

Anchorage Chapter



Volume 10, Issue 3

ALASKA MASTER GARDENERS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER March 2008

From the President Beth Schlabaugh

Welcome March! I hope that last month's warm weather didn't catch too many of you or your plants unaware and unprotected. As many of you may know the warm spell caught me off guard. A slip on the ice, a visit to the hospital for surgery, and a pair of crutches later... I can honestly say I'm feeling better today than last week, but I'm desperately wishing for spring!

Joyce Palmer will be leaving her position on the AMGA board due to time and schedule conflicts. She has graciously agreed to stay on in her position with the conference planning committee until the spring conference is over. We thank Joyce for her great support and many, many hours of service to the Master Gardeners. We wish her the best.

The floor is now open for nominations to the vacant board position. Do you know someone who you think would be a great board member? Are you interested in serving on the board? Please contact me by email for more information or to submit a name. My email address is 2boysmom@ak.net. I look forward to hearing from you!

Be sure to mark your calendar early for the Alaska Master Gardener Conference and Garden Market "In The Zone", May 8 - 9. The conference committee is working hard to ensure an entertaining, informative conference. Volunteers are needed to assist with making this happen. Please enjoy Julie Riley's article this month on Cisco Morris. Cisco is one of the keynote speakers for the Conference. It's not too early to register!

The Alaska Botanical Garden's Spring Conference on Sustainability will be happening this month, on March 28th and 29th. The date was listed incorrectly in last month's newsletter. Per ABG's website: *Lee Reich, author of Growing Fruits in Your Backyard, Weedless Gardening, and Uncommon Fruits for Every Garden, will detail a four part system of sustainable garden practices that affect the web of life above and below the ground. (Keynote talk follows ABG Annual Meeting reports; coffee & cookies available). Attendance is free and open to the public.* Registration Forms are available for download at alaskabg.org/or via the ABG office at 3701 E. Tudor Rd., Anchorage AK 907-770-3692. It should be a great way to start off the 2008 gardening season.

A slight change to our regularly schedule AMGA Meeting: Monday, March 17th, Sally Karabelnikoff will be speaking about Asiatic Lilies, followed by Amelia Walsh demonstrating how to divide dahlias. All will be taking a dahlia bulb home! Don't miss it!

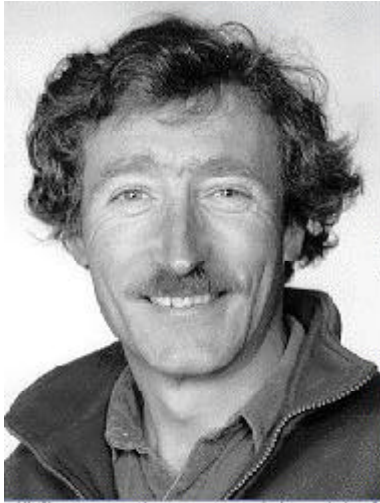




Ciscoe Morris to Open MG Conference

Julie Riley, Extension Horticulture Agent

Seattle author, radio/television personality and Master Gardener Ciscoe Morris is one of three keynote speakers scheduled to speak at the spring Master Gardener conference. The two presentations he'll be giving are "Designing the Ohh-la-la Garden" and "Master Gardeners are Great!"



Every year a couple of Master Gardeners leave Alaska permanently and head outside for the Pacific Northwest where they think the gardening is easy. Since we are still in the throes of winter here, I thought I'd share part of Ciscoe's web page "Protecting Plants from Winter Cold Damage", <http://www.ciscoe.com>. Apparently there are plants in Seattle that require winter protection...

Ciscoe writes, "especially if we get blasted with one of those horrible arctic cold fronts. Many kinds of evergreen plants, and even some of the roses we buy, may not be hardy enough to make it through one of our really cold winters. You might be a plant maniac like me. I have that uncontrollable drive to plant things that really don't belong in this climate."

Does this sound familiar? Ciscoe confesses, "About a third of the plants in my garden are those rare, 'must haves' that can barely make it though even a mild winter. Of course, the plants most likely to die are the ones that always cost the most!"

"There is no one way to protect your plants from cold. ... Sometimes all you have to do is pot it up and put it in the garage. Sometimes it takes elaborate structures to enable the plant to survive."

And here comes the story...

