

PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE

Two years ago, while driving on the Glenn Highway to my cabin, I began noticing an unusual brown tint on the needles of all the white spruce trees (*Picea glauca*).

It was a sight I had never observed before, and I became convinced it was a sign that they were destined to die. Despite seeking answers, nobody could provide an explanation for what was occurring.

My research led me to an article in the *Anchorage Daily News* that described the phenomenon—it was Spruce needle rust (*Chrysomyxa ledicola*). Fortunately, this rust rarely proves fatal to the tree. Notably, it affects not only white spruce but also black spruce (*P. mariana*) and Sitka spruce (*P. sitchensis*).

What adds to the intrigue is the fact that the rust's life cycle depends on Labrador tea (*Ledum spp.*) for completion. With five spore stages, two on the spruce tree and three on Labrador tea, this rust overwinters on the Labrador tea plant before spring winds disperse its spores to infect young spruce shoots.

The complexity of this life cycle raises questions: How did anyone figure this out? What drove the evolution of such a fascinating phenomenon? And what else is transpiring in our gardens, trees, woods, tundra, and wetlands? I view AMGA as a platform to collectively explore and unravel these mysteries.

My name is Rich Ervin, and after completing the Master Gardener class last spring, I find myself, along with Nick Riordan (club secretary 2020-2023), stepping into the role of AMGA co-chair president.

This unexpected opportunity is both thrilling and challenging, and I am excited to contribute positively to our club of curious and community-minded gardeners. The steep learning curve has been balanced with an abundance of help from experienced club members, so please feel free to contact me or Nick via phone or email to offer suggestions.

Both Nick and I want to extend our gratitude to Emily Becker for her exceptional leadership as club president over the past several years (through COVID and conference no less!), as well as to past and current board and committee members.

Thanks are due to the dozens of volunteers of the Board too. You all are the momentum that allows this club to provide such a great service to Anchorage year after year. Thank you all for sharing your garden and your wisdom.

Your co-presidents, Rich and Nick 🌿

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AMGA 2024 PROGRAM CALENDAR

The start time for AMGA member meetings remains at 6:30 pm for the coming year, with a mix of Zoom and in-person meetings.

AMGA Vice President Troy Weiss is looking to fill two empty speaker slots for the September and November programs. If you are interested in presenting on a topic, or want to nominate a speaker or topic, please send details and contact information to vicepresident@alaskamastergardeners.org.

2024 PROGRAMS

Feb 19: Composting - Jodie Anderson (Zoom)

March 18: New Soil Food Web - Jeff Lowenfels (Zoom)

April 15: Soil Conservation & Nutrient Management - Jessica Anderson (BP Energy Center)

May 20: Mushrooms and Fungi - Gabe DeGange & Allison Dunbar (BP Energy Center)

Sept 16: TBD - 6:30 pm

Oct. 21: Show & Tell Photos from Summer 2024 (BP Energy Center)

Nov. 18: TBD - 6:30 pm

DEC. 2023 TREASURER'S REPORT

Balances on 12/1/2023

Checking S-88	\$ 28,044.44
Savings S-2	\$ 5.25
Savings S-29	\$ 17,023.70
CD General 2 year 1.95%; 1/23	\$ 11,060.20

Total Assets \$ 56,133.59

Interest/Dividends \$ 67.89

This month's revenue

Membership	\$ 1,213.10
Donations	\$ 20.00
Fundraising/Plant sale	\$ -
Advanced M.G course	\$ 1,024.12
Name Tags	\$ -
Total revenue	\$ 2,257.22

This month's expenses

Postage	\$ -
Pioneer Home Plants	\$ -
Operations	\$ 113.00
Website	\$ 105.00
Directory	\$ -
Fundraising/plant sale	\$ -
Newsletter	\$ 29.99
State Fair prize donation	\$ 25.00
Lifetime achievement	\$ -
2023 AMGA conference	\$ -
Total Expenses this month	\$ 272.99

BALANCES ON 9/30/2023

Checking S-88	\$ 30,028.67
Savings S-2	\$ 5.25
Savings S-29	\$ 17,031.65
CD General 2 Year 1.95%, (1/23)	\$ 11,120.14

Total Assets on 12/31/2023 \$ 58,185.71

Amount in PayPal at yearend \$ 161.91

Total Assets on 12/31/2023 \$ 58,347.62

Prepared by Jan van den Top



JANUARY MEETING: ENGLISH GARDEN HOPPING

Debbie Hinchey gave a talk at our January 15 Zoom meeting about the English gardens she and Julie Riley visited in May 2023.

