ALASKA MASTER GARDENERS ANCHORAGE

NEWSLETTER
December 2025
VOLUME 27, ISSUE 12

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE by Rich Ervin

What a fun year 2025 has been for AMGA!

In January, we had Josh Smith of Bear Mountain Forest Nursery give us a talk on starting native plants from seed and his pioneering work with filberts in Alaska. He is going to be speaking to us again in March. Josh is very popular among Alaska's gardening community. It is obvious why when you hear him speak.

In February, Jeff Lowenfels presented "The 3 Microbial Loops: the Poop Loop, the Fungal Loop and the Bacterial Loop." His knowledge about the goings-on in the soil is quite profound. He advocates no-till gardening, avoiding herbicides and pesticides, and letting nature take its course.

Nick Riordan's composting knowledge is unparalleled and he presented a wonderful course on composting in March. It was a lively audience participation event. If you haven't visited his Yarducopia midtown garden depot spot at Cheechako and Benson, give it a look. It is quite an operation. A gardener's and composter's delight.

In April, the incomparable Brenda Adams gave us a presentation from her book "Cool Plants for Cold Climates." She had beautiful slides and a wealth of information and design ideas. If you haven't read her books on gardening you are missing out. "There's a Moose in My Garden: Designing Gardens in Alaska and the Far North" is another one of her books. Check them out!

One of the biggest events of the year was hosting Charles Dowding of Somerset, England, in May. He was on his way to be the keynote speaker at the Southeast Alaska Master Gardeners conference. He gave us a workshop and a presentation. He is a proponent of no-dig gardening. Pictures of his garden in England would make any gardener envious and he showed us how to do it. Many of his methods are backed by studies he has done over several years in his garden.

Cover photo: Treasures from Jan Van den Top's garden.

IN THIS ISSUE

He set up a small plot at my house. We then had a most wonderful picnic out on the deck. I'll tell you what, our group knows how to cook! Goodies beyond your wildest dreams. By the way, the plot we made with him turned out very productive with the most beautiful, tasty carrots I have ever grown. But, it did need to be weeded more than I anticipated.

The summer garden tours are a signature highlight of AMGA. What a great summer of tours! We tried to throw in a few volunteer days, which were much appreciated, but not well attended, and so this year we will do something different. There will be a new cadre of graduates from the Master Gardener class, so maybe we could do something in the realm of volunteering on another day. Any ideas?

The pop-up tours were a very nice addition. I am

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always truly amazed at the talent, ingenuity and beauty of the gardens we visit. There is always something to learn, to envy, and new plants to grow and try. And hope that someday my garden can look so unique and beautiful. *(Editor's note: It does.)*

Our final presentation was Rebecca Ligler's talk on "Harvesting the Bounty: Essential Food Preservation for Alaskan Gardeners." What a wonderful presentation! I learned so much and had thousands of questions after that presentation. We also learned what a gifted and vivacious speaker she is. Next time I'd like to see more pictures from her pantry and sample the goodies.

Our slide show presentation in October gave us another glimpse into the talent of our members. Thank you all for submitting your pictures.

Two plant sales in the spring and fall were a big success and it was very fun to visit and commune with fellow gardeners. If you want to have a lot of fun and meet lots of fellow gardeners and club members get involved and attend. You won't be disappointed.

Again, I want to thank you all for the support and help you gave me over the last two years as your president. It has truly been an honor. I am super excited about our next president, Dawn Groth! She is going to add new energy and enthusiasm to AMGA. Please give her your support, encouragement, ideas and talent.

NOTES FROM SEC. PECK

The AMGA held its Annual Business Meeting on November 17, covering key updates and plans for the year ahead. Members reviewed the club's finances and priorities, received an update on educational initiatives planned for 2026, and heard the latest on our transition to Neon One—including the move toward an online-only member directory. The slate of 2026 Board Members was presented, voted on, and unanimously approved. Committee roles for 2026 were also confirmed. Thank you to all who participated and continue to support AMGA's work and mission.

