

ALASKA MASTER GARDENERS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER April 2006

From the President's Corner By Dana Klinkhart

Oh my, but it's good to be back in Anchorage! A road trip is just the ticket to get a perspective on how lucky we are to live in Alaska. After 6,000 miles of 'rolling along, singing a song', there is no place like home. With drought in the desert southwest this year, the wildflower displays were on hold and with the west coast inundated with rain, I watched the green appear in the form of moss on sidewalks. To keep abreast of activities of AMGA while I was traveling, our AMGA website (www.alaskamastergardeners.org) provided access to the newsletter as it was published on-line. Our webmaster, Gina Docherty keeps our web site current for us all. Thank you, Gina. Through e-mail, I was only a 'click' away and gardeners could contact me even though I was on the road. Upon my arrival here at home the sunshine and seed catalogs greeted me. When I went to the store to stock the pantry, packages of lily bulbs magically appeared in my shopping cart. How tickled I was to arrive in time to find Primula polyanthus available to bring home to brighten my kitchen window. Ahhhh spring! I love it!

I was home just in time to attend a meeting of the 'Garden Network' on March 22 at the Cooperative Extension Service. The meeting was energized with ideas from many of our south central gardening club representatives. Sharing resources was one of the suggestions. An example of a shared resource might include a club sponsoring a guest speaker at another's garden conference or working as a group to hold a Garden Fair for the purpose of sharing speaker costs as well as audiences. Our resources could also be combined to develop programs for youth in our area. The Junior Master Gardening Program is just one example. The list of ideas included managing liability insurance as a larger group. As a start in this network of linking communications, gardeners throughout the network are invited to submit articles on horticulture and gardening for the *Gardens North* publication. The Alaska Botanical Garden newsletter is published quarterly. The articles would reach readers beyond our Alaska Master Gardeners Association. So while you are creating articles for our own newsletter, consider submitting the article to the editor of *Gardens North* as well. Contact Cynthia Tomlinson at: <u>garden@alaskabg.org</u> for details.



Your annual AMGA Directory 2006 should be delivered to your mail box about the time that you receive this newsletter. This directory arrives with considerable effort from volunteers. Our directory chairman and editor is Sandra Harrington. Her attention to detail has made this directory one to be proud of. When asked how many hours it took to gather, compile and enter all of the information, Sandy said, "We don't want to even go there!" Thank you, Sandy for your hard work in creating our 2006 AMGA Annual Directory.



Begonia Information

A full house and a full stomach waited for members at the February Master Gardener meeting and potluck. Begonia Baskets were in the spotlight for our educational entertainment. Unfortunately, Scott Pettit was unable to attend due to vehicle problems, so Marge Olsen and Pat Anderson stepped up to the plate with information and handouts. They visited Scott while he was at work and received an impromptu lecture and training.

A few new varieties available include new picotee colors, daffodil formed flowers and bulbs called "On Tops" because they can tolerate more sun.

Marge and Pat got these timely tips from Scott: Start bulbs by the end of March. Choose bulbs that are firm, heavy, and with some growth already started. He uses 4/5 soil (ProMix) mixed with 1/5 humus (compost). Only fertilize once monthly. Scott uses 20-20-20 fertilizer. Keep the soil light, don't pack it in the container. He starts his bulbs in 6 inch pots and transplants them into larger containers when they are 4-6 inches tall. Add a stake at this time, as they will need it to support the heavy stalks & flowers.

"Tips" from members included using Lemon Pledge on the leaves to prevent powdery mildew helps to prevent the dreaded disease. Another product is "E-Rase RTU". In regard to using Messenger, one only needs to spray 1-2 leaves to get the same effect of more growth.

Suggestions for planting arrangements, use impatience, lobelia or million bells as companion plants.

The evening was concluded with door prizes, the men being the dominate winners: Frank Pratt, Jim Roberts, "Lucky" George Patrawke, Elizabeth Holt and Pat Anderson.