"A good friend of mine grew up in New Jersey in a Croatian family. When my friend was young, his immigrant uncles loved figs and were determined to grow them in New Jersey, even though it was way too cold for figs there. They built giant wooden structures, 25ft tall by 20ft wide, over the figs to get them through the winter. These structures were heavily insulated and then the whole structure was covered with aluminum foil. I guess these

structures looked like huge nuclear missile launching pads in the front yard.

"This did not go over real well with their wives. They did everything possible to make the uncles lives so miserable they would finally give up and grow apples or some other fruit that did not require these horrendous silos to protect them. As I understand it, my friend's uncles never gave in. They got their figs, but life was anything but pleasant at their houses. No Brussels sprouts casseroles for those guys!"

As far as vegetables go, brussels sprouts are a much beloved topic of Ciscoe's. He has amassed 30 brussels sprouts recipes which can be found at <http://www.ciscoe.com/boogs.html>. You might think about sharing some of your favorites when he's here.

Seed Planting 101

By Jane Baldwin

Our evening began with a welcome note from new AMGA president, Beth Schlabaugh, and an invitation to partake in the now traditional February potluck, which as usual, provided an excellent range of food, enjoyed by all. Thanks to all the folks who brought the goodies. Noted was Julie Riley cruising through the crowd with water pitcher and coffee pot refilling cups. Good food, good service, good company, good conversation: can't get much better than that!



Mary Shier's Seed Planting 101 program included excellent basics for both the beginner and the experienced gardeners. Her multi-paged handout was full of good stuff: seed planting particulars right on through the process to transplanting your seedlings. Also included in the handout were directions for creating a relatively simple to construct PVC light stand, copies of worksheet tables for seed starting dates and growing notes for commonly grown vegetables, herbs and flowers and a method for keeping track of your seeds packets on hand. In choosing seeds to start, we were reminded that we should read the seed packets for details like planting depth, light (don't cover with planting medium) or darkness (put newspaper over the plant flat) needed for germination; to keep in mind the space we have for growing them – not to mention what might be suitable for your garden (know your yard's microclimates!). Label, label, label each container.



Mary always has good and practical tips and techniques she has acquired over the years. Besides seed warming mats and cables, who knew you could provide bottom heat for germinating seeds with a heating pad, electric skillet or a warming tray? With folded towel placed on top of the heating pad, the plant flat is placed on top of the towel. Heat is monitored by placing a thermometer between the plant flat and the towel, adjusting the depth of towel layer and/or heating map accordingly. [Be sure to observe accepted safety precautions for water and electrical mixes; the heating pad should not be totally enclosed with the towel or get wet – comment from my resident electrical engineer – jb.] Once your seeds have germinated, get them off the bottom heat as excess heat at that stage may contribute to elongating/stretching of your seedlings much as inadequate light will do.

Mary had a really nifty bulb/pump squirter for gentle watering of planted seeds. Of course she bought it many, many years back at the now no longer existing Alaska Greenhouses – so if anyone finds a contemporary source for something similar, please let the rest of us know.

Winning Mary tip of the evening: to pick up those tiny misdirected seeds, wet the tip of a pencil and touch the seed – voila! – like magic, the seed adheres to the pencil tip and can be moved to where you want it.

CHRIS BEYTES, A GREAT GUEST SPEAKER

by Nickel LaFleur

Congratulations to Fairbanks folks (from the 27th Alaska Greenhouse & Nursery Conference held in Fairbanks on January 30th and 31st) for starting the conference off with Chris Bytes, Editor of GrowerTalks and Editorial Director of Ball Publishing!!!

In his talk about “Hot Trends for Growers & Retailers”, he encouraged us to look at large retailers who don’t sell our products for ideas on what looks good with our product. He pointed out magazines such as Crate ‘n Barrel and Tiffany’s where greenery was mixed in the photo, not to sell the greenery, but to enhance their product. Why not take advantage of their creative ideas and incorporate them into yours?

This thought brought in the concept of Gardening vs. Decorating. He talked about the people who like all the pretty flowers and greenery but have no idea, interest or time to take it on. You know the type: the people who are interested in the end result and not the process; they aren’t interested in the botanical names; more apt to be looking for plants to be put on decks and in pots rather than in the ground; immediate gratification is important. To bring this type of clientele to your nursery, Chris suggested outdoor

furniture to rest in, a coffee shop to give them another place to spend their money, and lots of signage and pictures so shoppers will know what the plant will look like at maturity.