She described and shared pictures from Kew Gardens, Chelsea Physic Garden and Chelsea Garden Show in London; Ham House in Richmond; RHS Garden Wisley and Hall Grove in Surrey, the Special Plants Nursery and Derry Watkins house/garden near Bath; Windsor Castle gardens in Berkshire; Great Dixter in Sussex; and Sissinghurst Castle in Kent.

Starting at Kew but also at many other gardens, Debbie noticed a common theme of using natural materials in lieu of purchased supports (See above photo of woven red and yellow dogwood twigs; hazelnut branches are most commonly used). She also shared that the gardens—including Kew—were not mowing portions of their lawns to support wildlife. It's a new look, maybe it will come to America, she said.

They arrived at Kew while the bluebells were blooming and right before King Charles III's coronation. The day before the coronation, Debbie found it hard to take a picture at Kew without a jet in it. The next day, they watched the coronation with Kew's restaurant staff.

At Ham House, they visited one of the oldest orangeries still standing in England and perhaps the world. This type of building was a predecessor to greenhouses. She also toured the Cherry Garden, redeveloped using a 1671 plan with trimmed box hedges and balls, lavender, and santolina, after the trees failed. Debbie didn't expect to enjoy a garden that was so uniform.

Their two days at RHS Garden Wisley wasn't long enough, according to Debbie. Periodic cloudbursts

provided the geese lawn puddles for swimming, showing how badly the soils drains. The garden—including the lawn—was planted with a huge number of tulips. She also visited the "World Food Garden" which demonstrated many different ways of growing food. Other highlights included an alpine house, cushion house, wisteria collection, and crevice gardens. Before leaving Surrey, they also visited Hall Grove.

Near Bath, they visited Derry Watkins, an acquaintance of Debbie's who started the "gravel garden" movement. The goal is to fix the poor drainage problem that causes dry climate plants to suffer in wet climates like England.

At the Windsor Castle gardens, one of the first things they saw was bergenia. They also saw wisteria growing along the ground instead of supported, and learned that Windsor uses truckloads of hazel sticks, which are supple but dry hard, for weaving plant supports.

They visited gardens developed by famous gardeners—including Christopher Lloyd and Vita Sackville-West—at Great Dexter and Sissinghurst Castle, respectively. Debbie noticed a lot of perennials planted in the rose garden at Sissinghurst, which helps since roses "aren't doing anything most of the time." Centennial Rose Garden volunteers in Anchorage have been taking a similar approach, she said.

Their last stops were the Chelsea Physic Garden and the Chelsea Flower Show. The physic garden had areas focused on oncology, neurology, and other medical fields. At the flower show, they saw many different varieties of garden plants, and got "lots of ideas" for gardening. Pro tip: they avoided the huge crowds at the garden show by visiting the landscape exhibits late in the day. 🌿

ALASKA SEEDS OF CHANGE: STICKLEBACK FARM UPDATE

Alaska Seeds of Change welcomes community members to join its work to build up a garden space next door to its Arctic and Northern Lights hydroponic facility, and it is also looking for a new entity to take over the Stickleback garden site downtown.

Between 2019 and 2023, Seeds worked with local organizations in pursuit of a positive, community-focused vision to build Stickleback Farm, at 3rd and Ingra, on the site of the former Alaska Native Service Hospital.

Partners for developing Stickleback included the Anchorage Heritage Land Bank, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, Third Avenue Radicals, Southcentral Foundation, Alaska Food Policy Council, and Alaska Resilience Farms. Many individual garden volunteers also supported the project.

Since breaking ground in 2020, partners and volunteers built a garden perimeter moose fence, fish-tote orchard, and large garden beds; held a healing ceremony for the site; and put up a beautiful mural!