Applied Organics By Marge Olson

Tom Hoosier from Applied Organics gave us a very good overview of using compost tea instead of chemical fertilizers at the March 20 AMGA Meeting. He gave us hints never heard before for the people who buy compost tea and apply it themselves. Use warm (70 degree) water to make the tea. You can use an aquarium pump to keep the mixture aerating so the brew lasts longer. Did you know that you have to feed the little microbes? They like baby cereal. You need to apply mulch to the ground to keep the little darlings happy and fed in their new home. Below ground is a very busy place while everybody down there is pulling down mulch and other yummies to keep their little tummies fed. This is not a story of spray and forget. He also suggests aerating the lawn to get oxygen down to the roots. He drew a picture of the aerator that he made to keep the brew in good shape. He handed out a book list of informative reading about the benefits of compost tea and how it works. Linda Klinkhart had put out a call for refreshments - what a feast we had! They really outdid themselves. One lady asked if we could eat first since it smelled so good. Carol Ross was voted in as Board member by unanimous vote to replace a member that had resigned.



. . .And We Think We Have Problems by Jo Anne Banta

Aloha from your roving reporter!

Hawaii is chock-full of invasive species. From Asia, Africa, South America to Australia, anything that grows, simply thrives in the I slands. Unchecked, many of these plants are slowly overtaking and dominating the native shrubs, ferns and forests.

I read the Master Gardeners' column which appears every Sunday in the <u>West Hawaii Today</u>, and I usually get a kick out of comparing it to Alaska gardening: such advice as using macadamia nut hulls for mulch, selecting great orchids for your garden, and controlling the hibiscus mite. However, today's article on invasive species really grabbed me.

When we watch <u>Lost</u>, which is filmed on Oahu, the plants we see as the characters run through the forest were all brought from other countries, most within the last 200 years. The latest threat is the night-blooming jasmine, a shrub that grows quickly up to twelve feet and chokes out everything else. The sweet smell of its flowers entices buyers; but, beware, birds eat the white berries and spread them uncontrollably. The berries, incidentally, are poison to pets and humans. As in Alaska, Hawaiian gardeners are advised not to buy the plant – and to get rid of it if they have it in their gardens.

A discussion of invasive species wouldn't be complete without mentioning the local culprit, "the coqui frog." Less than one inch long, this little nocturnal creature with the very loud voice, disturbs not only the ecology but also the sleep of those in his area. He lives from ground to tree top, from sea level to 4,000 feet elevation, and in virtually any moisture (like slugs, maybe?!) . When an infestation begins, the combined loud <u>Ko KEE</u> sound of the males is nearly deafening. Hawaiians are now using citric acid or hydrated lime to kill them. A newspaper article shows a home-made contraption, a plastic tube with a plastic bag taped to its end for night time "frog hunting." I magine, when you're out there with your ammonia-water hunting slugs, you could be "tubin' up the frogs."



Perpetual Gardening – Alaska – by Herb Spencer MG

I still vividly remember my first garden. It was about 10 feet wide by 20 feet long and I turned the soil with a shovel. I was nine years old. Although I knew almost nothing about gardening, the magic of California soil, California sun, and sheer innocence combined to work their wonders. That tiny garden produced hundreds of sweet pea pods [Most of which never made it to the pot. Sweet peas on the vine: Yum!], corn, carrots, cucumbers, squash and strawberries.

Back then I knew nothing about fertilizers; I'd never heard of compost, insecticides, or of any of the myriad pests and diseases that could infest or infect a garden. My 25 cents-per-week allowance didn't allow me to buy more than a few seed packets or daffodil bulbs (my mother's favorite flower).

That was forty years ago. I hope that I 've learned a lot about gardening since then, but knowledge can be the proverbial "two-edged sword". Blissful innocence can be replaced by worry: "I s it too dry for my roses/flowers/vegetables?", "I t's too early for those leaves to change color! What pest/disease/stress is after my roses/flowers/vegetables this time?!"

I'll never have a garden that was as magic as that first one.

I signed up to take the 2005 Master Gardener's course at the Sears Garden Fair last April, then sat on pins-and-needles waiting to apply, to be accepted, and then to actually start.