In Chris’ opinion, two great flower shows on the cutting edge of what will be “in style in the US” are held in Amsterdam in October each year and suggested everyone make the trip. He also advised attending the Pack Trials held in California in March to be on top of what is hot in horticulture for the upcoming planting season.

Instead of hearing about ‘organics’, Chris said that ‘organic’ was being replaced with “sustainability”. Along with all the pluses of being organic, sustainability seeks to provide profits and maximizes employees well being. He left the crowd with the new buzz word to replace “cocooning or nesting” – it’s “hiving”! I’m “hiving” at home in Anchorage, paging through all the magazines and catalogs I can find dreaming about gardening. Hope you’re staying warm and dreaming of spring, too.

**In case you missed this quiz at the
January AMGA Meeting, here it is:**

Quiz on Evergreens

by Patricia Joyner

True or false:

1. All evergreens are conifers.
2. All conifers are evergreen.
3. All evergreens have needles.
4. Conifers have flowers.

What am I?

5. My needles are sharp and square. I am a _____.
6. My needles are flat and friendly. I am a _____.
7. My needles come in packages of 2, 3, or 5. I am a _____.
8. If you had to shake hands with a fir or spruce, which should you choose?
Why?

Answers on page 5





Indoor Composting

By Lynden Grothe



Growing up in Kodiak, my family composted. We had a pile in the very far corner of our backyard where we threw our organics and shredded paper. My mom would turn it and the chickens would go stand in it to find worms and other creepy crawlies. I learned early on to separate my compostables from regular trash.

I've read multiple articles that claim composting is the "best thing you can do for the environment." Not only does it reduce the volume being added to our already overflowing landfills but it breaks down biodegradable waste to create a product that builds and enriches your existing soil. When I left home for college in 1997, I lived in a student apartment complex with three other girls and was at a loss as to what to do with my organic garbage. It was against my nature to throw it in the trash. So I searched the web and found an indoor composter. My early attempt at vermiculture produced fruit flies galore and one day a worm exodus that sent my roommate screaming down the street to the apartment managers. After the worm exodus debacle I knew I had to learn to manage my compost.

The first thing I tackled was keeping the worms in the bin. I learned that worms will desert their posts if the PH of the bin is too high or too low. This can be controlled by balancing the "greens" and "browns". Browns are leaves, sawdust, egg shells, the newspaper or your shredded term paper. Greens are the stuff that came from the kitchen like broccoli stalks, coffee grounds, apple cores, etc. Not all organic material can go into an indoor compost bin. Things such as dairy products, meat, kitty poo, plastics, or grease and oils are niche-niche. There are various reasons these items can not be added to an indoor compost. One of the most important for me was smell. Since I lived in a small living space with three other women I couldn't risk my bin grossing them out too much. If you only add the correct things to your compost it will smell mossy like the forest. If the bin stinks it is because stuff is rotting instead of getting eaten by the worms; in which case you just need to add less stuff to the bin until your worm population is high enough to process it. Other things you shouldn't add to your indoor compost bin are anything treated with chemicals, such as glossy paper or magazines, waste sprayed with pesticides, or treated wood products.



The second thing I had to work on was the cloud of fruit flies that emerged from the bin. I was advised to freeze my fruit scraps in the freezer and then thaw in the refrigerator before adding it to the compost. That is fine and good until you get one single fruit fly and then it doesn't matter. I would recommend going this route because it does slow the introduction of fruit fly larvae to your compost bin. However the fruit in your fruit basket should be refrigerated or kept in closed containers to keep from introducing fruit flies into your home.

The best way to control already present fruit flies is to make a composter cozy with fuzzy fake fur material. If you turn the material so the fuzzy fur is towards the compost bin, the flies that manage to eek out of the bin will get trapped in the fur. The cozy needs to be tight enough as to not allow very much room for the fruit flies to crawl around. I made mine by simply cutting out a circle of fabric and sewing it to a rectangular piece to produce a cylinder. I then added a draw string to the middle and to the bottom so I could pull the cozy tight around the bin. Now you can't even tell that my bin is a bin. It looks like fancy cat furniture and my cats like to sit on it and look out the window further adding to the effect. It is a little bit awkward but I usually carry my compost bin outside to add waste. The worms don't mind the quick blast of cold air and any escapee fruit flies meet their demise in the Alaskan winter cold. I've also thought of adding a strip of Velcro to the cozy so it would be easier to get on and off the bin. However my next project is adding wheels to the bottom of my composter so I can transport it outside easier.