OCT. 2025 TREASURER'S REPORT

Balances on 9/30/2025		
Checking S-88	$ 16,462.22	
Savings S-2	$ 5.25	
Savings S-29	$ 17,196.41	
CD General 2 year mature; 1/3/27	$ 11,575.39	
CD General 1 year; mature 1/30/26	$ 10,688.12	
Total Assets		$ 55,927.39
Interest/Dividends		$8.03
This month's revenue		
Membership	$401	
Donations		
Fundraising/Plant sale		
Advanced M.G course	$1,704.42	
Total revenue		$ 2105.42
This month's expenses		
NEON 1	$724	
Grants	$0	
Operations	$ 167.31	
Website Hosting	$	
Website Maintenance	$	
Postage/Box Rental	$	
Fundraising/plant sale	$	
Newsletter	$ 34.99	
Postage/Box rental	$	
Speaker Fees and costs	$	
Total Expenses this month		$ 926.30
Balances On 10/31/2025		
Checking S-88	$ 17,641.34	
Savings S-2	$ 5.25	
Savings S-29	$ 17,204.44	
CD General 2 Year 2.71%, (1/23/25)	$ 11,575.39	
CD General 1 Year 4.07% (1/30/25)	$10,688.12	
Total Assets on 10/31/25		$ 57,114.54
Prepared by Jan van den Top		

TURMERIC (*Curcuma longa*) by Elaine Hammes

Turmeric *(Curcuma longa)* is in one of the largest genera, *Curcuma*, of approximately 100 species in the ginger family, Zingiberaceae. The greatest diversity of *Curcuma* species is in India, at around 40 to 45 species. It is a perennial, herbaceous, intense yellow spice which, like ginger, comes from the underground rhizome of the plant. The word "curcuma" is derived from the Arabic word for yellow, "kurkum."

Turmeric is found throughout tropical Asia from India to South China, Southeast Asia, Papua New Guinea, and northern Australia. *Curcuma longa* has been associated with Indian culture for nearly 4,000 years. It later reached China, East and West Africa. *C. longa* has been cultivated for more than 2,000 years in Assyria, India, China. It is cultivated today in India, Jamaica, Haiti, and Peru.

Recent studies have shown that the taxonomy of *C. longa* is problematic. While only the specimens from South India are identifiable as *C. longa*, Thailand has 30 to 40 species. The identities and cultivars in other parts of the world still need to be established and validated. Various species currently utilized and sold as "turmeric" in other parts of Asia have been shown to belong to several physically similar taxa, with overlapping local names.

Curcuma longa has yellow-white flowers with seeds that are brown and ovoid. The plant grows upright up to one meter tall with large, thin leaves growing from the base. The rhizome is the part used for spices and medicine. It needs a tropical moist climate and light well-drained soil to grow (zones 8-11). A crop is ready to harvest in about 10 months after planting rhizomes. The rhizomes are dug, cleaned, and boiled before being dried. After drying, they are either ground or left whole for use.

Turmeric root for sale at Natural Pantry. Photo by Mary Contrary.

The rhizomes of *C. longa* and other *Curcuma* species are widely used in traditional medicine, as spices, flavoring, coloring, perfumes, and cosmetics. Turmeric rhizomes provide oil of curcuma, an essential oil, used in some perfumes. Demand for yellow saffron dye historically outgrew supply so turmeric has been used in China and India as yellow dye for silks and cotton.

Turmeric is an essential ingredient in curry powders for color and flavor. It is also added to mustard powder, pickles and chutneys, is used as a color and flavor for deviled eggs, salad dressings and marinades, as a substitute for saffron, as coloring for butter, cheese, margarine, fruit drinks and some liquors. Some say turmeric has a delicate aromatic, slightly peppery taste and fragrant scent. To others, it smells and tastes like dirt by itself.

Medicinally, *Curcuma* species are used in traditional medicine to treat diverse immune-related disorders. In India and other countries, it is boiled with milk and sugar (also known as golden milk) for a cold, and as a remedy for flatulence, liver complaints and more. Turmeric is available locally in the form of the rhizome, powdered, blended in teas and in supplements. More in-depth studies are required prior to pursuing clinical trials for development into possible treatments that change the body's immune response.

Curcumin, the chemical compound, is approved as a food additive by the World Health Organization, European Parliament, and the US Food and Drug Administration. Turmeric and its extract curcumin are generally considered safe but have recently been linked to rare cases of immune-mediated acute liver injury.

Precautions are noted for use during pregnancy, and with gallbladder and bleeding (including with uses of blood thinners) issues. As with all herbs, one should always consult with their health care provider to check for interactions with other medications and side effects.

USING KELP AS FERTILIZER IN ALASKA by Erin Oliver

Alaska's cold soils are often nutrient-deficient, creating interest in finding soil amendments that help boost plant growth. An expanding mariculture industry producing Alaskan-grown kelp is also interested in finding new markets. In recent decades there has been growing interest in kelp meal and kelp extracts due to their high nitrogen and potassium contents and biostimulant properties. Over the last year, I performed evaluations of minimally processed, shredded dry kelp to determine if the material can be used directly as a locally sourced fertilizer for Alaskan grown crops.