Once I was notified that I'd been accepted, I borrowed MG Linda Slack's [1993] Master Gardener's manual and began to read.

Do you have any idea of how humbling it can be to find out that you know far less than you think you do – especially after 40 years of experience in the subject matter?

My gardening had specialized over the years. I'd become enamored with roses. I'm still enamored with roses; no other plant has been cultivated for so long, has as many cultivars – with more created annually, and has such a plethora of scents.

Generally speaking, roses are "hard-keepers" outside of Alaska. They've been cultivated, crossed, and hybridized so much and for so long that an entire ecology of pests and diseases now exists that prefer roses as a food-of-choice. [Many of those pests and diseases don't survive the climate in Alaska, so the real challenge here is a comparatively simple one: overwintering.] It was so easy to get caught up in their culture to the point that I seldom took the time to literally enjoy them.

I needed a study-aid and I needed one fast!

So I built one. It's now called "Perpetual Gardening" (<u>www.PerpetualGardening.com</u>). It's pretty good... In January of this year, the Alaska Botanical Garden linked to it, and in doing so called it the "most comprehensive" online Alaskan gardening resource.

I didn't know they had done that until Julie Riley called to let me know about it. But the ABG didn't stop there: in February they decided to add a second link from their calendar page because the events calendar in Perpetual Gardening is also the most comprehensive statewide gardening calendar on the web.

Much of the information on the site will look familiar because it <u>should</u> be familiar; it's the same information you can get – if you don't have it already – from any of the UAF/Cooperative Extension Service offices.

Currently the site contains a list of Alaskan garden clubs, garden suppliers, information on over 400 plants, a botanical glossary, references, UAF/CES publications list, [self-written] articles on subjects from mulches to rose care, a chat room, a bulletin board, and more. It's still a work-in-progress, so I invite you to watch it grow!

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Topless Trees Are Indecent International Society of Arboriculture (ISA)



Trees must be pruned sometimes to avoid interference with utility lines, buildings, or parts of the surrounding environment. Whenever pruning to reduce a tree's size is required, avoid the harmful practice of topping.

Topping involves removing all parts of a

tree above a certain height with no consideration for its structure or health. This method is not a viable method of height reduction but only a temporary and ineffective solution that actually makes a tree more hazardous in the long run.

The International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) explains why topping is not an acceptable pruning technique. "Topping is probably the most damaging and detrimental thing a person can do to a tree," says Sharon Lilly, Director of Education for ISA. "Topped trees are ugly, and the harmful effects usually endure for the life of the tree."

The destructive effects of topping include: "Starved" trees - Topping often removes 50-100 percent of the leafbearing crown robbing the tree of food-creating leaves. Creation of weak shoots- As a defense mechanism, a tree will quickly grow (up to 20 feet in one year) foodproducing shoots that are weak and prone to breaking, resulting in a more hazardous tree. Added stress for the tree-If a tree does not have enough stored energy it will not be able to produce the chemicals required to defend the multiple wounds from a disease or insect attack. "Sunburned" trees- The leaves within a tree's crown absorb sunlight. Without this protection, branches and trunks are exposed to high levels of light and heat which can burn the tissues beneath the bark. Poor aesthetics- Topping removes the ends of branches often leaving unsightly stubs, and destroying the natural form of the tree. A tree that has been topped can never fully regain its natural form. Higher maintenance costs- Trees that have been topped will need pruning more often, or may die and need to be removed. Topped trees are potential liabilities and can reduce property value.

To help avoid these harmful side effects I SA advises that trees should be pruned according to the American National Standards Institute's (ANSI) pruning standards. An I SA Certified Arborist should quote approved ANSI pruning methods to their customers. Beware of a tree service that offers to top your tree; they may not be up to date on the latest pruning methods. The International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), headquartered in Champaign, III., is a nonprofit organization supporting tree care research and education around the world. As part of ISA's dedication to the care and preservation of shade and ornamental trees, it offers the only internationally-recognized certification program in the industry. For more information, and to find a local ISA Certified Arborist, visit www.treesaregood.com.



