtown Farmers Market (at the BP Energy Center).

BTW, there's currently a slew of jobs available with RAIS, or Refugee Assistance & Immigration Services, the refugee program's real name. These are paying jobs, not volunteer gigs, so, if you're in the market, check them out.

A QUESTION...Is it true some of our members are going to the Royal Horticultural Society's Chelsea Flower Show later this month? In London?

They better check in with BC when they get back.

AN ANSWER ... Remember that picture of flowers Sen. Lisa Murkowski sent out last month that misidentified them as the Alaska State Flower -- forget-me-nots? Of course BC didn't know what they really were, but

Debbie Hinchey came to the rescue. They're likely creeping Veronica, she said. A smaller version of Veronica, obviously not the speedwell most of us grow.

FAKE BRAINS ...

Also known as artificial intelligence (AI). The Chicago Botanic Garden has "strategically" installed a system of AI across its acreage, an array of sensors that lets gardeners know what's happening at any moment -- and before humans can see it. Has a snowdrop bulb broken the surface? Are witch hazels about to bloom? What needs water? Food?

"These sensors signal a main computer that organizes the data and enables gardeners to understand and respond to the plants' immediate needs in a way never before possible," according to an article in the Garden newsletter.

We're really are going to be replaced by computers, aren't we? Sigh.

What's new, interesting, confounding and delightful? Send your bits of interesting garden news to stoomey@ymail.com.

Les Brake's Plant List shared at April 2023 MG Conference

lbrake@mtaonline.net

<i>Persicaria polymorpha</i>	<i>Silene acaulis</i> (moss campion)	<i>Helictotrichon sempervirens</i> (blue oat grass)
<i>Eryngium giganteum</i> (silver sea holly; Miss Wilmott's Ghost)	<i>Gentiana verna</i>	<i>Stachys macrantha</i>
<i>Crocus</i> hybrid	<i>Anemonella thalictroides</i>	<i>Rosa glauca</i>
<i>Epimedium</i> X <i>youngianum</i> 'Roseum'	<i>Primula veris</i> red and yellow	<i>Papaver commutatum</i> (ladybird poppies)
<i>Veronica gentianoides</i> 'Variegata'	<i>Euphorbia polychroma</i>	<i>Aruncus dioicus</i>
<i>Primula denticulata</i>	<i>Astilbe</i> 'Bumalda' foliage	<i>Papaver cambrica</i>
<i>Chionodoxa/Scilla forbesii</i> (glory of the snow)	<i>Cypripedium guttatum</i>	<i>Calceolaria mexicana</i> (Mexican slipper flower or pocket flower)
<i>Narcissus</i> 'Salome'	<i>Nicotiana sylvestris</i>	<i>Veronica</i> 'Pink Damask'
<i>Fritillaria meleagris</i> (guinea hen flower; checkered lily)	<i>Hesperis matronalis</i>	<i>Antirrhinum</i> 'Black Prince'
<i>Alopecurus pratensis</i> (golden foxtail grass)	<i>Zaluzianskya capensis</i>	<i>Malva moschata</i> (musk mallow)
<i>Primula elatior</i>	<i>Rosa</i> 'Lac Majeau'	<i>Eschscholzia caespitosa</i> (sundew poppy)
<i>Calypso bulbosa</i>	<i>Dianthus superbus</i>	<i>Kirengeshoma koreana</i> LOOK UP TO SEE FLOWERS
<i>Anemone nemorosa</i> 'Allenii' and white cultivars	<i>Freesia</i> hybrids	<i>Berberis thunbergii</i> 'Crimson Velvet'
<i>Pulmonaria</i> hybrid	<i>Centaurea macrocephala</i> (in moss bowl arrangement)	<i>Lilium</i> 'Peach Butterflies' with berberis
<i>Pulmonaria angustifolia</i>	<i>Narcissus</i> 'Sun Disc'	<i>Stachys officinalis</i>
<i>Anemone narcissiflora</i>	<i>Meconopsis grandis</i> with <i>Euphorbia dulcis</i> 'Chameleon'	<i>Paeonia lactiflora</i> for autumn color
<i>Androsace carnea</i> ssp. <i>rosea</i>	<i>Incarvillea zhongdianensis</i>	
	<i>Rosa</i> 'Alike'	
	<i>Angelica gigas</i>	
	<i>Gentiana asclepiadea</i> (willow gentian)	

Les Brake's Plant List

lbrake@mtaonline.net

Filipendula 'Kahome'

Thalictrum lucidum

Thalictrum rochebrunianum
(lavender mist meadowrue)

Ligularia 'Desdemona'

Clematis recta 'Purpurea'

Filipendula ulmaria 'Flore Pleno'

Gentiana septemfida

Next AMGA Meeting: BP Energy Center

“Introduction to Beekeeping”

Presented by Alexa Pullen

Monday, May 15 at 7 pm

Member Mtgs: Unless otherwise specified, **7 pm every 3rd Monday** of the month, September through May (except December). Free and open to the public.

Board Mtgs: 2nd Monday of the month, 6-7 pm, anyone is welcome to observe. Email 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, Katherine Karabelnikoff, Jamie Lang, Meg O'Mullane, Keenan Plate	At Large
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Committees, 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, Deb Blaylock	Advanced MG Course
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Janice Berry	Directory Editor
Kathy Liska, Cindy Walker	Facebook

Troy Weiss	Meetings & Educational Programs
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Troy Weiss	Garden Tours
Mary Rydesky, Gina Docherty, Jane Baldwin	Google Group Managers

Jan van den Top, Lili Naves, Sheila Toomey	Grants Program
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TBD	Hospitality
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Jamie Lang	Membership Database
Elizabeth Bluemink	Newsletter Editor

Gina Docherty	Ask a Master Gardener
Lynne Opstad	Lifetime Achievement

Lynne Opstad, Julie Ginder	Pioneer Home Garden
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Emily Becker, Keenan Plate	Volunteer Coordinators
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Nick Riordan, Keenan Plate, Alexis St. Juliana, Janice Berry, Emily Becker	Tech Committee
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Become an AMGA Member

Use our [online form](#) or [fillable PDF](#) to join or renew your AMGA membership. By joining, you support 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 stoomey@ymail.com.

Connect with AMGA

Website: www.alaskamastergardeners.org

Facebook: 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.

General emails: AskAMG@alaskamastergardeners.org

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