Carrot field plots with varying kelp amendment rates at the Palmer Experiment Station.

I performed initial tests in the laboratory last winter, followed by a field trial using carrots this summer at the Matanuska Experiment Farm in Palmer. The kelp used in the field trials was harvested in May from Prince William Sound, rinsed with freshwater to remove excess salts, and then dried and ground to make it easy to apply to field plots. I tested six amendment rates (ranging from 0.25-10 lbs dry kelp per 100 sq ft) and compared them to a commercial fertilizer mix that provided nitrogen, phosphate, and potassium, and also unamended control plots. I used carrots (Bolero variety) as a test crop because they grow fairly easily in Alaska.

Key results:

Salinity: When using fresh or dry kelp as an amendment, salt residue can be an issue, but the good news is that simply rinsing the kelp was very effective at removing much of the salt. In the laboratory I found that even after rinsing, the highest kelp amendment rate still raised soil salinity to a level of concern, but in the field it was less problematic. In the field, the highest amendment rate of rinsed kelp increased salinity to similar levels as commercial fertilizer (which also increases salt concentration). However, the effect was temporary, and salinity levels in all treatments returned to normal levels by harvest.

Kelp drying in the sun.

Nitrogen: Kelp is a nitrogen-rich material, with a C:N ratio between 6 to 15, which is similar to (or better than) many finished composts. However, I tracked soil nitrogen concentrations through time and found that kelp initially tied-up dissolved soil nitrogen for about 3 weeks following application. This tie-up coincided with a large initial release of CO2 from soil, suggesting that the kelp stimulated growth of soil microbes, which consumed available soil nitrogen, and then gradually released it back to the soil over time. This delay means that gardeners may want to amend their soils a few weeks before planting to give the kelp some composting time, which will allow nitrogen to become available to plants when they need it.

Potassium: Kelp is also a great source of potassium which particularly benefits fruiting crops. Between Day 0 and Day 70 in the field, potassium increased between 15% to 320% depending on kelp amendment rate.

Selecting an Amendment Rate: Amendment rates are usually recommended based on seeing what rate increased yield the most, but in this trial, carrot yield was high in the unfertilized control plots. There was no yield increase from adding commercial fertilizer or kelp, which suggests that the carrots had a low nutrient demand relative to what the soil supplied.

Next summer, I will repeat the trial with a more nutrient-demanding crop such as broccoli. Based on this year's nutrient availability results I would recommend applying between 2-10 lbs dry kelp per 100 sq ft.

Oliver is a postdoctoral researcher with Washington State University and a USDA Climate Hub Fellow. *This project is in collaboration with Native Village of Eyak and is funded by WSU and the USDA Climate Hubs.*

YOUR NEW AMGA BOARD MEMBERS

Nancy Tone

I am a lifetime grower of nearly everything I see as a challenge. After retiring from a lengthy nursing and emergency medical services training career, I launched a small market growing business. Nothing makes me happier than to grow! Now I have taken the formal step into the Master Gardener world. I look forward to the opportunity to serve the Board needs and ideals. Many thanks for this opportunity.

Janie Odgers

Born and raised in Oregon, my career has taken me from working as a Rosie-the-Riveter–style aircraft builder to serving in the nonprofit world as Executive Director of the Kenai Chamber of Commerce and later as State Director for March of Dimes, and on several boards. I've also led quilting groups on tours to Australia, New Zealand, and destinations beyond. My mother spent every waking moment tending her stunningly beautiful gardens, and her love for them inspired my own desire to create and nurture beautiful gardens of my own.

Jerelyn Miyashiro

will also be joining the AMGA Board; stay tuned for her pic and bio!

Thank you to departing Board Member **Rebecca Ligler** for her service to AMGA!

CARROT SEED HOT TIP! ✂️ Clip 'n Save

A few of Joyce's carrots photographed on Aug. 3, 2025. The rest grew much bigger!

Save this tip from AMGA member Joyce Falldorf:

My carrots were the best this year. When I prepared the soil, I made a trench in the row about 4 inches wide and 3 inches deep and put potting soil in the row. Then I made a small indentation 1/2 inches wide as usual and planted pelleted seeds 1 inch apart. The rows were 8 inches apart in my raised bed. When they came up, there was no chick week to fight with. I only needed to take a hoe and weed down the center between the rows. I water with a soaker hose buried in the ground about 2 inches. The carrots were long and straight.

