

PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE by Nick Riordan

Dear AMGA members,

Our board is considering a proposal to refocus AMGA around mentorship and volunteerism, and we want to share this proposal and invite feedback from all of you. We've noticed a decline in volunteer engagement, which may be related to CES' lack of capacity to track volunteer hours or perhaps the ongoing adjustment to in-person activities post-COVID-19. Whatever the cause(s), we believe volunteerism and mentorship are crucial to AMGA's purpose and are considering forming volunteer teams to reemphasize this priority.

Volunteer teams will focus on service projects, like supporting specific gardens in Anchorage. These teams, smaller than our entire membership, could help foster connection, collaboration, and mentorship among members. Each team could self-organize, with its own leader(s), priorities, needs, schedule, etc.

While not entirely new, this proposal aims to expand upon existing structures within AMGA. More service projects could also accommodate our membership's diverse schedules. For example, the Pioneer Garden team could meet on Wednesdays from 2 to 4 pm, the Spenard Community Garden team on Tuesdays from 5:30pm-6:30pm, and the Fresh International Gardens team on Mondays from 10 to 11:30 am.

This is also a proposal to modify other aspects of the club to better support service projects and the teams of AMGA members that carry them out. Here are some examples of ways we could modify existing club programming to support volunteer teams. First,

club membership meetings would include a time for teams to present their projects, seek input, recruit help, request funding, and share progress. Second, educational presentation topics could be selected to meet the needs of volunteer teams, as well as providing a time for more detailed reports from teams on their experiences, issues, and progress. Third, summer garden tours could include visits to service project sites to assess needs, offer support, and celebrate success. Fourth, club grants could be awarded internally to fund service projects. Fifth, continue membership meetings during summer months as that is when the bulk of volunteer work would be going on.

An exciting aspect of this process is considering which service projects we want to be involved in and what volunteer teams we want to form. Where, with who, and in what ways do we want to contribute? One of the next steps will be answering these questions, so please think it over, talk amongst yourselves, ask around, and [let us know](#) what you think!

The next Master Gardener class is scheduled for fall. It would be great to have volunteer teams formed by then so new Master Gardener program graduates could receive a list of active teams to join. 🌱

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CLUB NEWS ITEMS

Once again the Midtown Mall Garden Show was a lot of fun, in a gardener's sense. It was good to see all the Master Gardeners in action on Saturday, April 27, talking gardening after our long winter.



Marjorie Williams' Streptocarpus

All the garden clubs had booths and the Orchid Society was back after a 2-3 year hiatus after Covid.

Thank you to all the volunteers and the plant vendors. We had plenty of help and lots of plants, especially tomatoes. We sold \$2,373 worth of plants, compared to last year's \$1,800.

It was really great to see everyone. Thank you again for helping make it a successful plant sale at the garden show. — *Susan Negus, AMGA Volunteer*

The April 15 AMGA meeting started off with information from club co-president, Nick Riordan. He shared some new initiatives the AMGA board is considering regarding volunteerism in the club.

We also discussed the summer garden tour schedule and floated the idea of renting a bus to visit gardens outside of Anchorage if members are interested. If you have ideas for garden tours, please contact Troy Weiss at vicepresident@alaskamastergardeners.org.

For the presentation portion, we heard from Sayako Schwing, the Urban Agriculture Program Leader at Anchorage Soil and Water Conservation District (ASWCD). She explained the different focus areas of ASWCD: urban agriculture, native plants, invasive plants, and natural resources at JBER. She also discussed the ASWCD soil test program. The tests cost \$40. Schwing will come to your garden to sample the soil, send it to the lab, analyze the result, and give you amendment recommendations and general consultation. Sampling will occur in September 2024, and you get the recommendation by Spring 2025. Any questions or are you ready to make an appointment? Contact Schwing at urbanag.aswcd@gmail.com right now with your name, address, phone number, and your availability in September. The spots are filling up fast! — *Keenan Plate, AMGA Secretary*

