

Anchorage Chapter



Volume 7, Issue 11

# ALASKA MASTER GARDENERS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER October 2005

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## Giant Alaska Slugs

by Julie Riley, CES

They're big, black and slimy and now we have a scientific name for them, *Arion rufus*. The 4 ½ inch slugs first came in to Extension's Anchorage IPM office this summer from King Cove. The two creatures were put into a terrarium where they happily fed on lettuce for a couple of months. IPM Technician Kelley McGuirk later added another specimen she collected in Cordova where she said the slugs were everywhere– in the woods, feeding on cat food and also on dog feces.

Pictures of the black beauties were sent to Oregon State University's diagnostic lab for identification. Oregon sent them to a USDA slug expert in Seattle and we now know the slug is *Arion rufus*. (Dissection is required to distinguish it from similar species.)

Black slugs are native to western and central Europe and have been introduced to many places around the world. Slugs in the genus *Arion* were first found in British Columbia in 1941. They have been recognized as serious pests in B.C. since 1962 where, among other plants, they like to graze on lilies and orchids.

The black slug can also be brown, yellow-orange or brown-red in color. Its foot can range from white to black or both. Other names for this species include two words that should never be used in combination with slug, chocolate and licorice.

When did black slugs first arrive in Cordova? Were they part of the environment when Dana Klinkhart, Jo Anne Banta or Marguerite Barnard lived there? Maybe Cordova landscaper MG Neva Nolan can shed some light on their story. Watch next month's Bird Chatter for an update.



"President's Corner" will appear again next month.  
Dana Klinkhart is still on vacation out of state.



## AMGA Focuses on Bulbs for Fall

By Jo Anne Banta

There were no "dim bulbs" at September's AMGA Meeting. Alaska Mill and Feed's own bulb expert Margaret Donatello was our main speaker, and what a wealth of knowledge she is.

For instance, did you know that tulips have been cultivated since 1,000 AD? that they came originally from the Turks (tulip being the Turkish word for turban)? and that they didn't reach Holland until the 17<sup>th</sup> century? Among the many enlightening facts:

- The bigger the bulb, the bigger the flower.
- Tulips will revert back to what they are hybridized from.
- Bulbs for forcing must be kept cool for at least 10 weeks.
- Skagit Valley tulips are shipped to Holland, then back for sale.
- You can extend bloom time from 2 to 12 weeks by careful planning.
- The Tulip-of-the-Year is Salmon Impression.

Need more bulb information? Read carefully Margaret's handout on bulb types and varieties: single, double, fringed, lily-type, short, tall, early, late, and even those with a peony look. Margaret suggests grouping bulbs, planting up to twelve in a hole, being sure that the bulbs are not touching. She plants tulips twice the depth of the bulb plus one-half inch, and cautions against planting too deep. Fertilize with bone meal only since the bulb contains all that's necessary.

Of course, there is the Anchorage standby, daffodils, which the moose do not eat. While these are actually narcissus; what we call daffodils have a trumpet cup and narcissus have a flat cup. Varieties include miniatures, large cup, and even fragrant daffodils that have several flowers per stem. Hyacinths are more delicate and should be planted near the foundation for extra warmth. Alliums bloom in late spring and come in a variety of sizes and colors. Crocus, of course, are the earliest harbingers of spring. We found it fascinating that crocus can be naturalized in the lawn and then simply mowed with the grass.

In keeping with the program, Amelia Walsh had a wonderful mid-June picture of her daffodil bed (King Alfreds) in full bloom, and another of that same bed in July, a colorful panorama of oriental lilies, speedwell, and oriental poppies. Pat Anderson and Marge Olson showed a photo of a flower "bed" they had planted in a neighbor's front yard, a stunning brass bedstead amidst a background of perennials. Rosemary Kimball told of her successful experience using predatory nematodes to combat root weevils and fungus gnats – Julie Riley also attested to their success. For more information about the nematodes, be sure to read Rosemary's article in this issue; and if you are interested in trying these, Margaret Donatello said that Alaska Mill and Feed carries them (20 million per box!).

