

ALASKA MASTER GARDENERS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

June 2005

From the President's Corner By Dana Klinkhart

his exciting and busy time - there are not enough hours in the day to plan and plant! I just couldn't resist the chance this week to 'hit' a few of the nurseries before Memorial Day. At 9:15 am my partner in crime, Linda Klinkhart and I opened the doors at Wilderness Nursery to admire their beautiful baskets. I took note of the complimentary combinations. The purple Wave Petunias and yellow Bidens ferulifolia or violet Vebena, variegated Creeping Charlie and pink Geraniums were just two of many. How do they come up with such wonderful ideas? At 10:17 a.m. we entered the Recluse Garden Center on the Palmer Wasilla Highway. They must have known that we were coming... It was difficult just getting through the gift shop as the tempting garden structures and supplies caught our attention. Have you been looking for water or marginal plants? I found lots to choose from - lucky me. After a bite to eat, we were off to the Recluse Gardens on the Parks Highway to admire the new construction added to the existing rock garden. Are you looking for ideas for rock gardening or a selection of climbing vines? You'll find some choices there. As we worked our way south and home, Bush Landscaping came to mind. The selection of conifers and flowering trees is amazing. They had a variety of hardy Azalea, too. Driving back to Anchorage, there was time left to check out the treasures at Forget Me Not Nursery near Indian off the Seward Highway. We weren't disappointed. The day may have ended but not the challenge for searching for new plants. In the Garden Specialty Nursery opened the following day. If you want to see your gardening friends, opening day is the time to go. I found Astrantia major to try and of course, some new Primula. Alaska Mill and Feed was a show place for Rhododendron this season. Dimond Greenhouse has a selection of annuals you might be searching for. Goodness knows, I could never choose a favorite source for plants. I believe some of the best selections of plants to be found are available through our local garden clubs. The annual plant sales provide us all with a chance to purchase those tried and true varieties while visiting with others gardeners about the latest and greatest gardening ideas. I recommend checking your AMGA directory for those sales as well as your AMGA newsletter. Happy gardening!





AMGA Donates Scholarship & Tools

On June 20th the Master Gardener's Association will meet at the Alaska Botanical Gardens for a presentation by Patrick Ryan. Through show and song, Patrick will bring us all up to speed on the Junior Master Gardening Program. This is a chance learn what is happening in the world of gardening for children here in Anchorage. Youngsters that are between the ages of 6-14 are brought into the garden to learn through application and entertainment the wonderful world of plants.



Bent Wood Furniture, Anyone? By Jo Anne Banta

ndeed, that was the topic of May's AMGA meeting; and in spite of the beautiful weather, forty-six master gardeners turned out for Debbie Filter's presentation.

On display were bent wood chairs, stools, tables and miniatures, courtesy of vice-president Marge Olson, one of Deb's best customers. There were magazine racks, trellises and a willow wheelbarrow that anyone would love as a front yard plant stand.

Debbie Filter, who now lives in Trapper Creek, has been making willow furniture for five years. Her innovative work also includes bent wood tables with board tops, wall planters and miniature chairs for displaying flowerpots. While she uses several books as guides, Deb says she often gets her ideas from pictures or from the internet. A photo of a dogsled, for example, can set her creativity awhirl.

While we refer to "bent willow" furniture, Debbie has found that alder and birch work equally well. Her fifteen-year-old son is a big help in harvesting materials; and they have plans to build a love-seat swing together this summer. All of Deb's rustic furniture is finished with varathane to withstand weather although she recommends under-roof winter storage.

If you are interested in learning to build your own bent wood furniture, Debbie is giving a weekend class August 20 and 21 at her Trapper Creek home. The price of \$150 includes all the materials plus an overnight stay at their bed-and-breakfast, the Northland Inn; and you go home with a beautiful bent wood lawn chair. Should you have any questions, you may contact Debbie by phone at (907) 733-7377 or by email at northlandinn@gci.net. (An added note: the Northland Inn is partially furnished with her rustic furniture.)

Julie Riley reminded us of the upcoming plant sales and told of an email she had received from Philadelphia saying AMGA had the best web site in the nation. (Cheers for Gina Docherty!)