GRANT REPORT: YOUR AMGA DUES AT WORK

During the summer of 2025, Empowering Education worked with people to learn about accessible gardening techniques. With money donated by AMGA, we built raised beds at Bambino's Baby Foods in Spenard. We were able to coax many fruits and veggies to grow! As autumn approached, we heard a desire from people to learn about indoor gardening and keep the fun going -- so we held an indoor gardening event at Anchorage Greens that included info about hydroponics. People left the event excited to grow their own jar plant indoors. For some, a jar plant represented their first ever plant roommate in their new home, while for others, their plant was a wanted addition to their collection. Whether gardening in soil or in water, our project increased the energy around gardening while inviting people to talk about their plant experiences and learn from each other.

Volunteer Ptery Lieght decorates a raised bed at Bambino's Baby Foods in Spenard.

Some quotes from participants in our Community Garden:

"I have some containers and a raised garden bed of my own so I have been starting flowers and next year I will be able to grow food!"

"I learned that I too can grow!"

"I am a 7-year-old gardener. I enjoy the beauty of plants."

Interested in applying for an AMGA grant? **Find info here.**

ONLINE MASTER GARDENERS COURSE - DEC. 2-FEB. 27

Registration is open for a new Alaska Master Gardener course, which will be taught over Zoom. Casey Matney and Darren Snyder, agriculture and horticulture agents with the University of Alaska Fairbanks Cooperative Extension Service, will lead the course. It provides a broad horticultural background and includes Alaska-specific lessons on botany, soils, vegetable production using organic and conventional techniques, integrated pest management, greenhouses, lawns, houseplants, trees and shrubs, flowers and invasive plants.

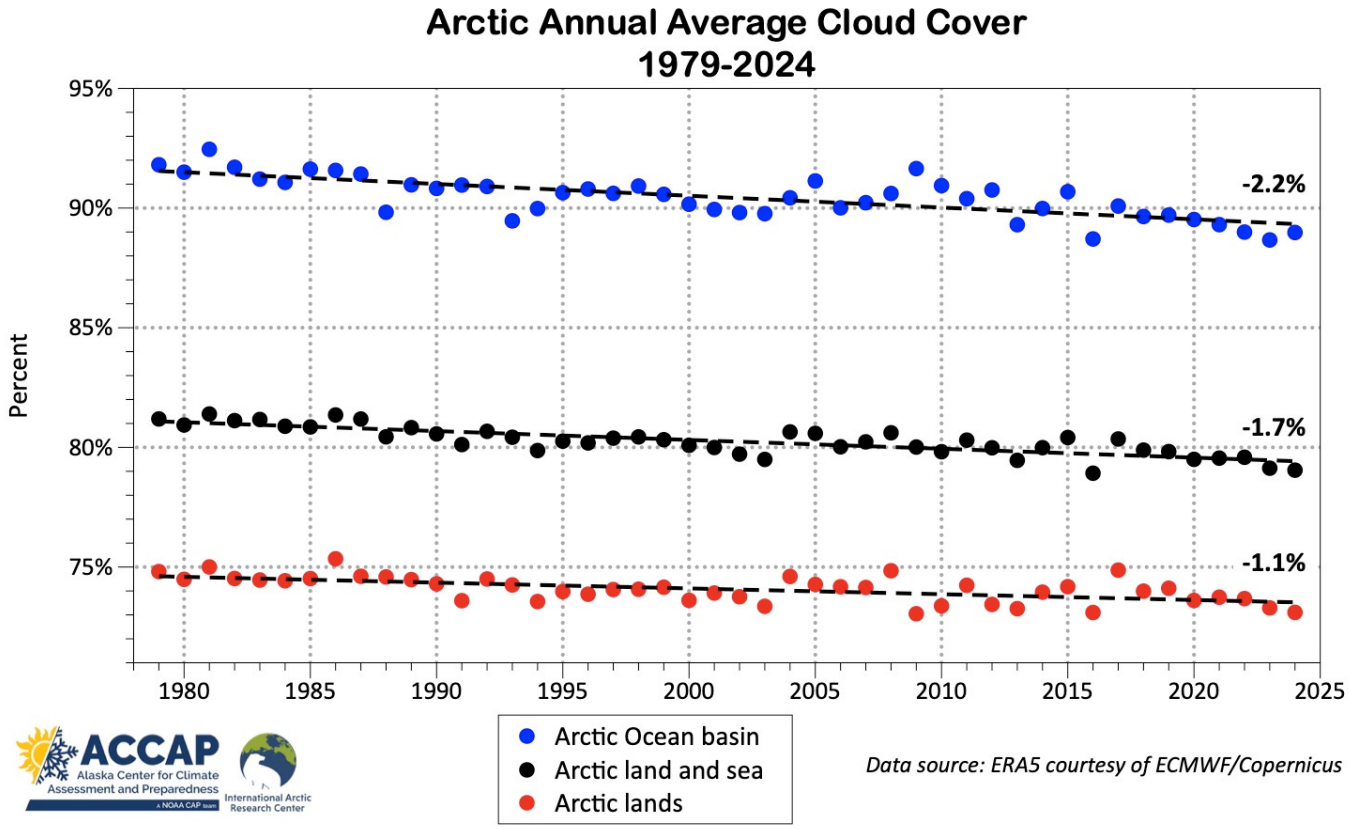
Classes will be Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3-5 p.m. from Dec. 2 to Feb. 27, 2026, with a break for the holidays. Registrants will receive a recording of each class.

