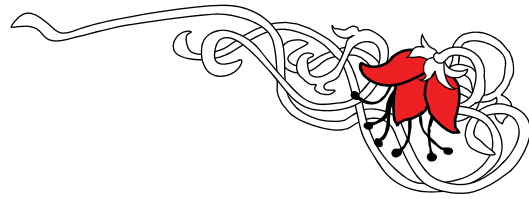


Anchorage Chapter



Volume 13, Issue 12

ALASKA MASTER GARDENERS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER December 2011



Message From Jane

Whoosh again! Here it is December and I don't remember what happened to most of November! My four amaryllis plants that Debbie Hinchey grew from seed from a cross between two different amaryllis plants are doing well. I think Debbie seeded them nearly two years ago and they looked like not much more than pieces of grass when I got them. Labeled Amaryllis x Tall Mother, they grew outside this past summer and are now about 12-15" tall. They've made good progress, but don't think I'm in for any flowers this Christmas season since I think it takes 2-4 years from seed to flowers.

Here's a challenge for you! Cross pollinate some of those Christmas amaryllis plants you have this year and grow them from seed. Find excellent information on pollinating your amaryllis and then growing the viable seeds produced at <http://www.amaryllisbulbs.org/2007/11/how-to-pollinate-amaryllis-bulbs.html> This is basically a blog type site, so you may have to follow links to get to specific information on pollinating, saving amaryllis pollen in case two flowers aren't blooming at the same time, how to determine viable seeds, and sowing and germinating amaryllis seeds.

November brought some pretty cold weather, and I'm sure we're all happy that we have some decent snow cover on our garden beds. Funny how those shortened daylight hours sort of snuck up on us. But (with my glass half full) there is less than a month to 5 hours and 27 minutes of daylight on winter solstice which arrives on December 22 at 5:30 a.m. UTC -- which I think translates to Wednesday December 21st at 8:30 p.m. Alaska Standard Time. Winter solstice is a pretty unique day in the Northern Hemisphere presenting us in Southcentral Alaska with both our longest night and our shortest day.

More importantly it's a pivot point - we can begin to say goodbye to our winter dormant season with its shortening daylight hours and increasing darkness and say HELLO to the coming days of increasing daylight hours! Winter solstice is an occasion to celebrate the return of light! GET OUT THE SEED CATALOGS!

Some AMGAA reminders to keep in mind:

Membership Renewals: The 2011 membership year ends December 31st. The Membership renewal form (enclosed in this newsletter) should be reviewed for

accuracy of your contact information and returned with your dues (still at \$20) to AMGAA, P.O. box 221403, Anchorage AK 99522. Your personal contact information as indicated on the enclosed renewal form is what will be included in the directory. If no email address is listed, none will appear in the directory. You can also offer suggestions for future programs and garden tours on your renewal form.

Election for Board of Directors: The election for vacant Board of Directors positions will be conducted electronically from January 1-14, 2012. The slate of nominees with pictures and brief bios will be included in the January newsletter and on the electronic ballot you will receive. Hard copies of the electronic ballot will be mailed to voting members who do not have an email address in the membership database. If you do not receive either an electronic or hard copy ballot shortly after January 1st, please contact Judy Christianson to request a ballot.

AMGA Service Project - Pioneer Home

The Pioneer Home entry beds have been the only Master Gardener Service project for the past 20 years. Many of you have volunteered your time in maintaining these gardens during the summer. Since Judy Christianson and Mary Shier have retired from their many years of service, this leaves a void that needs to be filled. It will require reorganizing from the ground up. We need volunteers to commit to this endeavor so that we, as a volunteer organization, can continue this worthwhile Public Service Project. This will involve garden design, early seed starting, plant procurement, fund raising (possibly), soil improvement, etc. We will be forming a committee and having a meeting in January to begin this process, but it won't happen without dedicated volunteers. Please consider being a part of this public service project by bringing your talents and ideas to the table. And besides, it might be kind of fun!