Most of the door prizes came from Verna Pratt: a perfect-shaped, juicy red Beefmaster tomato and a collection of a great variety of her geranium starts, which were doled out carefully as names were drawn. Naturally, the tomato was the first to go.

Julie Riley announce that the fall Master Gardener Class will take place October 11 through November 29, Tuesdays and Thursdays. This will be an evening class to accommodate those who work during the day. Classes will run from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m.



## 4th Annual Rock and Mineral Show November 4th and 5th, 2005 Sheraton Anchorage Hotel Anchorage, Alaska

Mark your calendars! The annual Rock and Mineral Show is coming up soon, November 4th and 5th to be exact. As in the years past the show will be associated with the Alaska Miners Association annual convention at the Sheraton Hotel. The show will begin on Friday from 5-9 pm and continue on Saturday from 10 am to 5 pm. It is supported by the Alaska Miners Association and the Chugach Gem and Mineral Society.

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## ROCK AND MINERAL SHOW CONTINUED

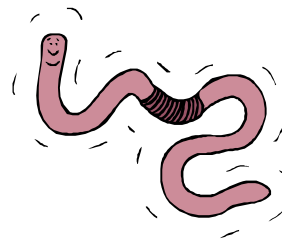
There has been fantastic public support for the event over the past four years since it has something for everyone at every age. Friday seems to attract more adults and of course the geologists from the AMA convention. Kids are the highlight of Saturday's activities. For some families the show is an all day event with kids leading their parents between displays and vendors finding new and exciting rocks, stones, and treasures at each stop. The resident clown keeps the kids busy customizing their rock bags for a treasure hunt and face painting. Rock displays sponsored by the Chugach Gem and Mineral Society include beautiful rocks, minerals and fossils from Alaska and around the world, rocks that glow in the dark, core from some of the mining projects across the state and a plate full of polished rocks that look good enough to eat. Of course no one knows what the displays will be this year so you'll just have to stop by to find out. There will be a People Choice Award for the 3 most popular displays. Anyone can enter a display since the Gem and Mineral Society has plenty of cases to loan out. Show off a collection, describe a project or mine, or just be creative with rocks and stuff.

No rock show is complete without vendors with minerals from around the world, polished stones, jewelry, natural crafts, carved stones, fossils, books, rock hammers, paintings and items too numerous to mention. There are plenty of return vendors, but there is always room for more. So far most of our vendors are from south central Alaska, but it'd sure be fun to have some folks from the rest of the Alaska and the Yukon participate too- Are you all listening out there!!? A vendor booth is \$50 for a 6' x 8' space and a table.

Remember that no event happens without help and support. The rock show is no exception. Volunteers are needed to help get cases, set them up, take them down, man the club table, and help out around the show on Friday and Saturday. If you like to work with kids there is always help needed on Saturday with face painting, balloon art and the treasure hunt. OR create your own activity for the kids- new ideas are always appreciated.

This will be the 4th Rock and Mineral Show and it is still fun and exciting to plan, organize and participate in it. The show is a great place to see beautiful rocks. learn a few things, expand a hobby, tell a few tales, hear a few tales, and just have a good time with your whole family. And the best part- admission is free. Now that is a hard deal to beat.

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### Earthworms in Alaska By Kelley McGuirk Anchorage IPM technician

Many client inquiries in the Integrated Pest Management office involve turf issues, such as "why is my lawn so lumpy?" Earthworms have made a noticeable mark throughout lawns in South-central Alaska. These lumps are caused by the burrowing habits of earthworms, which live and travel in the soil. During heavy rains, they will show themselves on the surface. Recent earthworm sightings, collections, and identification show that Alaskan lawns do indeed have established populations of the common night crawler, *Lumbricus terrestris*.

Earthworms aren't picky eaters; they'll digest any decaying plant or animal matter. They then cycle the nutrients through their segmented bodies, where the digested organic matter creates nutrient-dense castings, which are deposited into the soil. The favorable part of this lumpy-lawn making behavior is that we're able to reap the benefits. Earthworms provide high dosages of nutrients to our soil as they burrow through the ground, which aerates the soil for water and nutrients to infiltrate through. As far as the annoying and potentially hazardous lumps in the lawn: either adapt to it, or vigorously rake the lawn. No pesticides are registered for the use on these beneficial worms.

