

## PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE by Rich Ervin

*“I Dig a Collard Green” by Charles Hawltrey, “Phase One in Which Doris Gets her Greens.”* (A variation on “Two of Us,” Let It Be, 1970. If you know you know.)

When I recently looked out my window to my garden, with the meager amount of snow, I spotted the one plant that is still standing because I don't chop it down when the frost and snow come. It's the only one I continue to eat after several frosts and even the second snow. It is one of the most overlooked and least used vegetables: collard greens (*Brassica oleracea var. viridis*). I plant them every year and they are one of the hardiest and most reliable vegetables I plant. Collard greens are thought of as a southern garden staple, but man, do they do well up here.

When it warms up above 32 degrees they perk up and are ready to be harvested again. After the first frost they taste better and become more nutritious. They are delicious and full of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants. They are packed with Vitamin K, C, A and high in manganese. They can't be beat for fiber, are low calorie and one of the best sources of non-dairy calcium.

Collards are in the cruciferous family along with kale, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, and broccoli. They are biennials in areas that have a frost. They originated in Eurasia and made it to the Americas with enslaved Africans who came to Jamestown in the 1600's.

Collard greens are easy to plant and have never failed to come up, grow and be vigorous for me. I usually plant them in the back of the garden because they can get quite tall and their leaves can be immense. A few plants go a long way. When they are young the whole plant can be cut back and it will regrow. This can apparently be done several times but I have never tried it.

Best way that I have found to store them for the winter is to blanch them for 2 to 3 minutes then immediately transfer to ice water and then freeze. They last for quite some time in the freezer and are a welcome addition to winter meals.

A wide variety of recipes abound on the internet. One recipe I found several years ago was collard ceviche. It was so delicious but I lost the recipe and can't seem to recreate it. Anyone know of it? If so, please send it to me. I also throw several cut up leaves into tomato sauce for spaghetti or lasagna. Collard potato soup is another one of my favorites. It's all delicious and nutritious!

There are several varieties of collard greens. An interesting website and seed catalog with a large variety

### IN THIS ISSUE

- » Treasurer's Report
- » Jeff Lowenfels Gets Loopy
- » Winter is Warmer
- » Herb Study: Thyme
- » Recycling in the Garden
- » ASWCD Uncertainty

*Continued on next page*

President's Message, continued from previous page

of collard greens is the [Southern Exposure Seed Exchange](#). They have heirloom varieties of collards and other vegetables. I don't know how many of these varieties would do up here but I am ordering some and we will see.

For a reliable vegetable that always performs, is highly nutritious, available late in the season and delicious, you can't beat collard greens. If you haven't tried them in your garden I highly recommend you do.



### Notes from AMGA Secretary, Diane Peck

Planning for Charles Dowding event in May continues. Board discussed marketing and promoting the event and would like to encourage all members to help get the word out. Discussed having an Advanced Master Gardener Class fall 2025. Board will discuss more in-depth at next meeting.



Spot the milk cartons? Debbie Hinchey uses them for many garden purposes. "When Oriental lilies are blooming I bring them to where I can enjoy them (and recess the ugly cartons in a wooden planter.) As the flowers fade I put them back in the back yard to grow on until I finally get them planted in the garden." See more on page 5.

## JAN. 2025 TREASURER'S REPORT

### Balances on 12/31/2024

Checking S-88	\$ 18,831.28
Savings S-2	\$ 5.25
Savings S-29	\$ 17,125.83
CD General 2 year mature; 1/3/25	\$ 11,361.83
CD General 1 year; mature 1/30/25	\$ 10,374.42
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$ 57,698.61</b>

### Interest/Dividends

\$42.32

### This month's revenue

Membership	\$190.00
Donations	\$80
Fundraising/Plant sale	\$ -
Advanced M.G course	\$ -
Name Tags	\$ -
<b>Total revenue</b>	<b>\$ 270.00</b>

