

GRAND AND GLORIOUS GRASSES by Brenda Adams

Have you ever driven down a road past a field of native grasses when they were backlit by the sun? Did you find their glow breathtaking? Have you sat in a field of grass for hours watching it sway with the breeze? Do you remember the whispering sound it made? Have you marveled at how many grasses grow right to the water's edge of a creek or pond? Have you been thrilled by their abundant presence on the dry plains waving their inflorescences above the lovely cone flowers and asters of fall? Can you picture those fluffy grass plumes sticking



Calamagrostis x acutiflora "Overdam": A very dependable, tall, cool season grass stands upright in mid-winter in the Serenity Garden at South Peninsula Hospital. Adams photo.

out of the snow? If you are a gardener who has reveled in these images, then it may be time for you to create these same effects for yourself.

Hardy ornamental grasses provide us with an incredible design tool. They add interesting and varied forms, wonderful texture, nearly constant movement, subtle sound, surprising luminescence, a wide range of color and several seasons of interest. They also provide habitat for wildlife and are nearly disease and pest free. That's a pretty good list of attributes. Then, add that they are tolerant of many soil conditions, extremely low maintenance and require little water once established. It's easy to wonder why it has taken so long for grasses to become part of every garden.

I enjoy mixing grasses with bold-leaved perennials and dwarf conifers. I like the contrast of textures. To take advantage of their luminous qualities, I try as often as is practical to situate the taller grasses so they will be backlit by the sun as it passes behind them.

There is an ornamental grass for nearly every situation – sun, shade, moist or dry, humus-rich or poor, well drained or clayish soils. Sometimes, as in the case of

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE by Dawn Groth

JAN 2026 TREASURER'S REPORT

As your President, part of my role is to keep you informed about Board actions and the direction we are taking as an organization. I have begun hosting twice-monthly Zoom office hours for Board and committee members to improve communication, provide support, and strengthen coordination across our volunteer teams.

My goals this year include increasing AMGA membership, creating new sponsorship opportunities for local garden-related businesses, and expanding meaningful engagement opportunities for members.

2026 Homer Garden Tour – Save the Date

The Board has approved plans for an exclusive AMGA Homer Garden Tour on July 22–23, 2026.

The tour will include: chartered bus transportation, reserved hotel accommodations, and organized meals. Final details are still being worked out. As soon as arrangements are confirmed, members will receive notice of the official sign-up date along with complete information, including pricing. Please note: Due to requests from participating gardens, catered meal providers, and Homer's smaller dining venues this tour will be available only to members traveling on the chartered bus.

Introducing Neon One CRM

The Board approved implementation of Neon One, a software platform designed for nonprofit organizations. Neon One will help AMGA manage membership, education, events, and volunteer coordination. Soft rollouts will begin in March. If you are a member of the Alaska Botanical Garden, you may already be familiar with Neon One—they use it successfully and report excellent results.

Vice President Role Adjustment

The Board voted to streamline the Vice President role to focus on technology support only. In previous years, the VP managed technology, general meeting programs, and garden tours. This workload proved too burdensome for a volunteer position. We are testing this revised structure. If successful, a bylaw change will be presented to the membership for a vote in November. Thank you for your continued involvement. **Together, we are growing a stronger, more connected AMGA.**

Balances on 12/31/2025

Checking S-88	\$18,443.86
Savings S-2	\$ 5.25
Savings S-29	\$ 17,213.06
CD General 2 year mature; 1/3/27	\$ 11,648.33
CD General 1 year; mature 1/30/26	\$ 10,795.88
Total Assets	\$ 58,106.38

Interest/Dividends \$38.70

This month's revenue

Membership	\$819.12
Donations	
Fundraising/Plant sale	
Advanced M.G course	\$222.13
Total revenue	\$ 1041.25

This month's expenses

NEON 1	\$125
Grants	\$0
Operations	\$ 134.25
Website Maintenance	\$0
Pioneer Home Garden	\$0
Postage/Box Rental	\$
Fundraising/plant sale	\$
Newsletter	\$ 39.99
Postage/Box rental	\$
Speaker Fees and costs	\$
Total Expenses this month	\$ 299.24