The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the eyes of others only a green thing that stands in the way. Some see nature all ridicule and deformity... and some scarce see nature at all. But to the eyes of the man of imagination, nature is imagination itself.

-William Blake, poet, engraver, and painter (1757-1827)

PERPETUAL GARDENING CONT FROM PAGE 3

The list of things that the site does NOT contain is equally important: There are no pop-ups and no spy-ware; nowhere on the site are you asked for personal information, so there's no risk of identity theft. [The chat room and bulletin board do ask you to register, but I strongly suggest that you provide fictitious information in doing so. I do nothing with the information, so I don't care what you enter!]

There is also no advertising on the site, although I ve specifically set up "Gardening I tems for Sale" and "Nongardening I tems for Sale" areas in the bulletin board. Use them if you want to do so. Keep in mind, though, that the costs of building, running, and maintaining the site come out of my own not-very-deep pocket so I may allow some lowprofile advertising to recoup those costs.

The response I ve gotten to the website has been incredible. The ABG endorsed the site; visitors began arriving at (to me) incredible rates. In December 2005 the site had 1,990 "hits" although I had not registered it with any of the search engines. After a slight drop [seasonal?] in January, the site has rebounded. The number of "hits" for March has already exceeded 2,000 and there are still ten days left in the month!

I ve built several websites over the past decade most of which were of little or no interest to me personally. In taking Alaska gardening "virtual" I ve been pleasantly surprised by the response by visitors to the site.

More importantly, I get a [much-reduced] reminder of the magic I felt from creating that first garden so long ago...







Central Peninsula MG News By Rosemary Kimball

It's official! Spring is on its way. The DOT has plowed the roads to accommodate the melt water.

Another sign of imminent spring was Julie Riley who packed people in for her talk on herbs mid-March. Seating was at a premium and if you were late the hunt was on for a chair. I 've always grown some herbs but she's expanded my horizons and I can hardly wait for the snow to quit and get busy! And snowing it is, albeit gently, on this first day of spring. But last week with the blue sky and sunshine (never mind the -18° F in the morning) without exception everyone grinned and said this was their favorite time of the year.

Our next speaker will be Bill Campbell on April 20th about potatoes and the late blight. Late blight, Phytopthera infestans, is the potato disease that sent the I rish that didn't die of starvation to the United States. That was its only beneficial effect I could possibly think of. Late blight is found on the Solanaceae family and what we have here on the peninsula are potatoes, tomatoes, peppers and eggplant. As long as your plants are started from seed, vou're probably in the clear. BUT, and it is a big one, don't buy tomatoes and peppers from the Big Box stores because you don't know their provenance. Maybe I should have capitalized that whole previous sentence. There is a wonderful web site by going to www.lateblight.org maintained by Michigan State University. Go there! And if you come down to hear Bill, you will get some nifty handouts.

We don't have any reported cases of late blight on the peninsula but our seed potatoes come from the Valley and it is there. On the peninsula we might want to reconsider just what we will use for seed potatoes this year. Mine, in the root cellar, look better and better. Another thing about seed potato acquisition is to not buy any from Outside- and DON'T ask your Aunt Minnie in Dubuque for any of hers. Let's keep the peninsula as free of the blight as possible. This stuff spreads like wildfire via water and air. I don't have any, and I don't want yours! 'Nuff. I'll rant more later.

I ended up my Thaw at the Western Winter Study Weekend of the North American Rock Garden Society in Sidney-bythe-Sea on Vancouver I sland B.C. Now what I know about rock gardens would fit on the head of a pin with space left over, but since my neighbor, MG Mark White, gave me a subscription to the Society 5 years ago for Christmas, I haven't missed a study weekend. I learn much about plants that I can never grow up here but it's concentrated plants/ talk and stretches the mind! This year I went with two other Alaska Rock Garden Society members, MGs Carmel Tysver and Mary Jo Burns. We went early, stayed late and had the best time. There were all sorts of vendors and wonderful plants, local members' open gardens, public gardens and wineries. And by the time this gets into circulation, my husband and I will be off to the big island of Hawaii to house sit for three weeks. The people for whom we will be house sitting are the consummate tropical gardeners. Harry sent me a packet of black pepper corns from his first crop last year...