Progress continued in 2022 despite challenges such as vandalism and limited water access. However, by the end of Spring 2023, the area around Stickleback had transformed into a makeshift camp with over 100 tents, broken vehicles, and hazards like littered needles. The Third Avenue Radicals hosted the annual neighborhood cleanup. This early-season cleanup revealed significant vandalism and accumulation of dangerous materials like used needles and broken glass.

Due to safety concerns, Seeds, a youth-serving program, reluctantly withdrew from hosting community events, volunteer days, and youth work experiences.



Photos of Stickleback Farm volunteer days, courtesy Cole Murphy

Seeds' withdrawal was conducted with the blessing of the Heritage Land Bank, which owns the site and has been a graceful partner through the rise and current stagnation of the garden.

Fortunately, an opportunity arose for Seeds to build up a garden space with secure water access right next door to its Arctic and Northern Lights hydroponic facility. The Seeds team is building new soil on site in the form of 80-foot-long lasagna-style bed and is able to expand upon its existing indoor and outdoor gardening and job training program.

— Cole Murphy & Sara Renard, *Alaska Seeds of Change*



2024 HERB OF THE YEAR: YARROW by Marjorie Williams

Yarrow (*Achillea*) is a low-growing perennial with gray-green leaves, straight flower stem and flowers in a tight group, with tiny, daisy-like flowers clustered in umbels. Leaves are feathery, with varying degrees of hairiness. Flowers are normally white but can be pink, cream, light yellow and red. The plant ranges from 8-40" tall and 12" wide. Yarrow's sweet scent is similar to chrysanthemums. A member of the aster family, it is native in temperate regions of Asia, Europe and North America.



Yarrow at the Alaska Botanical Garden, courtesy Mary Contrary

Common names of yarrow include milfoil, thousand leaf, sneezewort, sanguinary nosebleed, soldier's woundwort, stop bleed herb, blood wort, wound herb, seven year's love, military herb, thousand seal.

Yarrow is hardy to Zone 2, likes well drained, fairly dry soil, and is drought resistant. It does better in full sun but tolerates some shade with fewer flowers and possible need for staking. Yarrow propagates by seed, plant division, bare roots or cuttings. A 5-10-10 fertilizer may be applied lightly in spring. Too much nitrogen leads to weak growth and floppy stems. Flowers may be deadheaded to prevent reseeding and encourage additional blooms. Divide every 5 years or more often if in shade. To dry flowers, cut as they begin to flower and hang upside down.

Yarrow pollen has been identified in Neanderthal burial caves dating to 60,000 years ago, suggesting a long association with humans. Achilles was reputed to use yarrow for wound healing during the Trojan War and was likely the botanical namesake. It was used for this purpose from medieval times and as part of U.S.

Civil War medical kits. Native Americans used yarrow for healing sores, earaches and more. In the Middle Ages, yarrow was used for women's problems and for melancholy. Albertus Magnus combined it with nettles to treat fear and self-negation. Shakers used it to treat complaints from hemorrhages to flatulence. The stems were used in ancient China to foretell the future.

Yarrow is used a companion plant in herb gardens to attract beneficial insects and repel some pests. It has been used for erosion control; dyeing wool; and flower tea extractions, poultices, infusions, and aromatherapy for numerous maladies. Yarrow is edible but in small quantities as it is pungent, bitter and astringent. Leaves can be brewed as tea. Before hops were used in beer making, yarrow was often used. The flowers and leaves are used in some liquors and bitters.

For medical uses, consult your healthcare provider, particularly if taking blood thinner, using lithium, sedatives, antacids and acid-reducers. Yarrow is considered unsafe for pregnant and breast-feeding mothers. Prior to using, people sensitive to aster family plant should do skin patch test on yarrow as it may cause sneezing and allergic skin reactions. Toxicity and other cautions have not been well documented. Side effects include headaches, dizziness and light sensitivity. 🌿

HERB STUDY SCHEDULE

The Herb Study Group meets via Zoom on the 2nd Friday of the following months, from noon to 1:30 p.m. Upcoming topics are as follows:

Feb. 9: Slide show: Herb Gardens seen in England during May 2023

March 8: Book review and discussion: wild foods and medicinal plants

April 12: Herb seedling exchange (no Zoom)

May: Transplanting plugs at ABG (dates to be determined)

Anyone interested in participating in the Herb Study Group discussions is welcome and should contact anchorageherbstudygroup@gmail.com to get on the list for announcements.