### This month's expenses

Postage /Box rental	\$ -
Grants	\$ -
Operations	\$ 389
Website Hosting	\$ -
Website Maintenance	\$ -
Directory	\$ -
Fundraising/plant sale	\$ -
Newsletter	\$ 34.99
State Fair Prize Donation	\$ -
Tree adoption in Boyer's garden	\$ -
<b>Total Expenses this month</b>	<b>\$ 423.99</b>

### Balances On 1/31/2025

Checking S-88	\$ 18,677.29
Savings S-2	\$ 5.25
Savings S-29	\$ 17,133.83
CD General 2 Year 2.71%, (1/23/25)	\$ 11,363.17
CD General 1 Year 4.07% (1/30/25)	\$ 10,407.39
PayPal balance on 1/31/25	\$ 1,472.75
<b>Total Assets on 1/31/25</b>	<b>\$ 59,059.68</b>

Prepared by Jan van den Top



# JEFF LOWENFELS AND THE MICROBIAL LOOPS EXTRAVAGANZA

by Dawn Groth

On February 17, 2025, our member meeting took an uproarious turn when the incomparable Jeff Lowenfels took the virtual stage to present “**The 3 Microbial Loops: The Poop Loop, the Fungal Loop, and the Bacteria Loop.**” Yes, you read that right—poop, fungi, and bacteria! Jeff’s lecture, a delightful blend of scientific insight and signature wit, reminded us all to AVOID CHEMICALS—LET THE NATURAL BACTERIA DO ITS JOB. [If you missed the live event it was recorded and will be available to view at this link until March 10, 2025.](#)



*Jeff delivered his program via Zoom.*

Jeff, renowned author of award-winning guides such as *Teaming With Microbes*, *Teaming With Nutrients*, *Teaming With Fungi*, and *Teaming With Bacteria*, dazzled us with humorous anecdotes and practical tips on organic gardening practices. With over 48 years of experience writing a weekly gardening column—recently honored with the 2022 Gold Medal at the Garden Communicators International Conference—Jeff has earned his place as one of the most respected garden writers of our time. Not to mention, his podcast, *Teaming With Microbes*, is a fantastic listen for any gardening enthusiast.

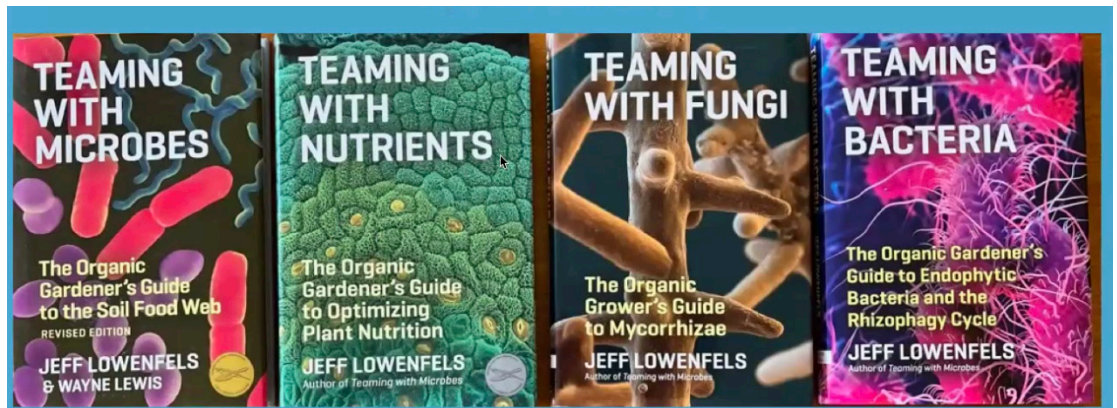
Before signing off on many of his *Anchorage Daily News* columns, Jeff reminds us to “Join the Alaska Botanical Garden!” And always encourages us to plant a row for the hungry. To assist you with Jeff’s composting rally, mark your calendar for our upcoming AMGA program on March 17 featuring Nick Riordan on Composting. This event promises to keep the momentum going and inspire us all to nurture our gardens—and our community.

