

## **PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE** by Rich Ervin

*"Give me spots on my apples but leave me the birds and the bees." ~Joni Mitchell*

On Monday, June 16, AMGA had a tour at my house. Of course, before the tour I was frantically trying to get everything ready to look its best and to impress. Not an easy task with so many talented and knowledgeable gardeners with beautiful and fecund gardens.

Normally I don't care about what my lawn looks like regarding weeds. It's green. I am very content to know that the microorganisms, worms, bees, insects, birds and whatever other creatures enjoy our yard are content and thriving. But on this particular occasion I was worrying how my lawn is mostly weeds. Dandelions, plantain (English-man's foot), clover, moss, trollius, chickweed. It goes on and on. I remember visiting a beautiful yard and garden on the hillside where there was not a weed in the yard. It was beautiful. Amazingly, no weed-and-feed was used. They picked all the weeds by hand. I was dumbfounded. That will never happen in my lawn because to get all the weeds out of my lawn, vegetable and flower gardens would take eons of work. I don't have that kind of time. Last year I noticed a patch of violets in the middle of my lawn. Where did they come from? No idea but I was very happy to see them and also happy they were not killed by weed-and-feed.

Why does a monoculture lawn look so attractive? I keep asking myself this question. Is it drummed into us

as Americans or is it pleasing to the human eye? Nature never has monoculture except maybe after a cataclysmic event like a volcano, tsunami or other events. However, even that is for a relatively short period of time.

I have travelled fairly extensively and I have never seen the obsession with monoculture lawns like here in the good old USA. I have marveled at the variety of weeds in many overseas lawns. Lots of beautiful little flowers and different colored leaves and textures. And no smell of toxic weed-and-feed as I travel through their countryside as I so often note in springtime in Anchorage and elsewhere in the US.

Reports from scientists are that we are on the 6th extinction. Called the Anthropocene extinction.

This event is said to be accelerated by 100 to 1000 times faster than past extinction events. Humans are the driving factor. Can we reverse it?

It certainly would help to stop killing the very fabric of the soil in which we grow our food that sustains us. Not to mention the illness and death to microorganisms, worms, insects, birds, animals and eventually us. Yes, yes I know that fertilizers and

### **IN THIS ISSUE**

- » Treasurer's Report
- » Advanced MG Class survey
- » Lady Beetles
- » Adopt-A-Bird Cherry...and kill it
- » Summer Heat
- » Garden Tours

herbicides have allowed us to produce much more food to feed the world. But at what cost? There must be a more sustainable agricultural pathway.

If you do use weed-and-feed on your lawn please consider an alternative. In some small way it may ultimately help. As gardeners we need to educate and promote the health of our soils. We now know how important it is. Let's continue to get the word out there!



## Take the Advanced Master Gardener Class Survey!

We are planning a training for **Advanced Master Gardeners** titled **"Knowing Your Soil."** It would be 6 presentations of 2 hours each. We would like to confirm the level of interest in this topic.

1. Would you attend a class on this subject?
2. Would you prefer a class in October/November or January/February?
3. Would a charge of \$75 work for you?

Please email your response to: [roslyn@alaskamastergardeners.org](mailto:roslyn@alaskamastergardeners.org)



## MAY 2025 TREASURER'S REPORT

### Balances on 4/30/2025

Checking S-88	\$ 21,627.46
Savings S-2	\$ 5.25
Savings S-29	\$ 17,156.82
CD General 2 year mature; 1/3/25	\$ 11,431.66
CD General 1 year; mature 1/30/25	\$ 10,476.96
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$ 60,698.15</b>

<b>Interest/Dividends</b>	<b>\$8.01</b>
---------------------------	---------------

### This month's revenue

Membership	\$175.56
Donations	\$ 101.34
Fundraising/Plant sale	\$
Advanced M.G course	\$
Dowding Event	\$ 829.14
<b>Total revenue</b>	<b>\$ 1,106.04</b>

