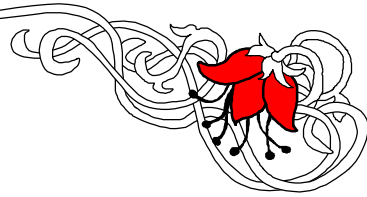


Anchorage Chapter



Volume 5, Issue 5

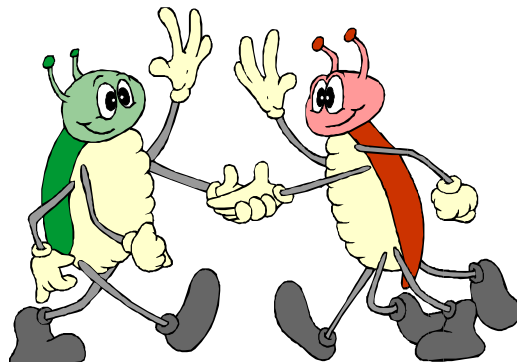
# ALASKA MASTER GARDENERS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

April 2003

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## From the President by Mary Shier

What a pleasure it was to see new and familiar faces at the last AMGA meeting. I was going to say "old" faces but you might get the wrong impression! We would definitely not want that! It's always nice to have friends we haven't seen for a while make an appearance at our meetings and to reconnect with them. I like to hear what's been going on in their lives and to find out what the newest conquest in their gardening world is. What a joy, though, to see new graduates of the MG course taking part in our meetings and even volunteering to be an active member of the group. Our social time at the meetings is quality time to visit and meet our new members as well as the regulars. To linger and chat is one of the finest portions of our meetings. However, we have neglected our new member/graduates at times by not being more cordial to their new faces in our social time. I'm as guilty as anyone, I hate to say. We're so used to migrating over to visit with familiar folks that we miss out on welcoming our visitors or new members. It's much too easy to pick the path of ease and comfort. Did you happen to notice the person sitting all alone over to the side, or a person eager to leave the gathering as if from an uncomfortable situation? If that had been you at an earlier time, wouldn't you have liked someone to come over and offer a welcome and some conversation? You know darn well you would have! To some it makes the difference of returning or not the next time. I would like us to make more of an effort to mingle during our social time at meetings, to introduce ourselves to newcomers and to extend the warmth, I know we have for plants, to others who may turn out to be our next best friend. For those who have hesitations, just think of these folks as a new variety of a flower you need to get acquainted with. Maybe that will ease the procrastinating. Hey, there's nothing better than nibbling refreshments and chatting, especially about gardening, with old or new friends.





## Growing Mushrooms in the Garden by Michele Hébert

It is not difficult to grow mushrooms, especially outdoors. Just look around the woods in the Alaskan fall, the woods are filled with mushrooms. A mushroom patch can become part of a gardener's plan for food produced. Japanese farmers just maintain a stack of inoculated oak logs to produce their crop of shitake mushrooms. Shitake mushrooms are the number one agricultural export.

One of the easiest mushrooms to grow outdoors is the wine-red *Stropharia (Stropharia rugosa-anulata)*. It is sometimes referred to as the "Giant *Stropharia*" because it can grow up to 16 inches across. It has a nutty flavor and meaty texture. It has been compared to the Alaskan Bolete, the most commonly collected mushroom.

You can grow *Stropharia* in a low mound or bed of wood chips and or straw. The mushroom naturally lives on decomposing woods. A close water source is a must since these mushrooms live in high humidity. A shady spot helps.

Spring is a good time to build a mushroom bed. Start by clearing a spot of all the vegetation and mulch down to mineral soil. You can also make a box or bed 4 feet wide by 8 feet long and 7 inches deep. Fill with 4 inch of fresh wood chips 1 to 4 inches in diameter. Sawdust does not work as well because of less air. If straw is used be sure there is no mold. Choose bright yellow straw. Chop the straw with a garden shredder into 1 to 4 inch pieces. It is important that the bed be made from fresh materials so that it will grow the right fungi or mushrooms.

Wet the bedding material and allow it to sit for several hours till the moisture has had time to distribute. Inoculate or seed the bed with mushroom spawn. Spawn comes in clear plastic bags that contain the white fungus mycelium and bedding material. The spawn can be purchased from garden supply companies or mushroom growing companies. Fungi Perfecti, in Olympia, Washington is the most famous supplier of spawn in the Northwest.

Break the spawn block into small pieces and distribute evenly across the 4 x 8 foot bed. The spawn will grow towards each other forming a continuous mat of white mycelium throughout the bed. Spread 2-3 inches of wet chips on top to keep the bed from drying out. The bed must be kept moist for a week or two while the mycelium grows. Once the bed is completely filled with mycelium, cover the bed with one inch of garden soil spread over the chips. Some growers like to plant a crop of rye grass in the garden soil to keep the bed shaded. If you live in a dry climate like Fairbanks, moisture loss from the grass may be more a problem than help.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5...