Treasurer's Report

Opening Balance: 10/29/11	\$1010.83
checks	-\$415.21
deposits	\$+1780.00
Ending Balance: 11/27/11	\$ 2375.62



Accent Your Garden By Jo Anne Banta

You missed a real treat if you weren't at November's AMGA meeting. The program, "Garden Accents," featured paths, fences, arbors and trellises as presented by Fran Durner, Gina Docherty, and Jane Baldwin.

"Down the Garden Path" by Fran was filled with excellent suggestions and accompanied by beautiful slides that stressed the following:

- Paths should always go somewhere and should be wide enough for two;
- Curved paths make a garden seem larger and create a mystery (What's around the corner?);
- Repetitive accents lend unity while plants soften path edges;
- Paths are made from a variety of materials and spaces can be filled with moss, creeping plants or even stone.

"Arbors, Trellises and Pergolas" was Gina's subject and once again the accompanying slides told the story. While these provide plant support they can also be used in a variety of ways. Try attaching a trellis to a fence or use it in a single large pot. Use it to create a boundary or for screening anything unsightly in your garden, maybe your drier vent.

An arbor is an entryway that says, "Welcome to my Garden." Gina had a gorgeous photo of her arbor, complete with blooming Polestar (Polstjarnan) rose - taken before the wind "huffed and puffed" and blew it all down. Garden supports can be made of lattice, poles, willow and recycled materials. One particularly striking slide showed an item done with recycled bicycle tires. Remember, too, that arbors, trellises and pergolas covered in snow make great winter "sculptures."

"Good fences make good neighbors," Jane echoed Robert Frost as she stressed that before attempting a fence, you must check the neighborhood covenants. Then she proceeded to woo us with a series of slides that made each of us want to go out and start digging postholes. She must have burned up at least one tank of gas driving about Anchorage, taking pictures of the best in town.

There were wood and wire fences; pole fences; commercial wooden fences with lattice tops, and picket fences. A variety of wood fences used uprights, alternating panels, finished side then rough side out, while others showed diagonals interspersed with uprights. Then there were metal fences: wrought iron and chain links painted black. For novelty: a fence made of upright skis, and a picket fence where the "pickets" were Crayola crayons.

At the general meeting: Jane noted that nominations were open and that voting would be by e-mail January 1 to January 14, 2012.

Thanks goes to Mary Shier and Judy Christianson who are retiring after 16 and 20 years, respectively, as co-chairs of the Pioneer Home Service project. Jane asks for volunteers to take over. All AMGA members are invited to the Pioneer Home Friday, December 9, for the Ice Cream Social Day, to help the Pioneers recognize Judy and Mary for their many years of Pioneer Gardening.

Vitamin Therapy for Tomatoes Joette Storm

What gardener doesn't long for home grown tomatoes? Especially in Alaska where the cardboard texture of store bought red orbs pass for the fruit, we who recall the smell and taste of the tomatoes of our Midwestern youth dream of them. We yearn for the soft ripe beauties that drip juice down one's arm after the first bite.

Motivated by this desire, I have for several years planted seeds and purchased set plants and carefully tended them throughout the summer. I'd cover them every evening to preserve the heat of the day. This spring my husband and I scoured catalogs in search of varieties suited to our subarctic clime. Johnny's Seeds featured two that caught our eye, Moskvich, an heirloom variety described as extra early, and Polbig, a red determinate recommended for cool climates.

So we sent away for seeds in anticipation of plants that could withstand Anchorage temperature and wind conditions. The snow-sown seeds did not do well. We planted more seeds in peat pots and transplanted them as they grew. The Moskvich sprouted in 10 days.

By May when we purchased a pop up variety greenhouse, the plants were healthy and getting taller. They flourished in the greenhouse under the frequent 80 degree temps. Fruit was plentiful by July.

Then one day in August I was examining a hefty specimen and noticed brown spots on the bottom. It spread days later. That meant a trip to Cooperative Extension Service to verify that the blemishes were blossom end rot.