Balances On 1/31/2026

Checking S-88	\$ 18,265.22
Savings S-2	\$ 5.25
Savings S-29	\$ 17,217.45
CD General 2 Year 2.71%, (1/23/25)	\$ 11,648.33
CD General 1 Year 4.07% (1/30/25)	\$10,830.19

Total Assets on 1/10/26 \$ 57,966.44

Prepared by Jan van den Top

GRASSES, *continued from page 1*

Calamagrostis x acutiflora 'Karl Foerster', the same grass will handle all of these situations. There are blue-toned selections like the fescues and the upright *Panicum virgatum* 'Heavy Metal'. Others like *Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola' can add gold and green plus an elegant form reminiscent of a waterfall. The variegated options are particularly versatile. My favorite is *Calamagrostis x acutiflora* 'Overdam' which combines a soft green, creamy white and a hint of mauve that enhance a huge array of perennials. It is tall, graceful and well behaved.

Which brings up the one area of caution regarding grasses. Perennial grasses are generally categorized as runners or clumpers in terms of their spreading characteristics. Unless you have a special situation, like stemming soil erosion on a bank, I suggest you stick to the clumpers. While technically speaking, all grasses spread via lateral shoots, the degree and aggressiveness with which this happens determines the category. Clumping grasses basically stay in place with the original clump growing bigger at a very manageable rate. Running grasses will spread rapidly throughout your gardens. Some common examples are crab grass and our native *Calamagrostis*.

Finally, it is helpful to know if you have a cool or warm season grass, as they behave differently. Both will grow in Alaska. Karl Foerster is cool; Heavy Metal is warm. Cool season grasses grow actively from freezing to



Alopecurus pratensis 'Aureovariegatus': A pretty cool-season grass; it does well in sun or shade. Although it has always behaved for me, some have said it spreads a bit too much in sun for them. Adams photo.



Deschampsia cespitosa 'Bronzeschleier': A graceful, fine-leaved cool season grass with feathery bronze inflorescence. For best results divide every 3-4 years. Adams photo.

about 64 degrees. Warm season grasses appear later for us because they need warmer soil to begin their growth. They do better in Interior Alaska where average temperatures are higher than on the coast. Warm season grasses will die back with freezing weather and will be dormant beneath the soil for the winter. Cool season grasses will stay erect through all but the heaviest snows providing interesting effects in winter as well as treats for the birds. I don't cut mine back until spring so I can enjoy every minute of their beauty. Give all ornamental grasses a light dose of composted steer manure in spring and that's it!

Ah. Ornamental grasses—so much beauty for so little work! And I didn't even mention that you can put them in your bouquets—dried or fresh. More information on these and other hardy, well-behaved grasses can be found in my book *Cool Plants for Cold Climates*. There's also an excellent, comprehensive book by Rick Darke entitled *The Encyclopedia of Grasses for Livable Landscapes*, Timber Press, Inc., 2007. Caution: before you fall in love with a grass in Rick's book, check the zone. Not all are hardy.

HERB STUDY: BORAGE by K. Michael Ward

It seems lots of people have a story about their borage. Will it have purple, pink, or white flowers? Or will the borage even pop up again this year? Borage is not a perennial, but an annual that is a consistent self seeder. I've always thought borage was just a plant that attracts lots of bees, but it has many other uses.

Diving into the subject, I found out that it originated in the Mediterranean. Today it's found all over, including Alaska. It represents honor and courage, and was worn by medieval knights, who added the flowers to their drink the night before going into battle.

A tea made from flowers and young leaves is very popular today. Also popular is using borage in cooking. It has a light cucumber-like taste. Old stalks are not used as they get very spiny with age.

There are pluses and minuses when it comes to borage. Although it is said to help arthritis and a multitude of other ailments successfully, the flowers, leaves, and stalks contain small amounts of unsaturated pyrrolizidine alkaloids (PAs). Even small amounts of PAs can cause problems over time with regular intake.

Although borage has been used traditionally, the presence of PAs raises safety concerns with experts who recommend avoiding daily, long-term consumption. This caution is to prevent the risk of chronic poisoning, liver issues, and digestive issues. According to Web MD, daily consumption is unsafe; only certified PA-free products should be used. Symptoms of overconsumption include nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, diarrhea, and seizures.