# Watershed Stewardship

Are you interested in our creeks and streams? If so, The Cooperative Extension System is offering a 12 hour class on Watershed Stewardship. This class includes: Hydrology, Bioassessment, Monitoring, Non-Point Source Pollution, Impervious Surfaces & Stewardship Opportunities.

**When:** Tuesdays and Thursdays  
June 10, 12, 17, 19 from 6-9 pm  
**Where:** Cooperative Extension Service  
2221 E. Northern Lights Blvd., Suite 130  
Anchorage, AK  
**Registration:** Call our office 786-6300  
**Cost:** FREE!



## Living Wreath Demonstration at March AMGA Meeting



Members and guests were treated to a lively demonstration of how to make a living wreath. Dana Klinkhart, AMGA board member, gave a very informative talk and PowerPoint presentation on her newest hobby. She described the different forms that can be used, as well as plant material that is attractive. The forms used, as well as the potting material, were on hand to show how this art is created. The PowerPoint presentation was created by Dana, and had photos of Dana putting a wreath together, as well as samples of her work. All in all, a very enjoyable meeting!

If you missed it the class, she may have a spare handout or two. It's definitely worth a try!

The door prize was a pair of garden gloves from AK Mill & Feed, and was won by "Lucky" George Patrawke.



## Garden Peas and Spinach from the Middle East

[Reprinted with permission from Texas A&M University web site]  
<http://plantanswers.tamu.edu/publications/vegetabletravelers/peas.html>

Pea (*Pisum sativum*) gets its English name indirectly from the Latin *pisum*. In AngloSaxon the word became *pise* or *pisu*; later, in English it was "pease." So many people thought pease was plural that they persisted in dropping the "s" sound, thus making the word "pea." The Latin name resembles the older Greek *pisos*, or *pison*.

Many different species have long been called "pea," so that this word alone is not definite. In much of our own South today "peas" usually means some edible variety of cowpeas. In referring to what most of the United States understands as "peas" (*P. sativum*), the southerner says "English peas."

The main center of origin and development of this pea is middle Asia, from northwest India through Afghanistan and adjacent areas. A second area of development lies in the Near East, and a third includes the plateau and mountains of Ethiopia. In these areas wild peas of related species have been found, along with a remarkable diversity of cultivated forms of *P. sativum*, but wild *P. sativum* has never been found.

This pea was first grown only for its dry seed. Some varieties are grown extensively today for the dry seeds for "split peas" for soup. The varieties known until about a thousand years ago had seeds that were much smaller, dark colored, and otherwise different from our garden types.

### Cave Men Ate Primitive Peas

Seeds of primitive peas have been found in lake mud beneath the positions of houses of the Swiss lake dwellers, dating back perhaps 5,000 years to the Bronze Age. Peas also were found buried in a cave in Hungary, believed by some to date back even further.

Despite recurrent claims, this species of pea has not been found among any of the ancient Egyptian treasures, but it has been found in diggings on the site of ancient Troy. The Aryans from the East are supposed to have introduced peas to the Greeks and Romans, who grew them before the Christian Era. Greek and Roman writings indicate that the crop was held in no special favor.

There is no hint of "green peas" until after the Norman Conquest of England. In the 12th century, among other foods stored at the famous old Barking Nunnery, near London, were "green peas for Lent." Nothing really definite was recorded about them, however, until 1536, when they were described in detail in France. The edible-podded pea was also known at that time.

Before the end of the 16th century, botanists in Belgium, Germany, and England described many kinds of peas-tall and dwarf, with white, yellow, green seed colors; smooth, pitted, and wrinkled seeds.

Garden peas were not common until the 18th century. Toward the end of the 17th century they were still such a rare delicacy that fantastic prices were sometimes paid for them in France.

"This subject of peas continues to absorb all others," Madame de Maintenon wrote in 1696. "Some ladies, even after having supped at the Royal Table, and well supped too, returning to their own homes, at the risk of suffering from indigestion, will again eat peas before going to bed. It is both a fashion and a madness."

The English developed fine varieties; hence the common designation "English peas" in America.



**Central Peninsula  
Master Gardener News  
By Rosemary Kimball**

Isn't it nice that "spring" is here! Let's hope there are no more boras or below zero temperatures. Almost to the day, bora notwithstanding, the air took on a different quality. Has anyone else noticed it (or am I nuts)? Mid-March, the temperature is still cold, it may or may not be cloudy, but there is a day when the temper and scent of the breeze changes and it almost seems balmy and smells like bare dirt. I wasn't expecting it this year, but it came.