Unfortunately, earthworms bear the brunt of pesticide use, as non-target organisms. Specific types of insecticides, such as organophosphates and carbamates, tend to have toxic effects on earthworms, because they target their nervous systems. A reduction in the number of earthworms can potentially have adverse effects to the soil structures. That said, if you'd like to keep your worms around, it's extremely important to reduce the amount of pesticides you use on your lawn. Contact the Cooperative Extension Service IPM office if you have further questions.





## Buying Commercial Compost

By Blythe Campbell

If you don't have the time or space to compost, but would still like to reap the benefits of compost in your garden, there are a number of commercial sources for compost in small and large quantities.

Gardeners use compost for its many benefits – as a mulch to inhibit weed seeds and reduce evaporation, as a soil conditioner to increase aeration and water retention, and as a source of nutrients for better plant growth – although most compost has very low NPK values, so for the best vegetables and annual flowers you may need to supplement your soil with organic or other fertilizers.

Composts that contain manures have higher nitrogen values; those with a lot of food waste have higher potassium values. How do you know what's in the compost if you don't make it yourself? Look at the labels to see what parent materials were used to create the compost.

Compost from large-scale producers – available in bags at home and garden stores and nurseries, or directly from the Anchorage Regional Composting Facility - may be more stable and more consistent than your own compost. Some people feel, however, that commercial compost contains larger concentrations of heavy metals, salts, and other toxins since the parent material may be contaminated with pesticides or other pollutants from large-scale farming or animal operations.

There are a variety of composting demonstration projects going on throughout Alaska, most designed to use waste from local industries. A farmer in North Pole, Alaska, received an Alaska Science and Technology Foundation grant to test commercial production of compost from farm waste. He used long “windrows” of one part wood chips, two parts grass clippings and eight parts hay. He found that the wood chips helped to keep the piles aerated. With frequent turning, the compost was ready in 14 days.

An organization in Sitka is trying to commercialize compost made from wood and fish waste. In Haines, an EPA-funded project is underway to compost organic waste from the community with sewage sludge. Commercial compost is in its infancy in Alaska, but in Oregon, where many cities require composting, trade associations and state regulators are working together to come up with standards for pollutants and nutrient values in commercial compost. An Alaska Solid Waste Workgroup has been formed to share information about local solid waste projects.

One type of bagged compost available in Anchorage is mushroom compost, which is made from the waste materials used as a growing medium for commercially grown mushrooms – wheat straw, dried blood, horse manure and ground chalk. The nutrient content is low because most of the nitrogen is used by the mushrooms, and the chalk makes mushroom compost very alkaline, which might be a good addition to Alaska's acid soils. Mushroom compost may contain traces of the pesticides used to kill fungus gnats. Other bagged composts include composted chicken or steer manures, and unidentified “garden” compost.

Organic Gardening magazine tested 30 different brands of bagged compost and found problems with almost all of them – from waterlogged texture, to ammonia odors that signaled incomplete composting, to shredded bark products mislabeled as compost. Many were excessively acid or alkaline or had high salt contents. They recommend that you buy one bag before buying any compost in quantity, and look for the following:

- Loose and granular texture, with no recognizable wood or bark
- Dark brown or almost black in color
- Moist, not dry or soggy – one of compost's benefits is its ability to hold 2-1/2 times its weight in water, but if you buy a wet product, you are paying for water and not compost. Excess water may trigger anaerobic decay, with accompanying horrible smells.
- A good smell – although the plastic bags do inhibit the microbes that create that great earthy smell, the compost should not smell like ammonia or manure.



## Central Peninsula Master Gardener News By Rosemary Kimball

All those fungus gnats that came in from the cold say it is September.

They have the most annoying propensity to get between me and the TV or computer screens. Some of the plants I left out for the frosts with a death wish survived 26° temperatures anyway. It's time to screw the courage to the sticking point and compost them live! Now to find some dry sand to cap all my potted plants. That ought to set the gnats' breeding back since I don't have any predatory nematodes on hand at the moment.

