ALASKA MASTER GARDENERS ANCHORAGE

NEWSLETTER
January 2026
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PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE by Rich Ervin and Dawn Groth

Growing Together: A Message from Dawn Groth, Future President, and Rich Ervin, Current President

Happy New Year! As we turn the soil on a fresh season of ideas and community, we celebrate the strong foundation built by our past and present board members, committee chairs, and project leaders. Their thoughtful stewardship has enriched our organization and made continued growth possible.

We also extend heartfelt thanks to our current board and committee members, whose work—often behind the scenes—supports education for new and Advanced Master Gardeners, strengthens our communications, produces our newsletter, hosts plant sales and garden tours, maintains gardens for young and old, manages social media and email outreach, and adds warmth (and great food!) to our gatherings. Your efforts keep us connected and thriving.

This year, we hope to cultivate more intentional connection. If you're interested in helping build community, planting seeds of collaboration, or simply trying something new, we warmly invite you to get involved. There's a place for every interest and energy level, and our organization flourishes because of members who contribute in ways big and small.

One new opportunity is open "office hours" for board and committee members, held on the 1st and 2nd Monday of each meeting month from 9–10 a.m. on Zoom. These casual, come-as-you-are gatherings offer time to share updates, ask questions, or just connect over coffee or tea—no agenda required.

We also encourage attending monthly meetings in person when possible. Face-to-face time helps relationships deepen and community take root, with Zoom remaining a valued option when needed.

Here's to a year filled with growth, color, and connection.

— Dawn

IN THIS ISSUE

I want to wish everyone a Happy New Year! Dawn Groth is charging ahead with fantastic and exciting ideas for growth and fun for AMGA! As I've said before, she has lots of good energy, commitment and plans for AMGA. I'm going to ask all of you to give her your support and encouragement as she takes on the presidency.

On January 20th, 2026, at our monthly membership meeting, please bring seeds you would like to share and exchange. It makes these cold months of dreaming about our gardens and growing season a little more exciting. See you all January 20th for the Invasive Species presentation!

— Rich

Cover photo: A primula in Janice Berry's garden.

AMGA GRANT REPORT

Your AMGA dues do great work! This is the last of three grant reports from AMGA grant recipients in 2025; see previous newsletters for other reports. Interested in applying for an AMGA grant? **Find info here.**

The RurAL CAP GROW Program used their AMGA grant to purchase gift certificates to the Muldoon and Grow North Farmers Markets. These gift cards were distributed to RurAL CAP Supportive Housing residents who volunteered to work in the community gardens established at four Supportive Housing facilities in Anchorage. Over the course of the summer, over 280 volunteer hours were donated to the gardens, mostly by residents. At the end of the season, undistributed Grow North gift certificates were used to purchase potatoes, beets, carrots, and garlic in bulk from Grow North Farm. The garlic was planted at one of the Supportive Housing gardens, and the other vegetables were distributed amongst Supportive Housing residents and used for pickling classes.

Brooke, A RurAL CAP supportive housing resident, shows off produce grown in their community garden. Brooke was a stellar worker in the garden this summer. Emily Becker photo.

NOV. 2025 TREASURER'S REPORT

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 mature; 1/3/27	$ 11,575.39	
CD General 1 year; mature 1/30/26	$ 10,688.12	
Total Assets		$ 57,114.54
Interest/Dividends		$4.24
This month's revenue		
Membership	$352.16	
Donations		
Fundraising/Plant sale		
Advanced M.G course	$592.44	
Total revenue		$ 944.60
This month's expenses		
NEON 1	$125	
Grants	$0	
Operations	$ 167.21	
Website Hosting	$	
Pioneer Home Garden	$6.00	
Postage/Box Rental	$	
Fundraising/plant sale	$	
Newsletter	$ 34.99	
Postage/Box rental	$	
Speaker Fees and costs	$	
Total Expenses this month		$ 333.20
Balances On 11/30/2025		
Checking S-88	$ 18,252.74	
Savings S-2	$ 5.25	
Savings S-29	$ 17,208.68	
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 11/30/25		$ 57,730.18
Prepared by Jan van den Top		

EAT YOUR *AEGOPODIUM*? by Debbie Hinchey

Bishop's Weed, *Aegopodium podagraria*, to be exact, has a good quality? Did I read that correctly? I made a note to myself to ask to present the topic at the Herb Study Group meeting. I needed to know more.