### This month's expenses

Charles Dowding	\$ 2,900
Grants	\$1000
Operations	\$ 8.47
Website Hosting	\$ 50.34
Website Maintenance	\$
Directory	\$
Fundraising/plant sale	\$ 440.25
Newsletter	\$ 104.97
State Fair Crop Donation	\$
Speaker Fees and costs	\$ 329
<b>Total Expenses this month</b>	<b>\$ 4,833.03</b>

### Balances On 5/31/2025

Checking S-88	\$ 17,900.47
Savings S-2	\$ 5.25
Savings S-29	\$ 17,164.83
CD General 2 Year 2.71%, (1/23/25)	\$ 11,431.66
CD General 1 Year 4.07% (1/30/25)	\$10,476.96

<b>Total Assets on 4/30/25</b>	<b>\$ 56,979.17</b>
--------------------------------	---------------------

**Prepared by Jan van den Top**

*AMGA Member K. Jane McClure thins apples at Boyer's Orchard on July 2. Photo by Emily Becker.*



## HERB STUDY: COSTMARY by Elaine Hammes

If you know what a costmary flower looks like, you will know that it does not look like a white shooting star! I didn't, so when I saw a lovely white flower among the costmary leaves in ABG's Herb Garden, I was happily surprised. I told one of the ABG staff members about it. The next time I was there, another staff member told me that it really was a shooting star in the middle of the costmary patch, with very similar leaves. However, the shooting star leaves have smooth edges compared to costmary's finely serrated edges.

*Tanacetum balsamita* is a perennial herb known as costmary, alecost, balsam herb, bible leaf, or mint geranium. The name "bible leaf" seems to have originated with parishioners using the scented leaves as bookmarks in their bibles. The name "mint geranium" would refer to the minty scent as it is neither a mint nor a geranium.

The English name 'Costmary' stems from 'costus of Saint Mary'. The name is derived from the Latin *costus* (an Oriental plant), and 'Mary,' in reference to Our Lady. In the Middle Ages, the plant was widely associated with her name and was known in France as *Herbe Sainte-Marie*. It is also associated with the Virgin Mary, most likely because it was thought to be a treatment for women's diseases.

It is a fragrant plant native to Asia but has become naturalized in Europe and has been used for centuries for culinary, aromatic, and traditional medicinal purposes. Costmary is a perennial with oval leaves and can grow up to 6.5 ft tall. During summer, if grown in adequate light, it may have small, yellow, button-shaped blossoms (similar to tansy flowers) appearing in clusters.

The plant is easy to grow in nearly every soil or situation, but will do best in dry soil. Propagation is best by division of the roots in early spring, or in autumn. As the roots creep freely, the plants will spread over the intervening spaces, often crowding out other plants, and will need dividing every few years. Costmary was widely grown since the medieval times in herb gardens until the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In the 21st century, it has mostly disappeared in Europe, but is still widely used in southwest Asia.

Costmary was used medicinally, having somewhat astringent and antiseptic properties, and used for



*Costmary at the ABG Herb Garden. The costmary in ABG's Herb Garden has apparently never flowered, likely due to shade.*

dysentery as a laxative. An ointment made by boiling the herb in olive oil with Adder's Tongue and thickening the strained liquid with wax and resin and turpentine was considered to be very valuable for application to sores and ulcers.

Bundles of costmary and lavender were tied together and placed in bedding for fragrance. The leaves can be dried for use in sachets and potpourri with a minty scent. Costmary combines nicely with rosemary, cloves, bay, cinnamon and sage. The leaves may also be used to scent a bath.

Costmary was used to add a spicy flavoring to ale that resulted in the common name, Alecost. The fresh young leaves may be used in iced tea and in salads, shredded leaves in soups and sauces. Suggestions include covering fish with a leaf before baking and placing a leaf in the bottom of a cake pan before pouring in the cake batter. It is said to have a minty or balsamic scent and a bitter taste.

**CAUTIONS:** While the leaves of costmary are edible, trace amounts of the toxin 'ketone' have been found. In small volumes eating the leaves is harmless. However, pregnant, breast feeding, or vulnerable individuals should avoid using costmary as a herbal remedy. It has also been noted that costmary is a problem for cats, dogs, and horses.