Going to have a wonderful time and I won't rub it in.

What a rock gardener does with a broken pot.....



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







- Joyce Powers submits the following quote from Marcel Proust: *People who make us happy are charming gardeners who make our souls blossom.*

- According to a UAF trial, the snap bean 'Concesa' has a much better quality (is less fibrous) than 'Provider' which CES has been recommending to gardeners for years.

- Thanks to MG Nickel LeFleur for unearthing information on Anchorage's first potato chip factory that was in business in the early '50s.

- Mary Shier won a potato gun at the Potato Lover's Bash so best stay on her good side.

- There are now 7 farms in Alaska that are "Certified Organic" and 4 coffee roasters. (It costs big bucks to pay for an inspector to come up from Washington.)

- It is estimated that 90% of the known species of insects in the world are beneficial.

- Scented geraniums are the 'Herb of the Year' for 2006. They are available in many fun aromas. MG Kathy Feathergill Calvin reports good overwintering success at Forget-me-not Nursery in Indian. (The plants are tender perennials and can be treated as a houseplant during the winter or can be made to go dormant like an overwintering fucshia.)

- Recluse Gardens and the Recluse Garden Center businesses are for sale.

- Congratulations to Joe Jordan who is now the Anchorage CES Office Manager.

- An article on delphinium in the first edition of *Alaska Home* quotes delphinium guru Catherine Renfro (MG) and is illustrated with a beautiful lavendar flower photograph taken by Annie Nevaldine.

- IRT plastic mulch is no longer available. A similar product for sale in Anchorage is SMR-Olive. When is someone going to teach these plastic mulch companies that a catchy name makes good marketing sense?

- It's not too late to decide to go to the Southeast Alaska Gardening Conference in Juneau, April 27-29. The Alaska State Federation of Gardening Clubs is also holding their statewide convention in Juneau April 29-30. You should be able to get to Juneau on a \$200 "constituent" airfair since the State Legislature is still in session. - "An act banning the importation, transfer, and cultivation of orange hawkweed and purple loosestrife" is currently in the State Legislature. Check it out at http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/start.asp. (Type in HB 324 as the "Bill Root".)

- From the newsletter Avant Gardener: Cornus canadensis has been named "the fastest plant of earth" by researchers at Williams College in western Massachusetts, who found the flowers of this ground cover open in less then half a millisecond and shoot their pollen at 800 times the force astronauts experience on launching! Whow! To think we have such a star up here!



Spring is when you feel like whistling even with a shoe full of slush.

~Doug Larson

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)

Mulch Alert

If you use mulch around your house be very careful about buying mulch this year. After the Hurricane in New Orleans many trees were blown over. These trees were then turned into mulch and the state is trying to get rid of tons and tons of this mulch to any state or company who will come and haul it away. So it will be showing up in Home Depot and Lowes at dirt cheap prices with one huge problem; Formosan Termites will be the bonus in many of those bags. New Orleans is one of the few areas in the country were the Formosan Termites has gotten a strong hold and most of the trees blown down were already badly infested with those termites. Now we may have the worst case of transporting a problem to all parts of the country that we have ever had. These termites can eat a house in no time at all and we have no good control against them, so tell your friends that own homes to avoid cheap mulch and know were it came from.

http://www.agctr.lsu.edu/termites/



Invasive Plants Book

CES no longer has a supply of **Invasive Plants of Alaska**. If you would like a copy, please contact Jeff Heys at the National Park Service in Anchorage (644-3451), or Eric Wade with the Alaska Association of Conservation Districts in Palmer, 373-7923.

4-H Fundraiser Flowers

The Anchorage 4-H Council will once again be selling hanging baskets and flats of annuals. Coupons are available by contacting 4-H & Youth Development agent Marianne Kerr in the Anchorage CES office, 786-6300.