There are many ways of consuming borage, not just tea. You can buy capsules, tinctures, carrier oil to mix with your essential oils, or make your own poultice. There is even a recipe to make your own mead. Many of the capsules sold on the market have been made PA-free, just double check to make sure. That way you can enjoy the medicinal qualities without the risk of consuming PAs. The black seeds of the borage contain few PAs so the carrier oil is close to or PA free.

Growing borage is very easy. It is an energetic plant that is not too fussy about the soil. Best if you put the seeds directly in the ground since the tap roots go



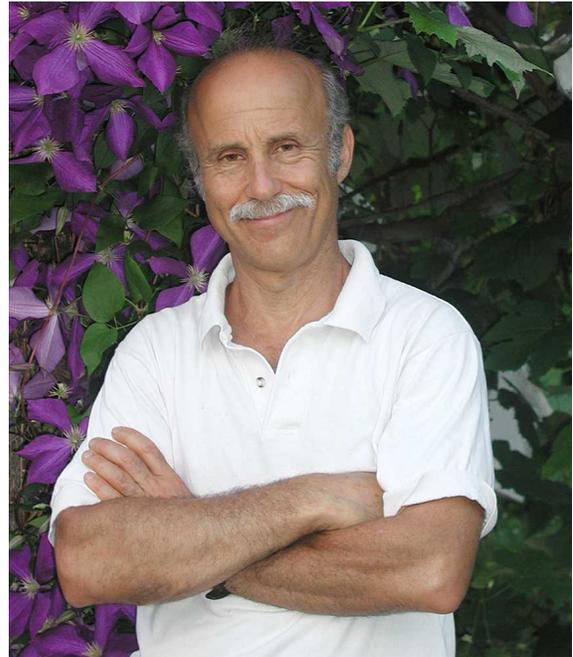
An unusual white-flowered borage grew at Fairview Elementary School in 2024. The edible flowers can be purple, pink or white. Emily Becker photo.

down at least 12 inches, making transplanting difficult. Borage is a great companion plant. Tomatoes & Peppers: borage is famous for deterring tomato hornworms and improving the flavor of tomatoes. Strawberries: it is believed to enhance their growth and flavor. Cucumbers & Squash: attracts bees, essential for pollinating these vines and increasing yields. Other friendly neighbors include: carrots, celery, chard, corn, eggplant, parsnip, peas, potatoes, and radishes. It contributes to soil health as a nutrient accumulator and recycled plants create excellent 'green manure'.

Borage is an amazing attractant to bees and works as a protector against pests for companion plants. Except for sampling a couple of flowers, before using borage directly from the garden for tea or cooking, safety concerns should be considered, and if used, only in moderation or PA-free.

Zoom with Fruit Master Lee Reich, Ph.D

The Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers Association invites Alaska Master Gardeners to join our March meeting on **Thursday, March 12, 2026, at 4 pm**. We are pleased to have [renowned horticulturist and author Lee Reich, Ph.D.](#), as our March presenter for the APFGA Winter Speaker Series. His talk is entitled, "**Pruning Berries and other Small Fruits.**" Many of us own at least one of Dr. Reich's books on pruning, landscaping with fruit, or gardening. He expertly weaves science into his presentations which are both informative and engaging. To join the meeting, [simply click the Zoom link at 4:00 pm](#) AKST on Thursday, March 12.



FUSED GLASS FOR THE GARDEN

An Alaska Master Gardeners Creative Workshop - No prior glass experience required.

You're invited to a hands-on fused glass class, brought to you by DBee Flowers, designed for gardeners who appreciate artistry inspired by nature.

Instructor: Charlene Howe

Class Length: 1½ hours 6:30pm - 8pm

Location: 8050 Resurrection Drive

Class Dates & Projects:

- **March 3rd** — \$40 — Garden Stakes
- **March 10th** — \$60 — 8×12 Plate/Tray

Classes will be held with a minimum of 5 participants.

Sign up early to secure your spot.