Sherrie confirmed my suspicions and produced some material on the topic. Calcium deficiency was the culprit. Since the plants were in soil mixed from various sources old and new, I had no way of knowing the soil lacked calcium. What to do?

Research indicated a foliar spray might help alleviate the deficiency. I quickly purchased a bottle and applied the substance. The label cautioned against spraying too frequently which might cause the leaves to burn. So I could only wait for results. When more tomatoes sported the spots I was disappointed. How could we lose so many lovely specimens?

Then something occurred to me. Among the vitamins I take myself are calcium and magnesium supplements. What if I made a solution of the pills and watered the tomatoes with it? What did I have to lose?

So I crushed the pills and blended them in water and applied it liberally. And it worked for both varieties. No more brown spots.

In the spring I will have the soil tested for calcium and apply Epsom salts. My brother in law does that every year to prevent blossom end rot in his Kentucky garden.

Master Gardener Focus: Richard Sanders By Cheryl Chapman

It's a bleak snow day in November Anchorage, dreary unrelieved white, gray and black except in Richard Sanders' gardens, where drifts are broken with snips of color: his carved birds perched on branches that poke through the snow like "In-Your-Face-Old-Man-Winter" sculpture.

As with most of Richard's gardens, the birds and their secured branches went in as a progressive call-and-response that began when a tree ended, but not just any tree. This one had a bird's nest.

"After the tree was gone I saved the nest out front, thinking I needed something to go with it, to put in it, and found my birds on the Internet at Hummingbird Wood Carving Studio," he says. "But then a neighbor lady was walking her dog, and the dog found the nest and ate it."

By then, though, the birds already were on their way, eventually two dozen of them, from a baby black-capped chickadee to a house sparrow to exotica such as the blue waxbill and the red avadavat -- each carved by someone who seems to know how it feels to be a bird -- and Richard went to his Plan B, his display branches.

Come spring and summer, though, the birds' winter color will be overtaken by Richard's group of gardens that struck some visitors speechless on this past summer's Master Gardener tours.

"It was a gray day and a gray neighborhood and it was raining, and frankly, I didn't want to get out," says Master Gardener Gina Docherty. "Then I pulled up to the front of Richard's house, and my jaw dropped. The colors were unbelievable. It was an explosion of color."

Right now the Sanders' yard has 22 gardens out front (numbered 1-22) and 30 in the back (A-DD), raised Frame It All beds, hoops and row covers, two greenhouses, gravel paths with red stepping stones and come summer, 42 hanging baskets of purple wave petunias suspended from hoops around his chain link fence, plus more planted in three rusting chrome and steel blocks that used to be house furniture. "They're supposed to get rusty," he says, like the metal dog made by Alabama prisoners that's cemented in the garden at the foot of the front fence

"Richard's garden is the size of his lot, minus the footprint of his house," says horticulturist Julie Riley of the Cooperative Extension Service. "And this is the part I love: He lives down the street from my CES mentor, Wayne Vandre, who was Horticulture Specialist with Extension for 20 years. Wayne started the Master Gardener course in Anchorage in 1978. I wouldn't be surprised if Richard's garden is the reason Wayne had to start spending more time at his second house in Wisconsin during the summer. And you can quote me."

Richard is in the process of making an illustrated master list of each of his gardens, each plant in them, how many, where they came from, how much they cost, and how they're doing. Some plants will be leaving him. The whole south side of his home is devoted to lilies, 600-700 of them, that have been there for years, but, he says, it's time to move on.

"In the spring if volunteers will dig them up, they can all

go to the Pioneer Home," he says. I want other stuff in those places."

He grew up doing necessity gardening in New Hampshire. "That's how I got into gardening," he says. "We needed the food. We didn't grow flowers. We had to grow what we needed to survive."

He joined the Army out of high school, and after his discharge - "Vietnam was just starting" - he graduated from what is now Miami-Dade College on the GI bill and went to work for a bank.