MARCH 2024 TREASURER'S REPORT

Balances on 2/29/2024

Checking S-88	\$20,671.96
Savings S-2	\$5.25
Savings S-29	\$17,047.06
CD General 2 year mature; 1/3/25	\$11,120.14
CD General 1 year; mature 1/30/25	\$10,000.00
Total Assets	\$ 58,844.41

Interest/Dividends \$ 135.52

This month's revenue

Membership	\$ 155.80
Donations	\$ -
Fundraising/Plant sale	\$ -
Advanced M.G course	\$ -
Name Tags	\$ -
Total revenue	\$ 155.80

This month's expenses

Postage	\$ -
Pioneer Home Plants	\$ -
Operations	\$ 297.90
Website Hosting	\$ -
Website Maintenance	\$ -
Directory	\$ -
Fundraising/plant sale	\$ -
Newsletter	\$ 29.99
State Fair prize donation	\$ -
Adv. MG speaker fee	\$ -
Total Expenses this month	\$ 327.89

BALANCES ON 3/31/2024

Checking S-88	\$ 20,499.87
Savings S-2	\$ 5.25
Savings S-29	\$ 17,055.02
CD General 2 Year 2.71%, (1/23/25)	\$ 11,179.75
CD General 1 Year 4.07% (1/30/25)	\$ 10,067.95
Total Assets on 3/31/2024	\$ 58,807.84

Prepared by Jan van den Top



UPDATES FROM AMGA VOLUNTEER GARDEN PROJECTS

Centennial Rose Garden

Are you ready to stop and smell the roses? Not so fast! Near the west end of the Park Strip downtown the roses are still hibernating, awaiting warmer weather before greening up. When they do awaken, you could have a “Zen experience” there that keeps many people exploring and coming back to the garden summer after summer.

In mid-May, the rose beds should be ready for gardeners and rose lovers to pull back the blankets of leaves that were fluffed onto the beds last fall. Tucked in between and alongside the wide variety of roses are other perennials and annuals also growing including delphiniums, alyssum, irises and prim-roses.

Debbie Hinchey’s schedule has been Tuesdays 1:00pm– 4:00pm every summer for umpteen years and is expected to be this summer as well. All are welcome to join this year for summer mulching, pruning, sitting for “a spell” and strolling through the garden.

Herb Study Group

The Herb Study group continued with Zoom meetings this past winter season, moving into an April afternoon of tea & biscuits (cookies), quiche, fresh veggies; and exchanges of seedlings, seeds and cuttings. Enjoyable conversations continued past the 2 p.m. schedule! Special thanks go to Debbie Hinchey and Jerelyn Miyashiro.

The Herb Study group is moving ever closer to spring clean-up, planting and summer maintenance in ABG’s Herb Garden. The first regularly scheduled meeting in the Herb Garden is planned for Friday May 17, 1 to 3 pm, subject to unforeseen weather. Volunteers plan to assist ABG in potting up seedlings (likely before the end of April). Every year, new and/or returning plants are added to existing reseeded and perennial plants in the Herb Garden. In addition to weeding and watering, Alaska native plants and additional signage are on the

activity list for this summer.

New and returning volunteers for ABG are required to attend annual orientation. Orientation session options are scheduled for May 13, May 14, June 12 and July 10 ([more info here](#)). Interested persons may contact ABG for other volunteer opportunities. Those interested in Herb Study activities and meetings are welcome to be added to the email list at anchorageherbstudygroup@gmail.com.

Pioneer Home Garden

Email notices about scheduled work days will start going out soon. If you would like to be notified and have not yet signed up on one of the volunteer lists, please contact Susan Miller at smiller.ret@gmail.com.