Refreshments were provided by Joyce Palmer and Dottie McDevitt. (I need that pumpkin bread recipe!) Door prizes went to Cheryl Ann Griffin

who won a jade plant and to "Lucky Linda" Ewers who went home with the coveted rustic birdhouse trellis donated by Debbie Filter. Maren Carey, Kathy Knight and Carol Ross each won wooden garden ornaments donated by Beth Schlabaugh.

A reminder: If you have leftover plants, Clitheroe Rehab at Pt. Woronzof needs flowers. I tems should be boxed or bagged, labeled and dropped off at the CES office shortly before their last pickup date, which is right after Memorial Day. Questions? Call Cooperative Extension Service.



AMGA Donations continued from page 1...

The AMGA has recently donated funds for a youngster to attend the eight week summer course. A scholarship of \$160 has been dedicated for one child to attend this great experience who may otherwise not have the means to do so.

And that is not all - there are 10 Hmong families who have garden plots at the McPhee Street Community Gardens in Mountain View. Julie Riley will be working with the folks and through an interpreter will serve as a resource for them. You may have heard of these families who arrived here in Anchorage after 30 years of being held in refugee camps. They gave aid and served the CIA in Vietnam and could not return to their homeland after the war. These new residents need gardening support. Your Alaska Master Gardeners Association has donated \$100 for the purchase of tools. Additional donations of used hand trowels and other weeding implements are also needed. This is a good time to inventory our supply of tools and 'weed' out the extras. Bring them to CES for our Hmong gardeners. Good things happen through gardeners in our community.





Wonderful Spring Time By Mary Shier

love springtime. Have you been walking around your gardens and checking out what's coming up and what's taking forever to return? I'll bet you have, just as I have for the last month or more. It's so exhilarating to be experiencing sun and warmer weather again. I look forward to it all winter; although, I was glad to have had a bit of time off to recoup after a busy summer.

The early record warm days were beginning to be nerve-wracking. It reminded me of last year - I am not looking forward to the water hose routine we all had last summer. Yuk! I suppose it was good exercise hauling those things around so many times a week. I think I'd rather pull weeds – but then again, it might be a toss up!

Everyone I know has been experiencing spring fever lately. We're all a bit panic-stricken not finding our crocus peeking out among the groundcovers. Feeling guilty over maybe having unknowingly moved them or somehow destroying them – and then being totally relieved and thrilled to see small patches of color finally making their appearance. Nature sure has a way of putting us through agonizing times.

Speaking of nature and surprises, I have found a surprise in my greenhouse. Somehow my kiwi vine, planted along the outside west wall years ago, found a way to sneak into the south <u>inside</u> bed. We have four courses of block foundation below ground! Gad, that is one determined plant! Too bad its days are now numbered. It should have behaved. I am on the warpath because it's in a space I intend to plant peppers.

In the meantime, I have been hardening off plants and have quite a few to get into the garden in the next few days. I'm looking forward to the beds in the vegetable garden thawing out enough to be worked and planted.

As I wander about the yard, I'm finding plants, which don't normally return, showing signs of life this year. Others, which normally return faithfully each year, are showing NO sign of life. How can this be?? I am totally baffled. Is no year the same? I suppose nature wants to keep us on our toes and alert. Okay, I get that, but personally, my toes are getting calluses.

On a lighter note: By the time this newsletter comes out I will have been to Washington state to visit the granddaughter and family and to celebrate her 8th birthday. One thing she had on her birthday wish list was to have a larger garden plot. That makes a gardening grandmother's heart swell. Naturally, I took her and her mom some plants from my greenhouse as usual. Not extras, but ones I'd grown especially for them. Gotta keep that interest going, right?

By the way, the flowering trees and Rhodendrums down there were outstanding. They were in full bloom and at their peak.

Okay, now back to our unusual gardening year and problems. Shucks!