I have two *Aegopodium* infestations I have been fighting for decades. One patch came with the property when I purchased about 35 years ago. In my research, I found it is common to find it on the grounds of monastic ruins. It was introduced into northern Europe by monks as a medicinal herb. The common name "goutweed" comes from its use to treat gout. Later, it is thought that the connection to religious properties is how another common name of "Bishop's Weed" was coined.

In Wikipedia, there are references that claim the plant was also introduced to Great Britain by Romans as a food plant when they invaded roughly 2000 years ago. I then read that it was introduced into the colonies on the east coast of America as an ornamental plant. By the 1860s, it was recognized by Rhode Island as an invasive plant. Many of the New England states and others have since legislated against this invasive.

Yes, *Aegopodium* is tenacious! So, when I heard it was edible, it blew my mind! Most of the culinary sources called this plant "ground elder." As one online source (Forager Chef) asked: what more would you want from a garden plant? It's a perennial plant that can grow in most types of soil, winter hardy, and tastes pretty good. He claimed it was a traditional food in Scandinavia. I suppose once it was introduced and spread everywhere, their practical sensibilities figured out they could eat it! And that is what I intend to try next year.

Aegopodium podagraria 'Variegatum', photograped by botanist Krzysztof Ziarnek in the Arboretum Rogów in Poland. Photo from Wikimedia Commons.

It is said that the easiest way to prepare it is to harvest the new shoots, before the leaves unfurl, and fry in olive oil until the leaves have wilted and the stem is tender. Serve as a side dish. Frying is a good way to bring out the flavor for even more complicated dishes. (Check out: **www.foodforest.garden**) Not being much of a cook, I think I can handle frying! Besides frying and sauteing with aromatics, blanching and draining is good, especially if it's going to be frozen for later use.

Most sources agree that the best time to harvest is in spring to early summer, before the plant starts to flower. Some say the older leaves get less tender and more bitter. It can be eaten raw, but some mention the texture is not so good because of the hairiness of the leaves.

The Vita Library website reports that the most common uses today are as a spring vegetable, herbal infusion (it has a grassy, parsley-like flavor), topical cosmetic ingredient for anti-aging effects (that are not yet proven to work). Promising research is also going on to see if gout treatment beats what is on the market now.

I will now look and think (a little) differently at my *Aegopodium* infestation. Ideally I will get out there in the spring as the first shoots pop out of the ground and throw them into my clean bowl instead of the weed bucket.

I would still never plant it if I were you. You probably know someone that will let you, and maybe even pay you, to harvest all you want. I would have never guessed there was a "silver lining" to those thugs.

Check out **The Forager Chef** for *Aegopodium* recipes and more.

MYSTERIOUS AND VERSATILE VINES by Brenda C. Adams

We are excited to introduce a new monthly column by acclaimed author and AMGA Board member Brenda Adams. She'd love your ideas and feedback! ~Ed.

You may not think of vines as mysterious, that is, unless you've been surrounded by them at twilight in a tropical rain forest. Then they're downright spooky. But did you ever think about how they climb? How do they find something to hang onto and how, when they get big and heavy, do they resist gravity? The mechanisms they employ are varied and surprisingly fascinating

Vines use essentially four different techniques to climb. Some have a mass of little rootlets that cling like Velcro. The best known of this type are the English ivies that cover the walls of eastern colleges. Other vines twine around their supporting structure; *Clematis* works this way. A third group uses hooks that slide up the host but not down. Many of the rain forest plants fall into this category. And the fourth general group includes those that have specialized tendrils for gripping like sweet peas. What we know as the Alaska State Fair vine, *Rhodochiton astrosanguineum*, uses a variation of this technique by twining its petioles around a support structure.

Charles Darwin, after returning from the Galapagos, was quite ill and spent much time in bed observing vine growth from his window. For those of you who want the details, the results of his observations can be found in his book, *The Movements and Habits of Climbing Plants*. Another comprehensive source is *The Light Eaters*, a book recently recommended by AMGA president Rich Ervin. In case your interest is more general, let me share a few basic tidbits. Twining vines are genetically programmed to twine either clockwise or counter-clockwise. Most of them twine counter-clockwise regardless of hemisphere. Some find a support structure by turning away from the sunlight, seeking shade, somehow knowing there will be a tree there! The tendrils of grasping vines are often triggered to grip by a sense of touch. And that question about gravity? According to an article in the Washington Post, a group of mathematical physicists studying twining vines have learned they increase their hold in response to the downward pull of gravity just like the finger gripping toys of our youths.