# HAVE AN APHID PROBLEM? DON'T BUY LADY BUGS!

A question about where to buy lady bugs over on the [AMGA Google group](#) sparked a great discussion about our beloved lady bug insects, which are, in fact, beetles, not bugs, and in the family Coccinellidae.

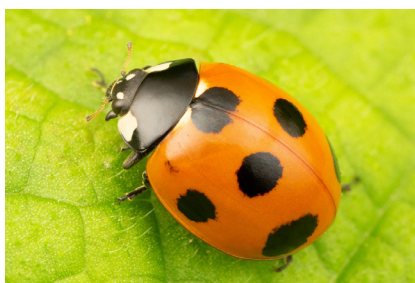
Lady beetles are voracious predators with an appetite for aphids. Often sold in garden stores, they are a popular recommendation to greenhouse gardeners.

**However, purchasing lady beetles is not recommended by CES Entomologist Alex Wenninger.** She writes: “The species that is sold in garden stores is not native to Alaska, it’s wild-collected up from its overwintering sites in the mountains of California. They go through no testing whatsoever and can spread diseases and parasites to local lady beetles. Also, because they were collected up from the wild in their overwintering sites, when they get released outdoors their first instinct is to disperse away from the release site as they would have done had they not been interrupted, so they often don’t actually stick around and provide any meaningful pest control, most end up leaving. The risk of environmental harm is a lot bigger than the benefit folks get from them.

The companies importing these to Alaska are doing so without going through the permitting process because they know their permit would be denied for that particular species. If someone is looking for biocontrols for inside a greenhouse or other enclosed growing space, there are much more effective biocontrol options that could be ordered from a couple different reputable companies that do have permits to import a pretty big list of biocontrol organisms to AK. Which one they should order just would depend on their particular pest issue and greenhouse temp/humidity.”

You can contact Alex with your questions.:

akwenninger@alaska.edu  
907-786-6309



*A student at the Lake Otis Elementary summer school was thrilled to find a lady beetle in the school garden.*

## Other aphid-fighting suggestions from the Google group include:

1. **Recruit spiders!** When Debbie Hinchey finds a spider, she plops it in the greenhouse.
2. **Praying-mantis.** Courtney at Forget-Me-Not Nursery in Indian has had good results with them. *(Editor’s note: we have since learned that importing praying mantises is illegal in Alaska!)*
3. **Let some space in your garden go wild** in order to attract natural aphid predators.
4. **Paint the inside of your greenhouse white.** Rich Ervin swears by this!
5. There is always the old standby: **vigilance.** Watch for aphids, hose them off, and wash the plant with soapy water.

*Lady beetle photo by Ryosuke Kuwahara, from iNaturalist.*



# ADOPT-A-PATCH AND START MURDERING

Anchorage Parks and Recreation, in partnership with the Anchorage Soil and Water Conservation District, invites you to Adopt-A-Patch between June and September and help care for our parks and trails by removing invasive plants such as European Bird Cherry, Bird Vetch, and White Sweetclover! This program encourages community members to dedicate a little time each month to removing invasive seedlings from a designated section of a park or trail.

## How to Adopt-A-Patch?

1. Select a patch to adopt! Consider choosing a location that is close to home and easy for you to access. Not sure where to start? Contact the Volunteer Coordinator at 907-343-4587 or [ellen.devine@anchorageak.gov](mailto:ellen.devine@anchorageak.gov) to get assistance finding a patch to maintain.

2. Apply: [Complete and submit an Adoption Application](#). Once your application is approved, you will be contacted to complete an Adopt-A-Patch leader agreement.