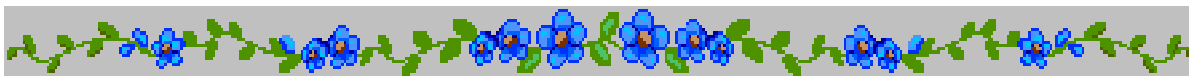
After using nematodes in the garden for root maggots for over a decade, I got lazy three years ago and didn't install them. I didn't have any losses that year so I didn't order them last year or this. Still no losses although there were more pupae this year than last so I will install them next year. We are very careful about digging out spent cole roots and should the pupae show up, very careful about applying the thumb-and-forefinger "insecticide". They make such a satisfying pop when squished. We also do quite a bit of composting in situ of the carrot and extra beet and cabbage leaves which helps expose any pupae that we missed the first time around. Unfortunately, Rocco Moschetti of Wasilla, our local nematode grower ([www.ipmofalaska.com](http://www.ipmofalaska.com)), is in Iraq so we don't have any locally produced ones but Alaska Mill and Feed has them in season, as well as Arizona Biological Supply ([www.arbico.com](http://www.arbico.com)) an organic supply catalog with excellent shipping to Alaska which, unlike some suppliers, they consider part of the real world, .

It is a satisfying, nay, smug feeling to have some of next spring's work done in the fall! The currants are all cleaned up and pruned so we can get at the slug housing under the bushes in order to dispose of them brutally. The raspberries are thinned to the most robust canes and I even wired up the guide wires on the side just like I've been planning to do the last couple years. I'm not as efficient as one friend who goes Outside for the winter...she's got her seeds for next year! I also followed my neighbor's dad's example and while washing potatoes prior to storage, selected out the most perfect for seed for next year. Fortunately I haven't heard of anyone with late blight on the peninsula but it makes me chary of even certified seed from the valley. The strawberries are limed and kelped even, as it has been a long while since they got any.

Gardeners are experimenting more and more. Garlic is The Big Thing down here right now. There is a grower in the Scout Lake area near us in Sterling, who grows lots of garlic. Neighbor Mark got me some of his product at the Farmers' Market and I've used some of the cloves for seed for me. MG Margaret Simon in Nikiski sent me two varieties that she grew this summer and they also are in my garlic patch. She said she was going to use more compost in her garlic patch this year, so I finally shook loose with some of mine for the patch. Mark's sister in Sterling grows enough green beans outside in her garden to let people pack them off after she's done her canning and supplied her relatives. If she can, I can. The zucchini goes into the lower garden next year instead of its protected location in front of the greenhouse. With my cold frames in place, I might try growing basil outside. I wish I could feel more regretful about global warming. At the end of the third week in September, there are people down here that still haven't gotten their first frost! Ditto the Hillside in Anchorage. I want to whine and say it's not fair but I'm glad to see the garden OVER!!!

After Donna Donatello's talk on bulbs, I went past Carmel Tysver's and she handed me a pocket guide to bulbs from Timber Press and said it was mine FREE if I would read and review. I'm a pushover and took it home via one of the big box stores and their bulb offerings. I'm going to try crocuses and a bulb I'd never heard of also starting with the letter "C". Unfortunately the yellow allium bulbs I got at the September meeting are a Zone 5 so they will have to go in a cluster in my whiskey barrel

Our Ramrod, Janice, the IPM scout, was the identifier of a huge- 5 inches- black slug in Soldotna. That was one scary beast and made the front page of the Peninsula Clarion. A nightmare for sure would be that in your garden.