Okay, so about now you've got to be asking, "What's

Aconitum off. hemsleyanum blossoms

the point, Brenda?" Well, I actually find all this totally interesting. Call me a plant nerd if you must. But, practically speaking, it's also helpful to know the mechanism a vine uses to grasp if you plan to offer it a support structure. Little tendrils need a narrow gage structure while twining vines need a substantial one.

From a garden design point of view, vines can be used to enhance a vertical structure in a garden – a fence, arbor or obelisk, even a dog kennel. They will add color and foliage to the structure, softening it and tying it to the rest of the garden quite literally! They can also be very effective at dressing up a shrub. Many of our flowering shrubs bloom early in the season. After that they can be a bit drab until fall when their foliage might add some arresting color to your landscape. Many clematis bloom during the mid-season period when our shrubs could use a boost. Training clematis into a shrub is a fun technique to add color to the shrub during its green period. Be careful in your pairing choices when you do this however. A zealous *Clematis tangutica* can overwhelm, even smother, most shrubs. The more delicate of the *Clematis* culitvars can produce surprising and lovely effects.

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Vines, continued from previous page.

Another way to use flowering vines in your garden is to let them scramble around on the ground, mingling with other plants in unexpected combinations. If you prefer a very tidy look in your gardens or if you need to be in control of all the combinations, this may not be for you. But if you like a natural look and are willing to let nature dazzle you with its combinations, give it a try.

We can successfully grow quite a variety of vines in our area. Hardy kiwi (*Actinidia kolomikta* 'Artic Beauty') offers delicious though tiny fruits. While the foliage of both male and female plants is attractive, male kiwi leaves sport a delightful splash of pink on their otherwise green leaves. *Aconitum off. hemsleyanum* is a lovely vining version of monkshood with either purple or wine-red flowers. American bittersweet *(Celastrus scandens)* with its colorful seed heads in fall, and many varieties and cultivars of *Clematis* are also among our options. Some call *Clematis* the queen of the flowering vines. It's an apt title. Blooms can be white, cream, yellow, pink, red, deep purple or even soft blue. Different flower shapes and sizes and a variety of bloom times make them a versatile design tool. Hops (*Humulus lupulus*) is quite a vigorous vine in green or gold. If your summers are warm enough, you may even get some hop flowers to try your hand at beer making. In addition, they have very attractive, textured foliage. The small but numerous blossoms of sweet peas *(Lathyrus latifolius)*, and honeysuckle *(Lonicera)* vines will provide luscious fragrance to your garden. Next year, consider adding vines to your garden and let their adaptability captivate you and add joy to your gardening experience.

YOUR NEW AMGA BOARD MEMBERS (continued from last month)

Jerelyn Miyashiro

I have always loved gardening and joined AMGA shortly after I retired from my job as a mechanical/piping designer in June 2021. I finally had the time to embrace gardening wholeheartedly and joining AMGA opened my world to the Anchorage gardening community through its summer garden tours, conferences, and knowledgeable, generous gardeners. I have been active with the Herb Study Group since joining and completed the UAF Cooperative Extension Service Alaska Master Gardener Program in the summer of 2023.

I am also a member of the Anchor Gardens Community group and an advocate of Permaculture-style, no dig, "lasagna gardening." In September 2023, I received an Advanced Composter certificate from a class sponsored by the Municipality of Anchorage and Anchor Gardens. I have taught a basic composting class and have participated in many community seed exchanges, seed starting and compost workshops in the community. I am delighted to join the board, to be a part of its mission and make a positive green impact in our community.

Jerelyn is joining fellow new Board members **Nancy Tone** and **Janie Odgers**, featured in last month's newsletter. See page 9 for your returning Board members. Welcome and thank you, all!

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.

A PLANT COMMUNITY FOR ALASKA by Chelsea San Roman

Chelsea San Roman is a farm technician at the University of Fairbanks who assists researchers in soil health, the small grains breeding program, and this plant community project, all part of a cooperative agreement with USDA Agricultural Research Service stations in North Dakota.

The goal of this research trial is to find effective methods of establishing a mixed plant community via direct seeding that requires minimal labor, uses native or locally sourced species of seeds/plants, and is beneficial to the ecosystem. The plant community project has been in field trials since the fall of 2023. It is a multi-year trial that builds on the observations from previous years, thus it is always evolving.