There is a lot of interesting composting now that Jeff Lowenfels has seen the light. This month we had our composting series starting with Cheryl Paige and her worms. I got to host her overnight, and got a furtherence of worms, science and composting. Loved it! We're going to try to get her to sell worms at our plant sale in June. She was followed a week later by Derec Marcorelle and his back yard, lazy man's composting. That really got energy flowing. Unfortunately, John Evans got bombed by the weather and couldn't make it down with his compost tea "recipe". Janice, our ever-resourceful Ramrod, winged it with a video on composting. The only program left is Annie Nevaldine's "Garden Art" the first week in April. After that, it's on our own with all those little green things 1/2 inch high.

We also got Stephanie Cohen from the Temple University Arboretum with a slide show on short plants that will "do" for us. It's the first time we've ever had a big-time speaker and our attendance almost tripled. Besides being informative, that woman is funny and the master of the one-liner ("a dead plant is an opportunity for another plant" "I like success"). She also distributes her abundant energy to QVC Shopping Network pitching plants and I'd get cable just to watch.

Fritz Creek Nursery ([www.alaskahardy.com](http://www.alaskahardy.com)) will be carrying an achillea that was named for her but is also sold under a different name... In my garden it will go under her name.

The cold wind coupled with temperatures below zero at night and bare ground dropped the soil temperatures at night to 19-21°, a range at which damage occurs to perennial plants. Later, during the day when the air temp went up to 35-40°, the soil temperature went back to 30°. I peered at my neighbor's 10-year-old Lewisia Tweedii and all is not completely lost because I could see undamaged new growth- I hope. No word yet what it has done to the naked strawberries- tune in next June.



Enough of the weird winter and on with the summer!

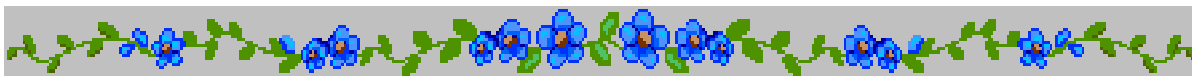
**"MUSHROOMS" CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2**

The bed should be watered well each day. This is a very important step. Install a rain gauge or soup can in the bed and be sure to add at least 4 inches of water daily. It may be helpful to cover the bed with a permeable garden fabric that breaths. The fabric will also help to keep out bugs. Mushrooms will form in 2 to 3 weeks.

Harvest when mushrooms get to the desired size. A young mushroom will be tenderer and have less chance to get attacked by bugs. Grab hold of the mushroom towards the base and slightly turn while pulling. Using this method you will be able to remove the base. It is important to not leave part of the mushroom in the soil to attract bugs. You should be able to harvest all summer long.

In milder climates it is easy to over winter the bed. It is more challenging in Alaska. Cover the bed with impermeable material such as polyethylene. Top that with several inches of closed cell foam. The snow will add additional insulation. If over wintering is successful the same bed will produce mushrooms for several years.

[Editor's note: Stropharia rugoso-annulata "Garden Giant"™ can be found at the following web site for \$20, out of Olympia, Washington:  
<http://www.fungi.com/cultures/spawn.html>]



## Bird Chatter

The 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the MG Journal (rivised) will be out soon.

The 2003 Annual Directory should be ready by April 21st, the next meeting date.

Gail Charles, new Master Gardener member, has volunteered to be the group's official "Hospitality Person". She will help set up the refreshment area at our monthly meetings. Thanks Gail!

An Alaskan comment: *I've come to realize that 'growing from seed' is somewhat akin to taking a charter to fish for halibut- going to the store to buy the product would be a LOT cheaper and you'd get exactly what you wanted, but you'd miss out on a hell of an adventure!*

Stephanie Cohen came up with a lot of one-liners... were you able to hear her? She was absolutely delightful and funny to boot:

*A friend told her "either you deadhead your flowers or you have a life".*

*She uses the "Baseball Philosophy of perennial gardening...if a plant dies three times, it's out. "*

*"Use golf tees for marking plants over the winter so you won't dig up the new growth inadvertently."*

*"A dead plant is an opportunity for putting in a different one. "*

### Garden Humor

Did you hear about the fungus and the alga? .....they took a lichen to each other.

A mushroom walks into a bar, sits down and orders a drink. The bartender says "we don't serve mushrooms here." The mushroom says "Why not? I'm a fungi!"

Recent Government Studies Now Prove: ALL MUSHROOMS ARE EDIBLE! Some however, are only Edible ONCE!

How are lawyers like mushrooms? They both thrive in dark places with lots of crap.

### PEAS AND SPINACH CONT. FROM PAGE 4...

About a hundred years ago the famous Austrian monk, Gregor Johann Mendel, was working with peas in laying the foundation of the modern science of genetics.

#### Spinach Hails from Persia

Spinach (*Spinacea oleracea*) has remarkably similar-sounding names in the languages of many widely separated lands, indicating that its spread to those lands has been comparatively recent.