## Bird Chatter

- The grand prize winner for the Alaska Botanical Garden fundraising raffle was MG and ABG volunteer Ski Olsonowski. Ski's prize is a trip to the Northwest Flower Show in Seattle this February!
- Bob Purvis, MG from the 1980s, visited Anchorage recently and reported that to prevent the squirrels from eating his plums in Minnesota, he uses hot pepper wax.
- Katy Gilmore has applied to be a member of the Jefferson County Master Gardener Association in the State of Washington.
- MG Tracy Johnson's son Reagan, was born on May 2nd just in time for the growing season. Her husband built him a cradle and entered it in the State Fair!
- A sunflower was seen growing this season that was so large the gardener used a 2 X 4 to stake it.
- Nine state records were set at the Alaska State Fair in Palmer this year.
- Rumor has it that the Alaska State Federation of Garden Clubs will be holding its 2006 state convention in conjunction with the Southeast Alaska Gardening Conference sponsored by the Master Gardeners in Juneau next spring. Is there any news on what the Mat-Su MGs might be considering for a MG conference in Southcentral?
- MG Leonard Grau was voted Wildflower Garden Club Member of the Year for 2005!
- The apple originated in Kazakhstan where forests of wild apples were discovered in 1929 by the Russian botanist Nikolai Vavilov. These early cousins of our domesticated apple bear little resemblance to the fruit we cultivate today.
- Congratulations to MGs Katie Belcher, Anna Davis and Ruth Kircher for completing their 40 hours of volunteer service!
- According to "Science News" (9/17/05), tree rings can be used to date hurricane activity. Storms change the composition of rainwater. Early on, hurricanes rain out water molecules containing heavy isotopes (oxygen with more neutrons). Isotopically light oxygen falls later and is taken up by trees. The oxygen is incorporated into cellulose and scientists studying tree rings can tell when hurricanes occurred in the past.
- A \$200 tapestry of *Papaver somniferum* was seen offered for sale at the Butchart Gardens in Victoria, B.C.
- Wasilla orchardist and MG Kevin Irvin was featured on the front page of the Frontiersman in September. The article was then also published in the Anchorage Daily News on Sept. 17.
- Late blight was discovered growing in tomatoes in an Anchorage garden this fall.
- Part of the carrots harvested by Charles and Jimmie King this fall were split wide open. Too much water? Nope- boron deficiency.

Autumn is a second spring when every leaf is a flower.

-Albert Camus, writer and philosopher (1913-1960)

## Junior Master Gardener Program

By Jo Anne Banta

Do you have any budding young gardeners in your family? If so, look to the Junior Master Gardener Camp next summer. It's a wonderful program that involves children 6 to 14 years, consists of eight 3-hour sessions, and develops a love of gardening and an appreciation of the environment. Its theme: growing good kids.

All fifty states, as well as eight foreign countries, have implemented the JMG program. Over 2.5 million young people have been reached by it. Here in Anchorage, the camp is held at Alaska Botanical Gardens. Lead instructor Patrick Ryan, a first grade teacher at Trailside Elementary, is a certified Junior Master Gardener Instructor and is assisted by AMGA volunteers. Patrick originally became interested through the AAI TC, Alaska Agriculture in the Classroom program in Palmer. He has attended training sessions throughout the country and has brought home some wonderful teaching concepts.

His introductory demonstration for us consisted of using an apple to represent the earth. He cut the apple into four parts – one part is land, the rest is water. He then cut the one-fourth in half to eliminate mountains, deserts and ice. The remaining one-eighth is then sliced into fourths to remove wetlands and cities. One-thirty-second of the apple remains, and the peel represents the topsoil which must grow food for all the people of the earth.

It is this and other such projects that keep the youngsters enthralled throughout the season. The three-hour sessions meet twice weekly for eight weeks. There is a morning session (9am to 12pm) and an afternoon session (1pm to 4pm). Age groups are separated: ages 6 -10, and ages 11 - 14. Classes are limited, though it is possible for extra sessions to be added. Patrick says his students often go home and get their non-gardening parents interested.

The text materials are great: there is The Reason for a Flower, a beautifully illustrated book by Ruth Heller, and other wonderful titles such as The Life and Times of the Apple and We Love Dirt. (Julie Riley has an annotated list of "Gardening Books for Children.") There are delightful worksheets, individual notebooks and, above all, an enthusiastic teacher who can, at the drop of a hat, pick up his guitar and sing a gardening song.

There is a harmony  
In autumn, and a lustre in its sky,  
Which through the summer is not heard or seen,  
As if it could not be, as if it had not been!