Herb of the Year 2005: Oregano & Marjoram

[Reprinted with permission by the author, Dr. Susan Mahr, University of Wisconsin] http://www.hort.wisc.edu/mastergardener/

The International Herb Association has designated the genus Origanum the Herb of the Year 2005. Oregano and marjoram are common names for different species within this genus, and there are several species in this genus in the mint family (Lamiaceae). There is some confusion about the names for the various species; the European O. vulgare may be called Common Oregano, Wild Marjoram, or Pot

Marjoram depending on where you live; this plant has relatively little flavor. *O. onites*, from Greece and Crete, may also be called Pot Marjoram or Greek or Cretan Oregano. Also known as Greek Oregano is *O. heracleoticum* (also called *O. vulgare* subsp. *hirtum*, *O. hirtum*, or *O. vulgare prismaticum*), from I taly, the Balkan Peninsula, and West Asia, which is less hardy than *O. vulgare*, but is much more flavorful. Another complication is that different types of oregano readily hybridize. But in all of these plants, essential oils, particularly carvacrol, provide the distinctive oregano flavor. Sweet marjoram, *O. majorana* from Asia Minor, is not winter hardy here and has a subtle taste unlike oregano at all because it contains less carvacrol. I talian oregano (*O. x majoricum*) has a bit of the sweet, perfumey scent of marjoram.

Several other unrelated plants with high amounts of carvacrol also have local common names of oregano. "Mexican oregano" usually refers to a tall, tender plant in the verbena family (Verbenaceae), *Lippia graveolens*, that has a similar, but stronger oregano flavor, but may also refer to *Poliomintha longiflora* and *Plectranthus amboinicus* (syn. *Coleus aromaticus*) in different parts of Mexico. *P. anboinicus* is marketed as oregano in Puerto Rico, and Cuban oregano or Spanish Thyme in other places. This Caribbean native is a large and thick-leafed plant that resembles a succulent. In Spain *Thymus nummularius* is sold and used in place of oregano.

Most plants in the genus *Origanum are* small perennial subshrubs or tender perennials native to the Mediterranean and adjacent areas. In Wisconsin many of the species are not completely hardy and are better grown as annuals or pot plants. *O. vulgare* has naturalized in the eastern United States. Oregano plants develop woody stems and can grow up to about 30" tall and wide under optimal conditions, but most types remain at 8-12" high. Because of its more compact habit, marjoram is often used in English knot gardens.

The leaves of *Origanums* are oval to spade shaped, dark green, and many are somewhat fuzzy. Marjoram tends to be a more gray green color than oregano, and the leaves are generally smaller and less fuzzy. The composition of the oils, and therefore the flavor, of all of these plants is greatly influenced by climate, moisture levels and soil. Flowers appear on long stalks in summer and will last well into the fall. Oregano typically has pink flowers, while marjoram usually has white blooms.

At least one species of *Origanum* is used solely as an ornamental. Hopflower Oregano (*O. libanoticum*) is a vigorous, trailing herb hardy to zone 4b. It can grow 10-15" tall and spread 18-24 inches. It produces hop-like bracts of lavender and chartreuse through the summer months; in autumn they turn brown and dry. This plant looks best when cascading over a raised bed, rock garden or container. Just like its culinary brethren, hopflower oregano needs well-drained soil in full sun to thrive.

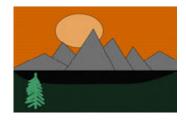
Varieties

Greek oregano is among the more common oreganos available in the U.S., having 'true' oregano flavor. It grows low to the ground, rooting as it grows outward. It is a vigorous spreader, but not invasive. There are numerous named oreganos offered for sale, but because of the confusion among names, it is not always clear what plant you are really getting. Some varieties that are offered include:

- · Origanum 'Herrenhausen' has reddish-violet flowers.
- · Origanum 'Hopley's Purple' has pungent, reddish leaves that can be used either fresh or dried, but is used mainly as an ornamental.

Continued on page 6 PAGE 4





Central Peninsula MG News By Margaret Simon

Rosemary is in Arizona supporting her husband in his "get-well" treatments. Our prayers to both of you. Good luck and we'll be happy to have you both back on the Peninsula soon.

It's that time of the year when we might be waking up with a few aches and pains because we began the yard/garden work in earnest and forgot to do our stretching exercises before we started! Yes? Temperatures that broke records for April certainly got our gardening juices going, didn't they?

How many of you are experiencing that serendipity walk and finding plants that have survived the winter which you purchased at last fall's nursery sales and stuck in the ground wherever there was a 'hole? It's our first 'word of encouragement' to carry on for another season of gardening.

When we had several feet of snow and I was perusing seed catalogs, I succumbed to ordering a TOPSY Turvy planter. It is now planted with a 'Tumbler' tomato but at this point of experience I would advise you to save your money and not purchase one. However, do consider the 'Tumbler' cherry tomato if you haven't. It's a dandy producer. And tasty, too.