"Everybody else in my apartment complex worked for the airlines, and they were always flying here, flying there," he says. "That looked pretty good so I applied and got offered a job at Northwest. Their next letter said, 'You're going to Alaska,' and I've been here since 1969."

Over the years he served Northwest in many different positions but ended with the hugely responsible task of handling weights and balances on the big 747 freighters, and crew needs. The gardening gene kicked in after retirement in 2003, or maybe it was the anti-yard gene.

"My whole object was to do away with grass," he says. "I started digging."

And his flowers and vegetables started growing. He cans, freezes and preserves and has reserves of dill pickles, bread and butter pickles (Boston pickling and Marketmore 76 cucumbers), carrots, peas and beet greens.



Richard's backyard greenhouses and raised bed gardens
Photo by G.Docherty

"Last season I had Stupice (pronounced Stoo-PEECH-ka), on the sweet side but I could not believe the tomatoes I had this year. I made tomato spaghetti sauce." (Stupice tomatoes are a Czech tomato variety that loves Anchorage and comes recommended by the Cooperative Extension Service.)

He tried a new cabbage as well, the little Gonzales that matures at baseball size. "Steam it with butter, salt and pepper, and it's delicious," he says.

He keeps detailed computer records of where his seeds come from, their cost, when they're started, when and how they're planted, how they do, and any comments, which is how Richard knows that on March 25 he planted 28 3-inch peat pots with Gonzales, three seeds per pot; put them in flats on a broad downstairs window ledge with an eastern exposure; they went outside on June 19; and they were ready for the steamer after 55 days. And every year, he adds one or two new perennials.

Continued on page 6



Interesting Christmas Tree Facts

Info gathered from
<http://web.extension.illinois.edu/state>

Here are a few facts on Christmas trees:

- Christmas trees have been sold commercially in the United States since about 1850.
- Until fairly recently, all Christmas trees came from the forest.
- In 2002, Oregon, North Carolina, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Washington, New York, and Virginia were the top Christmas tree producing states. Oregon was the leading producer of Christmas trees - 6.5 million in 2002.
- The best selling trees are Scotch pine, Douglas fir, Noble fir, Fraser fir, Virginia pine, balsam fir and white pine.
- More than 2,000 trees are usually planted per acre. On an average 1,000-1,500 of these trees will survive. In the North, maybe, 750 trees will remain. Almost all trees require shearing to attain the Christmas tree shape. At six to seven feet, trees are ready for harvest. It takes six to ten years of fighting heavy rain, wind, hail and drought to get a mature tree.
- In the US, there are more than 21,000 Christmas tree growers, around a half billion Real Christmas Trees growing on U.S. farms, and more than 12,000 cut-your-own farms.
- In 1979, the National Christmas Tree was not lighted except for the top ornament. This was done in honor of the American hostages in Iran.
- The first decorated Christmas tree was in Riga, Latvia in 1510.
- The first printed reference to Christmas trees appeared in Germany in 1531.
- Growing Christmas trees provides a habitat for wildlife.
- Recycled trees have been used to make sand and soil erosion barriers and been placed in ponds for fish shelter.
- The first Christmas tree retail lot in the United States was started in 1851 in New York by Mark Carr.
- Christmas trees remove dust and pollen from the air.
- The use of evergreen trees to celebrate the winter season occurred before the birth of Christ.
- Christmas trees are grown in all 50 states including Hawaii and Alaska.
- You should not burn your Christmas tree in the fireplace; it can contribute to creosote buildup.
- Artificial trees will last for six years in your home, but for centuries in a landfill.
- Thomas Edison's assistant, Edward Johnson, came up with the idea of electric lights for Christmas trees in 1882. Christmas tree lights were first mass produced in 1890.
- In 1963, the National Christmas Tree was not lighted until December 22nd because of a national 30-day period of mourning following the assassination of President Kennedy.
- Teddy Roosevelt banned the Christmas tree from the White House for environmental reasons.
- In the first week, a tree in your home will consume as much as a quart of water per day.
- An acre of Christmas trees provides for the daily oxygen requirements of 18 people.