Work on the Pioneer Home Garden will begin in the next few weeks. It will begin with cutting back perennials and cleaning out any annuals left from last year. Volunteers may also be needed to water the perennials and the new annuals being hardened off until planting day. A week or so before planting day, a few volunteers will be needed to add compost and Sustane fertilizer to the beds. Many volunteers will be needed on planting day, which will probably be near the end of May.

Then, all summer, volunteers will be needed to weed, water and dead head the plants. Volunteers will meet on Wednesday afternoon each week to work together on the garden (and learn from each other). We will probably meet at 1:30 or 2 pm. Additional volunteers may also be needed on other days to water the plants if this summer is too dry.

Contributions from Elaine Hammes and Susan Miller.

Please submit updates for your service projects (especially photos!) to newsletter@alaskamastergardeners.com.

CELEBRATING FIREWEED by Beth Baker

Sick of winter? Waiting for the snow to melt? Alaska's native plants survived winter and are waiting too. Some, like pasqueflower, are so impatient they'll push right through the snow.

Nearly every state sets aside a month to celebrate its native plants. In the Lower 48, that month is April. For obvious reasons, that doesn't work so well in Alaska. Starting in 2023, by formal proclamation from the governor, [May is the official month to celebrate Alaska native plants](#). This year, the Alaska Native Plant Society opted to celebrate a native plant of the year, too. With over 2,500 Alaska native plant species, picking one wasn't easy. Should we have held an election for write-in candidates? Then ranked choice? Well, this year, a small committee picked...drumroll...fireweed.

Fireweed occurs throughout Alaska except for the far north above the Brooks Range. Its Indigenous names in Alaska include: ch'desh'tleq'a in Inland Dena'ina, t'ik'desq'a in Upper Inlet Dena'ina, paniuqtaq in Inupiaq, lool in Lingít, ciilqaaq in Central Yup'ik, cillqaaq in Alutiiq, and chikayaasix in Unangax. Its scientific name was *Epilobium angustifolium* but that has been changed to the equally unpronounceable *Chamaenerion angustifolium*.

You might not recognize fireweed when it first comes up. Little, pinkish shoots. Then while you aren't paying attention, a long stalk with buds emerges. Bumble bees and other pollinating insects are paying attention though. When the buds open, one by one ascending the stalk, the insects move in for the nectar, transferring pollen between plants. Faster than anyone wants, the uppermost blossom opens and performs as nature's timekeeper, telling us winter is once again on the way. Seed pods develop and release white fluff that carries the seed to new ground. A Swedish study observed fireweed seeds floating over 330 feet above the ground. If seeds reach these heights, they can disperse 60-180 miles downwind. No wonder they are so widespread.

Bears and other wildlife eat fireweed. What about

humans? Oh my, yes. Who doesn't like fireweed honey from the state fair? Make a syrup or steam the baby fireweed shoots. Add a few sprigs to soups, casseroles, quiche, or a stir fry. Pickle unopened buds as a capers substitute. Blossoms brighten tossed salads and yield delicious jelly. Fireweed tea is flavorful though in excess can cause diarrhea. The Cooperative Extension Service provides [storage and preservation tips and recipes](#) for fireweed vinegar, scones, jelly, and fireweed honey. Yum! Forage responsibly by following the 10 percent rule, taking no more than that in the general area where foraging. And don't pull up the roots as they will form future shoots.



Photo by Dennis Ronsse

What about nutritional and medicinal benefits? Janice Schofield, in her book *Alaska's Wild Plants - A Guide to Alaska's Edible and Healthful Harvest*, shares that spring shoots are high in vitamins A and C, as well as mucilage, a slippery substance that forms when the shoots are chopped and steeped in cold water overnight. The mucilage can soothe a scratchy throat or mouth ulcers, among other uses. Infusions and poultices of fireweed leaves and roots are also used medicinally.