One thing I m excited about this spring is my bed of garlic. Last fall in October, I planted garlic which I had ordered from Territorial ('Georgian Crystal' and Purple Glazer'). The only thing I did was cover the bed with Remay (so that I would remember in which bed I had planted it). This spring, by the end of April with snow still around, it was already several inches out of the ground and it's still going great guns. Roasted heads of garlic this fall? If any one has a tip or two on growing garlic successfully, please share it with me.

The moose fence is in place (I use commercial fishing net on 8' metal posts—find a friend who is willing to give you some used netting and save your nickel). No hammer and nails required for installation. It's an easy fix—takes about an hour to put up and it can be taken down for the winter. So far it has worked well. The moose stick their

nose in it and try to eat what's on the other side but they must not like the feel as they soon walk away.

Time to water my 30 trays of seedlings....

Margaret Simon for the Peninsula MG's dmsimon@ptialaska.net

The Chocolate Story By Jo Anne Banta

n a candy store in Hawaii I spied what resembled an elongated yellow acorn squash lying on the counter. "Why for you got dat?" I asked in my very best Pidgin English.

" Dat be da cocoa pod," answered the clerk.

All right, let's get serious. I was in the Kailua Candy Company to buy a chocolate birthday card. The clerk turned out to be Robin Barrett, who, together with his wife Cathy, produces the best chocolates in Hawaii. The cocoa pod was a demo that he had received from one of his suppliers, Bob Cooper. About eight inches long, it was nearly all yellow, which indicated that it was ripe. On the inside would be 40 or so cocoa beans used to make the rich dark chocolate of Hawaii.

While they now buy most of their Hawaiian chocolate, Robin and Cathy have begun raising cocoa trees themselves. The beans have a 98 % germination rate and are grown in 4 x 4 rows in small areas. The trees will reach a height of 40 to 50 feet. The pods, yellow to red when ripe, do not drop but must be hand picked. The seeds inside are fermented and sun dried; then the shell is threshed off. Thus begins the process by which cocoa beans are transformed into those delicious chocolates we all know and love.

Chocolate is customarily made by blending beans from around the world. However, on the slopes above Kona, the Original Hawaiian Chocolate Factory has developed an exclusively Hawaiian chocolate. Owners Bob and Pam Cooper, pride themselves on keeping the cocoa Hawaiian – from their trees to the consumer. Consequently, they have set up the first and only processing facility for Hawaiian-grown cocoa beans. The Coopers welcome visitors to their farm, just call ahead for an appointment: (808) 322-2626.

If you are a chocolate lover, a visit to the Big I sland would be incomplete without a trip to Kailua Candy Company to sample the output of these two wonderful businesses. If you want a closer look at Hawaiian chocolates, try their web site *kailuacandy.com* or call them (1-800-622-2462) for a catalog. Remember: chocolate is good for your heart!





The first day of spring was once the time for taking the young virgins into the fields, there in dalliance to set an example in fertility for nature to follow. Now we just set the clocks an hour ahead and change the oil in the crankcase. ~E.B. White, "Hot Weather," One Man's Meat, 1944

Gardening is about enjoying the smell of things growing in the soil, getting dirty without feeling guilty, and generally taking the time to soak up a little peace and serenity. ~Lindley Karstens, noproblemgarden.com

Nature is slow, but sure; she works no faster than need be; she is the tortoise that wins the race by her perseverance.

-Henry David Thoreau, naturalist and author (1817-1862)



HERB OF THE YEAR CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

- · Origanum 'Santa Cruz' is an good choice for pots and planters.
- · O. vulgare 'Compacta' doesn't get as large as other types of oregano, but still produces quantities of dark green, fragrant foliage.
- · O. vulgaris 'Aureum' is a golden-leafed, ground cover type used primarily as a landscape plant, such as for edging paths or garden beds. It is edible with mild flavor.

Cultivation

Plants can be started from seeds, cuttings, or crown divisions. The very small seeds are very small and should be started indoors. Barely cover the seeds with a thin layer of sand or fine soil; they germinate better in light. Seeds should germinate in 4-14 days, depending on temperature and light conditions. Transplanted hardened-off seedlings to a permanent location when 2 to 3 inches high and when the temperatures are expected to remain above 45°F. Space plants 12-15" apart in rows 18" wide.