**Sign Up: Fused
Glass for the Garden**

FEBRUARY MEETING RECAP by Nancy Tone

Our February meeting was in the “big room” at the BP Energy Center, for the crowd to come and hear this young man who keeps turning heads in our gardening world. Josh Smith from Bear Mountain Forest Nursery inspired us to break out the blender and start germinating seeds. Taking us through a short journey of apple breeding, Josh shared how he is propagating and developing Alaska cultivars of apples and plums in addition to working with the “smash and plant” methods for berries. Josh conscripted us all to use our gardening and growing skills to grow our own Alaska bred cultivars. Go forth, citizen scientists!



Josh in his nursery. Emily Becker photo.

FREE MONEY

AMGA is increasing the number of grants and scholarships it is giving out to the community. We may award grants up to \$500 to individuals and organized groups for gardening education or community gardening projects that promote the purposes of AMGA, including community education, responsible gardening practices, and promotion of volunteerism. If you know an organization or individual who is seeking a grant or scholarship, please have them fill out [this simple application](#). We will be making our decisions in April. Students who enrolled in the 2025/2026 Master Gardener class are eligible for reimbursed scholarship grants.

[Our website has all the information!](#)

March Member Meeting



Come learn about Biosphere 2 in Tucson, Arizona, (via your computer here in Anchorage).

Monday, March 16th
6:00-6:30 mix and mingle
6:30-7:30

[Biosphere 2](#)
Zoom Presentation

Also:
Garden Tool Exchange
Recognition of new MG
graduates

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

March 13 – Cottonwood
April 10 – Tea Party TBD
May 8 – Plant Exchange TBD

LEARN SOMETHING NEW

Build Your Own Planter Box or Wooden Sign



- April 25 & 26**
- 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM (both days)
 - Alaska Industrial Hardware, 2716 Commercial Dr.
 - Lunch: Not provided



with Alaska Creative Woodworkers

Build your Own Potting Bench with Alaska Creative Woodworkers



April 4 & 5
(continued April 11-12, if necessary)

See sign up for details, including instructor, cost, and wood options.



**Sign Up:
Planter Box**

**Sign Up:
Potting Bench**

Chair Yoga

Tuesdays and Thursdays
12-1 pm via zoom



with **Debbie Selman**, Certified Yoga Teacher
Designed to support ease in everyday activities -- especially gardening.



**Sign Up:
Chair Yoga**

Create your own Hanging Basket with Forget-Me -Not Nursery

April 22, 5-7pm



- Private visit to Forget Me Not Nursery in Indian
- Tour
- Plant a 12" or 14" hanging basket; Forget Me Knot nursery will care for it until end of May (unless you want it sooner)
- Choose plants that work in your microclimate
- All participants receive discount coupons for future shopping
- \$100; payment collected at event

**Sign Up:
Hanging Basket**

LAUNCH A GARDEN BIZ

14
MAR

20
26

LOCATION: NEIGHBORWORKS ALASKA, 2515 A STREET, ANCHORAGE 99503

OPENING & WELCOME

9:00am - 9:15am

Coffee & Tea

BLUE MARKET: BECOME A VENDOR

9:15 am - 9:45 am

Amber Dolin, Front of House Manager at Blue Market AK, will share how she selects small farm produce to sell at the store.

START YOUR SMALL BUSINESS

9:50 am - 10:20 am

Ginny Grabowski of the Alaska Small Business Development Center will share resources they offer for small biz start-ups.

FARM USE TAX EXEMPTION

10:25 am - 10:55 am

Learn and ask questions about the new Anchorage property tax exemption for small farmers who sell at least \$2500 in goods.

GROWING FOR MARKET

11 am - 11:30 am

Mary-Ellen Garner of Common Root will share tips and tricks for selling at local Farmers Markets.

GARDEN PLANNING FOR A CSA

11:35 am - 12:05 pm

Rachel Shedd of Alaska Botanical Garden will share how she plans for Community Supported Agriculture, ie, weekly veg subscription boxes.

Free, but
seats
are
limited!

Sign Up
Here!



Questions?
Email: info@anchoragewcd.org



Sign Up:
Garden Biz

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
 Facebook: [facebook.com/Alaska-Master-Gardeners-Anchorage](https://www.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
 General emails: AskAMG@alaskamastergardeners.org
 Mail: AMGA, P.O. Box 221403, Anchorage, AK 99522-1403