3. Orientation: A member of the volunteer coordination team will reach out with an orientation packet and additional details. Before beginning maintenance on one's



*Retired Forester Michael Shepherd getting ready to kill bird cherry in Kincaid Park on July 4th.*

patch, Adopt-A-Patch adopters must first attend an Invasive Plant volunteer event, which takes place every two weeks from late May to September. **Come to the orientation event at Tikishla Park in Airport Heights on Wednesday, July 9th, at 6 pm.**

4. [More information can be found here on the Muni website.](#)

# HAWKWEED HUNTERS

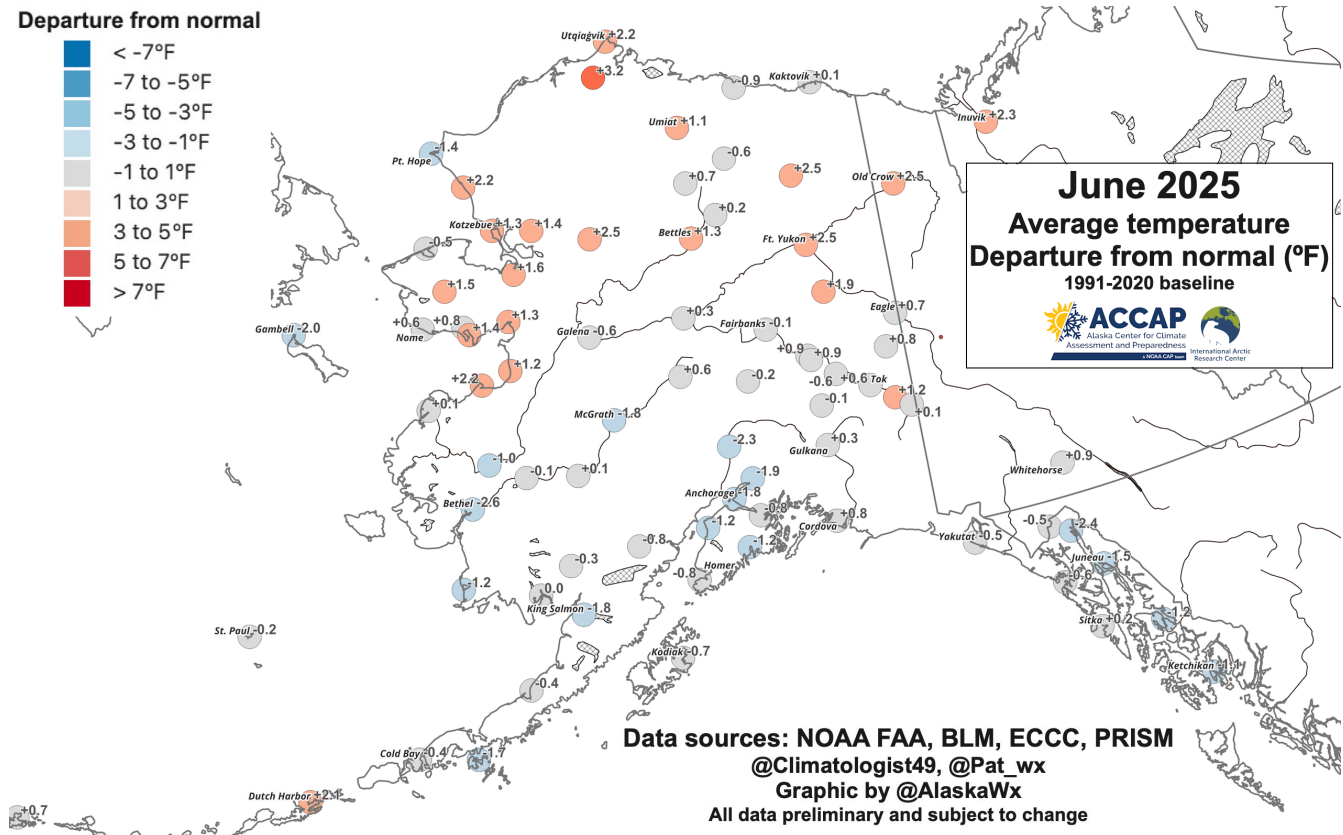


*Two young volunteers clip the flowers from orange hawkweed, *Hieracium aurantiacum*, at Boyer's Orchard on July 2. After this team clipped flowers, another group covered the plants with a couple layers of cardboard and topped it with several inches of horse manure. Will it work? Time will tell.*

Read more about orange hawkweed in this CES publication, "[Control of orange hawkweed](#)" by CES agent Gino Graziano.