However, "oregano" is quite variable when grown from seed (partly owing to the confusion of names, but also to natural variation in carvacrol concentrations in individual plants), so you may prefer to purchase a plant from a reputable dealer. If you have a plant you like the smell or taste of, you can propagate it by taking cuttings or root divisions in the spring.

Oregano grows best in well-drained soil in full sun, while marjoram prefers moister soil but still in bright light. As with most herbs, average to poor soils produce the most concentrated flavors.

Pinch back any flower buds to keep the plants from getting rangy and going to seed. Fertilize yearly with a balanced plant food. You may wish to mulch plants to keep the foliage clean, but in our moist climate this invites root rot. Oregano has few pests, but can become infested with spider mites or aphids.

Harvest

You can start using the leaves, a few sprigs at a time, once the shoots reach 4-5" tall until the first frost (if outdoors) or all year long, if in pots inside. Essential oil levels are highest just before the plant blooms, so the best time to harvest is just before flowers begin to develop.

To harvest the entire plant, cut the stems down to the lowest two sets of leaves; the plant should leaf out again within two weeks. Tie in bunches and hang in a warm, dry, shaded place to dry. Once crisp, strip the leaves from the stems and store in an airtight container.

Dried oregano leaves often are more flavorful than the fresh, because the essential oils are more concentrated. Use twice the amount of the fresh herb as you would the dried. But marjoram tends to be better when used fresh.

Uses

The leaves of oregano and marjoram are used for flavoring foods, and are best added to hot dishes at the end of cooking to preserve the flavor and prevent bitterness. They are an important component of commercially-produced poultry-seasoning mixes.

Oregano is an essential flavoring in I talian cuisine, where its robust, pungent flavor is great in tomato sauces, on vegetables and grilled meats, and, of course, pizza. Other Mediterranean cuisines use less oregano, but it is of some importance for Spanish, North African and Greek cooking.

Marjoram is more often used in recipes of French or English origin. Its sweeter, milder flavor works in cheese, tomato, bean and egg dishes, salad dressings, seafood sauces, and on poultry.

Oregano also has some medicinal and cosmetic uses, such as in bath oils and sachets to help relieve aches and stiff joints. The dried flowers are used for fragrance in potpourris and perfumes.



Gardening Calendar

June 2, Thursday

Anchorage Garden Club Program - "Eating the Fruits of your Labor" - presented by Bob Boyer of the Pioneer Fruit Growers Association. 7:30 - 9 p.m., Pioneer Schoolhouse @ 3rd & Eagle St. - Information can be found @ 566-0539, or http://communitynews.adn.agclub

June 4, Saturday

*Anchorage Garden Club and Alaska Rose Society Plant Sale -Location: 3734 W 35th Ave., Anchorage Ak 99517 http://communitynews.adn.agclub

*Wildflower Garden Club Anual Plant Sale - 9 a.m.-5 p.m. - 7435 Old Harbor Ave.

June 4 - August 31, Wed & Sat

Guided Tours of the Alaska Botanical Garden Meet at the ABG entrance for a docent led tour. Call ahead (770-3692) if you have more than 15 people. (Master Gardeners will be leading these tours; if you want to volunteer to docent, give ABG a call.) Children's Tours - Wed & Sat 10am, Adult Tours - Wed & Sat 11:30am, Children \$3, Adults \$5, Families \$10

June 5 - 11

National Garden Week

June 7, 9, 14 & 16

"Floral Design Workshop" - noon - 3:00 p.m. Sharon Hoffbeck, Master Gardener. Fee: \$45 (each class includes creating a floral design participants can take home) Registration deadline: June 1. Contact James or Celeste in the Senior Center office, 258-7823.

June 8 - August 24, Wed

Storytime in the Garden. 6:30pm - Come hear nature stories. For kids age 3 to 5 with caregiver. Cancelled if raining.

June 20, Monday

AMGA Field Trip: Alaska Botanical Gardens - Learing about Junior Master Gardening Program through Show & Song, with Patrick Ryan - 7:30 p.m., ABG.