If you need any more information on indoor composting there are multiple excellent sites on the world wide web. If you want more information on how to make a composter cozy you can contact me at lynden.carola@gmail.com Happy Composting!!!





Central Peninsula Master Gardener News

By Rosemary Kimball

February was a loooong month. I've killed my neighbor's pot of Berggarten sage in order to save it from going dormant in a root cellar and maybe surviving the winter. My seeds are ordered and are mostly here (would someone tell me why I ordered 9 different packets of tomatoes and 7 packets of peppers?), my refrigerator is clean and spices and herbs in alphabetical order. That's long for the shortest month of the year. But for some reason I feel uncommonly energetic at the end of February. I feel like winter's back is broken - whoooopeeeeeee! And I have the prospect of going to the Winter Study Weekend of the North American Rock Garden Society in Vancouver BC with Carmel Tysver, Florene Carney and Sue Kent from the Central Peninsula Garden Club...all good women to be around. We have lists of nurseries, open gardens, stores and restaurants that are possible sites for visits. We know where the closest Trader Joe's is too.

My rescued Brunnera macrophylla that started growing in the dark cold root cellar continued growing so I had to haul it out and give it light. It is, at present, a B. microphylla but it liked coming out of the closet and it bloomed lavishly with little blue flowers. The Brigus potatoes in that corner of the cellar were starting to sprout at least two months early. None of the other varieties have started sprouting yet so something is different but I sure don't know what.

After the prolonged cold spell- down to 30 below at our house in the mornings- we got all those days when it was above freezing, even at night. Anything that was laid on the snow when it was dry and fluffy and wasn't removed when it turned to slush, is frozen in for the duration.

With that nice fluffy snow we can keep track of the comings and goings in our driveway. The snowshoe hares are out in force for the first time in a long time! That probably is an indication that curry is on our menu for the spring as they are the best of the meats we have for that. I keep looking for lynx paws but there are none- so far.

Talked to the MG Hilo, Hawaii, travelers. They said before they left that they would get busy as soon as they got back. Not so. They're enjoying the winter sun, a continuation of the Hawaiian sun, just colder. Margaret Simon's observation was that she is very glad we have a short

season up here after watching stuff being cut back and hauled away in Hilo. That's WORK and she felt one could kill themselves doing it. Margaret said that her best buy in Hawaii was the \$5 she paid at the Farmers' Market for a bouquet of anthuriums and other flowers for their hotel room. It lasted their entire stay of 10 days.

The Garden Club was to have a potato tasting of over a dozen varieties in February. The program was called on account of weather. It was clear, still and the coldest evening (-11°F) of the year. You don't run 4 propane burners to cook the tubers and hope to have them get warm, much less done! A panel of potato growers was substituted. I was supposed to be on it but the heater in the car died that night and as I drove towards town with the window open and had to stop twice to scrape the windshield- inside and out- in 7 miles and decided that a glass of wine at home in front of the wood stove was a lot safer to my physical health.

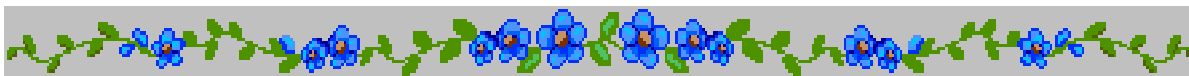
And that's it from the Central Peninsula. Things will start picking up in tempo soon and we will dream of the wonderfully calm days of winter non-gardening.

*No two gardens are the same.
No two days are the same in one garden.
~Hugh Johnson*

Quiz on Evergreen Answers

1. False. There are many broadleaved plants that are evergreen such as some rhododendrons and Alaska native Labrador tea.
2. False. Larch, common baldcypress, and dawn redwood are some the conifers that lose their needles each fall.
3. False. See number 1.
4. True, although they don't look like what we usually think of as a flower.
5. Spruce
6. Fir
7. Pine
8. Choose a fir because the needles are soft while a spruce are sharp and prickly.