Gardening Book Review

Costco has a great book on sale for \$23.99, called <u>"The</u> <u>Ultimate Plant Book - Every plant you need for your</u> <u>garden.</u>" It's over 3" thick and is pretty heavy, hard back and the I llustrations are wonderful. It has sections on trees, shrubs, annuals, perennials, grasses, sedges, bamboos, fruit trees, nut trees, other fruits, bulbs, corms, tubers, cacti and succulents, veggies and herbs, climbers and creepers, orchids, ferns, palms, and cyads. The plant pages have color, blooming season, fragrance, height, width, a hardiness zone and frost tolerance information for each one. It has seasonal calendars, cultivation guidelines, and general gardening information. The pictures alone were enough to let it jump into my basket! A feast for the eyes in the winter in AK! Linda McCarthy

Internet Seed Exchange

[email to AMGA web site]

Seedmessenger@yahoo.com extends an invitation for AMGA members to join the fastest growing free seed exchange community on the Internet. Members exchange seeds as well as gardening tips and information. Apart from the main SeedMessenger group, their are separate communities for Canada, United States, United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. Happy Gardening.

Philip from SeedMessenger

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

Gardening Calendar

Tuesday, April 11

"Dahlias for Your Garden" 7 - 8:30 p.m. Bud Dubay, Master Gardener. Inlet View Community School. See <u>http://</u> <u>www.akcommunityschools.org/classes.asp</u> to register.

Saturday, April 15

Spring Garden Show, Mall at Sears, 10 a.m. – 7 p.m. Join in the excitement of spring with Anchorage's many garden clubs. MG display, orchid and African violet sales, kids' marigold planting with the Wildflower Garden Club and more.

Monday, April 17

AMGA meeting 7-9 p.m. "Lawn Care: Answers to commonly asked questions", Chris Mizelle, UAA Grounds Department & Master Gardener, Anchorage CES conference room, 786-6300.

Thursday, April 20

Herb Study Group meeting, "2006 Herb of the Year: Scented Geraniums" (and getting organized for spring at the ABG herb garden). 7 p.m. CES conference room, 786-6300.

Wednesdays, Saturday, April 19, 26, 29

Garden Design Workshop - Learn about Landscape Design, create a working plan; Lecture-style presentations, slides and handouts. \$225 - Signup by April 16th.Call 279-3688 or mail:

ehuggins@earthscape.alaska.com

Thursday April 20

Herb Study Group meeting, "2006 Herb of the Year: Scented Geraniums" (and getting organized for spring at the ABG herb garden). 7:00 p.m., CES conference room, call to confirm date, 786-6300.

Friday - Sunday, April 21 – 23

Alaska Women's Show, 11 a.m. – 6 p.m., Sullivan Arena. "Dahlias" taught by Bud Dubay, 1:00 p.m. on Friday, April 21.

Tuesday, April 25

"Growing Strawberries & Raspberries" 6:30 - 9 p.m. Patty Joyce Nedland, Master Gardener. Abbott Loop Community School. See <u>http://www.akcommunityschools.org/classes.asp</u> to register.

Thursday – Saturday, April 27 – 29

Southeast Alaska Gardening Conference & Alaska State Federation of Garden Clubs meeting, Centennial Hall, Juneau. Early registration, \$80. See <u>http://</u>

www.akcommunityschools.org/classes.asp to register.

<u>Tuesday, May 4</u>

Anchorage Garden Club - "Birding Hotspots", given by Sirena Brownlee (Anchorage Audubon Society). Pioneer Schoolhouse, 3rd and Eagle, Anchorage; 7:30 Public I nvited.

Monday - Wednesday, May 17-19

Pacific Northwest Community Tree Conference Conference for citizens, arborists, urban foresters, planners, landscape architects, and public land managers to learn ways to develop and maintain successful community forestry programs. Millennium Hotel, Anchorage; Conference fee \$125-\$150 includes lunches. Information and registration forms available at http://www.dnr.state.ak.us/forestry/pdfs/

PNW022806conf_flier.pdf or from patricia_joyner@dnr.state.ak.us



For information about membership or upcoming programs, contact:

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MGs Mary Jo Burns and Carmel Tysver on the ferry from Vancouver I sland [see Central Peninsula MG News article]

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