FEBRUARY EVENT CALENDAR

CLASSES/WORKSHOPS

Thursday, February 1, 6-7 pm

Homer Soil & Water Conservation District: Know Your Land Series. Local Grower Spotlight with Ryan Lee. [Register here.](#)

Saturday, February 10, 10:30-11:30 am

Alaska Botanical Garden: LEGO Flower Valentines. Create something unique and fun for Valentine's Day this year and learn to make flowers out of LEGOS! \$38/members. [Register here.](#)

Tuesday, February 13, Noon-1 pm

RurAL CAP Grow Program: Processing Fish Waste into Fertilizer, via Zoom. [Details to be posted on Facebook.](#)

Thursday, February 15, 6-7 pm

Homer Soil & Water Conservation District: Know Your Land Series. Forest Stewardship for Common Landowner Goals. [Register here.](#)

Saturday, February 24, 4:30-5:30 pm

Anchorage Greens: Monthly Curiosity Classes (in person). House Plants with Holly. Anchorage's very own plant doctor will be talking about all things house plants. \$20. [Register here.](#)

Tuesday, February 27, Noon-1 pm

RurAL CAP Grow Program: Cold Storage & Root Cellars, via Zoom. [Details to be posted on Facebook.](#)

Thursday, February 29, 6-7 pm

Homer Soil & Water Conservation District: Know Your Land Series. Crop Rotation for Successful Harvests. [Register here.](#)

MEETINGS & EVENTS

Thursday, Feb. 1, 7-9 pm

Anchorage Garden Club: Poppies and Their Relatives. Open to the public. Central Lutheran Church.

Monday, Feb. 5, 7-9 pm

Alaska Native Plant Society monthly meeting: "Learning Alaska's Willows," presented by Cam Webb. Also with 5-minute talks on medicinal and aquatic plants. [Via Zoom only.](#)

Thursday, February 8, 10-1 pm

Wildflower Garden Club of Alaska: English Gardens Slideshow with Debbie Hinchey. Central Lutheran Church and via Zoom. [Contact club](#) for more info.

JOBS, ANNOUNCEMENTS, ETC.

Reminder: you must sign up to receive a printed copy of the AMGA directory. Copies will be available at the February and March meetings, or contact membership coordinator Jamie Lang for pickup options. [Sign up here.](#)

AMGA is seeking a **Pioneer Home garden co-leader**, a **hospitality coordinator** for in-person meetings, and a **plant sale leader**. Contact president@alaskamastergardeners.org for more information.

The Alaska Community Foundation's MatSu-focused **Community Food Security Through Gardening Grant** is accepting applications for ten \$10,000 awards. [Learn more.](#)

The **Society of American Foresters** annual tree sale opened on Jan. 22. Lodgepole pine, Scotch pine, and paper birch are still available, other species have sold out. Plant your windbreak & carbon-sequester-ers! [Click on this link](#) for more information.

The Alaska Division of Agriculture's 2024 **Micro Grants for Food Security** will be available soon. [Check here for details.](#)

RurAL CAP's **Orchards and Food Forests GROW-OFF Grant Program** is accepting applications. [Learn more.](#)

UAF's Heidi Rader is teaching the Growing a Productive and Sustainable Garden class in Spring 2024. [Read more about the class here.](#)



BIRD CHATTER



Seriously, guys. You expect me to write a column about gardening? It's minus-2 degrees out and there's eight feet of snow on my flowers.

Don't know how you cope, but BC is seriously into escape. Did you know a little potato from last year's crop that's too soft to cook can be stuck in a very small plastic greenhouse pot that somehow wound up under the sink with old dirt still in it and it will instantly start growing?

Emily Becker has a better idea: Curl up and read. Try "Witch of Wild Things,"

by Raquel Vasquez Gilliland, she suggested. "It's a plant-centered romance novel." The heroine is a botany sleuth. The author got her MFA from UAA. "When not writing, Raquel tells stories to her plants and they tell her stories back," says a blurb online. Honest.

It's only a 3 out of 5, but it's a fun read, says Emily. The library has it.