Sweet Potato or Yam?

Source: Jennifer Schultz Nelson,
Extension Educator, Horticulture
University of Illinois Extension
<http://web.extension.illinois.edu/state>
November 14, 2011

As the holiday season approaches, it seems appropriate to discuss the issue of sweet potatoes versus yams. Rhonda Ferree, University of Illinois Extension educator, horticulture, says that officially a sweet potato is never a yam, but that sweet potatoes are often referred to as yams.

Sweet potatoes (*Ipomoea batatas*) are yellow or orange tubers that elongate into ends that taper to a point. There are two types of sweet potatoes, which creates the confusion over yam versus sweet potato. The paler-skinned sweet potato has a thin, light yellow skin with pale yellow flesh which is not sweet and has a dry, crumbly texture similar to a white baking potato. The darker-skinned variety (which is most often called "yam" in error) has a thicker, dark orange to reddish skin with a vivid orange, sweet flesh and a moist texture.

The people in one of the highlands of western New Guinea are reported to subsist almost entirely on sweet potatoes. One medium (5" x 2") boiled, peeled sweet potato provides more than twice the recommended daily allowance of Vitamin A for an adult, 36% of the Vitamin C and a good amount of other vitamins and minerals. Sweet potatoes may be boiled, baked, browned, fried and candied. They can be used to make biscuits, breads, muffins, pies, custards, cookies, and cakes.

Ferree says that most of us have probably never seen a true yam. The true yam is the tuber of a tropical vine (*Dioscorea* sp) and is not even distantly related to the sweet potato. The yam is a popular vegetable in Latin American and Caribbean markets, and is slowly being introduced here. The true yam is actually even sweeter than the sweet potato, and the tuber can grow over seven feet in length. The yam tuber has a brown or black skin which resembles the bark of a tree and off-white, purple or red flesh, depending on the variety.

On another note, sweet potato vines are becoming increasingly popular for their ornamental value as ground covers, hanging baskets, in planters, and even in bottles of water in the kitchen. The ornamental vine's tubers are edible, but are reported to have a bland taste.

In the end it doesn't really matter what you call it. Regardless of whether you call them yams or sweet potatoes, enjoy them often - they're healthy and tasty choices for your kitchen table.

[Yams are very low in Saturated Fat, Cholesterol and Sodium. It is also a good source of Dietary Fiber, Vitamin C, Potassium and Manganese]

Read More <http://nutritiondata.self.com/facts/vegetables-and-vegetable-products/2726/2#ixzz1er5Cq6JU>



Central Peninsula Master Gardener News By Rosemary Kimball

This month is a rehash of last month---ain't nothin' goin' on down here. Except that a few people have started receiving seed catalogs. Remember a decade or more

ago the first catalog to arrive was Thompson and Morgan in January? Now try to get a T&M paper catalog. Or Burpee. Or Parks. I wonder if the powers that be in the catalog offices know how much ordering comes from just grazing through the catalogs and impulse ordering? Ordering carrots? But look at that new calendula...

Margaret Simon said she'd gotten two catalogs so far, otherwise nada is happening. Pinetree Seeds has shown up in four mailboxes and two of the boxes also got Stokes.

MG Mark White said he was going to clean up the vegetables in the garage, work a little and then nap. Sounds like a good plan to me. Mark stores his potatoes in my root cellar, but I hasten to add that I mostly eat rice. He was awed by the return he got on five pounds of Cherry Red potatoes--210 pounds. If I didn't know Mark to be completely honest I wouldn't have believed him!

MG Barb Jewell says her gardening life is boring and she's waiting to go visit her daughter in Seattle and her visit to Molbak's Garden Center. Been there and I know why she makes that pilgrimage every time she goes down.