Keep those microbial loops spinning and our compost piles thriving!

The session was packed with laughs, great follow up audience questions, and actionable advice.

**The most important first step is for gardeners to read his books then:**

1. Don’t sterilize seeds or soil.
2. Use mulches.
3. Don’t rototill or disturb soil.
4. Don’t toss used soil. Reuse it!



And his rallying cry to “Compost, Compost, Compost!” resonated with everyone, reminding us of the simple, sustainable practices that make all the difference.

*Jeff’s books take complex subjects and make them accessible to the backyard gardener. He also has a book on growing cannabis.*

# HERB STUDY: THYME by Elaine Hammes

The first question at the Herb Study February 14 meeting was: Are you going to Scarborough Fair? The answer included parsley, sage, rosemary and... thyme was the herb discussion of the day. The genus *Thymus* contains about 350 species plus many hybrids, varieties, and ecotypes exist. These are aromatic perennial herbaceous plants and subshrubs in the Lamiaceae family.

Thymes are native to Southeast Europe, Eurasia and north Africa. The ancient Greeks used it in their baths and burned it as incense in their temples, believing it was a source of courage. Ancient Egyptians used thyme for embalming. The spread of thyme throughout Europe was thought to be due to the Romans as they used it to purify their rooms and to “give an aromatic flavor to cheese and liqueurs.” In the Middle Ages, warriors were given thyme leaves before heading into battle and it was often placed on coffins for passage into the next life. Traditional societies also used thyme for medicinal purposes.

The name, thyme, is derived from the Greek word *thumos* which means courage. The most common names and varieties for the binomial/ taxonomic name, *Thymus vulgaris*, are: Common thyme, English thyme, Summer thyme, Winter thyme, French thyme or Garden thyme. Nurseries often use common names which can lead to mix-ups when the same common name is used for more than one species. Two more locally-known species are *Thymus praecox* (Creeping Thyme) and *Thymus lanuginosus* (syn. *T. serpyllum* – Woolly Thyme). Most species are 2 to 16 inches tall, have small evergreen leaves and have yellow, white, pink or purple flowers in dense terminal heads. *Thymus vulgaris* is generally known as “common thyme.” Ferry-Morse and Burpee Organics both sell thyme seeds labeled “Thyme” with no species noted.

Different species grow in USDA zones from 2 through 9. Thyme definitely grows in Anchorage although there are some species that grow better here than others as perennials. Thyme is best cultivated in a hot, sunny location with well-drained soil. Thyme is well adapted to dry, rocky, nutrient-starved soils and tolerates drought. Thyme can be propagated by seed, cuttings or



*Thyme in winter, Anchorage. Photo by Mary Contrary.*

divided rooted sections of the plant. If supplements are added, it should be minerals like limestone for a more alkaline pH. If using fertilizer, avoid too much nitrogen that causes the plant to be leggy or grow excessive pale foliage. It also dims down the aroma and flavor. Thyme can be pruned after flowering to keep from getting woody. The most fragrant leaves occur just before the plants begin to flower, when the aromatic oils in the foliage is at its highest. The leaves can be frozen or dried for longer storage, and can be refrigerated fresh in water for a limited time.

Thyme is used for flavoring many foods. The condiment Za'atar (Arabic for both thyme and marjoram) contains many of the essential oils found in thyme. Thyme is a common component of the herb combinations in Herbes de Provence. The oil is used in the flavoring of toothpaste, mouthwashes, cough medicines, perfumes and cosmetics. Leaves and flowering tops are used in sachets. Woolly and creeping thymes are used as ornamentals in rock gardens, ground covers, along walks and borders. Its small flowers attract hoverflies that can provide a check on aphids.

Further research and analysis is required but the application of thymol and thyme essential oil in the healthcare sector is very promising.