In order to find the best method of plant establishment, we wanted to test these parameters:

- 3" of sand mulch vs. no mulch
- seeding in fall vs spring
- custom vs. commercial seed mixes

Our plots were designed to test each possible combination of these variables; for example, one treatment would be sand/fall/custom and another no sand/spring/commercial. This resulted in eight unique treatments replicated three times for a total of 24 plots that were then randomly distributed across the field. We use randomized plot designs and replication in almost all research trials to remove unintentional bias or random environmental influences.

We planted 12 plots in the fall of 2023 and 12 plots in the spring of 2024 at both the Palmer and Fairbanks experiment stations. Throughout the summer, we collected data on varieties present, number of plants per variety, growth stages, weed species/pressure, and visual remarks on how plots compared to each other.

At the end of the 2024 growing season, we analysed our observations to guide improvements to our study design. Here are a few notable observations and the changes they inspired.

Mulch vs. No mulch: We found that 3" of sand mulch was effective at keeping weeds out of the plots, but our seedlings had a difficult time staying alive long enough to reach the moist soil underneath. Unmulched plots were overrun by weeds with little room for anything else to grow. Despite some of the issues with seedling survival, we decided that the benefits of the weed suppression of the mulch outweighed the relatively low seedling survival and so we decided to drop the no mulch treatment for the second year.

To improve seedling survival we decided to use less sand (1¼") so that our seedlings could quickly reach the soil. Less sand could result in greater weed pressure but we felt it necessary to establish a healthy plant community. To increase survival rates of our seedlings, we implemented slightly different watering regimens at each farm to achieve even moisture for the first month after planting.

Flowers from Chelsea's custom mix. Chelsea San Roman photo.

Custom vs. commercial seed mixes: The major result we saw was low species variety across all plots. The highest species variety was 6/39 in a custom mix plot and 8/20 in a commercial mix plot.

These preliminary results sparked a lot of conversation about how to further improve outcomes, and so we implemented three different methods of seeding techniques to trial in the 2025 growing season:

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A Plant Community, continued from previous page.

1. Grow a selection of perennials from seed indoors through the winter and use these seedlings to achieve earlier flowers, early ground cover, and a greater variety of plants in the first year.

Initial observations showed that we had a nice variety of plants right away, which provided good canopy and visual interest. Most of these perennials did not flower, however, so we will monitor them for survival and flowering through next summer.

2. Seasonal Seeding: We planted annuals for ground cover in the spring to provide early visual interest and pollinator resources. Then in late fall, we added perennials that need winter stratification to those plots.

We had lovely flowers in these plots that provided visual interest, canopy cover, and there were many pollinator visits. Next summer we will monitor these plots closely for our fall perennials and to detect if the annuals were able to reseed themselves.

3. Dormancy Breaking: We planted seeds we had scarified, stratified, or treated in their preferred way to induce germination, then scattered those seeds along with the rest on planting day. We wanted to see if this was a viable way to achieve more variety in the first year.

This treatment was difficult to pull off. As you may know, seeds each have their own requirements and peculiarities, and this proved difficult to keep track of as well as store properly. It remains to be seen in the data if there was any difference in the variety of plants as opposed to the other plots. Now that the growing season is over, we are once again compiling the data to see what worked, what we might need to change further, and make plans for the future of this trial.

With new experimental elements for 2026, we picked out new land at each farm and created a smaller randomized plot design. (4 treatments replicated 3 times for 12 plots total) We will continue to monitor the plots next summer for overwinter survival, variety of plants, and any successful self-seeding.