Drops of Jupiter Oregano, *Oreganum x hybrida*, via Ball Seed.

ANOTHER ESCAPE...A visit to a greenhouse helps — just to feel humidity, if nothing else. Most of the ones that stay open are featuring house plants, which don't float BC's boat; ergo, a phone call to a favorite, Mile 5.2 Greenhouse in downtown Eagle River. They've got spring bulbs and herbs, said the woman who answered the phone, and are busy switching from their emphasis on trees to a new "stress on perennials."

At Alaska Mill & Feed, Garden Center Lead Russell said they've got seed starter kits and lights in and are waiting to see how much of their wish list gets filled for the coming season. They're trying for an increase in variety balanced by fewer numbers of each variety. But not to worry, they'll have plenty of the pelargoniums (yes, geraniums) we count on them for.

One of the new things they've ordered is called Drops

of Jupiter, said Russell, who clearly enjoys his job. It's an ornamental oregano. BC looked it up. It's pretty. It's edible. And it smells nice.

MEA CULPA...BC is so embarrassed. You know member Lili Naves —BC serves on the MG Grants Committee with her and has been treating her like a regular person. But it turns out she's some kind of international bird goddess. In fact, she's not even Lili: She's Dr. Liliana Coelho Naves. The doctorate is a Ph.D. from the Sorbonne—yes, the one in Paris, you know

—France. There's a BS and MS from Brazil, but who's counting. Anyhow, she got a big-deal award on December 14th. It's called the Isleib Award—named after a famous Alaska birder.

"Liliana's considerable quantitative skills and fresh perspectives have helped guide development and adoption of new approaches to improve accuracy and reduce

uncertainty of bird harvest assessments," says an admiring blurb in the Alaska Bird Conference program.

These kudos are late — but not too late to say "Way to go Lili!!"

IT REALLY IS HOTTER...The USDA has published a new hardiness zone guide, a need created by climate change. BC checked ZIP code 99508. It's gone from zone 4b in 2012 to 5a today, an increase of 5 degrees in the coldest winter temps.

Somehow it just doesn't resonate at the moment.

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

February 19 Member Meeting "Composting" Presented by Jodie Anderson 6:30 pm, via Zoom

Member Mtgs: 3rd Monday of the month, 6:30 pm, September-May (except December), unless otherwise specified. 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

Rich Ervin & Nick Riordan	Co-Presidents
Troy Weiss	Vice President
Jan van den Top	Treasurer
Keenan Plate	Secretary
Kathleen Kaiser, Katherine Karabelnikoff, Jamie Lang	At Large

Committees, Program Coordinators & Volunteers

Emily Becker	CES Liaison
Steve Brown	CES Master Gardener Program Liaison
Emily Becker	Broadcast Email
Nick Riordan	Calendar of Events
Don Bladow, Troy Weiss, Emily Becker, Deb Blaylock	Advanced MG Course
Janice Berry	Directory Editor
Kathy Liska, Cindy Walker	Facebook
Troy Weiss	Meetings/Programs
Troy Weiss, Janie Munson-Odgers, Rich Ervin	Garden Tours
Mary Rydesky, Gina Docherty, Jane Baldwin	Google Group Managers
Jan van den Top, Lili Naves, Sheila Toomey	Grants Program
Vacant (please apply)	Hospitality
Jamie Lang	Membership Database
Elizabeth Bluemink	Newsletter Editor
Gina Docherty	Ask a Master Gardener
Vacant (please apply)	Lifetime Achievement
Susan Miller	Pioneer Home Garden
Emily Becker, Keenan Plate	Volunteer Coordinators
Nick Riordan, Keenan Plate, Alexis St. Juliana, Janice Berry, Emily Becker	Tech Committee
Vacant (please apply)	Plant Sales

Renew/Join AMGA

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

The deadline for submitting an item for publication is the 20th of the month. We welcome educational articles (400-600 words ideal), Bird Chatter, calendar items and announcements. Educational articles qualify for MG volunteer hours. Contact/send items to the editor at newsletter@alaskamastergardeners.org and send Bird Chatter items to stoomey@gmail.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 updates: Jamie Lang, jamie@alaskamastergardeners.org
 General emails: AskMG@alaskamastergardeners.org
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