Bird Chatter

- Rita Jo Shoultz's pick for a favorite plant to grow from seed is listed in the Feb/March issue of Horticulture magazine along with 34 other experts from around the country. The article includes a beautiful photo of her *Primula auricula*, too.
- Wayside Gardens has compartmentalized their customers into zones. Messages for Zone 3 gardeners now show up in Julie Riley's email box.
- The USDA Agricultural Research Service at Utah State's Bee Biology & Systematics Laboratory is researching how to manage wild bees in a similar way that European honeybees are managed in an effort to increase crop pollination.
- The picture of Larry Hodgson on the Alaska Master Gardener Conference web site shows the author standing in his bathroom. To get to the page, go to www.alaskamastergardeners.org. And while you're there, see Jeff Smeenck taking soil samples in December.
- MGs Susan Lang, Flory Vinson and Jeannine Lysterly have booked passage on a barge to float around Holland this month.
- Flower seeds donated by Denise Elder have made their way to Juneau for planting at the Jensen-Olson Arboretum.
- There will be no Master Gardener sponsored conference in Juneau this year and the group is considering being part of the rotation with Anchorage, Mat-Su and Fairbanks.
- Photographer Ray Bulson has produced a beautiful poster of Alaska wildflowers. Fine art prints (23.2"x36.2") are available for \$75, rb@wilderness-visions.com. See color image in the March newsletter on the AMGA web site.
- Michael Rasy, IPM Technician, reports that insects collected in Anchorage from the Christmas trees that were barred from entering Hawaii included the Western Yellowjacket, *Vespula pensylvanica*, a species not previously observed in Alaska.
- The Juneau Garden Club has just published their 3rd edition of Gardening in Southeast Alaska. Todd Communications in Anchorage was responsible for the color printing. The book sells for about \$30 at Title Wave.
- Thank you to Amelia Walsh, Susan Brusehaber and Mary Susan Goocey at the MOA Mann Leiser Memorial Greenhouse for offering to open their gardens and greenhouses for post-garden conference tours scheduled for May 11.
- There's a big elm tree growing in a private yard downtown Anchorage. The owner thinks it's a Siberian Elm. It was in the yard when the current folks bought the house early to mid-70's. After a crash-course on Google, I think it probably is a Siberian elm (*Ulmus pumila*). Does anyone know of any other elm trees growing in Anchorage? email: Jane Baldwin - jbaldwin@alaska.net

Seattle Flower Show Mantra

Back from the Northwest Flower & Garden Show in Seattle, MG Catherine Renfro reports that each day was started with the "Gardeners Prayer".

"Gardener's Serenity Prayer."

God, grant me the serenity to accept those things in the garden I cannot change,
the money to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to hire a professional!

MG Fran Durner has posted many great stories and pictures from the show on the ADN garden blog. For inspiration see <http://community.adn.com/?q=adn/blog/36232>.

MasterGardener Magazine

In 2007 Washington Master Gardeners and the Cooperative Extension Service began a new publication geared towards Master Gardeners and the general gardening public. Before MasterGardener Magazine articles are published, they go through scientific review by Extension faculty and other experts. The spring issue will include articles on unusual fruits and drip irrigation.

The four-color, science-based quarterly is available by subscription for \$10/year. Regular subscription price is \$20. See <http://www.mastergardeneronline.com> for more information or subscribe by check, money order, or credit card.

MasterGardener Circulation
105 South 18th Street, Suite 217
Yakima, Washington 98901
(509) 575-2315, Ext. 208
Toll free, 1-800-487-9946
Steve Call, Ext. 208

Haskap: Opportunity for New Cultivars



The Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers are bringing in haskap (honeyberries, blue honeysuckle) that are not available yet in the U.S.. Cultivars include 'Tundra', 'Borealis', and 9-92. (See Nov AMGA newsletter for more info.) They are offering to sell plants to AMGA members. The Mat-Su MGs are getting some too. If you are interested in coordinating the sale/transfer of plants for those who might be interested, please let Julie Riley know, 786-6300; afjar@uaa.alaska.edu