# THE HEAT IS ON



Much of Alaska north and west of the Alaska Range came in with near to a bit above normal temperatures in June. In contrast, southern areas were mostly near to below normal. At Bethel, this was the coolest June since 1985. At Kotzebue, this was the mildest June since 2019. *Map and caption courtesy Rick Thoman, International Arctic Research Center, UAF.*

**Editor's note:** On May 6, 2025, NOAA/NCEI announced the retroactive termination of funding for data sources used by Dr. Thoman. [Read more about the loss of scientific data here.](#)

Blooms on an *Incarvillea zhongdianensis*, a parting gift from Les Brake, the Coyote Gardener. Large leaves in the back are elecampane.

Les' Willow house and gardens are now, you guessed it, on AirBnB. [Check it out here.](#)





## Herb Study Group Schedule

Volunteers have been caring for the Herb Garden! Borage, calendula, sage, canary bird vines, nasturtiums, two varieties of chamomile and more have been planted. As usual, the chives and many other perennials are doing well. More volunteers are welcome! The schedule for Herb Garden volunteers is Tuesdays and Fridays from 1-3 PM. All volunteers must first contact and attend ABG's orientation.

Contact Elaine at [chammes@hotmail.com](mailto:chammes@hotmail.com) or the Herb Study Group at [anchorageherbstudygroup@gmail.com](mailto:anchorageherbstudygroup@gmail.com) to get on the list to be notified of announcements.

## Summer Garden Tours!

- **July 7, 6 pm: Alaska Centennial Rose Garden**
- **July 14, SPECIAL EVENT** 10 am tour in Palmer. Touring 2-3 private gardens with a stop at The Alpine Garden Nursery
- **July 21: 6 pm, Northland Orchard and Berries**
- **July 28: 6 pm, Volunteer Day** at Harvest of Hope

Details are emailed to members. Tours are a benefit of AMGA membership and are for members and their guests. Make sure your membership is up to date: email [rebecca@alaskamastergardeners.org](mailto:rebecca@alaskamastergardeners.org)



*Elderberry blooming June 1 at Potter Marsh watershed park. Elizabeth Bluemink photo.*



*It was hard to pick a favorite of Rich Ervin's many bonsai, but this potentilla was a top contender. Emily Becker photo.*

## 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, anyone is welcome to observe. Email [president@alaskamastergardeners.org](mailto: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, Rebecca Ligler, Roz Goodman, Ellen Kirchner, Dawn Groth	At Large

## Committees, Program Coordinators & Volunteers

Casey Matney	CES Master Gardener Statewide Coordinator
Troy Weiss, Emily Becker	Broadcast Email
Nick Riordan	Calendar of Events
Board of Directors	Advanced MG Course
Janice Berry, Cheryl Chapman	Directory Editor
Kathy Liska	Facebook
TBA	Meetings/Programs
Troy Weiss, Janie Odgers, Rich Ervin	Garden Tours
Mary Rydesky, Gina Docherty	Google Group Managers
Jan van den Top, Lili Naves, Sheila Toomey	Grants Program
Lynn Hansen	Hospitality
Rebecca Ligler	Membership Database
Emily Becker	Newsletter Editor
Gina Docherty	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. Contact/send items to the editor at [newsletter@alaskamastergardeners.org](mailto:newsletter@alaskamastergardeners.org).

## Connect with AMGA

Website: [www.alaskamastergardeners.org](http://www.alaskamastergardeners.org)  
 Facebook: [facebook.com/Alaska-Master-Gardeners-Anchorage](https://facebook.com/Alaska-Master-Gardeners-Anchorage)  
 YouTube: [www.youtube.com/channel/UCvZehJprKkjQzivQvNDKopQ](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCvZehJprKkjQzivQvNDKopQ)  
 Google Group: <https://groups.google.com/forum/?fromgroups#!forum/AkMGA>  
 Membership issues/address updates: [rebecca@alaskamastergardeners.org](mailto:rebecca@alaskamastergardeners.org)  
 General emails: [AskMG@alaskamastergardeners.org](mailto:AskMG@alaskamastergardeners.org)  
 Mail: AMGA, P.O. Box 221403, Anchorage, AK 99522-1403