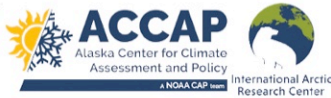
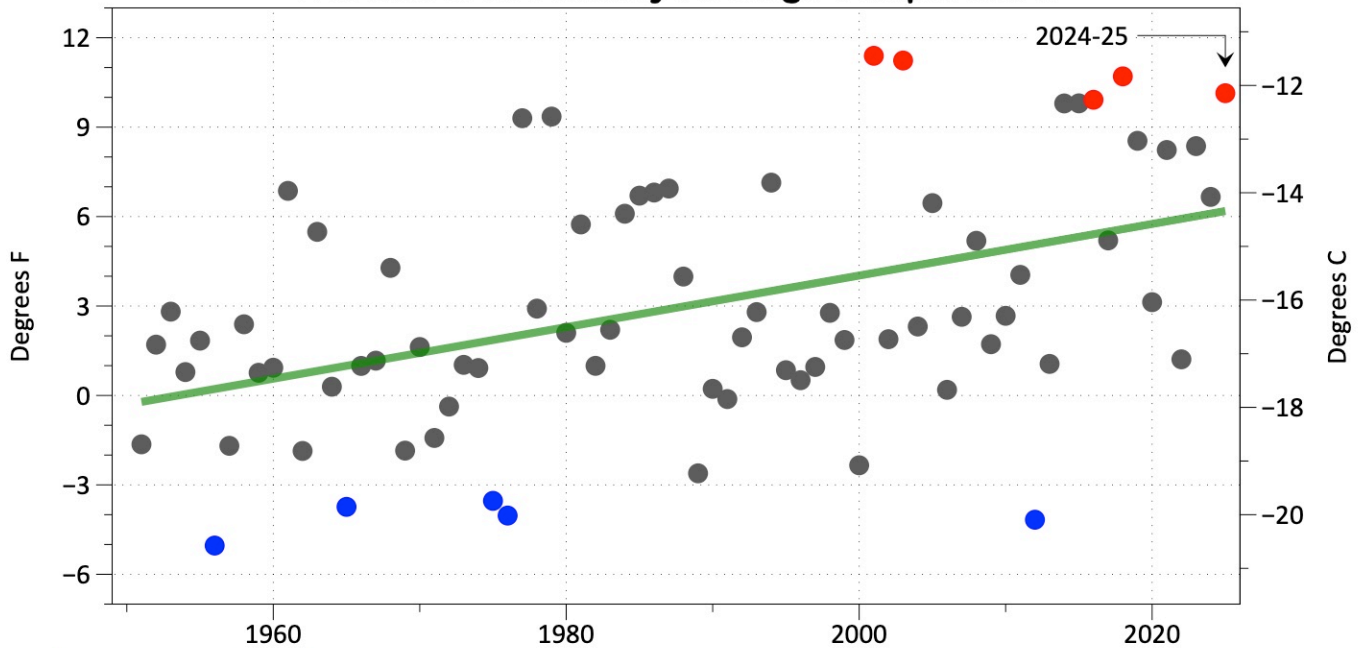


*Thymus nervosus, photo by jacinta lluch valero via Flickr.com, Creative Commons.*



# WINTER IS GETTING WARMER

## Alaska Statewide, 1950-2025 November to January Average Temperature



Data source: ERA5 reanalysis courtesy ECMWF/Copernicus

For Alaska overall, the November through January early winter season average temperature was the fourth highest of the past 76 years. Red shows the five warmest years; blue the coldest. The trend is remarkable: more than 6°F (3.4°C) of warming between 1950 and 2025. *Map and caption courtesy Rick Thoman, International Arctic Research Center, UAF.*

## RECYCLING IN THE GARDEN by Debbie Hinchey

Paper milk cartons are the best type of container for starting lily bulbs that I buy in early spring. (See pic on page 2.)

- 1 - Punch & twist four holes about inch up from bottom
- 2 - Write the lily variety on the carton before soil is added because the carton is cleaner.
- 3 - Fill the bottom third of pot with moist soilless mix and place ONE bulb on top. This allows all the roots that develop along the stem (above the bulb) to have enough soil mix to grow into.
- 4 - Fill to top with moist soilless mix and water.

