

PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE by Rich Ervin

Balsam poplar (*Populus balsamifera balsamifera*) and black cottonwood (*Populus balsamifera trichocarpa*) have intrigued me for many years. The two subspecies are difficult to distinguish particularly since they hybridize in our area of Alaska. To my amazement, 3 weeks ago, I saw a poplar with a hole in the trunk 30 feet up from the ground that was a den for a black bear sow and her cub this winter. That's a new one on me. Recently, they have been going up and down the tree getting ready for spring. Reportedly, she had been using this poplar den for many years.

Over the years of wandering through poplar forests, my intrigue has grown for many reasons. It starts with the intoxicating fragrance that the buds exude in the spring, then its super abundance of seeds it dispenses in the summer ("summer snow"), then the vibrant yellow it displays in the fall. It is a mesmerizing giant later in its life. Its forests can range from stands of behemoths lower in elevation to bonsai type growth up in the tundra with fantastic contortions.

I have read that the fragrance of the buds can be captured by heating the buds in oil then straining it and adding some beeswax (Balm of Gilead). Haven't tried it but I would love to capture that odor. It is intoxicating. Poplar bud tea is used by interior Alaskans for colds.

When this dioecious tree goes to seed it puts out from 8000 to 54,000,000 seeds! That's right, 54 million from one tree! It is easy to believe if you happen to live around them when its starts to "snow"

their seeds in summer. It is a mess and likely one of the reasons people cut them down. Then the seeds come up everywhere there is a hint of open ground. Likely why they are so successful.

Mature poplars reach 80 to 100 feet high and there trunks can be massive. I have had 5 people fingertip to fingertip surround a poplar tree I pass by frequently on my hikes. An eagle's nest sits way up in its branches.

Poplars provide many animals with dens and nesting spaces. Their interiors rot out and make for a den or home for many animals.

Next time you are in a poplar forest take a closer look at them and admire their size, shape, smell and the surroundings and beauty!

On a side note I want to thank everyone who volunteered at the Anchorage Home and Garden Show and at the Midtown Mall plant sale. We had lots of interest at both venues and hopefully recruited some new members and ticket buyers for Charles Dowding's presentation.

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Stephen Brown

1963-2025



JOIN US FOR STEVE'S CELEBRATION OF LIFE:

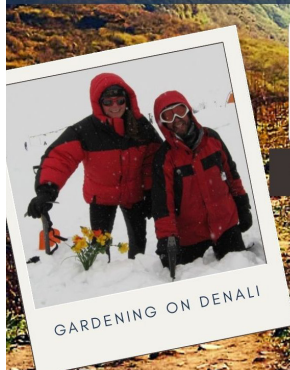
DATE: SATURDAY, MAY 10, 2025

TIME: 2 P.M. - 5 P.M.

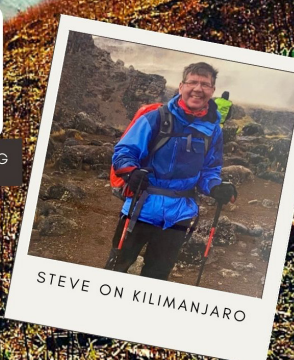
LOCATION: LAZY MOUNTAIN BIBLE CHURCH

(16005 E. SHAWN DR.; PALMER, AK)

REFRESHMENTS WILL BE OFFERED AFTER THE SERVICE;
FEEL FREE TO BRING FINGER FOODS TO SHARE.



LIVESTREAMING



STEVE ON KILIMANJARO

"THE SOVEREIGN LORD IS MY STRENGTH! HE MAKES ME AS
REFOOTED AS A DEER, ABLE TO TREAD UPON THE HEIGHTS." HAB 3.



Special thanks to
Southeast Alaska
Master Gardeners!