June 23, Thurs

Opening Gala at ABG - 4pm-7pm - Enjoy a fabulous buffet with wine and live music. Take a docent led tour and learn the secrets of the Garden. Chat with local gardening experts: Jeff Lowenfels, Mel Monsen, Verna Pratt, and Julie Riley.

\$15 per person (with Secret Garden Series), otherwise \$25, reservations required. Call ABG office 770-3692 for reservations.

June 23- Aug 11, Thurs eves

ABG - Secret Garden Series. Features gala opener and up to 7 private gardens. Chat with the owners in an unhurried atmosphere. Learn about the importance of hardscape, using native stone, starting seeds, dividing perennials, pruning specialty trees and how to grow a living wreath.

June 25 & 26, Saturday - Sunday

Alaska Botanical Garden 8th Annual Garden Fair - Sat 10am-6pm, Sun 10am-4pm

Both days include: invitational garden art show, craft and plant vendors, speakers, demonstrations, Children's Village, music and food. Plant Show for Alpine and Rock Plants. Admission \$5/person, \$15/family.

June 28 - August 17, Tuesdays and Thursdays

Alaska Botanical Garden Junior Master Gardener Camp - Handson group and individual activities for kids ages 6-14 with a focus on botany, horticulture and ecology. Let by Patrick Ryan, certified JMG Specialist. \$160 per child

Tuesdays 9am-12pm (ages 6-10)

Tuesdays 1pm-4pm (ages 6-10 returning)

Thursdays 9am-12pm (ages 11-14) Thursdays 1pm-4pm (ages 11-14)

Call ABG office 770-3692 for registration forms.

July 6, Wednesday

Wildflower Garden Club - Verna Pratt: Hatcher Pass Tour - Bring your cameras & notepads as we expand your knowledge of Alaska's alpine flora. Carpool @ Fred Meyers on DeBarr, left of the Freddy's sign.

July 9 & 10, Saturday

Blue Poppy Garden Tour - 10am-6pm, Sunday 10am-4pm; Come see professional growers Stan and Dona Ashmore's beautiful garden filled with many varieties of poppies, including the striking blue poppies. Mile 9 Wolverine Road, Palmer.

\$10 per person benefits ABG.

July 15, Friday

Lighthouse Garden Tea. 3pm-7pm - Explore fabulous gardens and beautiful views at a riverfront home in Eagle River; enjoy a light meal and live music. This year's theme is "Gone Fishing". Tickets \$30 (reservations required).

July 16 & 17

Coyote Garden Tour at Les Brake's home, mile 7 Willow/ FishhookRd., Willow. Sat 10am-5pm, Sunday 12pm-5pm. A visit to this garden featured in Horticulture Magazine, Sunset, Country Gardens, and Gardens I llustrated. Donations benefit ABG and Willow Garden Club.

July 18, Monday

AMGA Field Trip - Wilmarth Peony Gardens, 7 p.m., 3323 DeArmoun Road.

July 23, Saturday

Monsen Garden Tour at the home of Mel and Lisa Monsen.

MG Volunteer Opportunity

There are still opportunities available to assist with maintenance of the Pioneer Home beds and the Alaska



Botanical Garden Entry bed. This is a great opportunity to demonstrate what Master Gardeners are all about. Many of the residents at the Pioneer Home were once gardeners, and enjoy these beds immensely. They often stop by to thank the Master Gardeners for all their hard work. There are many visitors to the Alaska Botanical Garden, often from out of state. They often stop to comment or ask questions about gardening in Alaska. This is a golden opportunity to share 'gardening talk' with others, and to show your appreciation for the work Mary Shier & Judy Christianson put forth every spring to make this garden happen.

Master gardeners do not get hours credited to their 'pay back' obligation to CES; but the satisfaction of volunteering in a gardening setting makes your efforts well worth it.

Call or e-mail Linda Klinkhart to sign-up - 345-2672 or

gek@gci.net



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: amga@gci.net

AMGA Web Site: www.corecom.net/~gardener (The Newsletter will be on-line in living color!)

For information about membership or upcoming programs, contact:

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

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National Garden Week June 5 - 11



Inside this issue....

From the President's Corner
AMGA Donates Scholarship & Tools
Bent Wood Furniture, Anyone?
Wonderful Spring Time
Herb of the Year 2005: Oregan & Marjoram
The Chocolate Story
Gardening Calendar
MG Volunteer Opportunity



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