The cost is $250, which includes a copy of Alaska's Sustainable Gardening Handbook.

ADVANCED TRAINING FOR MASTER GARDENERS

Sign up for our in-depth, six-week class for Master Gardeners on Soil Management, beginning Thursday, January 15th, from 6-8 PM and continuing weekly on Thursdays at the same time. There will be a seventh optional session during which students in the class may present a project plan based on what has been learned. Feedback on projects will be provided by senior members of AMGA. All classes will be offered via Zoom. Tuition is $75.00 for the full course.

DECREASING CLOUD COVER IN THE ARCTIC



Annual average cloud cover (percent sky cover) 1979 to 2024 for the Arctic Ocean basin, the Arctic overall (land and sea north of 60°N), and Arctic lands. Numbers at the right end of each plot show the total change in the 46 years. Data from ERA5 courtesy of ECMWF/Copernicus. Map and caption courtesy Rick Thoman, International Arctic Research Center, UAF. **Read more about the curious science of Arctic cloudiness on Thoman's blog.**

January Member Meeting

Mel sorting native plant seeds at the Anchorage Soil and Water Conservation District's native plant nursery.

No December meeting!

TUESDAY, January 20th
6:00-6:30 mix and mingle
6:30-7:30

Mel Langdon
"Invasive Plants in Anchorage: Why We Should Care and What We Can Do"

BP Energy Center
all are welcome

Herb Study Calendar

The Herb Study Group meets the 2nd Friday of each month from noon to 1:30 PM. The following topics and dates are planned, subject to possible changes. Interested in joining any of the meetings? Email: anchorageherbstudygroup@gmail.com

December 12 – Aegopodium podograria (Bishop's Weed)
January 9 – Dill
February 13 – Borage
March 13 – Cottonwood
April 10 – Tea Party TBD
May 8 – Plant Exchange TBD

Join our Meetings

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, all are welcome to observe. Email president@alaskamastergardeners.org for details.

AMGA Board of Directors

Rich Ervin	President
Troy Weiss	Vice President
Jan van den Top	Treasurer
Diane Peck	Secretary
Merlin Hamre, Brenda Adams, Roz Goodman, Ellen Kirchner, Dawn Groth, Jerelyn Miyashiro, Janie Odgers, Nancy Tone	At Large

Committees, Program Coordinators & Volunteers

Casey Matney	CES Master Gardener Statewide Coordinator
Roz Goodman	Broadcast Email
Nick Riordan	Calendar of Events
Board of Directors	Advanced MG Course
Kathy Liska	Facebook
TBA	Meetings/Programs
Troy Weiss, Janie Odgers, Rich Ervin	Garden Tours
Mary Rydesky	Google Group Manager
Jan van den Top, Lili Naves, Brenda Adams, Roz Goodman	Grants Program
Lynn Hansen	Hospitality
TBA	Membership Database
Emily Becker	Newsletter Editor
Dawn Groth	Ask a Master Gardener
Board of Directors	Lifetime Achievement
Susan Miller	Pioneer Home Garden
TBA	Volunteer Coordinators
Nancy Grant, Sue Negus	Plant Sale Coordinators

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), calendar items and announcements. Educational articles qualify for MG volunteer hours. Please disclose use of AI. Contact/send items to the editor at newsletter@alaskamastergardeners.org.

Connect with AMGA

Website: www.alaskamastergardeners.org
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YouTube: www.youtube.com/channel/UCvZehJprKkjQzivQvNDKopQ
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