NO-DIG GARDENING

with Charles Dowding

English
horticulturalist
and author

THURSDAY, MAY 15

Evening presentation at UAA Rasmuson Hall

6-8 pm \$15/AMGA members

\$35/non-members (plus UAA parking)



BUY
TICKETS



Questions?
AskAMG@alaskamastergardeners.org



MARCH 2025 TREASURER'S REPORT

Balances on 2/28/2025

Checking S-88 \$ 21,207.79

Savings S-2 \$ 5.25

Savings S-29 \$ 17,141.06

CD General 2 year mature;
1/3/25 \$ 11,363.17

CD General 1 year; mature
1/30/25 \$ 10,407.39

Total Assets \$ 60,124.66

Interest/Dividends \$146.07

This month's revenue

Membership \$420.97

Donations \$ -

Fundraising/Plant sale \$ -

Advanced M.G course \$ -

Dowding Event \$ 263.58

Total revenue \$ 684.55

This month's expenses

Postage /Box rental \$ -

Grants \$ -

Operations \$ 238

Website Hosting \$ -

Website Maintenance \$ -

Directory \$ -

Fundraising/plant sale \$ -

Newsletter \$-

State Fair Prize Donation \$ -

ABG Donation \$ 212.10

Total Expenses this month \$ 450.10

Balances On 3/31/2025

Checking S-88 \$ 21,442.24

Savings S-2 \$ 5.25

Savings S-29 \$ 17,149.07

CD General 2 Year 2.71%,
(1/23/25) \$ 11,431.66

CD General 1 Year 4.07%
(1/30/25) \$10,476.96

Total Assets on 3//31/25 \$ 60,505.18

Prepared by Jan van den Top

DIG INTO SPRING WITH CHARLES DOWDING: NO-DIG GARDENING EVENING PRESENTATION

by Dawn Groth

Get ready, garden lovers! An incredible treat is blooming this spring for the Alaska Master Gardeners community—and you won't want to miss it! Mark your calendars for Thursday, May 15th, and join us from 6–8 PM at UAA Rasmuson Hall for an inspiring evening with none other than Charles Dowding, world-renowned English horticulturist, author, and pioneer of the No-Dig Gardening method!

This special event, co-sponsored by the Southeast Alaska Master Gardeners, is your chance to learn directly from the master himself. Charles will walk us through the principles of no-dig gardening with a lively presentation packed with wisdom, wit, and practical advice for getting started—just in time for the growing season. Whether you're a green thumb or a curious beginner, you'll walk away with fresh ideas and renewed excitement for your garden.

What is No-Dig Gardening? No-dig means working with nature, not against it. The method revolves around two key principles:

Minimize soil disturbance. That means no back-breaking digging unless absolutely necessary—such as planting a tree or tackling stubborn roots.

Feed the soil life with organic matter layered on top. Just like in the forest, where leaves and twigs nourish the ground from above, your garden can thrive



Charles in his garden, Homeacres, in Alhampton, near Castle Cary, Somerset, in South West England.

with compost as a surface mulch—especially great for veggies in our damp Alaskan climate. Bonus: fewer slugs!

Charles will explain how to begin your no-dig journey and why compost is your garden's best friend. You'll also have a chance to ask questions, meet fellow gardeners, and leave energized with that magical boost of springtime gardening joy.

Tickets: \$15 for AMGA members | \$35 for non-members (plus UAA parking)

For a sneak peek at the no-dig method and loads of excellent resources, visit Charles's website: <https://www.charlesdowding.co.uk/resources/beginners-guide>

Let's dig into spring—without digging! See you there!



An aerial view of Homeacres.

COOL PLANTS FOR COLD PLACES: Brenda Adams at the April AMGA meeting *Summary by Dawn Groth*

The BP Energy Center may not have had blooming borders or buzzing bees, but on the evening of April 21st, it was filled with garden lovers eager to soak up every verdant word from Brenda Adams, the celebrated author of *Cool Plants for Cold Climates* and a long-time friend of the Alaska Master Gardeners community. Brenda, never one to shy away from a spade of wit, brought us deep into the leafy heart of garden design with her keynote talk: “Cool Plants for Cold Places.”

Foliage: The Unsung Hero of the Garden

Flowers? Lovely. Short-lived. Showy. Foliage? That’s the friend who stays through thick and thin, snow and shine. Brenda reminded us that while blooms come and go like fleeting flings, foliage is the lifelong partner in our perennial love affair with garden design. With examples like ornamental rhubarb (a showstopper with more drama than a moose in the broccoli), lamb’s ear (as soft as a springtime sigh), and ajuga (ground-hugging and gloriously moody), she urged us to think beyond the petal.