PLEA FOR Conference VOLUNTEERS

Do you have an hour to spare to make calls, help with mailings or do other tasks? Then we need you! Want to share your creative talents, garden savvy, or people skills during the conference? You're the one for us! We need help starting now through the event to help make this a success. Please offer your time and talent today! Contact Martha Jokela @ 345-9569 or jokela@acsalaska.net

USED GARDENING BOOKS AND MAGAZINES SOUGHT



If you're like me, you have a few (or many!) wonderful gardening resources that may be cluttering your shelves that you no longer use. And what about those gorgeous magazines you can't bear to recycle but are threatening to take over

the coffee table? Let the AMGA help you out with some early Spring cleaning! Donate your used books, magazines, manuals, and printed garden resources to our first used book sale! We'll use funds raised to help pay for coffee and conference goodies. Call and I'll come pick donations up, or you may drop them at the CES office. 'Where and when' details will be in next month's newsletter. Clear out the old to make way for the new! Contact Martha Jokela @ 345-9569 <jokela@acsalaska.net> for pick up. If you would like a receipt for your donation, please include your name and address.



ABG Conference Date correction:

Friday, March 28th

"My Weedless Garden" - Alaska Botanical Garden Annual Membership Meeting with Lecture by Lee Reich; 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. Open to public/no charge; Held at the Anchorage Museum - 121 W. 7th Avenue. Museum garage parking is free for this event.

Saturday, March 29th

Spring Garden Conference: Sustainability

The Alaska Botanical Garden presents a full day of gardening seminars with Lee Reich and local experts. Register by 5p.m. March 21st to receive a complimentary lunch. 9 a.m. To 6 p.m. Held at UAA/APU Consortium Library, 3rd Floor, 3211 Providence Drive, Anchorage. Parking is free. Fee: \$70 or \$60 for ABG or Garden Club members. www.alaskabg.org or contact Donna Basinger, 562-7071.

Garden Event Calendar

Wednesday, March 26

Anchorage TREErific educational meeting: **Urban Trees: the Dirt(y) Truth (As we know it)** by Dwayne Adams; discuss ways to solve problems associated with our urban trees destined to live in a salt-laden sidewalk environment. TREErificAnchorage@yahoo.com or call Nancy Beardsly at 343-4288

Thursday - Friday, March 28 & 29

ABG Conference: See article this page

Monday, March 17

AMGA Meeting: **Asiatic Lilies with Sally Karabelnikoff**, and **Dividing Dahlias** with Amelia Walsh. CES, Conference room 130. Call 786-6300 for info.

Thursday, March 27

BLOOM TOWN fundraiser for Anchorage's downtown flowers. 6 - 8 p.m. Showing and sale of the "Bloom Town" DVD produced by Laura Bliss. Mingle with DVD stars Mary Susan Goocey and (MG) Amy Hubbard. Bid on a lobelia basket that the Municipality's horticulture crew will grow for you until its blooming and beautiful. Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center, free parking in the garage.

Thursday, April 17

Composting Techniques, Instructor: Jeff Smeenk, Horticulture Specialist, CES; 7 - 9 p.m., Anchorage CES Conference room, #130. Class will be repeated with Julie Riley as the instructor on Wednesday, April 23, 12 - 2 p.m. Registration: Details at a later date.

Wednesdays, April 2 & April 9; Saturday, April 12

Garden Design Workshop - Held at BP Energy Center, classes include lecture-style slide presentations, handouts, & one-on-one workshop.

April 2 - Introduction to Garden design, understanding your site & understanding how local climate, microclimates and other natural & human elements effect design;

April 9 - Developing a concept plan, common landscape problems (how to avoid them, how to solve them) detail and art in the garden, & plants for the garden.

April 12 - WORKSHOP

\$225 - Sign up by March 28. Contact 279-2688, or email: ehuggins@earthscape.alaska.com

Friday - Saturday, May 9-10

Alaska Master Gardener's Conference and Garden Market, "In the Zone"

For details and registration, visit: Alaskamastergardeners.org and click the **2008 AMGA Conference** link



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!)



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Alaska Wildflowers Poster by Ray Bulson -
See related notes in Bird Chatter

Alaska Master Gardeners Association, Inc.
Anchorage Chapter
University of Alaska Cooperative Extension
P.O. Box 221403
Anchorage, Alaska 99522-1403

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