In October I got a note from MG Kathy Wartinbee wanting to know if I was interested in going to the MG Botany class in Anchorage. Fine by me. We were going to share driving chores but the roads were more conducive to her driving skill and Jetta then to my "mommy" van. Besides she had a five CD player and lots of audio books. We listened to two unabridged Tony Hillerman books. I really like his books and the reader had the nicest voice. It was a Hello-How-are-you-May-we-listen-now? trip.

Our text for the class was Brian Capon's third edition of "Botany for Gardeners". In this edition botanical words are broken down into the Latin or Greek from which the meanings came. Really, really interesting.

There were some very good speakers and I don't know how much botany I really learned (remembered?) but I no longer think my plants are wilting, but that their vacuoles are dehydrated which I learned from the first class which was on cells. My thyme's vacuoles could not be rehydrated so I threw the plant over the rail--Ciao, honey.

Other trivia learned: Your MG Michael Baldwin says that carnivorous plants do work as a pest control device. Sounds good to me.

Want to sprout your potatoes early? Don't use the whole apple for the ethylene gas, instead use peelings or the core. That from Pat Holloway. That would work on seed potatoes too if you green sprout them.

Eggs are the largest single cell. Is there anything bigger than an ostrich cell?

And this from Kathy Wartinbee from somewhere in her life: "The mind can absorb as much as the tail can endure".

Don't look behind you. You're not going in that direction. Wait until next year in the garden.

Petunias By Rosemary Kimball

Petunias are one of the mainstays of our summer plantings in Southcentral. Who would know that the name came from petun, the Brazilian name for tobacco. And yes, petunia is a close cousin to tobacco. It wandered into Europe from South America when Napoleon was at work. The night-scented petunia was introduced in 1823 and the purple-flowering petunia in 1831. All of our petunias are descended from those two plants. How far hybridizing has gone!



'Aurora Carniflora' Growing Carnivorous Plants in the North

Mike Baldwin, MG

I want to share a quick note about growing carnivorous plants in Alaska (or Aurora Carniflora as I like to call them sometimes). At the recent Advanced Master Gardener course on Plant Physiology, I talked about carnivorous plants and their unique adaptations to their environments. Afterwards, a number of people asked about where they can buy carnivorous plants.

You can occasionally buy carnivorous plants locally. I have found them in local nurseries like Suttons, Dimond Greenhouse, and P & M Gardens. Every now and then the big box stores, Lowes in particular, have carnivorous plants for sale in the garden department.

Occasionally you may see some offered in plant catalogs, typically the American pitcher plants, but they are usually on the more expensive side.

Your best option is to buy them on-line from a specialty carnivorous plant nursery. There are a number of nurseries out there - a few of the well established legitimate nurseries with good reputations that I've ordered from in the past are Cooks Carnivorous Plants (<http://www.flytraps.com/>), Sarracenia Northwest (<http://www.cobraplant.com/>), California Carnivores (<http://www.californiacarnivores.com/>).

If you have any questions about a carnivorous plant source, or just any questions about carnivorous plants in general, ask away - If you can't tell, I love to talk about them!



Bird Chatter

[No Bird Chatter this month]

Master Gardener Christmas Lists

-My Christmas wish list includes a set or two of steak knives so I can slice back turf around trees and shrubs with little effort from me.

-On my "Wish" list is a request to get together with other gardeners in late winter to decide who wants to start which flower/herb/veggie and share seedlings instead of everyone starting EVERYTHING on their own.
-Another "Wish" is to see Master Gardeners more politically active in our Community ... and then recognize each significant accomplishment at our monthly meetings.
Nickel LaFleur

1) Two 8"x16" cement pavers for each year of my life... should be enough to build a respectable sized patio... :-)

- 2) A bag of cement, a bag of fine sand, a bag of vermiculite and a bag of Perlite.
- 3) Gift certificates from In The Garden, Sutton's, and Alaska Mill & Feed
- 4) Gift certificates from online nurseries such as Wrightman Alpines, Joy Creek, Sequim Rare Plants Jane Baldwin