Foliage, she mused, adds not just color and texture, but mystery, motion, and magic. Think shady glades, leaf shadows dancing in the breeze, and unexpected architectural flair. She nudged us gently to consider what our gardens look like outside the bloom calendar—January, anyone?

Alaska-Proof Plants (Moose Not Included)

Brenda, a battle-tested garden designer in the Last Frontier, understands that in Alaska, the zone hardiness of a plant isn’t just a label—it’s a dare. Her advice? Choose plants that not only survive, but thrive and entertain. She gave shout-outs to:

- Trollius ‘Golden Queen’ – a crown jewel of the damp bed
- Blue poppies – the prima donnas of the subarctic stage
- Alliums – fireworks on a stalk
- Ornamental rhubarb – again, because... wow

She also stressed the importance of moose-resistance (mock orange, barberry, and honeyberries got honorable mentions), garden architecture, and the sensual delights of fragrance and motion. Grasses and quaking aspens? Nature’s wind chimes.

Winter Wonders & Cold Comforts

Alaska gardens aren’t just for the fleeting summer. Brenda encouraged us to think long-game: bark



Brenda with her book, Cool Plants for Cold Climates.

textures, seed pods, and persistent silhouettes that carry the garden through snowfall and thaw. Want to help your plants beat the freeze? Tuck them near rocks for cozy microclimates. Rocks: the unsung heated blanket of the botanical world.

She highlighted:

- Tulips – resilient little rebels
- Rhubarb (again... yes, it’s that good)
- Certain grasses – understated and elegant even under frost

And let’s not forget the bees and birds. Brenda reminded us to design with pollinators in mind, from first thaw to final frost.

Gardening with Grit: Self-Discipline and the Battle of the Invasives

Every gardener has that plant. For Brenda, it’s the deceptively cute butter and eggs and overly enthusiastic lupine. Her advice? Don’t fall for a pretty face if it plans to overrun your borders.

She emphasized matching plants to place, respecting soil conditions, and not planting with wishful thinking. Love wet feet? Don’t plant on a slope. Want alpine gems? Build a rock garden. And above all: plant what brings you joy—just not at the expense of your ecosystem.

As the evening closed, attendees left buzzing with ideas—and perhaps a newfound appreciation for a leaf well-placed. Brenda’s talk was a reminder that good gardening is as much about artful restraint as it is about bold choices, and that even in the coldest climates, with the right foliage and a bit of imagination, beauty is always in season.

‘Til next thyme, happy gardening!

SPRING PLANT SALE RESULTS

The April 19th AMGA plant sale at the Midtown Mall Garden Show was once again a great success for club members, with 25% of proceeds going to AMGA coffers.

- 352 plants sold (every single one!)
- Prices ranged from \$2.00 to \$20.00
- Total income was \$2044 (compares to \$2555 in 2024, \$1537 in 2023, and \$1427 in 2022.)
- Some donated the proceeds to the club, so we netted about \$500.00
- **Numerous hours of outreach on behalf of the Cooperative Extension Service**
- **THANK YOU VOLUNTEERS!**



Plant sale volunteers at the Midtown Mall Garden Show on April 19, 2025. Photos by Mary Contrary

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.

May 9: Plant exchange

Contact Elaine at ehammes@hotmail.com or the Herb Study Group at anchorageherbstudygroup@gmail.com to get on the list to be notified of announcements.