Another frequent use is to cut off the top 40% of the cartons so that they fit easily into my freezer shelf. I fill these with kitchen scraps, freeze them for at least a week, thaw them in the refrigerator, and then place them in



my Can-O-Worms bin. They are great for collecting seed heads, holding twigs in water for rooting, and giving away Chocolate lilies and other small, skinny plants. They also work well as containers and drawer dividers to organize garden stuff by cutting crosswise or lengthwise as needed.

# UNCERTAIN TIMES AT ASWCD by Sarah Cronick, ASWCD Manager

Since January 20, our world has been upended. Anchorage Soil & Water Conservation District (ASWCD) is primarily funded through federal agencies with whom we have long-standing, mutually reliable, and respectful relationships.

As of 4:20 pm on February 27, 2025, over 90% of our funds remain frozen, including reimbursements for work already completed. Our funding that has been legally unfrozen is yet frozen. Funding agencies report complete chaos and growing uncertainty. Access is limited, restricted, glitchy; communication stifled. Our ability to cover payroll is declining at an alarming rate. We are facing decisions we never thought possible less than five weeks ago.



*Programs at the ASWCD include invasive species control, seen above, as well as a native plant nursery, urban agriculture program, and more. The program has been especially valuable in Anchorage since the contraction of the UAF Cooperative Extension program. ASWCD photo.*

ASWCD helps people care for our forests, lands, and waters throughout the city, JBER, and surrounding areas in various capacities including integrated pest management, native plants, urban agriculture, outreach, education, and technical assistance. ASWCD is governed by a local advisory board; we work with and receive funding from a wide variety of state and federal programs for agriculture and conservation. The Anchorage district was revived from near-death only a few years ago and has been growing and flourishing.

We're the people to call when you want to get your soil tested, trees removed, or create a weed pulling event for your community. Curious about land management and wonder why we don't see many high tunnels in town? Need native plants? We can help.

If we can't help you directly, we know someone who can. It's the coolest thing about our organization. That means you can come to us with just about anything related to conservation, agriculture, earth-tending, community-building, and we will connect you with someone who can help. It's a pretty fun web of people

and places devoted to caring for our lands, forests, waters, and everything within.

Our partners provide immeasurable expertise and support to our team; we would not be who we are without them and owe them a tremendous amount of gratitude and praise. A few of our them: Alaska Division of Natural Resources. The United States Dept. of Agriculture. The Alaska Division of Agriculture. Sustainable Agriculture and Research Extension. The Plant Materials Center. UAF Cooperative Extension. US Fish & Wildlife. National Resources Conservation Service. 4H. Anchorage Parks Foundation. The USDA Forest Service. Bear Mountain Nursery. The National Association of Conservation Districts. US Army Corps of Engineers. Copper River Watershed Project. Community Councils. The Bureau of Land Management. The Alaska Department of Fish & Game. AK Division of Forestry & Fire Protection. Every single state, municipal, and tribal conservation district.

We remain optimistic that the importance of our work will be recognized and our mission can continue.





# CHARLES DOWDING

- English horticulturist
- Author of more than 12 books
- Pioneer of no-till gardening

**THURSDAY MAY 15th**

**Hands-on workshop**

12-2 pm \$20/AMGA members only

**Evening presentation at UAA Rasmuson Hall**

6-8 pm \$15/AMGA members, \$35/non-members  
(plus UAA parking)

**BUY  
TICKETS**



## Herb Study Group Schedule

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

**March 14:** Mints & mint tea

**April 11:** Tea and seeds

**May 9:** Plant exchange

Anyone who has questions or is interested in participating in meetings should contact Elaine at [ehammes@hotmail.com](mailto:ehammes@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.

## AMGA Member Program

### Rot on, Dude!



**A chat about improving backyard and neighborhood-scale composting options in Anchorage.**

**with Nick Riordan**

**March 17th  
6:30 pm  
BP Energy Center and Zoom**

## 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://www.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>  
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