I bought my gift yesterday at Costco. They have Nikon kool pics on sale til Monday, \$109. they have two models 4100s and 6100s for the same price. I bought the 6100S.
Margaret Love

A one-size-fits-all useful-at-all-seasons indoors-and-out lovely big bag of worm poop.
Cheryl Chapman

If Santa is listening, he'll bring me a really nice shredder/chipper to help make my compost pile cure faster! And if that is too awkward and heavy to carry in his bag, a really nice set or two of garden gloves is always welcome.
Fran Durner

Why is it that I seem to drool over new plants for in the house when I don't even keep the ones I have alive or in good condition? Always wishing for the magic touch I guess.
Marty Black

- 3 or more hours of spring gardening help.
 - Gift Certificates to locally owned greenhouses and nurseries
 - Load of top soil.
 - Load of crush rock.
 - Locally created, artful pathway pavers.
 - High quality Nitrile gardening gloves....not cheap knock offs.
- Marion Nelson

Janice Berry's Garden Wonders & Woes 2011

One evening in late May, I got a notice on my doorknob about electrical work in an easement in my backyard. Came home the next day to see half of my perennial garden replaced by a bulldozer. All plants completely obliterated. They were replacing some electrical cables underground. For the trouble, I got 2 Bell's gift certificates for \$50 in late June, when all the good perennials were sold out. Thanks to gardener club sales that spring, I was able to restock with many favorites. And the new landscaping efforts resulted in some pesky "weeds" disappearing forever!



MG Focus: Richard Sanders... cont. from page 3

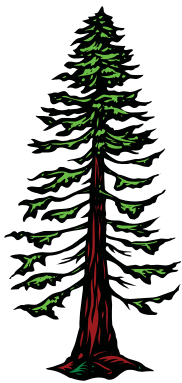
Planting directions have to be adapted. "People in the Lower 48 don't understand that in Alaska, things are different," Richard says. "We have a lot of sun. If the packet says to plant the seeds 8 inches apart, you better make that 12-14 inches."

"If I can, I like to buy locally, but some of the seeds I want aren't available locally, and then I order," he says. He subscribes to Garden Gate magazine ("No ads") and mines it for ideas, and in addition to being a Master Gardener, helping answer questions every week at the Spenard Farmers Market, he belongs to the Alaska Botanical Garden and the Alaska Rock Garden Society.

"I love Pasque flowers (*Anemone patens*) and have a lot of them, he says, "and right now I'm trying a lady's slipper orchid that I got at Dimond Greenhouse. They had one outside that had been there for a long time, and there must have been 15-20 lady's slippers on that one plant."

In winter, Richard studies piano, and puts on his railroad cap to expand the world of trains he has created on the first floor of his home. Scale models of the Boston & Maine ("Their track went past the back of our house") chuff past forests, each tree handmade by Richard, homes and buildings, each shingle smaller than a match head individually painted and applied, trash such as an old tire in a creek, a wiener dog, a fully stocked lumber yard, the ghostly outline of a torn-down building against another building, an exact model of the Haverhill, N.H., station, down to a broken window. A full day wouldn't be enough to take in everything.

"When God gave out brains, I took trains," he says. "I think I am a fanatic. In the winter, I do trains and piano. In the summer, I garden. It's a lot of work but I enjoy it. I really do. In the summertime, if the floor's dirty, it's going to stay that way. When summertime comes, you've got to enjoy it while you can."



The Wild Trees by Richard Preston

Nickel LaFleur
ISA certified arborist

As a tree lover, I enthusiastically poured through the 284 page best seller called 'The WILD TREES' by Richard Preston. But, even if you aren't a tree enthusiast, the author has written an excellent, informative page-turner of a book. The author (a writer for the New Yorker) tells the stories of several people, Steve Sillett, Marie Antoine, and a group of botanists and amateur

naturalists who all had one thing in common: a fascination with the world's largest living organism, what grows in the redwood canopy, and the search for the tallest tree on earth. The book partook of valuable life lessons tucked away in chapters, showing the characters' interaction with each other and Mother Nature.