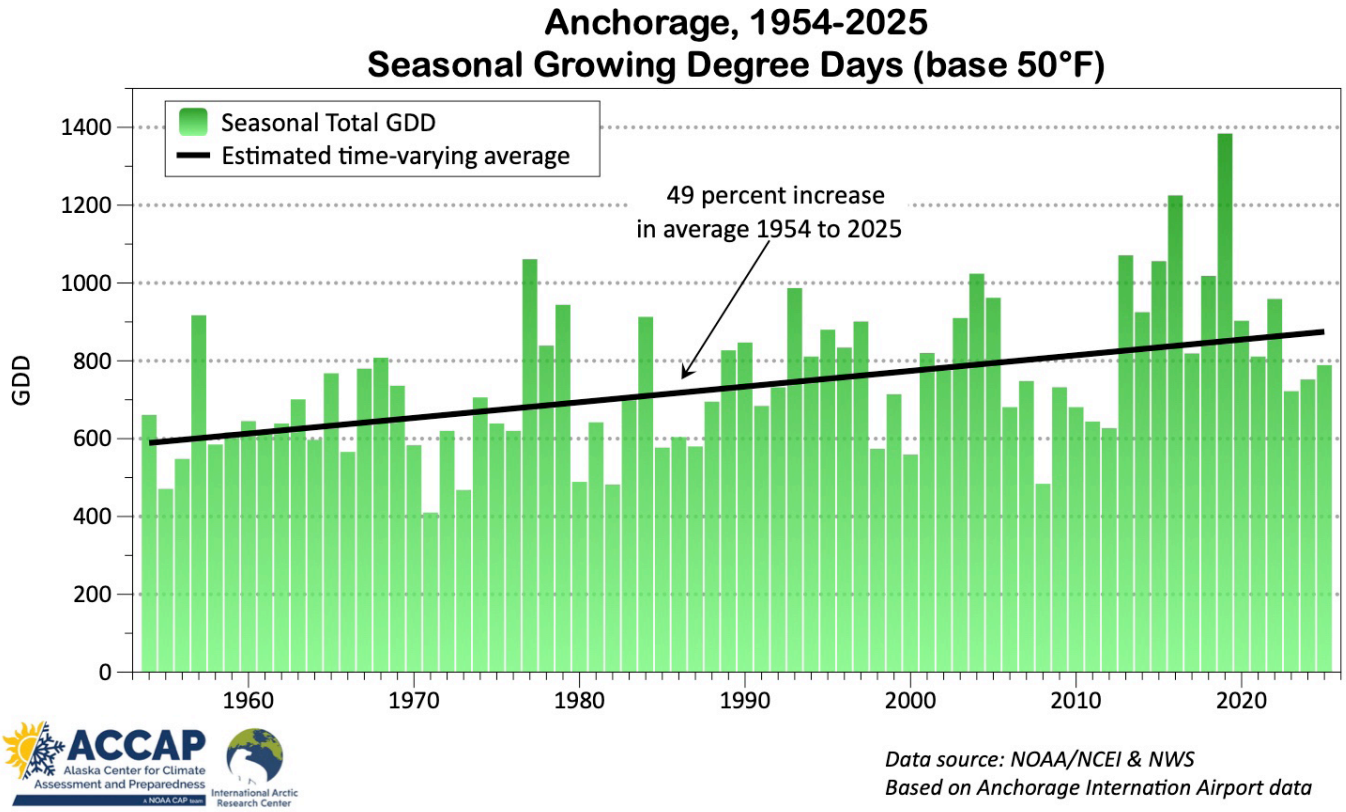
A note on the seed mixes we used. Katie used a commercially available mix as a starting point and added additional species. I have checked out a few different packets labeled "Alaska Wildflower Mix" and they all have a similar species list. The mixes I have scrutinized do not have a consistent amount of each variety of seeds, and high-value perennials are in low amounts, which makes sense for a seed company trying to make money. We changed Katie's mix somewhat by purchasing from local seed suppliers, adding a few varieties donated by the Alaska Plant Materials Center, and changing the number of seeds per variety. The mixes are not solely natives; there are California and Icelandic poppies in both, along with honey bee favorites such as flax and *Phacelia*. Our project is more focused on methods of establishment, rather than developing a perfect seed mix. We want folks to be able to create their own mixes and use our techniques for establishment. ***A list of seeds used in the project can be found here.***

This work is supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, ARS Cooperative Agreement #58-3064-1-002.

This project was originally researched and designed by Katie DiCristina, former Director of the Georgeson Botanical Gardens who took inspiration from projects at **UAF**, **Nigel Dunnett**, and **Ben O'Brien**, among many others.

Flowers from Chelsea's commercial mix. Chelsea San Roman photo.

2025 ANCHORAGE GROWING DEGREE DAYS



Seasonal growing degree days at Anchorage Airport 1954 to 2025 using a 50°F daily average temperature threshold. The 50°F threshold is widely used for warm-weather crops. There is substantial year-to-year variability, but the trend over the past 72 years is considerable. Graph and caption courtesy Rick Thoman, International Arctic Research Center, UAF.

January Member Meeting

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

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

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

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

Committees, Program Coordinators & Volunteers

Casey Matney	CES Master Gardener Statewide Coordinator
Roz Goodman	Broadcast Email
Vacant	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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