- Percy Bysshe Shelley



## TASTY APPLES

by Julie Riley, CES

The Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers held their annual apple tasting event on September 22 in Eagle River. Almost 70 Alaska-grown apples were ranked on a scale of 1 to 10. My top scorer was 'Ginger Gold', but MG Dan Elliot is not convinced the cultivar is completely winter hardy. He says his tree dies back to snow level when the temperature gets to minus 40°F in his Wasilla orchard.

The apple I liked second best was 'Zestar', a nice sized apple with a pinkish blush on the skin. Others that ranked high on my list included 'Heyer 10', 'Simonet', 'State Fair' and 'Silken', which was grown by Bob Boyer in his greenhouse. Bob also grew the biggest apple I have ever seen. Its name was 'Rambo'. It must have been double the size of most grocery store varieties and was pretty tasty, too.

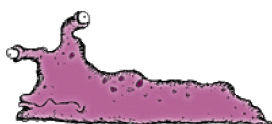
It's amazing how many apple varieties are now being grown in Alaska compared to twenty years ago. About all you could find then were 'Chinese Golden Early', 'Rescue', 'Yellow Transparent' and 'Summerred'. Members of the Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers have done an amazing job of increasing our knowledge on tree fruits. As soon as I receive the tabulated results from all of last month's tasters, I'll pass along the information.

## Slug Survey

We have a wonderful opportunity to get our slugs identified. Do we have more than one species or are they all the same (except for the big, black Cordova slugs)? More on the Cordova slugs in the October AMGA newsletter. Please bring your slugs to the CES office in Anchorage in a plastic bag or jar. They can be collected without soil, plants or leaf litter as long as you bring them in the same day you collect them.

IPM Tech Kelley McGuirk will be sending them off to a USDA slug expert in Seattle. When you drop off your specimen, please also leave your name and the location where the slugs were collected. Two of each kind should be sufficient. (They will need to be dissected in order to get a proper id.)

Thanks for your help in one of the first-ever slug surveys of Alaska.



## Gardening Calendar

### October 6, Thursday

Anchorage Garden Club Program - "Native Water Plants and Bulbs" - presented by Sally Karabelnikoff of the Sally K Nursery. 7:30 - 9 p.m., Pioneer Schoolhouse @ 3rd & Eagle St. - Information can be found @ 566-0539, or <http://communitynews.adn.agclub>

### October 13, Thursday

Wildflower Garden Club - Annie Nevaldine: Imaginative and Wacky Yard Art - Still uncertain about what to add to your garden to give it that personal touch? Annie will share photos of what she has seen in other yards. Central Lutheran Church, 10 a.m.

### October 17, Monday

Alaska Master Gardener Program: "Organic Gardening, Organic Soil Building" with Jeff Lowenfels. 7:00 p.m., at the CES, 2221 E. Northern Lights Blvd., Conference Room 130. Refreshments and door prizes provided.

### November 3, Thursday

Anchorage Garden Club Program - "Fruits and Berries" - presented by Julie Riley, Extension Service Horticulturist. 7:30 - 9 p.m., Pioneer Schoolhouse @ 3rd & Eagle St. - Information can be found @ 566-0539, or <http://communitynews.adn.agclub>

### November 15 - 16, Tuesday-Wednesday

Anchorage Garden Club 45th Annual Holiday Flower Show - 9:00 am - 6:00 pm - A flower show that will start the holiday season. Anyone can enter. There are both horticulture and design categories. A schedule listing the categories should be available in September. Location: Wells Fargo Bank, C Street and Northern Lights Blvd

### November 21, Monday

AMGA Program: "Pruning: How to and When" with Mike Post. 7:00 p.m., at the CES, 2221 E. Northern Lights Blvd., Conference Room 130. Refreshments and door prizes provided.



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

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

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**Photo by Debbie Hinchey.**

There are only part of the apples that were available for tasting at the Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers' annual event. Those present in the photo include Mary Boyer, Dwight Bradley, Kevin I rvin and Bob Boyer. See article page 7.

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US Postage Paid  
Permit #107  
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