Sequoia sempervirens is the botanical name for the coastal redwood - often referred to as just redwood. Its wood has a lemony smell and doesn't rot easily aiding it in its claim to be the 'oldest and largest' living thing left on earth. No one knows exactly how old they are because unlike most trees, the redwood has a hollow center (from being burned and then regrowing) so counting tree rings to determine its age can't happen. Botanists have guesstimated the age of some of the oldest redwoods to be between two and three thousand years old and over 350 feet in height. To give you a perspective of how tall the tallest redwoods are, 379.1 feet is the tallest found to date, roughly 30 stories high. The tallest building in Anchorage (and also in Alaska) is the Conoco Phillips Building, which stands at 22 stories, 296'. A giant redwood would tower over this building by 83 feet!

A coastal redwood can go from a seed to a 50' specimen in twenty years and to a 'big' tree in 600 years. It is considered to be 'out of its youth' at 800 years of age. Unlike the *Sequoiadendron giganteum* (giant sequoia) which needs sunshine to thrive, the coastal redwood does fine in the shade. If it's too shady, it will just slow down its growth-cycle for a couple hundred years, waiting for the conditions to improve. Life expectancy for a redwood needle is seven years when it will be discarded in the autumn. A redwood doesn't have a strong branch structure on its lower trunk so accessing them often requires climbing another tree and 'skywalking' over to the redwood using ropes and other climbing devices.

Humans are the only primates that don't live in trees and are the only ones that have an inborn fear of heights. Every other primate when afraid runs up a tree to feel safe; humans will run for the open spaces.

I enjoyed reading about climbing the redwoods and of finding virtual gardens tucked in the center of the trunks. A mixture of rotting redwood needles, twigs, roots of plants and particles from the air provide the sustenance needed for fern gardens, huckleberry bushes and other plants to thrive. Truly, trees holding up the earth! Makes me smile!

Garden Event Calendar

Monday, December 5

Alaska Native Plant Society, Macrophotography Workshop, with Julie Jesson, 7 p.m., Campbell Creek Science Center.

Tuesday, December 6

Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers, hosting speaker Dr. Dan Barney from USDA Agriculture Research Services; 6:30 p.m., BP Energy Center, south of the BP Building at the corner of Benson and New Seward, accessed through BP Parking Lot One. www.apfga.com

Thursday, December 8

Anchorage Audubon Society, Winter Wildlife around Anchorage and preview of the 2012 Christmas bird Count; 7 pm, BP Energy Center.

Saturday, December 10

Alaska Botanical Garden Winter Workshop, Building Colorful Ice Luminaries, with Lacey Ott; Reservations and fee; 907-770-3692 (Call for details and time)

Saturday, December 17

Anchorage Audubon Society 2012 Christmas Bird Count, Sunrise til Sunset, all over town. Check the website for details. www.anchororageaudubon.org

Monday, December 19

NO MASTER GARDENER MEETING IN DECEMBER! MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

See you on January 16, 2012

Saturday, December 31

AMGAA membership renewal due.

January 1-14, 2012

Electronic Voting Period for AMGAA 2012 Election to Board of Directors.

Monday, January 9

Alaska Native Plant Society, Invasive Plants with Gino Graziana, 7:00 p.m., Campbell Creek Science Center.

Wednesday - Thursday, January 25-26

Alaska Greenhouse and Nursery Conference

Thursday - Friday, January 26-27

Alaska Peony Growers' Conference



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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Anchorage, AK 99516

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AMGA Web Site: www.alaskamastergardeners.org

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

To send concerns or information to the AMGA directly, mail to:

AMGA

P.O. Box 221403

Anchorage, AK 99522-1403

If you have questions or want to make address or email corrections, please contact Barb Baker at:

bbaker@alaska.net

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