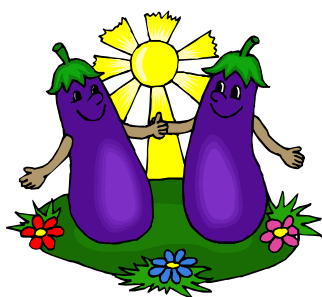
Our name for spinach comes from the Old French *espinache*, which was derived from Arabic or Persian words of somewhat similar sound. The Armenian name is *spanax* and the Spanish is *spanacha*, or *espinaca*. The technical Latinized name *spinacea* is a term devised by botanists probably no earlier than the 12th or 13th century.

Spinach is native to Iran (Persia) and adjacent areas. It apparently was unknown outside its native land until about the beginning of the Christian Era. Even then it was unknown to the Greeks and Romans.

The earliest record of spinach is in Chinese, stating that it was introduced into China from Nepal A. D. 647. Old writings indicate that it reached Spain about A. D. 1100, having been brought from North Africa by the Moors. They in turn probably got it by way of ancient Syria and Arabia.

The prickly-seeded form of spinach (still grown today) was known in Germany in the 13th century and by the 14th century it was commonly grown in European monastery gardens. A cookbook of 1390 for the court of Richard 11 contained recipes for *spynoches*. Smooth-seeded spinach was described in 1552.

It is not known when spinach was first brought to America, but it was doubtless in early colonial times.



### Volunteer Opportunitites

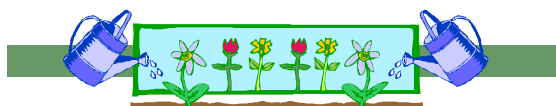
Sue Lincoln is out of town, so you will have to check the web site for current opportunities:

corecom.net/~gardener

Don't forget, writing an article for the newsletter counts for volunteer hours! This is a good opportunity to share your experiences, knowledge or whatever, with your gardening pals! There's always room for another article, no matter how short or long it is. Put your thoughts to words!

### Next AMGA Meeting Highlights "Moss Gardening" with Fran Flint April 21st, 2003

Fran Flint will be the featured speaker at the next AMGA meeting, held at the CES. Come in and see how you can use Moss in your garden. This will be our next to last meeting of the season. See you there!



The Anchorage Chapter of the Alaska Master Gardeners Association welcomes letters, opinions, articles, ideas and inquiries. Contact the editor, Gina Docherty, at:

Mail: 4006 DeArmoun Road  
Anchorage, AK 99516

Phone: 345-4099

Email: gardener@corecom.net

AMGA Web Site: www.corecom.net/~gardener

(The Newsletter will be on-line in living color!)

## Gardening Calendar

### April 3

Anchorage Garden Club: "Recycling is Working" presented by Mary Fisher from ALPAR; Pioneer Schoolhouse, lower level; located at 3rd and Eagle Streets; 7:30pm Programs are free and open to everyone.

### April 5 and April 12

UAA Class- "Introduction to Organic Gardening - Organic Garden Methods" -

HME A001 -1 to 6 PM - Chugiak- Eagle River Campus, 10928 Eagle River Road, Room 228-G . Non-credit, \$99 - Course reference number is 38779

To register, call 907-694-3313 or on line at <http://www.uaa.alaska.edu/eagle>

### April 12

Pioneer Fruit Growers Annual Grafting Workshop - Dimond Greenhouse, 1-3 pm - participants are advised to bring a sharp knife (i.e., sheet rock knife), a plastic bag for trees if they want to bring home their work. Cost: \$2 per root stock. Scion wood is free.

### April 19

Alaska Rock Garden Society Meeting - 2pm at Recluse Nursery, Wasilla - Rhonda Williams will be the speaker.

### May 1

Anchorage Garden Club: "Growing Maples in Anchorage" presented by George Lyle; Pioneer Schoolhouse, lower level; located at 3rd and Eagle Streets; 7:30pm Programs are free and open to everyone.

### May 17

Anchorage Garden Club: Lobelia Basket Workshop \$45 Learn how to make a lobelia basket similar to the ones the Municipality of Anchorage does downtown. Location to be determined

### May 19

Anchorage Garden Club: Alaska Arbor Day - Children will plant trees, usually held at one of the schools at 1pm.

### June 5

Anchorage Garden Club: "Primulas" presented by Sally Arant; Pioneer Schoolhouse, lower level; located at 3rd and Eagle Streets; 7:30pm Programs are free and open to everyone.

### June 7

Anchorage Garden Club: Annual Plant Sale held at 3734 W 35th Ave.; 9am to 5pm

For information about membership or upcoming programs, contact:

Cooperative Extension Office  
2221 E. Northern Lights Blvd.  
Anchorage, AK 99508

**Phone 786-6300**

**Fax Line 786-6312**



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