Garden Tours Begin May 19

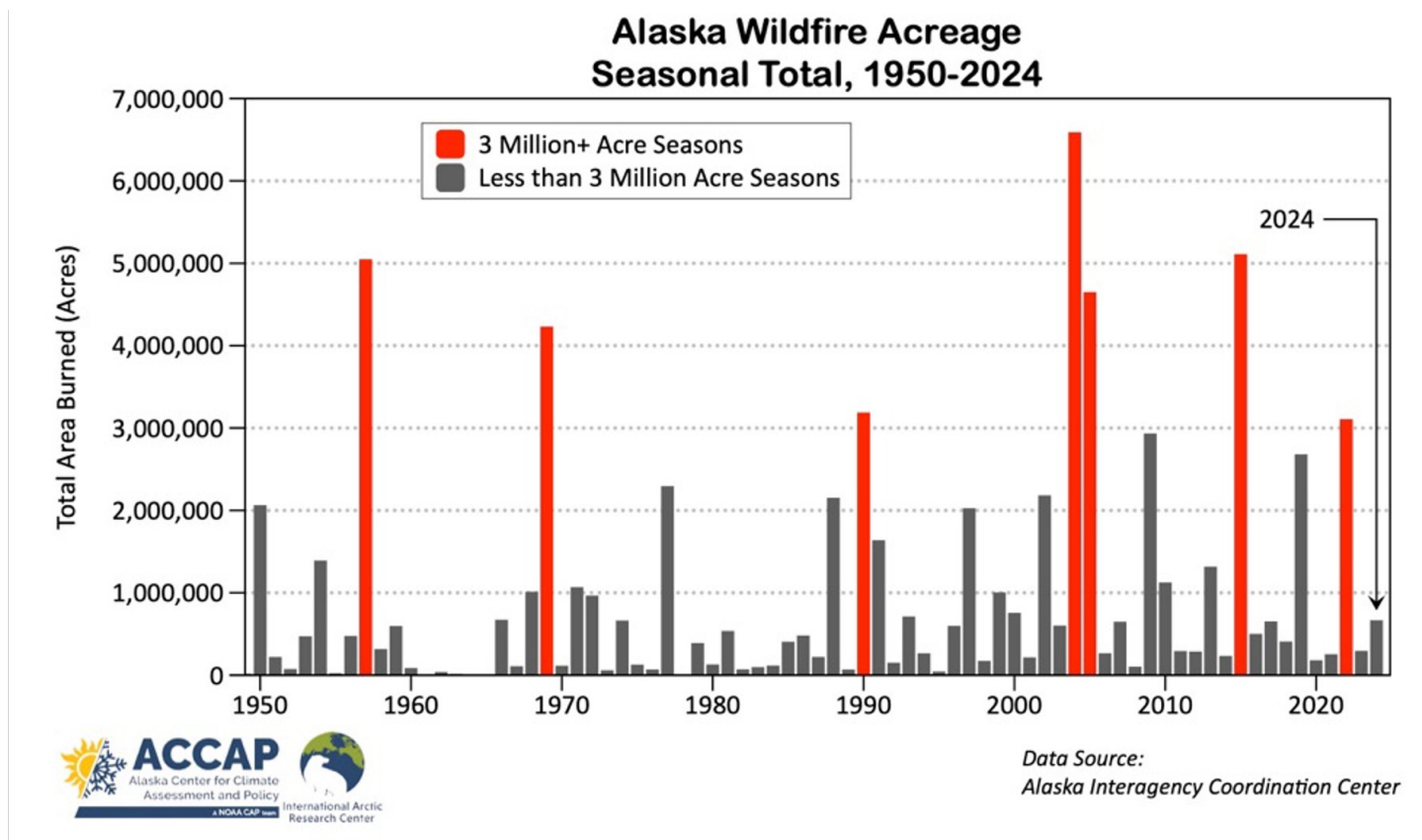


FORGET-ME-NOT
NURSERY

- **May 19, 6 pm: Forget-Me-Not Nursery** in Indian (yes, you can purchase plants, assuming there are some left!)
- May 26 No tour, Memorial Day
- **June 2, 6 pm: Faltz Nursery**

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

FIRE ON OUR MINDS



Not every Alaska wildfire season is big, but the frequency of multi-million acre seasons is about twice nowadays compared to 1950-2000. Historically at least, the wildfire season is short: nearly all the burning occurs late May through early August. As snowmelt proceeds and the ground dries out, the 2025 season will soon be upon us. *Map and caption courtesy Rick Thoman, International Arctic Research Center, UAF.*

WILDFIRE IN ANCHORAGE

Join Us:

COMMUNITY TOWN HALL

May 19, 2025
6:30-9:00 PM
Z.J. Loussac Library

**Presentations from a
Panel of Experts**

- Wildfire Preparedness
- 2025 Outlook
- Fuels Treatment Strategy
- Community Wildfire Protection Plan
- and more!

**Ask questions &
voice your concerns**

[Click here](#) for more
wildfire resources from the
Municipality of Anchorage.

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 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.

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: rebecca@alaskamastergardeners.org
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