The benefits of fireweed aren't limited to food and medicine. Fireweed is one of the first plants to arrive after wildfire, and helps the entire ecosystem by regenerating soil. Huge fields of fireweed form not only from seed but asexually, from rhizomes that run horizontally just below the soil's surface. If a pollinating insect never comes along to move the pollen for sexual reproduction, the fireweed has another way to survive. How smart.

We are blessed to share Alaska's glorious summer with fireweed. As Alaska Native healer Dr. Rita Blumenstein said: "Fireweed heals wounded ground from fire or other destruction. It returns vitamins and life back in the soil. It is gentle and healing. It is also gentle & healing for people."

Beth Baker is an Eagle River resident who serves on the board of the Alaska Native Plant Society as well as the planning committee for Alaska Native Plant Month.

MAY EVENT HIGHLIGHTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

To reduce redundant efforts by our member volunteers, we're merging the AMGA event calendar with Yarducopia's [Currant Affairs](#). A link to the most recent Currant Affairs calendar will be featured here and you can also [subscribe](#) to have it delivered to your inbox. This section will focus on AMGA events and local volunteer opportunities. Please continue to send event fliers to newsletter@alaskamastergardeners.org.

<p>May 20 AMGA Member Meeting “Mushrooms & Fungi” Presented by Gabe DeGange & Allison Dunbar BP Energy Center & via Zoom 6-6:30 pm socializing; talk begins @ 6:30 pm</p>	<p>Got ideas for spring garden tours? How do you feel about renting a bus to visit gardens outside of Anchorage? Please contact Troy Weiss at vicepresident@alaskamastergardeners.org</p>
<p>View a detailed list of volunteer opportunities for AMGA members! Check out the latest Currant Affairs event calendar!</p>	



VOLUNTEERS 4 GARDENS

AMGA and the Alaska School Garden Network have compiled [this list of public gardening projects](#) in Anchorage. We encourage AMGA members to join one!

AMGA is seeking volunteers to help out at events or fill a vacant role on one of our committees. Contact one of the following to learn about current openings.

Lifetime Achievement: Rich Ervin, president@alaskamastergardeners.org

Hospitality: Rich Ervin, president@alaskamastergardeners.org

Pioneer Home: Susan Miller, smiller.ret@gmail.com

Garden Tours: Troy Weiss, troydweiss@gmail.com

Plant Sale Coordinator: Susan Negus, senegus@gmail.com

[Currant Affairs](#) is a compilation of food and garden events, workshops, and opportunities in and around Anchorage and Southcentral Alaska and offered by the many awesome organizations and individuals who support gardening, agriculture, and local food systems in Alaska. For the last few years, the AMGA event calendar has been largely compiled from Currant Affairs. Email garden@akaction.org to sign up.

May 20 Member Meeting

"Mushrooms & Fungi"

Presented by Gabe DeGange & Allison Dunbar

BP Energy Center & via Zoom

6-6:30 pm socializing; talk begins @ 6:30 pm

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
Jamie Lang, Brenda Adams, Rebecca Ligler	At Large

Committees, Program Coordinators & Volunteers

Steve Brown	CES Master Gardener Statewide Coordinator
Emily Becker	Broadcast Email
Nick Riordan	Calendar of Events
Don Bladow, Troy Weiss, Emily Becker, Deb Blaylock, Rebecca Ligler	Advanced MG Course
Janice Berry	Directory Editor
Kathy Liska, Cindy Walker	Facebook
Troy Weiss	Meetings/Programs
Troy Weiss	Garden Tours
Mary Rydesky, Gina Docherty, Jane Baldwin	Google Group Managers
Jan van den Top, Lili Naves, Sheila Toomey	Grants Program
Vacant	Hospitality
Jamie Lang	Membership Database
Elizabeth Bluemink	Newsletter Editor
Gina Docherty	Ask a Master Gardener
Vacant	Lifetime Achievement
Susan Miller	Pioneer Home Garden
Emily Becker, Keenan Plate	Volunteer Coordinators
Vacant	Plant Sale Coordinator

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

